

50. But I understand from you that the Inspector went to the men themselves?—Yes; but the contention of mine is that I do not think the clerk-of-works should direct you how to do your work, as long as you do it.

51. *Mr. Hales.*] Your experience in tunnelling was on the Midland Railway?—For large tunnelling, Yes. I have seen others done in the Old Country.

52. With regard to the Belgrove Tunnel, were your specifications anything similar in regard to that tunnel?—Something similar.

53. Much the same description as you have got here (referring to the plans and specification)?—Yes; but they left it chiefly to me as to the size of blocks, and arch, and all that.

54. In the case of that tunnel was there any provision made for coming on soft ground?—There were different sections shown, but no provision in the specification.

55. But when you came to soft ground you used that different section?—We did not come on soft ground.

56. You were not required to use the other section, then?—Of course the ground was extremely bad. We took out the bars.

57. With regard to the cuttings, you had one slip?—Yes, but it was a bank.

58. With regard to the Newmarket Junction contract, what was that? What did it consist of?—New station and station-buildings, erecting a bridge, tunnel, lowering the existing track, and keeping the traffic open all the while.

59. And that was a long time ago?—From twenty to twenty-five years ago.

60. And Mr. Witheridge did not interfere with you in any way?—Only on one occasion, but he did not interfere with my method or anything of that sort.

61. Except that on one occasion perhaps he interfered with some of your men, who were doing something in your absence, no doubt?—I had a foreman.

62. But he went to the men; he did not go to the foreman?—Well, I do not know. Mr. Witheridge may remember the circumstance himself.

63. These men, we will presume, were not doing their work in the way Mr. Witheridge thought they should be doing it?—No, they were good men.

64. Mr. Witheridge was a good man; and except on this occasion you had no complaint about Mr. Witheridge?—No; but I had that feeling that he was very crochety at work.

65. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] You were a contractor for the Midland Railway tunnel?—I was.

66. What is the length of that tunnel?—Sixty-seven chains.

66A. And you consider you had some very bad ground in connection with it?—Yes.

67. Would you point out to the Committee on that sketch what you call the minor sill?—[Witness indicated a spot in the centre of the cross-section.]

68. In bad ground would you consider it an improper thing to take that sill out?—Yes; and I would not take it out.

69. Suppose you got a written order?—Well, I would take it out.

70. Suppose you got a verbal order?—I would not do it in that case.

71. Suppose it had been a custom, and it had been insisted on to take those sills out before the brickwork was put in, and a written order was given to take out one which the contractor refused to take out, do you think the Inspector was justified in giving that order to a foreman of the contractor's employed on a shift? Do you think the foreman was justified in obeying such an order as that?—I do not think the foreman should have taken the order; I think the order should have been given from headquarters.

72. But this was a general order, you remember, from the General Engineer. If that sill was taken away, is this other sill of any use?—No; it is a most important thing.

73. Now, suppose the department or the District Engineer was in charge of the whole of that work, and suppose the Engineer insisted on that sill being taken out before the invert was put in?—I would not take it out.

74. But the one prop being taken away, it is a matter of indifference with regard to the other?—Yes, it is of no use at all.

75. If they insist on this sill being taken away, of course, this is practically useless?—Yes.

76. In putting in the brickwork in bad ground, would you consider that the leaving this hole open at the end of the sill there would be any danger to the brickwork of the tunnel?—No, not the slightest.

77. Do you consider that the proper course to adopt in bad ground was to leave that sill in and build around it?—Yes; to cut them out, and then build them in afterwards.

78. You have known McLean Brothers for some years: do you think they are competent contractors?—I do.

79. Suppose it was stated that they were incompetent contractors, what would be your opinion?—I should not say so. At all events, I should consider them thoroughly competent.

80. From your knowledge of them as contractors—having worked alongside them on more than one occasion—do you think the department could support such a statement as that they are inexperienced contractors?—No, I do not think they could.

81. You do not think the Public Works Department could maintain a statement of that kind?—I do not think so. Of course, I could understand why such a statement might be made.

82. Do you think McLean Brothers were capable of carrying through a railway-tunnel, provided they had never carried one through before?—Perfectly competent; and I know they had some of the best tunnel-men in the colony, because one of them came down to me in my work.

83. You know that they had some of the best and most experienced labour they could get?—Yes, they had some first-class men.

84. You also stated that you had known Mr. Witheridge. Did you find him somewhat meddling in the work?—Well, I have already explained that.