

ACCIDENTS IN 1884.

There have, unfortunately, been already two fatal accidents in 1884, and several of which the consequences were less serious.

The following may be noticed here, and a full list will be given next year: On the 12th February, 1884, a man named Joseph Brown was killed on the Westport Coal Company's surface incline, and another man, named William Harrison, very seriously injured. In order to explain this accident properly it will be necessary to refer back to the action taken with a view to prevent persons from riding on these trucks. On the 11th January, 1884, I had an interview with Mr. Dickson, general manager, and arranged that I would undertake to prosecute somebody if the company would prove the case, there being an obvious difficulty in my doing so. Some doubt arose, however, as to whether the special rule forbidding riding had been gazetted, and on the 12th January I telegraphed an inquiry to the head office, receiving on the same day a negative answer. On the 16th I telegraphed to Mr. Dickson, requesting him to send it up for approval. At the date of the accident this had not been done. After the man was killed I telegraphed to the Coroner stating that I was very anxious to attend, and should like the inquest adjourned, which was done, but unfortunately I was unable to attend the adjourned inquest. The verdict amounted to "Accidental Death;" the jury making two suggestions, one as to the fastening of the truck, and the other urging on the Government the necessity for the construction of a road. On the 10th May, 1884, Mathew Joice, manager of the Dudley Coal Mine, Reefton, was killed by a fall of dirt in the mine. Information reached me at Dunedin late in the evening of the same day, and I attended the adjourned inquest on the 17th. It is unnecessary to give the whole of the evidence. The mine has been worked for five years on a very small scale, the output for that period being only 245 tons. It appeared that on the 8th a young man named James Phillips, who had been alluvial mining for about twelve months, and working for a few days with Joice, refused to go in, as he considered it dangerous. On the other hand, an experienced miner named McKnight, who was one of the first persons to find the body, considered that the place was perfectly safe with ordinary care. This opinion was shared by me, and apparently also by the jury, for some of them, who are practical miners, examined the drive, and the verdict was "Accidental Death." The immediate cause of the accident, appeared to be a slip, running almost parallel with the heading, which loosened a mass of coal and dirt. Deceased was working alone: this is always a dangerous practice, but it is difficult to see how it could be prevented. On the 11th February, 1884, as already mentioned, a man named Johns was injured by an explosion of gas in the Coalpit-Heath Mine. On inquiry the following facts were elicited: On the day in question Jos. Elliott, the underviewer, examined the place at 7 o'clock a.m., found a little gas, which he brushed out (contrary to Special Rule 35), neglected to mark the date, as provided by Special Rule 30, and finally omitted to enter in his report book the fact of gas having been found, as required by Special Rule 30. The day-shift came off at 3, and was followed by the night-shift at 4.30 p.m. Mr. Alexander saw the men, but did not warn them or give them a lamp. The place where the explosion occurred was a rise-heading, nearly through: in this a little gas accumulated while the shift was changing, and when Johns went in with a naked light he fired it and received slight injuries. Both the manager and underviewer were prosecuted. On the 2nd instant a miner named Henderson was hurt in the Banbury Mine by a fall of coal, and died in the Westport Hospital on the 3rd. It was impossible for me to go round to the inquest, so I telegraphed suggesting that Mr. Gow should attend. By your telegram of the 4th I learn that this course is impracticable, and that Sergeant Barrett, of Westport, has been authorized.

PROSECUTIONS.

Particulars of the prosecution of the Shag Point Colliery manager have already been given, and in the recent case of the Coalpit-Heath manager and underviewer the defendants pleaded guilty, and—as I did not press the case—were fined the mitigated penalty of £2 each and costs; total, £3 14s. It is to be hoped this will act as a warning.

DEATH-RATE IN SOUTH ISLAND.

The output being 328,002 tons, the number of deaths two, and the number of men employed 1,055, it follows that the death-rate is—164,000 tons of coal raised and 527 men employed per life lost, or 1.89 life for every thousand men.

NUMBER OF MINES.

The number of mines is ninety-four, or an increase of three on last year. Eight have been struck off and eleven added, of which three are old mines recommenced. With the exception of the Orepuke, none of the new ones will probably be of much importance.

NUMBER OF MEN EMPLOYED.

During 1883 there was again an increase in the number of men employed, the number being 1,055, as compared with 836 in 1882. The output per man, however, is not quite so large in the latter year, the amounts being respectively 337.4 tons and 311 tons.

OUTPUT OF COAL.

The output for 1883 is 328,002 tons, or an increase of 45,881 tons on 1882, the principal increase being—Brunner, 23,845 tons; Shag Point, 4,514 tons; Kaitangata, 15,027 tons; Nightcaps, 5,804 tons; Collingwood, 1,720 tons; Whitecliffs, 1,200 tons; and Fernhill, 1,230 tons: while the principal decreases are—Banbury, 13,351 tons; Springfield and Smithfield, 3,521 tons; and Brockley, 2,924.