

*Blackball Colliery.*—(20/6/96): Only one shift is being worked, employing, in all, fifty-eight men and youths. Fifteen places are working on the west side and four on the east side. Timbering and spragging well done, but the powder-smoke hanging too much. To obviate this, No. 3 incline is to be double-shifted to hole out to the cliff, and in the meantime the brattice will be kept well forward. The main intake showed a current of 6,800 cubic feet of air per minute. Rules and names posted up, and reports kept. When next inspected, in November, the incline had been holed out to the cliff and connected with a shaft 70 ft. deep, near which a furnace was in course of erection, which should provide an ample margin above the required quantity of air for some time to come. In January a greaser named George Abeley fell off a standard of the aerial tram and fractured a leg and arm. This was on the opposite side of the Grey River to the mine, and can hardly be deemed a mining accident. At date of writing work has just been resumed after a stoppage of several weeks, owing to the standards of the aerial tram and the line itself being damaged by a heavy flood in the river.

*Brunner Colliery.*—(16/1/96): Mr. Roberts, the under-viewer, was acting as manager during Mr. Bishop's absence, and his appointment was in writing. Pillar-work going on in Nos. 5, 6, 7, and 10 inclines at twelve places on the west side. On the east side only four fast places were working, the lowest bord being stopped for a fortnight on account of stone, but the bord above is further ahead without meeting any stone. No gas was seen, though tried for at each face; the brattice was well forward, and the air sufficient. On the 26th March the explosion occurred by which all the men in the Dip section—sixty-five in number—lost their lives. The nature of the explosion was the subject of lengthy investigation, and the report of the Royal Commission has been already published, in which the origin is found to have been a blown-out shot, and the explosion one of coal-dust, so a comparatively brief *résumé* should be sufficient here.

*Brunner Explosion.*—My first intimation that a disaster had occurred was by wire from the Hon. the Premier, on the evening of the 26th March, as the telegraph-wires were down with the previous stormy weather, and were only then got into working-order. I immediately left for Brunnerton, and found that the manager, Mr. James Bishop, had been overcome on entering the mine after a volume of black-and-yellow smoke had been seen to issue from the mouth of the main level, which was the intake airway, about 9.30 a.m. Mr. Joseph Scott, manager of the Blackball Colliery, who had been placed in charge of the rescue work until my arrival by the Premier, had regular shifts and relays of willing workers leading forward the air by erecting temporary brattice-stoppings. Many of the rescuers had to be carried out of the mine, but eagerly returned on recovery. I entered the mine about 2 a.m. on the 27th, and found the first indications of an explosion were to be seen near the head of the Main Dip incline. Large quantities of fine and dry coal-dust were lying on the rails where previously there had been none. The lights burned freely when I saw men falling, and their places being taken by others, but there was no indication of firedamp on the flame of the safety-lamp, though I tried for it right ahead of the rescuers and also at the stoppings in the rear. The pumps were destroyed for work, but several shifts would elapse before the water would rise to the position where the lowest body might be expected to be found. The crib-log stoppings, filled and backed by stones and dirt, had been blown out, but the main return remained intact from the dynamo out. Still, the resultant gases would leave little hope for any men to escape, and the safety of the rescuing parties claimed anxious consideration. In the morning, Mr. Lindop, manager of Coalbrookdale Colliery, arrived, and with Mr. Bishop, who had partially recovered, continued the work. All the men in the Dip section were found to have perished, either from the explosion or the resultant gases. The last body was recovered on the 31st March. A careful examination of the workings was gone on with, in conjunction with Messrs. Brown and Lindop, managers of the Westport Coal Company's collieries; Scott, manager of Blackball Colliery; Hayes, manager of Hokonui Colliery; Bishop, mine-manager; Dunn, mine-manager; Gordon, Inspecting Engineer; and four experienced miners—Messrs. Russell, Robinson, Ward, and Daw. Of the two sections, one on each side of the main incline, into which the dip-workings were divided, that on the west side was confined to pillar-work, and prior to examination of the mine I thought it not unlikely that the excessive rain of the previous days had found its way into the goaf and forced back gas on the miners' lights; but this, on examination, proved quite untenable, as the point of origin was undoubtedly on the east side. This latter section had no pillar-work proper, but "lifts" were started to be taken off some of the pillars, and four places were in the solid. These were separated completely from the old Coal-pit Heath workings by a fault, which at that point would have over 100 ft. displacement, and if 1 chain be allowed for lateral shift a further 2 chains of solid coal was left. This had been left for a barrier at my request, to guard against any possible influx of water, and it was found by the subsequent survey of Mr. H. Young, Assoc. M. Inst. C.E., not to have been encroached on. The roof of the mine is a strong grit, passing at places into hard sandstone, so that, though the stoppings were destroyed, the rails at one part of the Main Dip torn up, and some of the mine-tubs and timbering knocked about with great force, the mine was not in such a bad condition as might have been expected. Still, after hearing falls between us and retreat, it was considered necessary to have the mine made safer, and to have the ventilation more efficiently restored. This was effected from the 1st to the 3rd April, and our examination resumed on the 4th. Gas was found in small quantities, at places where falls had occurred, but not in such amount or position as could serve to account for the explosion. Much coked dust was observed, sometimes on one side, at others on both sides of the props. The force appeared to have varied much in intensity, in some places there being little or no indications. In the course of our inspections Mr. Brown found the remaining portion (2 ft. 1 in. in depth) of a blown-out shot-hole in No. 4 bord, at a part of the pillar up to which the rails were laid. Severe coking was seen all round, coal was lying on the rails: and the force appeared to go from this both out to No. 2 incline and into No. 3. An unsatisfactory feature was that no tools except a scraper were found near at hand; but after careful consideration all the experts were of