

120. *Mr. Corby.*] You say the fire would have burned the same if you had sealed it off, and if the stoppings had been put in properly?—The outcrop ground was all broken and open. We knew that before the mine was stopped. It was impossible to deal with the outcrops—it was beyond human aid. I think Mr. Dixon's reports are quite clear on that point. It was impossible to do anything on the haulage-roads, because the fire came back on him so rapidly.

121. *The Chairman.*] Supposing the thing was to occur again, what was there to prevent your going into the main entrance and sealing off the bords as you went along, driving the foul air back by a gentle application of the fan, if necessary, thus enabling you to take in a return brattice?—The fire came back on the haulage-road, and it was impossible to deal with it.

122. How long would it have taken to seal off the bords? Was it that the work was too great to do, or was it that the result would have been disastrous? It is suggested that you should, first of all, have sealed off the bords on the right-hand side as you went in?—There was nothing to prevent that. That was what we were fighting for—to go up and find out where the fire was. When I left Mr. Dixon my instructions to him were to brattice off all the openings on each side of the drive—on each side of the main haulage-road.

123. Was that done?—That was not done when I again entered the mine on the 5th February.

124. Do you know why?—I asked, and he said that he thought that with the air-current he had it was not necessary. It was the first thing I asked him when I did see him. We made an effort to cut off at No. 6.

125. Could it have been done on the 29th?—Possibly it could; but it was impossible for a man to live at No. 6 for two minutes.

126. *Mr. Lomas.*] If you gave orders that these places should be bratticed off, how do you reconcile that with the statement you made that when you came back the mine was satisfactorily sealed up?—The mine-entrance was sealed up. There was sufficient ventilation to carry forward the work of locating the fire. The chief thing in stopping this place was to prevent the accumulation of gases coming in behind the men. That was the precaution required.

127. Where was Mr. Dixon on the 5th February?—He came out on Wednesday, the 7th, when we were finishing the stopping. I do not think the coal in the North block is of any value. It is full of faults. Mr. Broome had driven past it.

128. *The Chairman.*] Now, with regard to the Hector block, is there any quantity of coal wasted in that block in consequence of the fire?—No. There are a few pillars on No. 1 left standing at present. There is no coal worth speaking of—that is, solid coal. There are a few pillars.

129. What damage has the fire done to the mine generally?—The fire has been the cause of the loss of a very small quantity of coal, and it has probably destroyed parts of the haulage-road. It has not interfered with the North block. The tunnel has fallen in just inside the stopping. Directly inside of the dam now the main tunnel has subsided direct through to the surface.

130. *Mr. Lomas.*] What do you think is the cause of that falling in?—We cannot tell.

131. Do you think it is due to the flooding of the tunnel?—It is solid rock there, and we were more than surprised.

132. *The Chairman.*] What is the height of the cover?—It may be 70 ft. The ground settled down.

133. *Mr. Lomas.*] Has not the flooding of a mine a tendency to destroy the roof?—Yes, sometimes.

134. You said no coal of any value had been destroyed by the fire?—No.

135. What means have you of knowing that?—Because the fire would naturally burn to the nearest place where it could get fresh air.

136. You say you saw the fire in the main drive?—Yes.

137. Where did it come from?—It came from that heading.

138. If that is so, it is possible that places between the pillars and the main drive may be somewhat burnt?—Yes, there would be a scorching.

139. What would put the fire out in the pillars?—The dam. They would get no air. After we put in the stoppings I reduced the speed of the fan to just enough to give the men air.

140. *Mr. Corby.*] Is the plan produced a correct one?—The plan I produce is the accurate plan.

141. You say that the object of Mr. Dixon and yourself was to locate the fire in order to save what property you could?—That was the design.

142. When Mr. Dixon located the fire, did he try to protect any property?—No; he did nothing but locate the fire. It was impossible to save the rails.

143. Do you think if this mine had been a large one, such as those at Denniston and Granity, you would not have taken more active steps to put out the fire?—I exercised all the skill I had, and all the physical energy in my body, to rescue the mine.

144. When you came there did you know that Mr. Dixon was going away with you?—He went back with me.

145. Did he promise to faithfully carry out your instructions?—There was no necessity for him to be there while they were constructing the fan. He would have been there within an hour's notice if required, and instructions were given that no one was to be allowed to enter the mine during his absence.

146. Do you not think it would have been practicable to put a practical mine-manager, who was on the ground, to take his (Mr. Dixon's) place in his absence?—I could not see the utility of it, because there was nothing to be done but the rebuilding of the fan.

147. *Mr. Lomas.*] Do you not think that some competent person ought to have been there night and day, whether they were erecting the fan or not, to watch the development of the fire?—Mr. Mitchell was there all the time. He is not a certificated man, but he is a good practical man.