

The remarks made with reference to the general condition of holdings will apply also to the village settlements throughout the district, which have helped many hardworking and deserving men to a position of comparative or actual independence, and on which have been reared a number of the younger men who are now going out to settle the unoccupied lands of the colony, though it is to be regretted that in many instances they are obliged to find holdings outside this district.

The land-for-settlements holdings are dealt with at length in a separate report. (See Appendix II.)

PAYMENTS OF RENT, REBATES, AND ARREARS.

The total annual rental payable by the 3,153 holders, occupying 4,133,818 acres and 32 perches of Crown land in the district, is £143,196 2s. The amount of arrears of rent due at the 31st March, 1907, by the tenants of all classes was £1,676 19s. 1d., owing by ninety-four holders, occupying 21,163 acres 3 roods 26 perches. This represents about 3 per cent. of the total number of holders, and, as regards amount, a little under $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the annual rent-roll of the district.

The usual rebate of 10 per cent. has been allowed to all tenants within the classes specified in "The Crown Tenants' Rent Rebate Act, 1900," and "The Land for Settlements Consolidation Act, 1900," who paid their rents within the prescribed period of one month after due date. The total number of tenants who received this concession was 1,755, out of the 2,065 tenants in the specified classes, and the amount granted by way of rebate was £7,946 12s. 5d.

FORFEITURES AND SURRENDERS.

During the year eight holdings of all classes were forfeited for breach of conditions, the total area being 240 acres and 26 perches. Surrenders were accepted at the request of the lessees in respect of six holdings, comprising a total area of 901 acres and 22 perches, making a grand total of fourteen holdings, representing an area of 1,141 acres 1 rood 8 perches, and an annual rental of £365 17s. 2d. Of the eight forfeitures, four leases in perpetuity were terminated for non-fulfilment of conditions of occupation and two for non-payment of rent, and two coal-mining leases for non-compliance with working-conditions.

TRANSFERS AND EXCHANGES.

A very large number of holdings occupied under settlement conditions changed hands by way of transfer during the year. This is probably due in part to a desire merely to take advantage of the present high values; while in other cases tenants have, aided by recent favourable seasons, done sufficiently well to be enabled either to purchase freehold properties in the open market, or to take up larger areas of Crown leasehold. The total number of settlement holdings that changed hands was 200, comprising 43,214 acres 2 roods 18 perches, made up as follows:—

	Number.	Area.		
		A.	R.	P.
Leases in perpetuity, all classes	144	22,141	2	0
Village-homestead leases, all classes	34	1,209	3	2
Perpetual and farm-homestead leases	5	662	3	35
Occupation-with-right-of-purchase licenses	4	209	0	6
Small grazing-runs and grazing-farms	13	18,991	1	15

These figures represent an increase of forty-one holders and 17,790 acres upon the corresponding figures for the preceding year.

The number of holdings exchanged from perpetual lease to lease in perpetuity was seven, comprising an area of 215 acres 1 rood 38 perches, a considerable decrease upon the sixteen holdings and 506 acres and 8 perches exchanged in the previous year.

In the figures quoted in the three foregoing paragraphs, the land-for-settlement leases have been included for the purpose of showing the actual totals dealt with.

RESERVES.

Twelve blocks of land, comprising a total area of 961 acres 2 roods 25 perches, were set apart as reserves during the year; four were for plantation purposes, three for scenery preservation, two for recreation, and one each for school-site, bridge-protection, and sanctuary for wild fowl.

TIMBER, FORESTS, ETC.

The number of sawmilling and splitting licenses in existence at the close of the year was twenty-one, covering an area of 3,319 acres 3 roods 8 perches, from which a revenue of £275 9s. 1d. had been collected. These were all situated in the Oxford Bush.

I have to report with regret that in January last, when the whole country was in an exceedingly inflammable condition as the result of an unusually dry season, destructive fires occurred both in the bush around Mount Oxford and also at Otarama and Paterson's Creek, on the south side of the Waimakariri River, near the Midland Railway. Aided by prevailing strong winds, the fires destroyed several thousand acres of bush that this district can ill afford to lose. Careful inquiry was made into the origin of the fires, and although there are grounds for suspecting that in the case at least of the Oxford fire it was caused either intentionally or through almost criminal carelessness, yet there is not at present sufficient evidence to admit of any proceedings being taken. A reward has been offered for evidence leading to the conviction of persons intentionally or carelessly causing such fires, and steps have been taken to make known the penalties attaching to such action. The question of dealing with the burnt