

many years, I think I may say, that was the custom, and there is no doubt this led to great possibilities of the tow being baled up damp. Lately—say, during the last eighteen to twenty-four months—the value has gone up enormously, and is now from 200 to 300 per cent. above what it was two years ago—that is in figures from about £2 to £2 10s. per ton to £7 to £9 per ton. Under the circumstances, and speaking without actual knowledge, it is not unreasonable to assume that millers have taken during the last twelve to eighteen months considerably more care of this by-product. The tow is pressed into bales and bound either with hemp, rope, or wire ties, and is then ready for shipment. Assuming then that the tow has either not been taken in hand for baling from the outside heap when damp, or has been confined in a shed after removal from the scutching-machines, it should under any circumstances be thoroughly dry. Now, the only other matter to be dealt with in this connection is the preparation of the wool. I think it is very well known that sheep should be shorn dry, and the process of preparation must be so well known to every one that I need not take up your time by going over it again. Outside the question of climate, or whether with proper shearing accommodation, it is plain that wool should be in a fit condition for shipment after being baled up in the shed. Whether locks and pieces are entitled to be so regarded is a question that is possibly open to doubt, and one on which expert opinion would no doubt be forthcoming.

5. *Captain Blackburne.*] We were told yesterday that it was notorious among the shearers that a great deal of wool has been sent here from sheep shorn this year more or less wet, owing, I suppose, to the high price and owing to the wet season they were anxious to get the wool forward as soon as possible. Do you know anything about that?—No. It only seems to me that if it is true then the theory that damp wool will combust is knocked on the head.

6. *The Chairman.*] There would have been fires long before they did occur if that had been the fact?—Yes. I believe that October was the wettest month during the season. Any wool shorn in October would have been rushed in in order to be shipped in time to catch the January sales. I would not say that the wettest month from a meteorological point of view would necessarily by any means be the wettest for shearing, for you will realise that there might be considerably more rainfall in a month extending over a few days, whereas less rain in light showers spread over a greater number of days would interfere more with a shearing. The quantity of wool sent away for the January sales must have been—the bulk of it—October shearing, and I say that if the statement made be true that a very considerable number of sheep have been shorn during the season with the wool wet, then that wool has been shipped and it has arrived Home safely without any sign of fire whatever. In that case, how does the argument stand that wool when wet is liable to spontaneous combustion?

7. Would it not more likely be in the early part of the season that they would hold over their wool, and not rush it so much as they did later on?—The sheep-farmer?

8. Yes. In the case of those who are shearing—or are accustomed to shear in October; they find it wet, are they likely to hold over? He will not be so particular as the farmer who is shearing late and cannot afford to wait?—Those who shear in October have a desire to catch the January sales. Of course, you will realise that all or most farmers have a fancy for some particular sales, either from habit or as the result of some profitable experience of them—however, they like to catch some particular sales. I am not going to say that the man who shears in October will run the risk that a man who shears later will not. From what Captain Blackburne said—that it has been stated that a great deal of the wool was shorn wet during the season—then, if that is so, why did not the wool that left Wellington earlier ignite, instead of that which left all within a week?

9. *Captain Blackburne.*] You have seen letters written to the papers purporting to come from shearers?—Yes.

10. *Mr. Foster.*] You are consignee of wool-shipments: has it come under your notice that complaints have been made by shearers that the owners sheared damp sheep?—No; I have never heard of any.

11. Have you had many occasions to return wool to be reconditioned owing to being wet in transit?—I do not know about many; I have had to occasionally—only occasionally.

12. And have they been very wet or only slightly?—I should say not very. Of course, the measure of wet varies in the bales.

13. Of course, where you have to get it reconditioned the underwriters pay for it?—Yes.

14. And it would not occur to you to make any inquiries as to whether the damp was greater or lesser of late?—I was just coming to that point. The position has lately changed to what it was before, and I was about to deal with the question of removal generally. The conditions attaching to removal appear to me to apply equally to wool, flax, and tow, as all three pass through exactly the same process, and I fail to see that the inherent qualities of either render one more susceptible than the other to any of the causes that might tend to spontaneous combustion, always provided that reasonable and proper care is taken, as otherwise a very slight shower of rain, which would have no appreciable effect on the bale of wool, might soak into and damp the bale of tow if uncovered. The removal will consist of cartage, railage, or water carriage. What is necessary in the way of clean and dry carts, trucks, and coverings is obvious. The onus of supplying clean and dry carts with their coverings would naturally fall on the carrier, be he the mill-owner or the contractor. The position, however, when it gets to railage, is possibly not so clearly defined. The railage supplies the trucks at a siding, and in the truck they will probably leave a tarpaulin, the carrier having to do the loading. In the event of rain having fallen since the truck was side-tracked, on whom does the onus of cleaning and drying fall?

15. *The Chairman.*] The cleaning and drying of the truck itself?—Yes. It would be side-tracked by some evening train, and when the carrier comes to load his wool or flax he finds there is an inch or two of water in the truck. Again, after loading, the carrier presumably covers over the tarpaulin, and makes it fast. The truck then goes out of his control, and whether from faulty handling, tying, or quality of rope, the tarpaulin is liable to come adrift. Serious consequences