

For the twelve months ended 31st December, 1943, Smokeless Fuel and Briquettes (Canterbury), Ltd., produced 1,300 tons of briquettes at its works at Sockburn. The production of tar was 27,000 gallons.

Testing-work to determine the possibility of making briquettes from Blackball slack, and also from a blend of Strongman and Blackball slack coals, was carried out at the works of the Waikato Carbonization, Ltd., of Huntly, under the supervision of the works-manager, Mr. A. B. Jones. These tests were highly satisfactory, and indicate that the briquettes make a good domestic coal, while the blend of briquetted coal has proved satisfactory for use on locomotives.

These briquettes have been made according to standard practice with a pitch binder, but it is of interest to note that binderless briquettes are now being made in America, with resultant economies in cost of production. Arrangements have already been made to have samples of New Zealand coals tested in America to see whether they will respond to this method of binderless briquetting. While the disposal of slack coal presents no difficulties at present owing to heavy demands caused by the war for coal of all types and sizes, it is essential that preparation be made to ensure that all coal produced in the after-war years is utilized to advantage. Accordingly, it is expected that briquetting of slack coal will become of increasing importance in the conservation of our coal resources. In particular the blending and briquetting of coals would enable much of our lower-grade coals to be utilized, with a corresponding saving in our limited resources of high-grade coals. A specification of the type of plant required by the State Coal-mines has been drawn up and leading manufacturers in England and America have been invited to submit quotations.

SUBSIDY ON COAL-PRODUCTION

For the financial year ended 31st March, 1944, the amount paid by way of subsidy on coal production and distribution was £510,642, made up as follows: tonnage subsidy (including provision for increases in mine stores), £428,645; subsidy in respect of coastal shipping freights, £12,590; and subsidy in respect of the additional cost of work on back Saturdays, and bonus payments to workmen not on contract, £69,407. At 31st March, 1944, the total sum paid out for coal subsidies since the subsidy was first introduced in May, 1940, amounted to £1,224,030.

COAL-MINES COUNCIL

The work of the Coal-mines Council continued during the year, its chief tasks, apart from special reports required from time to time, being the settlement of industrial disputes and the determination of the terms and conditions of employment generally in the industry.

PERSONS EMPLOYED IN OR ABOUT MINES AND STONE-QUARRIES AND IN OIL-PROSPECTING OPERATIONS

The following table shows the number of persons employed in each inspection district during 1943 and 1942:—

Classification.	Inspection District.			Totals.		Increase or Decrease.
	Northern (North Island).	West Coast (of South Island).	Southern (Rest of South Island).	1943.	1942.	
Gold, silver, and tungsten ore	547	629	295	1,471	1,561	Dec. 90
Coal	1,970	2,432	972	5,374	4,997	Inc. 377
Stone - quarries under the Stone-quarries Act	1,141	103	399	*1,643	1,559	„ 84
Silica	7	..	5	12	6	„ 6
Cinnabar	18	..	..	18	20	Dec. 2
Iron ore	18	2	..	20	15	Inc. 5
Manganese	2	..	..	2	3	Dec. 1
Fuller's earth	1	..	..	1	1	..
Diatomaceous earth .. .. .	..	..	..	..	1	Dec. 1
Bentonite	4	..	..	4	2	Inc. 2
Serpentine	9	..	3	12	16	Dec. 4
Asbestos .. .. .	..	15	..	15	12	Inc. 3
Dolomite .. .. .	..	3	..	3	3	..
Clay† .. .. .	..	6	4	10	5	Inc. 5
Phosphate .. .. .	..	..	23	23	..	„ 23
Oil prospecting	106	110	..	216	262	Dec. 46
Totals	3,823	3,300	1,701	8,824	8,463	Inc. 361

* The total number of men employed at stone-quarries is actually 1,672, as certain of the minerals listed separately in this table are produced from quarries which come under the Stone-quarries Act.

† Other than for brickmaking.