6. You say, so far as you can see, it is owing to the low class of wool being sent away?—The low qualities—that is, wool with a lot of vegetable matter in it, such as "burrs," and "dags" in the locks and "crutchings." Farmers, as a rule, are not so particular as to whether the wool is dry when they crutch the sheep, owing to the fact that they have no accommodation or conveniences for doing it in a dry place. I have seen considerable quantities of it heated in my time, and it is possible also that if it had been left a longer time it would considerably increase in heat. I have never seen it to the same extent in any good-quality wool after being packed. The whole tendency to heat has been in the low-quality wools where insufficient care has been taken before shipment. I could not say, at the same time, whether the heating I have seen would be sufficient to cause fire, because when wool heats up to a certain point it sort of comes down again. If the fires have been caused by wool at all, I am sure it is owing to the vegetation which has been left in the wool. For instance, I have known of sheep being driven across a stream—quite knee-deep—and shorn the very next day. With the amount of vegetation there would be in that wool it would be impossible to have the wool dry. This season—and that before the fires—has been very bad for shearing. I have known of a man taking a station for classing some nine thousand sheep, and he has taken five weeks in doing so. Then, owing to the limited accommodation which many of the farmers have at their disposal, it makes one think, when it takes such a length of time to cut out a shed, that the lower qualities of wool would not be properly dried. However, from my own personal observation during my time with the Wellington Woollen Company or with the Gear Company, I have not seen any of my wool damaged in any way at all.

7. *Captain Blackburne.*] In the instance you have just spoken of, where did the fire originate? Where did you first discover the fire?—On the outside of the pack.

8. On the outside?—Yes. On the outside of the bales. Little or no wool was burnt at that time.

9. You did not see any actual flames?—No, only smouldering.

10. I take it this was in a stack outside the shed, covered over with a tarpaulin?—Yes; about forty bales were stacked up together and covered with a tarpaulin.

11. I understood from the evidence given by you before a former inquiry that the fire originated in the centre of the stack?—It was between two bales, yes. But these bales were near the outside, as far as I can remember. It was thirty-five years ago.

12. *The Chairman.*] That was in your apprenticeship days?—Yes.

13. *Mr. Foster.*] In your evidence, then, you stated that you actually found certain of the bales on fire. Was there any actual fire, so far as you can remember?—The pack itself was on fire.

14. You mentioned three bales as being on fire?—Two at the bottom and one on the top on the outside, and between that they were on fire.

15. They were smouldering?—Yes. I think, if I remember right, the covering—the sheeting on top of them—had blazed, but that was not the wool itself.

16. You were satisfied that the fire was the result of spontaneous combustion?—We thought it was spontaneous combustion. We put it down to that, owing to the amount of vegetation that was in the wool.

17. The conclusion I draw from what you say is that, in your opinion, wool of that class, and in that condition, will spontaneously fire?—Yes, we think so, when packed wet. But a bale of good wool, or ordinary-conditioned wool—I think it would be impossible for it to spontaneously fire. It is the vegetation, if anything, that causes this spontaneous combustion.

18. In your earlier days—before going to the Gear Company—when gaining your experience, had you at any time experience of spontaneous combustion in wool?—No, not before going to the Gear Company—in fact, never since, either. I have heard it rumoured that the recent fires were caused by spontaneous combustion. I had the opportunity of examining a large quantity of the wool that was on that ship that caught fire in Wellington some years ago. That wool went to the Woollen Company. The bales had been left for a fortnight or three weeks before being opened, and there was little or no damage done to the wool at all; but then it was not stacked.

19. What class of wool was that?—Good clean fleece wool.

20. *Captain Blackburne.*] Were these bales wet on the outside only, or did the wet extend right into the wool?—About 6 in. all round. Some of them were damp right through; in fact, it astonished me the amount of time it took for the water to penetrate right through the bales, although there were tons of water poured into the ship.

21. These bales were stowed in a well-ventilated place when they came into your charge?—They were outside.

22. *Mr. Foster.*] Have you noticed any cases of a very perceptible rise in temperature in slipe wool at all?—After being dried?

23. At any stage at all?—Only with the seedy wool. Wool with vegetation in it will not remain long packed without heating. It is perfectly harmless when it is thoroughly dry.

24. Have you ever known slipe wool to reach such a temperature as would cause an outbreak of fire?—It would have to be very badly dried indeed.

25. Assuming it to be in the very worst condition?—Without being confined, I should say, No.

26. In the condition it would be on board ship?—I could not say.

27. Then, you think the condition of seedy wool is more dangerous than fleece wool?—Yes, such as crutchings or pieces. The greatest danger is in the dirty belly-pieces. The belly-pieces and pizzle-pieces retain so much moisture that it is hard to get them dry, and more particularly in those lots coming from the small sheds.

28. Have you had any experience of baling sheep-skins?—Yes. I have packed about a hundred bales a year.

29. Do you consider that there is greater risk with sheep-skins being packed damp than in the case of wool?—Well, it just depends upon the accommodation you have to finish them in. In