

ALFRED CARMEL HUCKSTEP, sworn.

370. *Mr. Cooper.*] I think you are employed in the Railway Department, in Mr. Hogan's gang?—I am in Mr. Russell's gang.

371. You were with Hogan in 1898?—Yes.

372. Are you a platelayer?—Yes.

373. You were in the railway employment in 1898, and are so still?—Yes.

374. So far as your experience goes, have the regulations with regard to precautions to prevent fires been adhered to?—Yes, strictly.

CHARLES SMITH, sworn.

375. *Mr. Cooper.*] What are you?—An engine-driver.

376. I notice by the reports that you drove No. 13 and No. 30 on the 13th January, 1898?—I could not recollect it, except from the records.

377. *Mr. Poynton.*] Did you notice any fires?—I could not say.

378. What was the condition of the spark-arrester?—In very good order. They have always been looked after.

379. *Mr. Cooper.*] So far as you know, are the spark-arresting appliances carefully looked after by the men in charge? I suppose you locomotive men pay some attention to other men's engines?—Yes; I can say the appliances are always in good order.

380. You speak specially for yourself and generally for the others?—Yes.

381. Each morning and evening?—Yes.

382. And when necessary during the day?—Yes.

383. *Mr. Brookfield.*] In spite of the arresters, do the engines throw out many sparks?—No; they might throw out a few sparks.

384. One witness said that from Ann's Bridge to Remuera he counted eleven fires?—Yes; he thought they were set fire to by the engine.

385. *Mr. McLaughlin* told us so. You know him, do you?—Yes.

386. And he said he watched?—The surfacemen might have been burning off at the time.

387. *Mr. Poynton.*] They are continually burning off, are they?—Yes, they are continually burning.

388. *Mr. Brookfield.*] Do you drive past Mr. Wallace's place?—Yes, four days in the week.

389. Lately?—Yes.

390. Mr. Wallace's daughter and Mr. Wallace say that since the 30th December they have put out seventeen fires after engines have passed?—I cannot say anything about that.

391. Do you still say that no sparks fly?—Well, of course, a fire might occur in a good many ways.

392. But this was just after the passing of a train?—There are any number of people in a train who throw out matches.

393. But these fires occur as much as a chain away from the line?—I do not know anything about that.

THOMAS UNDERWOOD, sworn.

394. *Mr. Cooper.*] You are an engine-driver in the employment of the Railway Department?—Yes.

395. I think you have been so for some years?—I have been a driver for seventeen years.

396. Do you look carefully after your spark-arresting apparatus and generally after the engine?—Certainly.

397. You know the regulations?—Yes.

398. Do you carefully and thoroughly attend to the engine?—Yes, it is part of our duties.

399. Do the other engine-drivers do the same?—They can hardly avoid it. There are certain duties a man has to do on putting his engine away. He has to open his smoke-box and clean it out at the end of the day, and if there is anything wrong he cannot help seeing it.

400. The engine-drivers on this section are careful men?—Yes. They are as careful a body of men as I have been among.

401. Every other engine-driver obeys the regulations as you do?—Yes.

402. Do you recollect the fire at Mr. Wallace's in December, 1898?—Yes.

403. When a freshly mown paddock was destroyed?—Yes, the fire was being extinguished as I passed.

404. *Mr. Oliphant.*] You say you examined the smoke-catcher every day? How long have you run the present engine without having any repairs or innovations in the spark-catcher? Have you had the same spark-catcher from, say, the 1st December?—It has been the same all the time.

405. It has not been repaired or renewed?—No, there has been nothing to repair.

406. Do the corrugations not wear?—Yes, but as a rule they last as long as the engine is out of the shop without repairs. If the engine goes two years without repair the deflector will last for that time. If there is anything wrong you immediately detect it. Immediately these things give way the engine makes steam so quickly that you cannot help noticing it.

407. And in that worn state the danger for fires would be great?—Yes.

408. And they sometimes run eighteen months without being renewed?—Yes, without being touched. I have run an engine for three years without renewing it.

409. In the last month of that time would the spark-arrester be as perfect as it was in the first month?—Yes; it might wear thinner, but it would not get through. The constant action gradually makes it thinner.

410. *Mr. Poynton.*] Do you find that the supports of the deflector ever gave way?—They do sometimes, but immediately they get loose we detect it by the sound made by the deflector.