

22. This is Mr. Fletcher's letter dated 14th January, 1914: "To the Inspector of Mines, Thames.—" I beg to acknowledge your letter of 8th instant regarding accidents by powder, explosions, and the ignition of firedamp. In the Extended Mine there were two cases of burning by explosions of firedamp during the past two years, but not serious. The first occurred to David Conn, a shift man. There had been a fall of roof at the face of the west heading, and he with other men had been sent to repair same. During the course of repairs slabbing had to be done, and while putting the slabs into position overhead he got his naked light which was on his head too far into the fall; some gas which had apparently collected in a pocket was ignited and he received burns to both arms: date of occurrence, 16/2/12. This place had been inspected and reported 'all clear' just previous to the shift commencing. The next occurred to William Willcox, who was a roadman at that time. It appears that on the previous afternoon this man had commenced to lay a turn into a cross-heading, which was driven in a distance of 15 yards and brattice carried right to the face. He did not complete the laying of the turn, but went in a little earlier next morning, but not before the examining deputy had inspected the place. At the point where he was laying the turn, 15 yards back from the face, an ignition of firedamp took place. Mr. Wood, the certificated manager, in company with Deputy Duncan and Assistant Deputy Wood, immediately inspected the place after the accident, and found no trace of any gas. It may have collected in a roof-cavity through a disarrangement of the brattice, but Mr. Wood is of the opinion that the acetylene-lamp he was carrying at the time on his head exploded. I might add that these explosions occurred during the time the small fan was doing duty, and there is no doubt—although plenty as regards quantity to comply with the Act—there was not sufficient volume to keep down small accumulations during the time the mine was not working; but since the new fan has been erected these troubles are things of the past: date of occurrence, 26/3/12. Regarding the burning of Alexander Reid by an explosion of blasting-powder on the 14th December, 1912, this accident was reported to you under date 16th December, 1912. In Ralph's Mine a roadman named Arthur Ruston went into an old bord in Dooley's dip to lift some rails near the face, and he ignited a small accumulation of gas near the face with his naked light. He escaped without injury." There are only two names in that letter of men burnt—Conn and Willcox?—Yes, that is so. I was told of another man, but his name I cannot remember.

23. That letter of the 14th January was the first intimation that you or the Department received from the management?—It was the first information on the matter which reached any officer of the Department from the manager. The claims on the Coal-miners' Relief Fund in respect of such injuries are certified to by the Inspector, and go forward to the clerks in the office to pay the money. The burns to Willcox are said to be on the face, due to gas, but it might have been gas on the surface for all the Department knows from the doctor's certificate. These are vouchers for the payment out of the fund, and they do not come to me at all. [Coal-miners' Relief Fund files.] They are not reported to the Department.

24. When you got the information contained in the letter of the 14th January about burns by gas-explosion, did you report it?—I did at once to the Under-Secretary for Mines.

25. Show me your report?

*Mr. Macassey*: I understand that the Commission has asked for the file, and I put it in accordingly. [File, 14/1194.]

26. *Mr. Wilford*.] Will you please turn up the letters yourself and hand them to me. I want first your report which you wrote after receiving the information contained in that letter on the 14th January?—I wrote six letters, but they are not all here.

27. You wrote six letters, all in connection with the Taupiri Mine?—I wrote six letters to the Under-Secretary before the explosion regarding the danger of such.

28. Are your letters not there on the file?—No, but I have copies of them. The first letter was at the end of January. Some important letters are missing.

29. Then, tell me the dates of any letters that are not there?—I will tell you the dates and the contents.

*Mr. Macassey*: Is there another file, because, if so, we will wire for it?

30. *Mr. Wilford*.] You say that you saw those letters on the file?—Yes, but files are sometimes split up. The last number I saw on the file was 14/11/94. I will refer to my letters, and tell you what are the dates of them.

31. You have said that since January of this year you have written six letters on the subject of the explosion—after the explosion?—Six or seven before the explosion, and two after. The first letter was about the end of January, in which I sent on Mr. Fletcher's letter of the 14th January. Mr. Bennie sent it to me, and I sent it on to the Under-Secretary with my remarks. I will tell you what I said in my letter. I put a covering memo. on it before sending it. The date of my memo. is 28th January, 1914.

32. And the contents?—It was to the effect that I regretted to report that there had been some ignitions or explosions in the mines at Huntly which had been concealed by the management, but Mr. Fletcher had now reported them without prejudice to himself.

33. I will read this memorandum of yours. The date is 28th January, 1914, and it is headed "Unreported Explosions of Firedamp at Taupiri Coal-mines." It is addressed to the Under-Secretary for Mines, and runs as follows: "I regret to report to you a breach of the law by the Taupiri Coal-mines (Limited)—viz., a miner, William Willcox, was seriously burned by an explosion of firedamp, which accident was not reported to the Minister and Inspector, as required by section 62 of the Coal-mines Act. The first intimation I received of this was on or about the 2nd January, and from a source I must regard as confidential. Upon the same day I referred the matter to Inspector Bennie, who informed me that no gas-explosions at the Taupiri mines had been reported to him. I thereupon asked him to investigate and report, and, if he could not otherwise obtain information, to request Mr. James Fletcher, the certificated mine-manager, to report to him now, without prejudice to himself. This report I have received and attach hereto. You will observe that four gas-explosions are admitted. For burns received as the result of an explosion William Willcox obtained relief from the Coal-miners' Relief Fund for three weeks. All explosions in coal-mines are most serious, as the conditions