

14. How long have you been in the employment of the department?—About nineteen years.
15. And during that time have you seen many fires that were supposed to be started by sparks?—A good many.
16. Can you suggest anything that would lessen the liability to fires from such a cause?—I think that everything is done in the engines at present to save sparks from coming out.
17. You can form no idea as to how this particular fire occurred?—No; I could form no idea at all.
18. On what sections of railway have you been working in New Zealand?—I was on the Auckland Section for several years, and I was on the Canterbury Section. I have been in Wellington about eight months.
19. The Auckland Section has a good many fires in the summer, has it not?—We used to have a good many in the Waikato, through the swamps.
20. Do you think there were more than in Canterbury?—No, I think we had as many in Canterbury.
21. Have you many fires on the Wellington Section?—We have had nothing to speak of since I have been here.
22. From your experience, do you find that the men—gangers and platelayers—exercise proper care?—Yes. They try to burn off all they can, and if they see a fire start they go immediately, according to instructions, to try to prevent it from spreading. All care is taken that we can possibly take.
23. You have had experience in other countries, have you?—I was in Canada for some years.
24. Employed on the railways?—Yes.
25. Do fires occur there?—Oh, yes; just as much as they do here. In fact, I have seen heavier fires there when we got into the new bush country.
26. What precautions are taken there for preventing fires?—I have heard the enginemmen talking about the spark-catchers in their engines.
27. You could not give details?—No.
28. Do you know anything of the fire at Hinds?—Yes, I remember it. It started after the express passed. My report on it is as follows:—

Memorandum for Resident Engineer, Christchurch.

Ashburton, 4th March, 1898.

SIR,—

In re Fire at Mr. J. Moore's Property, Hinds.

I saw Mr. Moore to-day, and he showed me over where the fire ran on his property. It has burnt about 50 or 60 acres of tussock-grass, and about 70 chains of gorse fence, and about 25 chains of stakes from a wire-and-stake fence. The fire must have crossed a chain road on to Mr. Moore's land. Half the road is bare, with heavy tussocks on sides.

I went over it afterwards to see what was burnt, and I found there were 315 stakes (the price at Hinds was £1 1s. a hundred), nine straining-posts (at 2s. each), and that it would take two men nearly a week to repair the fence. I cannot tell anything about the value of the tussock-grass burnt. Some had averaged it at 5s. an acre.

29. Your estimate of the damage, apart from the grass, was—how much?—About £10 1s. The 60 acres of grass would be worth about £9. I see by the report that Mr. Burnett has added that as the value of the grass.

30. The estimate made by you and Mr. Burnett, then, would be £19 1s. altogether?—Yes.

31. From the appearance of the area burnt, do you think it started near the railway?—Yes, about 2 chains from the railway-line. The wind at the time was blowing a heavy nor'-wester, and would carry sparks to the point where the fire started.

32. And it occurred shortly after the express train had passed?—Yes, shortly after the mail train had gone down.

33. Was there any loose material where this fire started?—It started in the plantation. We had land ploughed in front of the plantation—between the railway and the plantation—and the fire started among the young trees and grass.

34. On land not belonging to the Railway Department?—It was all railway land. The Government have some 14 or 15 acres planted there.

35. Under what department was the care of that land?—Under the Railway Department; it was all railway land.

36. Do you know whether the material was cleared away from that land?—There was grass and inflammable stuff among the trees. We generally plough a strip to prevent fires, but in this case the fire started beyond the ploughed strip.

37. You can say nothing of the origin of the fire beyond that it was seen after the passing of the express, and that it started outside the ploughed strip?—That is all.

38. I suppose it is only during the summer months that fires occur in Canterbury?—Yes, that is so. When it is a wet season there are never any fires there. Of course, it is possible that any of these fires was started by some one setting a match to the grass, or from some other cause like that, but it is not possible to tell the origin.

THOMAS FORTH ROTHERAM, sworn.

39. *Mr. Poynton.*] What is your position, Mr. Rotheram?—I am the Locomotive Superintendent for the New Zealand Railways.

40. How long have you been in that position?—Since 1888.

41. What was your experience previously in the same line?—I was Locomotive Engineer of the Hurunui-Bluff Section from 1885 to 1888, and I was General Manager of the West Coast railways—the Wanganui Railways—from 1878 to 1885. I started in the Railway Department in the colony on the 1st January, 1875, and I have been connected with the railways ever since.

42. I want you to state what, in your opinion, are the best means for preventing sparks on the railways, and to say if you have the necessary appliances on your railways here?—It has been