

resolved to try, first, to reduce the area closed in by trying to move the main entrance stopping, marked A. on tracing, back to second stone drive to points marked B. or N. This would also have relieved an unworked area lying between north section and faults bounding the Hector Block. However, the damp was too strong and would not move. This confirms the statements made by Mr. Tennent and others that the main haulage-road is fallen heavily, thus blocking the ventilation, so that after considerable effort we had to retreat and fix up stopping in old position—namely, at point marked A. on tracing.

Before submitting recommendations in regard to future operations it might not be out of place to detail a few facts that have come under our notice. These will tend to show how what at first must have been a trifling fire and easily coped with had there been some capable person in charge, but a fire that has now reached most extraordinary dimensions, and will with difficulty be overcome.

The last report signed in report-book by Mr. Broome, late mine-manager, is dated the 18th January, 1900. The report is No. 1 attached hereto. From that date till discovery of fire no examination of the workings appears to have been made, nor does it appear that any competent person capable of making such an examination and report was appointed after Mr. Broome left. Mr. Tennent, Inspector of Mines, states he was not officially notified of Mr. Broome's leaving, nor, as required under section 19 "Coal Mines Act, 1891," that any such person was appointed.

Prior to the discovery of fire apprehensions appear to have existed that the coal in the mine, especially in the Hector Block, was liable to spontaneous combustion. As proof of this Mr. John Tressman states that about eighteen months ago Guy Fleming and son, who were working on right hand side of back heading, saw cloud-like fog, which died away in two or three days. He (Tressman) examined locality several times and found it hot. Also when Mr. Broome was informed at Wellington that mine was on fire, he wired in reply: "Surmised fire in Long Jig or level workings." In Mr. Cochrane's time sign of fire in mine was seen by Mr. Broome, after which all rubbish was taken out of mine at 1s. per box. This last statement is contradicted by miners who state that they were paid by measurement for stacking rubbish at side of roads. Clause 21 in the memorandum of agreement by the Westport Cardiff Coal Company and the Mokihinui Coal-miners' Industrial Union of Workers bear this out. The following is clause 21:—"No. 21. All refuse to be carefully separated from the coal and to be either filled into tubs or left in the working-places at the option of the company. Refuse in coal to be paid for at the rate of 1s. per tub filled level full. Refuse left in working-places to be paid for by measurement at the rate of 1s. per tub, and to be so placed or stacked that the quantity can be conveniently estimated."

The quantity of rubbish tipped at mine-bins does not appear sufficient in quantity to us to bear out statement that all rubbish was brought out of mine, and we are inclined to believe that some has been left in workings.

The details from the 18th January till our arrival on scene are as follows:—

Sunday, 28th January: Notice of fire officially given to Mr. Tennent by R. Broome in Westport. Both these gentlemen then left for Seddonville on afternoon of that date, Mr. Tennent arriving at mine at 8 p.m. Before Mr. Tennent arrived Mr. A. Mitchel, formerly deputy in mine, put in three brattice-cloth stoppings. Mr. Tennent, on arrival, went into mine about 4 or 5 chains past present stoppings, marked A on tracing. Before leaving Westport on Sunday Mr. Tennent informed Mr. Bayfield, agent in that town for company, that a certificated man must be put in charge. In response to this Mr. J. Dixon, of Westport Coal Company, came out on Monday morning. On arrival at mine of Mr. Dixon he and Mr. Tennent went into second stone drive, marked B. on tracing, afterwards going round north section. They then went to Bridge entrance, and reached a point marked E, about 9 chains from mine-mouth, when they had to retire. In the evening they made Report No. 2, attached hereto, after which both left for Granity and Westport respectively.

In consideration of this report (No. 2) we cannot but express our surprise at the method adopted of sealing off the mine by brattice-cloth stoppings, and must state that if at this point had temporary stoppings of boards, lined with clay, been used, we consider the seat of fire could easily have been located in a day or two, besides preventing spread of fire beyond Hector Block, thus preserving haulage-road and workings from mine entrance to that block.

The utilisation of a fan to create a strong draught through a mine on fire was contrary to recognised custom of dealing with fires.

30th January: Report No. 3 attached. This report clearly shows the futility of brattice-cloth stoppings, as the men working at mouth of mine had to suspend operations for four hours owing to smoke oozing through brattice-cloths.

31st January and 1st February: Reports Nos. 4 and 5 attached. These reports also bear out the disadvantages of brattice-cloth stoppings, as it allowed gas generated by fire to ooze through stoppings which, had stoppings been tight, would have helped to extinguish fire.

2nd February: Report No. 6 attached. Fire discovered about point marked D. on tracing. This report bears out statement *re* use of brattice-cloth stoppings, as there appears no reasonable doubt but that fire was spreading up till this time through leakage of stoppings. The turning of main current of air up heading had the effect which any one with knowledge of underground fires would have expected, and it was not to be wondered at that the mass burst into flames upon getting current of fresh air, the natural sequence being that falls would take place afterwards.

5th February: Report No. 7 attached. The result of closing down from the 2nd to the 5th is apparent, as the fire has travelled from D., where first discovered, to main haulage-way.

We express our surprise that on this date, if not on an earlier one, no effort was made to confine fire to smaller area, say, by putting a timber stopping in at or about point marked B. or N. on tracing.

6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th February: Reports No. 8, 9, 10, 11 attached.