

MARLBOROUGH.

The total area opened for selection during the year was 294,045 acres, under the following heads: Optional system, 5,473 acres; cash by auction, 10,334 acres; lease by auction and application, 351 acres; village homestead, 1 acre; pastoral runs, 242,395 acres; small grazing-runs, 35,096 acres; lease in perpetuity, 395 acres.

Summary of Land taken up.—The total area of land selected during the year was 54,581 acres, by seventy-five selectors.

Cash Sales.—The town section disposed of is situated in the Town of Kaikoura, and the rural purchases (three) were under the Marlborough Waste Lands Act—one under the optional system and two under the “squaring-up” clause—the total area disposed of under this head being 10,454 acres 3 roods 5 perches. The cash received was £6,410 12s. 8d.

Deferred Payments.—The number of holders has now been reduced to eleven, three having acquired the freehold of their holdings during the year. We have only some 651 acres under this head.

Perpetual Leases.—There have not been any transactions under this head during the year, the number of holdings and area held remaining the same as last year.

Occupation with Right of Purchase.—Under this head 3,364 acres were taken up, by seven selectors. With one exception, the area selected is situated in the Hundalee Block. The total area now held under this system amounts to 4,500 acres.

Lease in Perpetuity.—During the year 5,947 acres were taken up, by seventeen selectors, the annual rent for which is £125 4s. 2d. Nine holders also exchanged their leases for leases in perpetuity, the area being 5,048 acres. We have now 111 holders under this tenure, the area held being 55,933 acres, and the annual rent £1,136 7s. 2d.

Lands under Land for Settlements Act.

Blind River Estate.—One section of 318 acres, which had been previously forfeited, was again taken up. The number of houses on the holdings is fifteen, and the number of souls resident on the land ninety-seven. Additional improvements, valued at £1,388, have been effected during the year, comprising buildings, £666; fencing, £695; and land broken up, £159. 905 acres have been under crop this season, as against 550 acres cropped last year; but, owing to dry weather, and a frost in October, which injured the pea-crop, the return has been very small; indeed, since the winter of 1896 there has not been at any time sufficient rain to saturate the subsoil. Of the various crops, wheat was the best, averaging about 15 bushels per acre; oats were extremely light; and the onions, on which much labour was expended, were, on many of the holdings, a complete failure, and on others the best patches were very poor. On the grazing-farms the effect of the dry weather was worse than on the agricultural land. At the date of inspection there were only 2,995 sheep on the estate, as compared with 4,195 last year. The number of stock at present on the estate is as follows: Horses, 50; cattle, 44; sheep, 2,995; pigs, 22.

Omaka Estate.—Although the second year of occupation will not terminate until the 26th June, all the holdings on this estate are ring-fenced, and many of them subdivided. The number of houses is ten, and the number of souls resident is fifty-two. The married tenants have erected good roomy houses, and the single men comfortable huts. Owing to the exceptionally dry season and the nature of the land, the crops generally have been light, the oats especially being very poor. 1,135 acres are under cultivation, and the number of stock is as follows: Horses, 45; cattle, 52; sheep, 2,454.

Puhipuhi is a block of 320 acres in the Kaikoura district, and is at present included in a pastoral license.

Mining Districts Land Occupation.—There were only two selections under this head, the area taken up being 125 acres.

Village-homestead Lease in Perpetuity.—There was only one half-acre section taken up during the year.

Village-homestead Special Settlement.—There has been no change in this tenure during the year. One of these settlements is situated at Kaikoura and the other at Wakamarina, and the value of the improvements now on the land is £1,223 17s. 6d. Ten of the holders are resident and four non-resident. The whole of the settlement at Wakamarina has been laid down in pasture or cultivated, and also 117 acres out of the 180 acres at Kaikoura.

Small Grazing-runs.—This year 34,372 acres were disposed of to fourteen holders, the average holdings being 2,455 acres, and the annual rent £676 3s. 11d. Five holders exchanged their leases for leases in perpetuity, the area so exchanged being 2,878 acres. We have now seventy-two holders under this tenure, holding an area of 64,253 acres.

Pastoral Runs.—Eighteen runs, of an aggregate area of 216,135 acres, were taken up during the year, the annual rental being £1,054 5s. There were not any forfeitures, but the surrenders amounted to 2,571 acres and the expiries to 970 acres. 3,010 acres, held by four selectors, were exchanged for leases in perpetuity. The total area now held amounts to 757,433 acres, the average holdings being 10,235 acres.

Miscellaneous Leases.—These comprise one flax-cutting and eight miscellaneous licenses, the latter being chiefly licenses to occupy reserves from year to year.

Revenue.—The territorial revenue shows an increase of over £4,000 as compared with last year, the increase being in the items cash lands, leases in perpetuity, small grazing-runs, and pastoral runs.

Arrears.—Of the sixteen selectors in arrears, one is a small grazing-run lessee, owing £1 13s. 6d.; the other fifteen are selectors on the Blind River Estate. The area they hold is 4,427 acres, and the amount owing is £486 6s. 9d.