

Mr. WORNALL, Chairman of the Kowai Road Board, examined. (No. 4.)

Witness: I came up to interview you on this matter. We know we are under a better system now than we would be under the Counties Act. Our Road Board has been in existence for twenty-seven years. We have five members, and these five members are distributed over the district in different places, and they look after each ward. Each man is supposed to look after a portion of it, and the interests of the ratepayers, and the roads. We have a valuation of £500,000, and a $\frac{1}{2}$ d. rate brings in £1,302. We have also had a special rate for special work on the Ashley River, which raised £350, and that was all expended in protecting the river-banks for six miles and three-quarters along the river. Other sources of revenue, such as dog-taxes and small reserve-rents, run up to £289: the total income is about £1,941. The cost of the administration of that is clerk's salary, £150, and other details might run into £20, which is the only expense we have outside of labour. We have about 214 miles of roads formed and metalled, and in fairly good order; also, there are two main roads running through the district for about twenty-nine miles. We have bridges, culverts, &c., and we are going in for permanent concrete bridges and culverts throughout the district. The Ashley Bridge is 310 ft. long, Saltwater Creek Bridge is about 250 ft. long. The labour falls entirely on the ratepayers. Another bridge we built cost over £300. We are of opinion that the rates collected and administered in the present way—under the Road Board system—is better, more satisfactory, and cheaper than it could be under a County Council; and in the event of the Counties Bill becoming law, we would ask that the ratepayers be consulted, and that they should decide whether they be brought under the Counties Act or remain under the Road Board. We do not wish to be under the Counties Act. We have also buildings belonging to the Board to the value of £790; and we have a plant, consisting of horses and carts, up to the value of £240, so that these, I suppose, would have to be done away with; and we think that if the Road Board were abolished and the Counties Act brought into operation, and the present members abolished, it would cost more to get other men to work than we get the work done for at the present time, and that it could not be looked after in as good a way as is done by the present administration.

46. *Mr. Hornsby.*] Are you in the same position as the Eyreton Road Board—your roads were principally made for you when you started?—No. The roads were good enough, and, of course, there were some grants, but it is many years ago. We have made new roads quite recently.

47. To what extent? How many roads have you made under your ordinary rate or proportion?—Under the ordinary rate, several new roads have been made since the Provincial Government was abolished.

48. And bridges?—Yes.

49. Were they principally made before you started to rate yourselves? Have you had to rebuild any?—No. We have had to renew the Saltwater Creek Bridge, 250 ft. long.

50. *Mr. Lang.*] Your Board has been thirty-seven years in existence, and has given general satisfaction to the ratepayers?—Yes, general satisfaction.

51. Would you be in favour of allowing the question to be submitted to the ratepayers, which form of Government they would adopt?—Yes; if this Bill is going to come into law, we wish to have the right to retain our Road Board.

52. Is $\frac{1}{2}$ d. the usual rate you strike on your Board?—For thirty-four years it was only $\frac{1}{2}$ d., and for nearly three years it has been $\frac{3}{4}$ d.

53. What is the special rate?—It was for the Ashley Bridge.

54. You do not pay a special rate in addition to the $\frac{1}{2}$ d.?—No.

55. I understand you are making permanent works: is that done out of your revenue?—Yes.

56. *Mr. Houston.*] In what county is your Road Board situated?—In Ashley.

57. How many Road Boards are there?—Eight.

58. Have you any idea of the working-expenses of the other Boards?—No, I have no idea—only what members here said.

59. That £150 you pay your clerk—does he do engineering work as well?—Yes, and also collects the rates.

60. You cannot say what would be about the amount of the other Road Boards in the county?—Some would probably be less, because their districts are not so large.

61. And you think these eight Road Boards can be worked more economically than a County Council?—I feel quite satisfied.

62. *Mr. Flatman.*] Would you be in favour of the County Council striking a rate and disbursing to the Road Boards for their requirements?—I do not know. The requirements of the Road Boards are different. They strike a rate for themselves.

63. You formerly had a fund from the land sold in Canterbury, of which you received 25 per cent.?—Many years ago.

64. How long has that fund been exhausted?—Some years.

65. And you have made many miles of road since that fund has been exhausted?—We have 214 miles of road made, and twenty-nine miles of main road. I would say that more than half of these roads were made since the Land Fund was exhausted.

66. *Mr. Hogg.*] You have five members?—Yes.

67. Are there any travelling-expenses charged?—No.

68. Assuming that instead of eight Road Boards you had a County Council administering the works of the district, do you think that the cost would be lessened or increased—I mean the official expenses?—I feel satisfied that under the Counties Bill the cost would be increased, because we would require more men to go and see the roads and attend to them. At the present time the members do a good deal, and they are in touch with all the roads, culverts, and bridges, and they know exactly what work has to be done.