

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, I wish to state that there is every prospect for another busy year in the building trade. Many firms are enlarging their premises, or demolishing their old premises and erecting new ones.

I must express my thanks to the Inspectors of Factories in the country districts visited by me; also employers and employees who have assisted me to carry out my duties.

I have, &c.,

The Secretary of Labour, Wellington.

HUGH GRESHAM,
Inspector of Scaffolding.

WELLINGTON.

SIR,—

Department of Labour, Wellington, 17th April, 1912.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ending 31st March, 1912.

During the year just concluded the building trades in Wellington have been somewhat quieter than formerly, but in the country districts they have been very brisk. Several large structures, have, however, been under construction in Wellington, and this, in conjunction with the briskness of the trades in other parts of the Dominion and in Australia, has prevented slackness of employment. On the contrary, employers have complained of the want of men.

Nothing unusual can be noted in connection with the operations of the Scaffolding Inspection Act during the past year. The Act is still working smoothly, but the work of administration and getting strict compliance with the regulations is very heavy. Scaffolding in use at buildings, particularly the larger ones, must necessarily be continually altered, pulled down, and re-erected. This entails many visits for the Inspector, and continual vigilance.

Some suggestions were made during the year that the Act be amended to give Inspectors power to condemn scaffolding, material, ladders, &c., at the owner's yards. To test whether such a clause would be of any utility I visited a number of builders' yards, painters' premises, &c., at several towns, including Wellington, Palmerston North, Napier, and Gisborne. At almost all the places visited I saw gear or material quite unfit for use, but when I pointed these out to the persons in charge they invariably explained that the gear, &c., in question was already condemned, and would certainly not be used again. I am of opinion, however, that in the event of any of the firms being very busy, and having all other available gear in use, some of the alleged condemned stuff would very likely be found in use again. As far as I can see, it is almost impossible to suggest anything workable to prevent this sort of thing, except what is already being done—that is, to keep a sharp look-out, and prevent workmen using any such gear at their work.

I am pleased to report that a good deal of improvement has been effected in regard to making provision for the better protection of the public where scaffolding is erected on or near streets or footpaths, by the erection of fanguards, gratings, or fencing a portion of the street off. This applies more particularly to country towns, and I have to thank the local authorities in most of these places for their co-operation and assistance in this connection.

During the period under review 319 notices of intention to erect scaffolding were received. Compared with former years this shows a decrease of notices from Wellington and an increase in the number from elsewhere in the district. With a few exceptions, these jobs were all visited; and, of course, the larger ones many times. A large amount of scaffolding was also visited that did not come up to the height requiring notice to be sent. It is seldom a visit is made to any structure without some omission or neglect being discovered. In many instances I have had to complain of the carelessness of the workmen in removing planks or other portions of scaffolding without authority, thus leaving danger for others, and in working at dangerous places when a little trouble would make them secure. For instance, a plumber was discovered working from a portion of an old pair of steps, nearly 30 ft. above the ground; the steps were stood on the top of a light box, which was in turn supported by a small nail barrel, and this "structure" was placed upon a plank, about 9 in. wide, fastened by brackets to the walls of the building, 25 ft. from the ground. A boy stood on the plank holding the box, barrel, and steps in position. This man could have erected a very safe platform to work from out of the material handy, but took the risk of falling to save a little time.

In other cases I find that some builders continue to use scaffolding material, such as planks, poles, ropes, ladders, &c., after they are worn out, and dangerous. A fair proportion of scaffolds were ordered to be pulled down after inspection, in consequence of rotten material being used, or the material not being strong enough for the purpose it was intended for, or of the structure being wrongly or carelessly erected. I still find it necessary to condemn a large number of ladders found in use in a dangerous condition. This is explained by the fact that the life of a ladder in constant use is generally very short.

The proper boarding-over of joists, the guarding of wells and other openings, the fixing of fender boards to working platforms, and the strength of hoisting gear are also matters that require constant attention.

I am pleased to say that when any defect or requirement is pointed out to the persons in charge they are generally very willing to comply with any suggestion or order.

I am of the opinion that the Act would be improved if the height of scaffolding requiring notice to be sent to the Department before erection was lowered to, say, 10 ft. The Inspectors would then have more knowledge of what is going on.

Five prosecutions were taken for failing to give notice of intention to erect scaffolding over the height of 16 ft.; a fine was imposed in each case. A number of offenders were warned.