

man. Mr. Jamieson at once met me and telephoned to Mr. Lindop, who mentioned that the best man possible to get hold of was Mr. Dixon, because he had had considerable experience of fires. We then rang up Mr. Dixon. There was a little delay in that, and I went back to my office. I also saw the captain of the fire-brigade, and some of the men were asked to kindly give their assistance, if required, with their hand-engine; but this it was found would be of little use. We will now get to the time when I first communicated with Messrs. Tennent and Broome. Mr. Broome spoke to Mr. Tennent, and we arranged to wait an hour for him to get all the information he could. I went back to Mr. Jamieson's private house, and was able to have communication with Mr. Dixon. It was arranged that Dixon should go out with me at 7 o'clock in the morning. I then went back to the office and waited until Mr. Tennent came back from the mine. That was on the same day. Tennent went up and reported to me that he could not possibly get in to the fire at the time but that he would make another effort, which he did. They then found that they could only get into the drive a certain distance, and decided that nothing could be done until the morning. I informed Mr. Tennent and Mr. Broome, who was the man in charge, of my coming out and bringing Mr. Dixon with me. I think Mr. Tennent was glad to have Mr. Dixon. At any rate, we went out next morning and met Mr. Tennent, and together we went up to the drive, I remaining outside while Mr. Tennent and Mr. Dixon and one or two others made an effort to get into the mine. They were away some time, and came back and reported that it was impossible to get in owing to the black damp and poisonous gases. Mr. Dixon and Mr. Tennent then deliberated as to their course of action. As far as I am concerned, I kept myself in close touch with my directors, and was successful in getting a message through to Christchurch at about 1 o'clock in the morning. I communicated with my people from Seddonville by urgent message, keeping them apprised of what was being done. I produce a memorandum as to the opinion given to me by Mr. Dixon as to the position. It is as follows:—

5.30 p.m., 2nd February, 1900.

THE fire in mine was located to-day in the back-heading of the long jig. Before entering the mine the fan was started, and a measured current of 10,440 ft. air obtained at mine entrance. The party consisted of J. Dixon, A. Mitchell, R. Broome, J. Clark, and J. Smith. The party travelled to a point some 29 chains on main road, returned to long jig back-heading and discovered the fire therein, some 4 chains up the said heading. The main road was closely bratticed off, and air diverted up heading. Success attended the efforts for some time, but about 4 p.m. a fall took place, and at same time the mass burst into flames for a distance back of 10 or 12 yards. Falls continued, one very heavy one taking place. The fire being so active, and falling roof so continuous, it was decided to abandon efforts to reach the seat. It was positively unsafe to venture anything of the kind. I, therefore, decided to withdraw the workmen, and close the mine as far as possible, until further considered and seen by Government Inspector. The heading was closely bratticed at 5 p.m., also all openings to mine reclosed; practically sealing the mine by temporary means. From my close observance of the conditions, I hereby state that the fire is extensive, and the only safe remedy is to seal off the affected district as soon as possible.

JONATHAN DIXON.

I felt that the matter was serious, and applied to the Westport Coal Company to let me have Mr. Dixon's services to practically deal with the matter, and informed my directors in Christchurch of what I had done. My request, of course, could not be acceded to until communication had been had with Dunedin. Mr. Jamieson's company very generously and promptly gave permission to Mr. Dixon to render any assistance he could in the matter. Practically, I left Mr. Dixon in charge for two or three days. That brings me up to the point where they endeavoured to combat the fire. I express no opinion as to whether the course adopted was right or wrong. Within my knowledge, Mr. Dixon left a statement with the Mines Department as to what guided him in the matter.

35. The fire is still burning, is it not?—Yes. When Mr. Dixon left, Mr. Tennent practically had sole charge of the directions.

36. Do you wish to express any opinion?—No. All I did was to get all the possible assistance I could to put the fire out.

37. That was in January, 1900. What has been the position of the company since then—what have they paid towards the expenses of putting this fire out?—I think over £400.

38. How many men did they put on after the Sunday, when the fire was discovered?—About half a dozen, performing various works under Mr. Tennent. Mr. Dixon only remained for a certain time—three or four days. Both he and Mr. Tennent concurred in the course of action taken.

39. How long did the company go on finding money to pay the expenses for putting the fire out?—We went into liquidation in March following.

40. Up to that time had you been paying men to endeavour to put the fire out?—I think so. The resolution to go into liquidation was passed in March, and was confirmed on the 4th April, I think.

41. Then, during all February and most of March, efforts were being made to put out the fire?—Yes, at the company's expense.

42. Was any money paid after the liquidation of the company?—I cannot say.

43. Has anything been done with regard to cancelling the lease?—The Government resumed possession on the 23rd or 24th May.

44. In what way?—By serving a notice on us, and posting it up at the office, under the provisions of the Coal-mines Act.

45. Did any officer go up and take possession of the property?—Yes, Mr. Tennent.

46. Was any rent due?—No rent, but the royalties were not paid.

47. Do you know what amount was due?—About £1,600 or £1,700.

48. For how long a period do you suppose the company was able to employ its average of ninety men and boys?—For about four years we had been putting out coal, and the number gradually increased. We began with perhaps ten or twenty at first. That was the actual number employed in the mine. We were employing a large number of men from the time we started,