

things on top of the load some match had possibly got amongst it, but I could not find anything like that. There was a dam a little way along, and I hurried there to get some water, but when I got there I found it had been let off. I examined the load again, and thought the best thing to do was to get it off the wagon. I pulled the horses to one side by a hill, so that when I cut the ropes it would scatter. I cut the ropes quickly and there were seven bales on top, and when I gave it a push the rest scattered. By this time the load was flaming. There was a publican across the road named Fulton cutting his crop, and he was very excited and gave me a hand; he thought his place would be on fire, so he took the horses out as they were getting uneasy. I took the leaders out as the flames were getting to them, and my intention was to pull the wagon backwards and tip it over to prevent the wagon from getting burnt. The publican was taking the shafters out, but before getting any good done the front wheels were burned down. I think the whole thing happened in less than forty minutes from the time I started—it flamed at a terrible rate. Well, there was a lot of inquiry made about it by insurance men and police, and several people thought I must have had something inflammable about—some kerosene or something like that spilt on it, but it was an easy matter to prove there was no chance of my carrying anything like that, and I was not supposed to be a careless sort of fellow. Some of those bales were burned lightly off and singed round, and others were burnt to dust.

79. The whole bale?—Yes, burned to dust like ashes, and very quickly. I never saw anything burn like it. The insurance people took charge of them and gathered them up, but in the meantime there were a lot of people trying to burn this wool to see if it would burn; they put scrub round it and it would not burn, it would smoulder and singe. The wool was afterwards gathered up, and I think they got about seven bales hand-pressed.

80. *Mr. Foster.*] Not dumped?—Oh, no, pressed in with the hand and trampled down. There were seven bales they got out of about thirty bales in the first place. It is a long time ago, and I do not remember everything. The front wheels were completely burned down, and the high wheels were the only things saved out of it. They kept me there three days to see if they could find out any trace of it being my fault.

81. That is to say, they thought you were carrying something else with the wool?—Yes, but it was decided that the wool had heated through being wet. This wool was said to be cold-water washed. The Lindsay River runs past this shed, and it is spoken of as being very fine water for washing wool, almost like hot water, and they washed the wool on the sheep's back.

82. Had you noticed this wool stacked outside the shed?—No; I had not been there for any wool that year previously.

83. They were not able to cart any away during the time standing out?—No.

84. You were not employed on the station?—No, I was simply carting wool.

85. Did you hear at all as to whether it was indifferently covered, or whether it was shorn and packed wet?—We had a lot of talk about that with one another, but it was only casual.

86. Do you happen to know the name of the insurance company that was affected?—No. Dalgety and Co. and Nichol were the people it belonged to.

87. Could we get any records of it?—Yes, you could get all the records from Mr. Sams, the clerk, who is now at Balmoral Station, and Mr. Dewar, who was the manager.

88. About what year would that be?—1876.

89. The shearing of 1876?—Yes. I wired to several of my old acquaintances to get the information, and they replied that they would let me know later on—I wanted the exact date.

90. *The Chairman.*] You only got about twenty per cent. of the wool?—Yes.

91. Did you see the wool itself burning?—Yes, everything I had was burned under it. I will tell you a remarkable thing that happened: I used to be very fond of a black-opossum rug, and in the mornings I used to roll it up and put the straps round it tight, and put it and the horse-covers on the bales, and when these seven bales turned over it was underneath them. Well, when I came back the following trip, a fortnight later, the publican's children had been raking out the ashes and they raked out my opossum rug, and it was not burnt except in patches. I do not know whether the man Fulton, who was present at the fire, is alive to-day; he was an elderly man then.

92. *Mr. Foster.*] He was the only man who saw the actual fire besides yourself?—Yes.

93. *The Chairman.*] And when you went to camp that night on the wool it was too hot, and you put it down to the sultry weather?—Yes.

94. It was evidently considerably warm then?—Yes, but I did not take any notice of that.

95. You did not begin to examine it then?—No.

96. And not until you were some time on the road the next morning?—Yes, and when I saw the fire it made me think of it being hot the night before.

97. Did you hear of any fire in the wool that was carted previous to yours?—It was all unshipped, I believe, and examined, from that station, and it was found all right. There were other carriers on the road, and they got very frightened—it went off like an explosion, and only took about an hour from the time it flamed till it was in ashes.

98. You could not say how long after it had been packed in the shed and remained there before being put outside in the open under the influence of the rain?—No.

99. Probably the first put in and the last taken out?—It might have been.

100. And the longest in the shed compared with any other portion?—It might have been. I remember calling the attention of the manager, when loading this wool, to some rubbish that was burning—some dags.

101. Had that started by itself?—I think it had started on its own. These men only came down to help load on this station. There would be nobody living at the place at the time.

102. *Mr. Foster.*] That would be merino wool?—I could not tell you.

103. I do not suppose they kept any crossbred sheep up there?—I believe it was first combing from what I remember of the marks on the bales. I know there are some careless fellows who use a bale as a candlestick, but if the wool caught it would only burn as long as the candle burned.