The Globe Pit Disaster.

THE INQUEST.

(*From the Newcastle Herald.*)

The inquest on the body of Herbert Pettit was resumed at the Newcastle Council Chambers on Wednesday morning at ten o'clock, by the City Coroner, Mr. G. C. Martin, J.P., and a jury of twelve.

Mr. W. Sparke was present to watch the proceedings on behalf of the Government; Mr. H. J. Brown represented the A. A. Co.; Mr. Curley, the miners' general secretary, was in attendance on behalf of the miners. Mr. Jesse Gregson, general superintendent, and Mr. Turnbull, colliery manager of the A. A. Company, and Mr. John Dixon, inspector of collieries, were also present.

The Coroner mentioned that he had received a communication from the Under-Secretary for Justice, intimating that the Minister had decided, under the special circumstances attending the case to grant jurors and witnesses fees on the scale granted at inquests on fires.

John Dixon, Inspector of Collieries for the Northern district, said: My appointment was gazetted in June, 1882. I consider under the Coal Mines Act I have powers of inspection under the Act. I have seen many practices in mines that are not provided for by the Act, and I should like extra powers. The plan of the mine produced is, I believe, a correct one. I have had thirty six years' experience of mining. Under some circumstances eight-yard bords and four-yard pillars are safe for working. I have known four yard pillars stand for thirty years. That is with an ordinary top, as in the Borehole mine. Pillars are in places thinner than four yards, turned away from the heading true four yards, but getting thinner inside. I have seen them two yards. After the pillars are got out, it is safest to let the roof down at once if you can get it. It would depend upon the nature of the roof whether it would be safe to take out narrow pillars from between bords ten yards wide. I have not known it done with ten yard bords. I have seen pillars taken out from between two ordinary wide bords. If the mine has a good framy stone or overlying roof with a coal band left up and timbered it is safe. The four-yard pillar system was commenced in this district with the first coal-mine. I never knew the four-yard system in England. In Durham it is worked with very thick pillars, twenty yards in many cases. There is a vast difference in the depth of the ground. I know a place in Durham 1800ft., nine times the depth of the Hamilton pit. Pillars can be smaller in a shallow mine. It depends on the superincumbent strata. I have known a fall in this district where men have had to run for their lives. It came on very suddenly. It was from a goaf where pillars had been abstracted, and could not have been foreseen. The men were much blown about, and cut, but no lives were lost. There was no carelessness in the working so far as I could see, and I was there the day after it happened. The main road did not collapse. I belive the strata over the fall is principally composed of loose shale and strong post, a gritty sandstone. I always thought the crosscut was strong enough to bear the roof without further timbering. I never thought it was in any way unsafe. I did not expect that a fall in the headings would have affected the roof in the crosscut. If I had gone in the mine on the Saturday morning of the fall, and had been told that she was working at the far end of Murphy's heading, I would have made my way into that place, and if I had been certain that I had to beat a retreat from Murphy's heading, I would have taken the line of heading on to the crosscut as a safe retreat. I would have considered where the men with Petit were sitting safe, and had I been there I probably should not have told them to shift, although knowing that a fall was imminent at the far end of Murphy's heading. I did not think that the pillars could have been worked on a safer system than that of taking them out at the back, and working forward. The press came 330 yds over the pillars to the crosscut, where the pillars were not strong enough to bear the strain, and the fall occurred there. It was working evidently from Johnson's down on to Murphy's heading; then the big fall was taken along Murphy's to the crosscut, and over it. I never would have thought that it would have taken the course from the long distance which the goaf is off the crosscut. I visited the mine on April 17th. I was in the crosscut before that this year. I was three times all round the crosscut, and twice all round the pit during the time. My visits are not made on a special day, but are all visits of surprise; and I cannot always get in within eight weeks, owing to other duties of a special nature. My duties are severe and arduous, and more so than usual this half year. Twice since I last visited the pit I have been for two days and a night without getting my clothes off. I visited the mine when they first began to take

night without getting my clothes on. I visited the mine when they first began to take out the pillars, and I never saw safer pillar working in this district. There was never much loose stuff about. I took particular notice of all the headings, and they were all securely timbered for working. There was plenty of timber ready for the men. I did not measure the pillars with a rule or stick, but I looked at them. They ran from four yards down to three, or somewhat less. The pillars were being worked with due regard to the safety of the men, and I advised the men to keep plenty of timber up. I considered last time I visited the mine before the fall, that there were plenty of means of exit in case of danger. I was accompanied part of the way by Mr. Sharp, who is a thoroughly practical and careful man with great experience. It was not expected on my last visit that any fall would take place behind the pillars. In my report on the visit of April 17 I said very little about the crosscut, as there was nothing remarkable to write about. I do not consider that Government Inspectors visit mines sufficiently often. When I go I make a thorough examination.

The Coroner: You have heard the evidence. Do you consider that, if you heard the working, booming, and other warnings that have been mentioned as occurring in the mine on the Saturday morning of the fall, you would have withdrawn the men?

Witness: I object to answer that question. It refers to a matter which can only be answered in my report to the Minister for Mines. My answer might lead to fixing the blame on some one, and only the Minister has any right to ask me to do that. There is a certain sound which if I heard it in a mine I would get the men out as soon as possible. It is quite a matter of judgment. I shall give my opinion without hesitation when I write my departmental report after I have heard the whole evidence in the case.

The Coroner: Have you ever heard a mine working as this one is reported to have done without there being a great danger?

Witness: That seems to be a twin brother to the other question. I once got in amongst bumping as bad as has been described, and I went into the worst of it. That was in the A A. Co.'s mine. One thing that bothers me in this accident is the fact that there are men lying buried as practical as any one in the room. Proctor, Peate, and Hodson were all good miners, and they heard all this noise, yet all kept on working. We know that one man stopped to tip up a skip.

The Coroner: We know, of course, that men will work when they know their lives to be in danger.

Witness: Yes. As a shiftman I have worked on duty, carrying my life in my hand; but no one would get me to stop in danger as a miner. I am puzzled to answer the question, knowing the practical miners who have been entombed. I think I could have warned every man in the crosscut district in half an hour. By Mr. Sparke: The Coal Mines Act provides for two systems of working—the bord and pillar and the long wall systems. The latter is only adopted at the Lambton C. Pit in this district. The Borehole post has great power of resistance to crushing. I saw nothing in my visit of inspection dangerous or defective tending or pointing to the likelihold of bodily injury. I do get reports of danger from miners, but I heard nothing of danger about the Hamilton Pit. It is no part of my duty to dictate to the management how the mine shall be worked. A great deal as to the working must be left to the management of the mine. I have no power to call the men out, unless there is actual and perceptible danger; unless the mine is tumbling about their ears, or when there are noxious gases or absolute danger from other causes. I know that one of the recommendations of the colliery commission on the Bulli disaster was that they did not believe in removing any responsibility from the management, or that the power or number of inspectors should be increased. Under the 25th section, if I found danger threatening, I should have to report to the colliery manager that some thing or practice was tending to the bodily injury of persons employed in the mine. After the manager receives that, he has seven days in which to send to the Minister for Mines his objections to my notice, if he has any; and then the difference of opinion between the manager and inspector must be referred to arbitration. Then, if experts got at it, the matter would be protracted. I could give no idea of the time in which the matter would be settled. If fortunate, they might finish in three months, but certainly not in a month. If the manager neglected to go to arbitration, or to make the alteration, he could be proceeded against, and the maximum fine would be £20. My powers as inspector are defined in the 24th section of the Act. I produce the Act, during the two months preceding the accident my duties were peculiarly arduous. There are now sixty mines at work in the Northern district, including sinking pits,

Northern district, including sinking pits, which Mr. Bates and I have to inspect. Some of these are nearly 200 miles away, at Gunnedah. There are several at Singleton and Murrurundi. Some of the collieries took three days to inspect. I visited Stockton ten times between April 17th and the disaster, and was there all one night. I was once called by the men for a joint inspection of the Bullock Island Colliery. Once at Wallsend I was called by the men about some defect in ventilation. I made one special visit to Linwood, beside one ordinary inspection, also once each special inspections of Monkwearmouth and of Hetton. In that time I investigated seven accidents, one of which was fatal, and attended one inquest. In addition to that, I have had to keep up the clerical work as well. I have always considered that the powers given by the Act were imperative duties to be performed. By Mr. Curley: There is no reference in the Coal Mines' Act to the size of pillars. It is a matter entirely left with the management. The crosscut was the main entrance to the crosscut headings. There were other roads out. They were through Robson's heading on to the old galley horse road. There was communication from the other headings with Robson's. I do not know if the men travelled the road. Robson's heading is closed, but the galley road is opened. The heading was a good travelling road. Some of the boards had a bit of the first shale down, others had not. It was not a properly made travelling road. You had to come down an old bord to get to it. That and Murphy's heading formed the return airway for the whole of the headings in the crosscut district. The men have been working the pillars at Hamilton for twelve or fifteen months; but there has never been many men at a time in them. I cannot say how much coal has been taken out in the time. If Sharp was told that Johnson's, Murphy's, and Martin's headings were working, I should think that it would give him an idea that there was likely to be a fall of some great extent. If Sharp had seen a fall in the crosscut district, he would have had an idea of the nature of the roof strata, but a fall anywhere else in the mine he could have no correct knowledge of the strata overlying the crosscut. He might have formed some general idea, but I can get you different roof on every half-mile in the district. I know No. 5 heading. The inmost ground is away beyond the church heading, beyond the Glebe land. It is not near the crosscut, and on the other side of a fault. It is to the left of the engine plane. No. 5 heading workings did not work up towards the crosscut. They went nearly

up towards the crosscut. They went nearly to the fault. A big pillar will give more resistance to a falling roof than a small one. If the pillars are taken out, and the roof does not fall for some time, it is an indication of a strong roof. I know the pillar workings in No. 5 district. The men working pillars usually rely on the main ways for safety. In this case the main road and return have fallen. It is possible that some of the men who waited till the fall took place were prevented from getting away, owing to the want of a road out. There are things in connection with sinking pits and in working mines that I should like to have power in. There is no provision as to trollies, brickwork, and timbering, and I had, in instances, to go outside the Act in order to secure the safety of the men. There are many things which could with benefit be included in a new Mining Act, but which I cannot enumerate now. I remember a creep which took place at the Newcastle Coal Co.'s A. Pit about five years ago. The main road was blocked for about 120 yards, but the men were safe. The business at Stockton was a report of an alleged creep. I have reported on that matter to the Minister. I have made no report on the present disaster. There has been no precedent for reporting on such a disaster until the evidence pertaining to the case has been heard.—By Mr. Brown: It was after the accident that I saw the pillars had not been strong enough to resist the crush. I had no reason to doubt them before. Some of the pillars in the crosscut are 8 yards, and at the top end some were of greater size than that. The Government lease coal-lands, and for workings under the tidal waters the Government require that the bords shall not be more than six yards and the pillars less than six yards. Under the tidal waters there is a double danger. I have been round many mines since the disaster. I could not get into where the pillars have been removed. I do not think that there has been a large fall on the left side of the crosscut. It has not extended much over the goaf on the left hand side of the crosscut. The most distant point that the fall has extended over Murphy's heaning is back over Hodson's heading to the fault by the long heading, a distance of about 18 chains. The places from which the pillars were being drawn were about the end of the headings. The floor of the crosscut is hard. The Borehole seam as a rule has a hard floor all over the district. I believe some of the pillars inside the line of fall were standing. I have every reason to believe so. I have seen some of them, and they were not crushed. If that seam crushes, it is a big crush. There must be a big crush or nothing. There is so

must be a big crush or nothing. There is so much dirt to strengthen it. The top band coal was left on the roof in the district. I like to see it, because I would rather see a coal roof than any other roof. The band was about sixteen inches in thickness. I saw some of it standing on the crosscut flat within the area of the fall. It is an immense frame of rock and coal where the pony was found. The roof has been crushed down about two feet or two feet six inches.—By the Court: The fact that a board roof had dropped an inch would not be reported to me.—By jurors: In saying that I wish the roof had not been so strong, I mean because then it would have emptied itself. If indications were given that the roof was coming down in Murphy's heading, it would be head on the left-hand side of the crossing. I think that there was sufficient warning to show that that a fall would occur. I believe that if the men had heard she was on the creep inside of them they would have come out.—By Mr. Curley: I was present when the body of deceased was found. He had his back against the pillar, and was crushed forward, with his head on his knees and his right arm behind him. I was present when the pony was discovered alive. Pettit was about eight yards back from the chock which the men set up.

George Dudley, a shiftman in the employ of the A. A. Company, residing at Burwood, said: I know the deceased man Pettit, and saw him on the Saturday of the fall. I went into the pit that morning about a quarter to 8 o'clock. I stopped at the crosscut for a few minutes, when Roarty came up and asked me to get a turn and take it into Hay's heading. I and my mate (Blackburn) took it in. After waiting there a few minutes Blackburn left me. I followed to the crosscut flat to see after Roarty. I heard nothing in Hay's heading. I did some other work, and set down to breakfast with Roarty and others on the flat. Turnbull, who went to look at Johnson's, came back and said there would be a fall in there in less than an hour. Turnbull said he would get the rails out, and one of the others added that he would be game to take the rails from Turnbull. Roarty was away a few minutes, and on coming back said a fall would occur in Johnson's heading; and almost immediately a gust of wind came and put our lights out. The next thing I remember was being buried. I sang out "I'm buried!" I found I was not very fast, and worked out of it. I fell on a skip, and having a lamp and matches I got a light. Roarty came and got a light from me. I heard Blackburn sing out, "Don't run away; there's somebody buried here." Blackburn tried to get the man out, but could not; and we left, got over the fall, and out. We travelled thirty or forty yards from where we were before we got to the large fall, which we had to get over. Petitt was sitting by my side almost within reach. Until the fall came I had no idea their was any danger where we were. I heard a remark about the stopping, but did not notice it, as I had as much faith in the stopping as in the roof.—By Mr. Sparke: I was buried about three or four feet from where I was sitting.—By Mr. Curley: Roarty did not tell me that the mine was working anywhere, and I did not hear why the rails in Johnson's heading were to be pulled up. I saw nothing to lead me to believe that there was going to be a fall while about the crosscut during the previous week. I was in Murphy's heading on Friday, and saw no timber broken there. I did see a few broken timbers in Martin's heading, here and there an old one; but there was nothing unusual in that It was about a week before the fall.

Edward Blackburn, a shiftman in the employ of the A. A. Company, living at the Glebe, said: I knew Herbert Pettit very well, and saw him in the pit on the day of the fall at about 8 o'clock in No. 5 cabin. He was going to the crosscut. Wilson, Blackmore, Jackson, and myself spoke to him there. They were going to pull up some rails. They went to the flat where Roarty and Dudley were at breakfast. They all had breakfast there, and Andy Turnbull, who went to Johnson's heading, came and told them she would be down within an hour, and that she was working ten times worse than No. 5 heading. Roarty came soon after, and said she would be down very shortly. The fall occurred five minutes later. I was sitting about five or six yards from Pettit, and did not see what became of him, as we were immediately put in the dark. I heard Dudley and Ryan cry out. I was helping Dudley out. The others were getting away. I heard a voice call from among the coal. I called the others back, and then started to scratch the coal, which was loose. I got some of it up, and he said, "That's the place." Andy Turnbull said "Come away boys; we can't save him. We'll all be buried." So we all cleared away. I met George Hamilton, the deputy of the old Borehole, and he asked me if I could give him any idea of where the men were lying. I went back with him, and the place whence we had escaped was all closed by a further fall.

had escaped was all closed by a further fall. He told me to go back, that it was not safe. I heard no working or bumping in the mine. The pillars were crushing in the crosscut. I had noticed that several times before the accident. It is a thing that often occurs when other pillars are being taken out. I saw some props and timber broken and bent in Johnson's heading. I was not a bit alarmed when told there was going to be a fall. I thought we were safe. No one spoke of there being danger to the men working in the headings.—Examined by Mr. Sparke: I noticed broken props on both sides of the crosscut. I saw Proctor about a quarter to eight with his mate, Dan. Moore, in Hayes' heading They made no remark.—By Mr. Curley: I was in Martin's heading a fortnight before the disaster and noticed the pillars crushing a little then. I have only been working in a coal mine two years and one month, and know very little about working pillars.

James Blackmore, a shiftman employed by the A. A. Company, said: At ten minutes past eight o'clock on the Saturday morning, when clearing dirt in the Church heading, Sharp came and told us to come to the crosscut and assist to get some rails up. He told us we could get our breakfast up there. He said nothing about a creep. We heard nothing till we were in the crosscut, having breakfast, when the fall took place. We got out all right. By Mr. Curley: I know very little about the crosscut district. I suppose we were in the crosscut about a quarter of an hour at the time the fall occurred. Roarty called my attention to the bumping in the distance just as it was coming away.

At this stage the inquiry was further adjourned until Thursday morning.