

COAL-BEARING LAND

Some Facts and Figures relating to Coal Resources, Landlord Obstruction, and Outcrops recently discovered.

THE NATION'S COAL RESOURCES

The latest official information concerning the latent coal resources of the United Kingdom are contained in the Reports of the Royal Commission on Coal Supplies (1903-1905). The Final Report, Cd. 2353, gives these particulars:—

Following the precedent of the Coal Commission of 1871, we have adopted 4,000 ft. as the limit of practical depth in working, and one foot as the minimum workable thickness, and after making the necessary deductions, we estimate the available quantity of coal in the proved coalfields of the United Kingdom to be 100,914,668,167 tons.

No less than 79.3 per cent. of the available resources* is contained in seams of two feet thick and upwards, and 91.6 per cent. in seams of 18 in. and upwards.

According to the estimate of the Coal Commission of 1871, the available resources of the country in seams of one foot thick and upwards, situated within 4,000 ft. of the surface, were 90,207,285,398 tons, our present estimate being 100,914,668,167 tons.

The statistics show that, though between 1st January, 1870, and 31st December, 1903, 5,694,928,507 tons have been raised, the present estimates of available coal are nevertheless 10,707,382,769 tons in excess of those of the previous Commission. This excess is accounted for, partly by the difference in the areas regarded as productive by the two Commissions, and partly by discoveries due to recent borings, sinkings, and workings, and more accurate knowledge of the coal seams.

In addition to the coal within 4,000 ft. of the surface, there are in the proved coalfields considerable quantities lying at greater depths; whether that coal or any of it is recoverable or not depends upon the maximum depth at which it may be found possible to carry on mining operations. The estimated quantities of such coal total 5,239,433,980 tons.

The Geological Committee appointed to inquire into the Productive Measures known or believed to exist outside the area dealt with by the District Commissioners, report that the amount of coal which may be expected to be available in the concealed and unproved coalfields at depths less than 4,000 ft. is 39,483 millions of

tons. This total does not include certain areas where the data are insufficient for an estimate.

The figures given above mean that on 1st January, 1904, it was estimated that the coal supplies in proved and in unproved coal fields, within 4,000 ft. of the surface, amounted to 140,398 million tons. Since then, to 31st December, 1919, approximately 4,048 million tons have been raised, equivalent to an average of 253 million tons a year. The greatest production in any one year was 287 million tons in 1913. The estimated resources in 1904 were sufficient, at the highest rate of production, to last 489 years. But such figures are subject to correction as further discoveries are made. It is already seen that the 1871 Coal Commission, in the absence of knowledge since gained, was at least 16,402 million tons below the mark in its estimate.

Sir Richard Redmayne, H.M. Chief Inspector of Mines, giving evidence before the Coal Industry Commission of 1919 (Vol. II. of the Report, p. 1158), quoted an extract from his Address to the Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, April, 1916, in which he said:—

An estimate of the available resources of coal was made by the Royal Commission on Coal Supplies which reported in 1905. But since that date our knowledge in respect of the available resources of coal has been considerably enlarged.

The extensions—then of a somewhat speculative character—of the Notts and South Yorkshire fields have been proved, and the limits are now roughly known. The compass of the Kent coalfield has been more correctly determined, and extensions of the Warwickshire field have been proved. Geologists are now not only speculating on the co-termination of the Warwickshire and Staffordshire coalfields, but as to the probability of the existence of an entirely hidden coalfield in Southern England. Much, however, yet remains to be done in the way of exploratory work. Thus the eastern and western limits of the Warwickshire field have not yet been determined. In respect of the Staffordshire coalfield west of Birmingham, the area between Wolverhampton and Shifnal remains to be proved, and I incline to the belief that in the latter area there are considerable deposits of coal. Another large and apparently profitable area of investigation is in Lancashire, where there is every reason to believe that there lies, immediately

* Excluding Ireland, Somerset and Gloucester, as the details for these districts do not permit the calculation.

under the Red Rocks to the south-west of Manchester, a very large tract of Middle Coal Measures.

INSTANCES OF LANDLORD OBSTRUCTION

In his evidence to the Coal Industry Commission, Sir Richard Redmayne had before him 100 cases which indicated that the "ownership of minerals ought to be altered." He gave particulars of many of them, and in his *précis* he made general reference to them as follows:—

A number of cases have been brought to my notice of either absolute refusal to lease mines, or the demand of prohibitive and unreasonable terms, even where no grounds for asserting that mineral support was essential, existed. I venture to say that an examination of the majority of colliery plans would show cases where coal had been left unworked for one or other of the reasons [given above] resulting in an absolute loss of coal for ever. I have one case in mind at the present time of divided ownership of minerals where one joint owner out of five is preventing coal being leased and the main headings of a colliery are standing at the coal in question. . . . I am strongly of opinion that powers should exist to enable such cases to be dealt with, not for only is a total loss of coal occasioned, very often extending into the lateral as well as the immediately subjacent minerals, but expense is incurred in so re-arranging the workings as to cut round these areas, and this further involves loss of output.

I have frequently met with cases where the prospective lessor has known that his particular area of coal was of vital moment to a colliery company, and in some cases opportunity has been availed of to extract extortionate terms, either of wayleave or by unduly inflating the price. Underground wayleaves are, in my opinion, absolutely unjustifiable where the exercise of such wayleave does not inflict any loss on the owner of the property passed through. In some cases lessees are forced to take in lease and pay minimum rent for seams which they have no possibility of being able to work in a reasonable time, merely to obtain the lease of vital areas.

I consider that the present system of Royalty Owning is against the National interest, and, if the minerals were owned by the State, it would be possible to remedy many abuses which now exist.

MANY OUTCROPS DISCOVERED

During the present coal stoppage, as on previous similar occasions, unemployed miners have discovered deposits of coal of which apparently no one formerly had any knowledge. The coal, too, is easily accessible. It requires no borings or shaft sinkings. It crops out on the surface, and all men need do is to come and take it with the help of quite primitive appliances. The only remarkable thing is that these resources have lain idle so long. When the coal stoppage is over and the men return to the pits, will these ready means of making wages direct from Nature remain open and if not why not? The answer to that question would throw a great light on the whole coal-mining dispute. The following are some of the instances of recent coal discoveries that have come to our notice:—

DENTON

Four miners at Denton have discovered a rich seam of coal in the Haughton Dale district, and have obtained permission from the owners of the land to get the coal. They have been on the work of getting down to the seam, which is very near the surface, for about three days only, yet after the second day they were able to divide nearly £8 for about 16 hours' work, and that included digging the soil away. The coal is extremely good house coal, and is part of the seam which was found some time ago by a local gentleman who desired to work it but found the difficulties too great. The owner of the land is now resident in Ireland.—*MANCHESTER GUARDIAN*, 22nd April.

LEIGH

Seven West Leigh miners on Monday discovered an extensive outcrop seam of good house coal 4 ft. 6 in. thick in Lilford Dingle, which forms part of West Leigh Park, about a mile and a half west of the Leigh Town Hall. The seam is worked by a gang of miners, and there has been a great rush for the coal. Thirty tons were disposed of yesterday at from 35s. to £2 per ton. Night and day shifts have been organised, and six shafts have been sunk along the high bank above West Leigh brook. No. 2 shaft is proving very rich. The shafts vary from 4 ft. to 8 ft. in depth, and tunnels have been driven. The miners, who are pooling the profits and dividing the work, made several pounds each yesterday.—*MANCHESTER GUARDIAN*, 27th April.

CAMBUSLANG

The present coal strike has presented some samples of what might operate on the law of wages, if the people had ready access to land. A few days ago the miners of a district near Cambuslang found an outgrowth of coal on the banks of the Clyde. They did not go on the search for a "Capitalist," but with their own capital—spades, shovels, and bags—got to work, and there was soon coal in their own homes, and they sold some coal to others, and secured a return for their labour. The owner of the ground in question, on learning that men were employing themselves on his land, had pickets of military on the ground within a few days, to prevent the miners working. This is how landlordism operates.—*J. O'D. Derrick, in the IRISH WEEKLY*, 30th April.

LOCHGELLY

Another coal seam has been discovered near Lochgelly, and about 200 miners are finding constant employment there. This surface seam and the one discovered last week at Parkneuk, near Dunfermline, are similar to those worked in the time of James VI. by the monks, who first discovered coal in Fife. The miners carry on in shifts, and find it a good financial undertaking. The coal, which is of good quality, is what is known as cherry or gas coal, similar to that which was produced in the early days of the industry. Yesterday three cartloads were produced from this seam by a father and his three sons. A list of old people in the district is being drawn up, and they are receiving supplies of coal daily.—*GLASGOW HERALD*, 23rd April.

WIGAN

Some twenty or more small coal pits have been worked in the woods on the Standish Estate in the Wigan coalfield for the past two or three weeks by miners on strike. A seam some four feet thick was found within a few yards of the surface, and some hundreds of miners have taken part in the operations. . . . Wooden structures have been assembled over the numerous shafts, and perambulator and bicycle wheels have been fixed to do duty as winding pulleys, and by means of this primitive type of colliery headgear the coal has been wound to the surface with bucket and rope by hand. The miners have descended by ladder-steps fixed to the sides, and have worked by candle-light, there being no danger from gas. Many of the colliers, it is stated, have earned as much as £2 to £3 per day, and have enjoyed the novel, not to say profitable, situation of being their own masters and, for the time being at least, owning the collieries which they have worked.—*MANCHESTER GUARDIAN*, 2nd May.

We have received from Mr. Joseph Hyder, Secretary of the Land Nationalisation Society, a communication with reference to the article appearing in our May issue on "Land Value Rating Criticised." We regret that considerations of space oblige us to hold over this matter until next month.