

The accident was due to a peculiar combination of circumstances which could not have been anticipated and is very unlikely to recur.

On the 25th March, in the Blackball Mine, an elderly man named Andrew Watkinson engaged in light trucking-work was found lying on the haulage-road between the empty and full trucks. Apparently he had fallen and struck his head on the rails, sustaining a fractured skull, from which he died the same day.

In the Linton Mine, on the 13th June, a miner named John Howd was killed by a fall of coal. A shot had been fired in his usual working-place, and while the smoke was clearing away he went into another place in which he had been working some ten days previously in order to fill some loose coal, when a fall occurred which killed him instantly. An inquest was held with a jury of four, who found that no blame for the accident could be attached to the mine officials.

On the 17th June a severe earthquake occurred on the west coast of the South Island. The earthquake caused large falls in many of the mines, and some of the small mines near Seddonville were badly wrecked. In the Cardiff Bridge Mine William Chamley, and in the Glasgow Mine R. McAllister, were caught and killed by earthquake falls.

On the 26th July, in the Rotowaro Mine, a miner named Samuel Broadbent was buried under a fall of small coal, and died of asphyxiation before he was released. The place had apparently been well timbered. It was in pillar workings, and the roof fell without any warning.

On the 3rd September, in the Wairaki Mine, a miner named R. J. Dixon was killed by a sudden large fall of coal. He was engaged in extracting a pillar. The working-place had been properly inspected, was apparently well timbered, and was thought to be safe. The Coroner's verdict at the inquest was that no blame was attachable to any one.

David Auld, a miner, was killed by a small fall of coal in the Millerton Mine on the 17th October. In his working-place the seam is 25 ft. thick or more, and at the time of the accident he was engaged in dropping tops in pillar work in pillars that had been formed many years before with wide and high bords that are difficult to timber securely.

On the 15th November an explosion occurred in the No. 1 Mine of the Linton Colliery, which caused the deaths of Anthony McCoy, Henry Kitto, and Robert Johnston, and seriously injured four others. The No. 1 Mine consists of two sections, named respectively the Horse Level section and the North-west Dip section, both ventilated by the same fan, which is a pressure fan. The Horse Level section is a small pillar section in which the available pillars are nearly all extracted. The North-west Dip section is the newest and principal developing section of the Linton Colliery. The main drive into the North-west Dip section, which is also the haulage-road and return airway, has a length of about 19 chains, and dips from the mine-mouth at an average gradient of about 1 in 5. At a point about 10 chains from the mine-mouth and at right angles to the main dip there is a level driven to the south-west called No. 2 level. From this level there are some rise workings. At the highest point of these workings an incline had been driven, crosscutting from the floor to the roof of the seam at a gradient of about 1 in 3; from the top of this incline a rise, through the rocks overlying the seam, was being put up to the surface, and on the day of the explosion was up 64 ft., and had only another 15 ft. to go before it would hole through. It was intended, when the rise had been completed, to install at the top of it a new and larger ventilating-fan of the exhausting type. Compressed air was used for operating rock-drills in the rise and also for pumping and haulage in other parts of the section. Inflammable gas had been found occasionally in small quantities in the section, and consequently only electric safety-cap lamps and permitted explosives were used underground by the miners. The seam gives off a considerable amount of water, with the result that there were pools of water on many of the roadways, and the roadways were damp where not actually wet. Stone-dusting had been done in the drier portions of the section. The coal in the Linton seam is hard, and great difficulty had been experienced in compelling the miners to properly prepare their places prior to shot-firing. There are normally about forty men employed underground in the Linton No. 1 Mine, and this was the number at work on the day of the explosion. The explosion occurred about 9.30 a.m. on the 15th November, and to the men in the mine at the time it appeared to originate in the rise workings. Some of the miners in the workings to the rise of No. 2 level actually saw the flame of the explosion but were able to escape. The North-west heading speedily filled with smoke and hot gases and vapour. With great difficulty most of the men were able to make their way to the surface, the men working below No. 2 level being led by the underventurer. Rescue parties were organized, and entered the mine as soon as possible. Three bodies were found, those of A. McCoy, H. Kitto, and R. Johnston. The first was found, badly burnt, half-way up the incline going to the foot of the rise already mentioned; the two last on or near the rope-road, and showing no signs of violence but that the cause of their death was afterdamp poisoning. A searching examination was made of the mine immediately after the explosion. The evidence was conclusive that the explosion had originated as an explosion of firedamp, that the point of ignition was at the place where the body of A. McCoy was found, and that the ignition was very probably due to some act by him, and that the gas-explosion was afterwards carried on into the other parts of the mine as a coal-dust explosion. Nowhere had the explosion been a violent one, and the inspection of the workings furnished clear evidence as to how it had been damped out by wet roads and stone drives.

An inquest was held on the 19th November, and the evidence went to show that the rise had been inadequately ventilated, that there had been laxity in the issue of detonators and in shot-firing, and that the search for matches and other prohibited materials had been perfunctory.

A Commission of inquiry was appointed to inquire into the explosion, and took evidence at Nightcaps during the second week of December. The report of the Commission is contained in Annexure B.

In February of this year the manager and four other officials of the mine were prosecuted for breaches of the Coal-mines Act and Regulations with respect to ventilation, search, and shot-firing, and were convicted and fined in each case.