

286. Have you ever been able to see a red-hot ember or spark falling through the air in broad daylight?—You could only see it with a dark background, but at the time an engine is emitting large volumes of smoke it is unlikely that sparks would be drawn through the funnel.

287. That is the least likely time?—Yes.

288. Do you recollect what the wind was that day?—It was blowing fairly strong from the nor'-west.

289. And, assuming a spark to have been emitted, where would it have landed?—Seeing the wind that was blowing, it would land two or three chains from the railway.

290. Beyond the boundary?—Yes.

291. Is it likely that on that day a spark would have landed midway between the railway-line and the fence?—I have not viewed the place, so I cannot say the distance between the railway and the fence.

292. How far do you think a spark would have been carried from the engine?—About a couple of chains.

293. That is, assuming a spark to have been emitted?—Yes.

294. *Mr. Lane.*] Have you ever seen a spark carried 2 chains?—I have seen it when they have been burning the lignite coal. In 1890, I think, they were burning it on account of the labour troubles.

295. And you base your estimate on that of the distance a spark would be likely to go?—Yes.

ASHBURTON.

WEDNESDAY, 14TH FEBRUARY, 1900.

JAMES MOORE, sworn.

1. *Mr. Purnell.*] You are a farmer, living at Hinds?—Yes.
2. How many acres of land do you own?—200 odd.
3. Your land lies between the railway and the sea?—Yes.
4. What is the distance between the railway-line and the nearest point of your land?—I should think about 9 chains, from the railway-line to my boundary-fence.
5. What lies between your boundary-fence and the railway-line?—The railway reserve and the road.
6. What is the railway reserve?—A plantation.
7. In January, 1898, when the fire occurred, what height was the plantation?—It was not very high. I could not say exactly.
8. Was it 2 ft. or 3 ft.?—Yes, I suppose so.
9. The trees did not obstruct your view in any way?—I do not think so.
10. Looking from your house you could see the railway-line?—No.
11. Well, between the trees and the railway-line what was there growing?—Grass and tussock.
12. Do you remember the 27th January, when the fire occurred?—Yes.
13. At what time does the south express pass your land?—About half-past one.
14. Were you at the door of your house at that time?—Yes.
15. Was any one with you?—Yes; Mr. Fleming.
16. Did you see the express come along?—Yes.
17. Up to the time when the express came along was there any sign of fire near the railway?—There was no sign of fire until the express had passed.
18. Did you see the express pass the plantation?—Yes.
19. What happened then?—I saw a little bit of smoke get up.
20. Where?—It seemed to me to be close to the railway-line. I could not tell how far it was off.
21. Was it between the railway-line and the plantation?—It must have been. I said to Mr. Fleming that we were going to be burnt out, and I ran to try and save my cattle and horses and things.
22. You went on horsback?—No, on foot.
23. Did the fire increase?—Yes, very fast. There was a nor'-wester blowing.
24. Would that bring the fire in the direction of your place?—Yes.
25. Did it bring it?—Yes, it came down fast.
26. Did it reach your land?—Yes, it swept the whole thing before it.
27. Did it pass on to Mr. Mackle's?—Yes.
28. And I believe some railway-men came to put it out?—Yes. Some came from Ealing, and some from Hinds.
29. Another train came and left some hands?—The other train came at 2 o'clock, and stopped nearly where the fire originated.
30. And finally the fire was put out?—Yes; but it was not put out for a long time. A lot of men gathered and put it out.
31. You went to save your cattle and horses from the fire?—Yes.
32. Did you go next day to see where the fire had started?—Yes, but I could not tell the exact spot.
33. Where did it start, do you think?—A little south of the 72-mile peg.
34. *Mr. Poynton.*] How far from the rails?—I could not tell.
35. *Mr. Purnell.*] Was it a foot, or a yard, or a dozen yards?—Well, that is a thing I would not say at all. I was not there to see whether it was a foot or a yard.