

A Juror : Have you made any report with respect to the working of the Kaitangata Mines ?  
There have been reports made for the last two years, but I have not made any this year yet.

The Coroner : That is not a matter for this inquiry.

The Juror : Only this far. The witness has stated in his evidence that he did not think Mr. Hodge competent to manage the mine. How long is it since he discovered that ?

I was then speaking of it in the light that he did not understand the fire-damp.

The Coroner : Only in that respect did you mean ?

Principally that.

Do you think he understood the proper system of ventilation ?

Not entirely.

You have seen Hodge only three times, I believe ?

Yes.

When did you begin to question his competency ? Before you heard of this accident did you have a different opinion with regard to his competency ?

He is not the man I should put in charge. The drives are very crooked, and that is an indication of want of skill, more or less.

Did you enter the mine as a right, or on sufferance ?

On sufferance, of course.

Had you free liberty to go through it ?

Yes.

James Davidson, general manager of the Kaitangata Railway and Coal Mining Company, Limited, said : I was gazetted as manager of this Company on February 23rd, 1878. I am also a director of the Company. I have not taken any part in the management of the mine except as one of the directors. William Hodge was the working manager of the mine, and had been so for seven or eight years. The whole of the working was entrusted to William Hodge. I do not know the terms of Mr. Twinning's engagement. He was first employed as a surveyor on the 7th December last. He was subsequently employed to increase the output of coal. Mr. Holmes had a very large interest in the Company. He took more interest in the working of the mine than the other directors. He makes mining his hobby to a great extent. We have not had any written reports from Hodge from time to time. It has never been reported to the Company that fire-damp had been found in the mine ; but it was reported to me once when I was in the mine. The other directors must have had a knowledge of it to some extent, but to what extent I could not say. Mr. Holmes and I are about the only directors who visited the mine pretty frequently. I had always been led to believe that the mine was perfectly safe. I was always very frightened about fire-damp ; and Hodge and others working in the mine, to whom I spoke, used to laugh at me for my fear. They thought I was over-cautious. The last time I questioned Hodge about fire-damp was on the Sunday prior to the explosion. I went down to his house in company with another gentleman, and just as I was coming away I asked him if he was yet troubled with fire-damp, and to what extent. He laughingly alluded to my horror of fire-damp, and said there was no danger. I had no idea of the foul air being carried from the new to the old workings. I have never interfered with William Hodge in regard to ventilation except on one occasion, when the fire at the air pit was going down, and I insisted on the fire being kept up.

By a Juror : Archibald Hodge I took to be a sort of handy man. I certainly did not look upon him as having any authority. I knew of Jarvie being burnt. I was at the mine that day. It was previous to the floods.

Matthew William Hawkins, secretary to the Kaitangata Railway and Coal Mining Company, said : I know of all the correspondence that takes place with the Company. So far as I know, no report ever came to the Company from William Hodge with regard to the state of the mine. To my knowledge he never reported that the mine was unsafe. In October last, after we learnt that there was fire-damp in the mine, William Hodge was in Dunedin, and said we should have to get safety-lamps some day. On the 21st of that month I was instructed by Mr. Holmes to obtain, among other things, some safety-lamps. They were unobtainable in town, so I ordered them per Briscoe & Co. to be imported. The order was sent on the 24th October, and the lamps have not yet been received. It was on the 28th of September, I remember, that Hodge was in town. He obtained a written order from me to select a barometer. He came down specially for it, I think. I can't say whether he got the barometer or not, but I believe he did. Archibald Hodge was employed as a daily labourer. He was a road-repairer and sort of odd-job man. William Hodge had full charge of the mine, both inside and out.

Superintendent Weldon : These are all the witnesses present to-day. There are four others yet to be examined—Mr. Holmes, Mr. Shore, Mr. Binns, and Dr. Smith. These are the only ones I am aware of who can throw any further light on this matter : but if there are any other witnesses the jury know of, whom they would like to hear, they can be summoned to attend.

A Juror suggested that Mr. Denniston, a former manager of the mine, should be called.

Superintendent Weldon : Mr. Binns, I thought, would give the same evidence as Mr. Denniston could give.

The Coroner (to the Juror : If there is anything Mr. Denniston may know you can tell me of it, and I will see that he is summoned here.

Superintendent Weldon : Mr. Binns was the last who inspected the mine. That was on the 24th January, and he can throw some important light on this matter.

The Foreman : I believe it is the general feeling of the jurymen that it would be most desirable to call Mr. Denniston. He has been a good deal connected with the mine previous to Mr. Twinning.

The Coroner : What evidence would you want from him ?

The Foreman : To show the state of the mine.

Superintendent Weldon : Mr. Binns was through it last.

The Foreman : But it appears from Mr. Twinning and Mr. Cox that they don't know much about these old workings.

Superintendent Weldon : From what Mr. Cox says it is likely Mr. Binns may know a good deal about it.