

work was suspended some months ago and left in its present unfinished state in consequence of a plan suggested by the Railway Commissioners, under which the course of the river would be diverted and the position of the training-wall changed.

Dredging was commenced so as to form part of the new scheme at a place where, under Sir John Coode's plan, the training-wall would be placed. This dredging has cost £1,342, and the channel cut, amounting to 40,453 yards, will require to be filled up again at a considerable cost, and the dredging repeated in the right place. I enclose herewith a plan specially coloured to illustrate these circumstances.

The dredging-plant, purchased at a cost of £12,000, was very much worn, expensive, old-fashioned, and unsuitable, and has cost £1,000 since its purchase. It consists of two steam-hopper barges, which discharge from the bottom, the lifts and pulleys being worked by manual labour. The propulsion—only five knots per hour—is much too slow for this river. The dredge is of an old-fashioned design, and in consequence of the difficulty in shifting the discharge alternately from side to side, a stoppage of twenty minutes is made at each exchange of barges. Working with such a plant involves heavy working expenses. With a proper dredge only one crew would be required, instead of three, as at present. The expenses upon the dredge have been reduced since the new Board came into office from 8d. per ton to 3·6d. per ton of dredgings, and the output increased from 12,810 tons to 28,570 tons per month. There are no records in this office to show why this dredging-plant was purchased at so high a price at a time a first-class dredge was obtainable in the colony, which would have been more economical at three times the cost of this.

The coal staiths now in use were erected in 1878. The timber used in its construction was not, as provided in the specifications, of good heart timber (kauri). Much of it was replaced in October, 1888, at a cost of £2,183, and now the structure seems fast approaching the time when another rebuilding will be necessary. The staiths are very useful for storage of coal, and for loading steam coal, but the disadvantage of this system is that the fall from the shoots breaks up the coal. The Westport coal is a pure and very brittle coal, consequently suffers more from this treatment than most other coals in use. It may be that this consideration, with others, decided Sir John Code, in his harbour plan, to provide wharves for delivering by cranes in preference. At Newcastle, New South Wales, and other coal ports, the use of the staith system has been superseded by wharves and cranes. Why the previous management decided to perpetuate the staith system here is a mystery. We have no records to throw any light upon the subject, but this has been done, and a contract let to extend the staiths 600ft., at a cost of £14,515 14s. 6d.

The structure of the first part was unprovided with any means of preventing stones from rolling down the river bank and falling under vessels at the berthage. This omission has cost the Government several thousand pounds, and finally sheath-piling was provided, but, still untaught by experience, the new design, closely following the old, shows the same omission. Some remedy must be devised sooner or later, and in the meantime the risk will continue. The new staiths being approached from the old will greatly increase the traffic upon it, and soon necessitate strengthening and renewals. The output must also be reduced by the difficulty of shunting full and empty trucks for the increased traffic upon a way already cramped. The staiths are necessarily of perishable material. If reasonable inquiry had been made, this expensive additional structure would probably not have been authorised, particularly in view of the fact that a number of valuable cranes will be available from the quarries long before the staiths can be finished. The expenditure here incurred would have sufficed to put up all the wharves required to give double the loading facilities. The harbour railway trucks, cranes, and other plant are in fair order, but now very much exceed the requirements. A list of the surplus has been prepared. (Copy enclosed.)

In regard to relief channel at Snag Falls nothing appears to have been done for some time, still it is moderately effective. The protection at the stop-bank has been neglected. I inclose a copy of the latest report upon the subject.

#### *Finances.*

The first loan, £150,000, was obtained in England at 4 per cent., with 1 per cent. sinking fund. When the proceeds came to hand, the funds were banked until required at 5 per cent. In that way a profit was realised upon the unused portion. Two hundred thousand pounds has been raised in debentures in the colony without competition at 5 per cent., so that by the latter operation the Trust loses annually £2,000. Something should be done to prevent a continuance of this loss, and to obtain the funds at the cheapest rate.

The revenue has increased, and is increasing from year to year, and it is confidently expected that next year will see the largest increase of all, for then the northern mines will be brought into connection with the port, and contribute their quota of royalty and other revenues.

I enclose herewith a table showing the annual receipts from revenue to date. I cannot conclude this without referring to the inconvenience to which the present Board and its officers have been subject in consequence of the removal by the late chairman of a number of papers, correspondence, plans, &c., the property of the Westport Harbour Board. Repeated applications have been made for their return, but to the present without avail. The records have been kept in a very complete and methodical manner. The loss of these papers causes troublesome breaks. Why they are not returned seems strange, as they cannot be of the slightest use elsewhere, except to obstruct the present action or conceal the past.

I have, &c.,

The Hon. the Minister of Marine, Wellington.

EUGENE O'CONNOR, Chairman.

NOTE.—The engineers more recently in charge of these works having left the colony they have not had the opportunity of replying hereto.