

97. In your report of the 19th February you say, "The fire discovered on the 2nd instant by Mr. Dixon and party on the back heading of long jig cannot be taken as sufficient evidence that combustion originated and was confined to this particular part of the mine, as was at first supposed, for on the morning on the 5th instant, before the temporary stoppings were reopened (that Mr. Dixon sealed down at 5 p.m., 2nd instant), active fire was burning up through the grass at the extreme boundary at No. 2 incline workings on Chasm Creek of the coalfield." You say everything was sealed down completely ten days after: did you seal the place where the smoke was seen?—No; we could not possibly seal it. It was there that morning, as I stated.

98. Could you expect the fire to be anything but extensive after the fan had been at work eight or ten hours?—It was practically impossible to deal with the fire without ventilation.

99. Could not Mr. Dixon, instead of trying to force his way up to the fire, have put temporary stoppings in, and left the main road clear—closed all the bords which led into the seat of the fire, and so confined it where it was?—Not being thoroughly conversant with the conditions, I could not possibly give a decided answer on that point. It was absolutely necessary on Mr. Dixon's part to locate the fire, and by all possible means to ascertain the extent of the fire.

100. If you had been there could you not have left it better?—I could not say what the conditions were when he was there.

101. *The Chairman.*] You went there on the 28th January?—Yes; I left on the 29th, and Mr. Dixon was left in full charge of the property.

102. On the 28th and 29th you went a considerable distance into the mine did you not?—We went in past the North workings. We went in to about No. 3.

103. Why did you not go further?—We could not, because the air-current turned or reversed.

104. As a matter of fact, since the fire, have you ever been to where the fire was?—The furthest point I ever went in after the fire was as far as the air-shaft.

105. *Mr. Cottrell.*] You say you went in 16 chains?—Yes; it was counted about that.

106. How long did it take you to return to the mine-mouth?—We went through the north workings to satisfy ourselves there was no fire in that region.

107. If I brought evidence to show that you went only to the first turn and stopped there, would you say that it was incorrect?—Yes.

108. Did you turn to the first opening on the left hand and stand there some time?—We never went either to the right or left, because it was impossible for us to travel further.

109. Did you give instructions to the men to give signals?—Yes.

110. Did you continue to give signals all the time?—While we were on the haulage-road I believe we met people going in. The chalk-mark was left in the drive. We all looked at it on the 5th February on going in.

111. Your report goes on to say, "Monday, 5th February, 1900.—Before reopening the mine I travelled over to Chasm Creek side of the fire-affected section, in view of ascertaining to what extent the fire was showing on the surface and along the outcrops. Indications of active fire were seen at the extremity of No. 2 incline workings, also from the two drives above main drive and old furnace shaft. Returning to mine-entrance, brattice was opened and fan started. Having obtained a reliable air-current, I led the party in the main roadway until we reached the junction of furnace-shaft drive. At this point a continuous column of smoke was discharging from the rise into the main roadway, making progress impossible either to the rise or along the level plane. From this point a fierce fire was discovered on main roadway, which proved the rise workings were one burning mass. To ascertain the intensity of the fire I waited at this point for fifteen minutes, but seeing there was no possible hope of saving the haulage-road I definitely decided to seal off the whole mine." You had the fan at work properly then?—Yes.

112. As the fan was working properly, could you not have got further up from the mouth of the mine?—Not with safety. I did not see any advantage in it; neither could I have got men to work in there.

113. What did you expect to save by putting the dam in where you did?—The stopping there was as effective as if it had been put further in.

114. Had you put the dam in 8 or 10 chains further, could the coal have been got at within ten hours?—I did study the conditions I was working in then. The first part of the paragraph shows my desire was to see if by any possible means we could save the haulage-road. That was the original design of Mr. Dixon and myself.

115. A far more effective way was to block off stoppings on the main road: instead of going that way to the fire, if they had blocked off the air-courses, would that not have been the most effective means?—Assuming that we had been able to save the haulage-road through the tunnel by stopping all the bords, the open and broken country overlying the pillar ground would have supplied fresh air to support the combustion.

116. As you say this is the case, and there was no commercial value in the coal, and no danger of the fire spreading to the North section, where was the use in going to all this expense for nothing? Was it not better to make permanent stoppings right off? What did you expect to effect?—We expected to save all the coal in the mine. If it had been possible for me to have had a water-dam at both ends of the tunnel, and to have raised the water, the result would have been the same to-day.

117. It was only a small fire when the fan was put to work?—The effort was made to locate the fire. If you assume that Mr. Dixon had attempted to seal the fire without locating it the same result would have occurred.

118. *The Chairman.*] Why?—I consider that as practical men it was our duty to locate the fire, and, if possible, to see what we could save.

119. But what result would have occurred? Do you mean that as regards the inquiry the same dissatisfaction would have occurred?—Yes, for not locating the fire.