

165. In what direction do they come?—As a rule, from the west. I have also known fires to go to the east when the wind was in the other direction: that is on Mr. Wylie's place.

166. Do you say the fires are caused by sparks from engines?—I am pretty well certain of it. I have been travelling and I have been burnt myself, though not seriously. In travelling along the railway I have seen fires lighting here and there, principally in the scoria ground, after the engine had passed.

167. On the line?—Not on the line, but outside, and not through smokers throwing matches away, but from sparks from the engine. I have seen them in other people's ground across the boundary.

168. Do you know the paddock that is called Buttle's paddock?—Yes.

169. Do you remember that about two years ago that paddock was burnt?—Yes.

170. You know what that paddock was up to that time?—Yes; it was in good grass—ordinary pasture.

171. Mr. Wallace says he had to resow that and put bonedust in. What would be fair compensation to him, now, through that fire—loss of paddock and expense of resowing?—I should say about £2 an acre.

172. Is £20 an overestimate for the 17 acres?—It is an underestimate. As to provisions for spark-catching, I may say I have been in the habit of working engines for the last twenty or twenty-five years.

173. What do you think could be done to stop the sparks?—The funnels at the top are copious, and I would suggest a wire cage of a very strong character. It would need a wire screen or cage, and it would have to be strong, as the engine works at a very high pressure, although we work at as high a pressure between the stacks.

174. Are you working at as high a pressure?—120 lb. to the square inch.

175. *Mr. Poynton.*] What sort of coal do you use?—Newcastle or Westport.

176. You do not use Taupiri?—We once did, and we had a fire, so we do not use it. I have owned a threshing-machine for twenty-five years, and I have had a traction-engine which we work up to 120 lb. pressure.

177. *Mr. Brookfield.*] Does it throw any sparks?—It throws sparks of little importance, yet we have no spark-arrester.

THOMAS WYLIE, sworn.

178. *Mr. Brookfield.*] You are a farmer, living on the opposite side of the line from Mr. Wallace?—Yes.

179. Can you tell us about the fires that have occurred on Mr. Wallace's land, and the cause of them?—The cause of them, I am certain, is the engine. I have proof positive of that. They all thought I was escaping pretty well on my side of the line, and that Mr. Wallace was getting all the fires, but when the wind changed I got them. Three or four times I had to go and put fires out. My man and I have sat for a whole day watching the trains to put the fires out. One fire burned 6 acres of splendid grass.

180. Which way is the prevailing wind?—The wind generally went towards Mr. Wallace's, but when it changed the fires came to my place. I have seen Mrs. Wallace and her daughter running out to beat the fires, and getting other people to help, Mrs. Wallace carrying a bag in her hand; and many is the time I have pitied her.

181. Did that often happen?—It sometimes occurred twice a day.

182. After the train had passed, have you seen fires start on Mr. Wallace's place?—Yes, it was shortly after the train passed that the fires started.

183. And that has always been the case?—Yes.

184. With reference to the value of the property itself, does it appreciate these farms, as farms, to be alongside the railway-line?—Undoubtedly it takes away from their value.

185. Could Mr. Wallace safely put a green crop into any of the paddocks alongside the railway-line?—Not if the wind was blowing to his land and the engines are running as they are now.

186. A good deal of grain is grown in the district, is there not?—Yes.

187. What would he have to do—plant potatoes, or use it for green stuff or feeding?—I suppose he would have to do that.

188. There would be nothing else left to do?—No.

189. *Mr. Cooper.*] I suppose, with all its faults, you like the railway?—Yes.

190. You would not like to be without it?—No; but I think they should put something on the funnel to keep down the sparks. They should not be allowed to blow out as they do now, and so take away from the value of our land.

AUGUSTUS VANZANT MACDONALD, sworn.

191. *Mr. Cooper.*] What are you, Mr. Macdonald?—Locomotive Engineer, Auckland Section of the New Zealand Railways.

192. Were you so in 1896?—In 1896 I was what is now called District Engineer. I was transferred to the department Mr. Biss is in from 1895 to 1897.

193. During 1896, then, you were District Engineer?—Yes.

194. But both as District Engineer and Locomotive Engineer you can speak to the precautions taken by the department in reference to sparks?—Yes.

195. Taking it generally first: you have studied the question very closely, I think?—Yes.

196. With the view of getting the best system introduced into the locomotives here?—Yes.

197. Dealing, first of all, with the appliances you had in 1896, can you say whether you had the best-known appliances?—Yes.