

in Lyttelton Gaol has occasioned many complaints, a temporary gaol has been established at Christchurch, but pending the completion of the Provincial gaol, now in course of erection in the outskirts of Christchurch, things remain in a very unsatisfactory state.

The irregular manner in which the English mails have been delivered under the contract with Messrs. McMeckan, Blackwood, and Co., has occasioned serious inconvenience to every portion of the community, and entailed additional expenses on Government, who have, in several instances, been obliged to subsidize transient steamers for bringing on the mails left behind by the steamers owned by the contractors. As the present contract is near its expiration, it is to be hoped that some more perfect arrangements will be made for the ensuing year.

The harvest of 1862-3, owing to the drought of the season, fell short of those of some preceding years. Of cereals—wheat, though small in quantity, in almost every case the samples have been fine, the skin thin, and the grain plump with flour, and in some cases weighing from 66 to 67 lbs. the imperial bushel.

The barley crop, where it had a fair chance from tilth and drainage, has been what may be termed fair, and of a better quality generally than might perhaps have been expected.

Oats, of which a large breadth had been sown, yielded an average crop. The high price which oats have realized for the last few years renders them the most paying crop.

From the continued dry weather the hay crops were generally light, and from the same cause many of them were over made; the same time for weathering having frequently been allowed for a crop of 12 cwt. or 13 cwt. per acre as in other years given a crop of one and a-half or two tons per acre. The season, however, gave us an opportunity of observing with satisfaction the diversity of the quality of our soils; from some lands—formerly flax groves, there has been got some very fine crops of hay; with a moister season the equally good but drier sub-soils would have had the advantage.

In the potatoe crop, however, the agriculturists had to deplore the greatest failure. On some few moist bottomed lands there was a pretty fair produce, but generally it was very small, frequently scarcely worth digging up. The pink potatoes appear to have stood the drought the best. At the close of the season (April) the following were the current prices of produce:—

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	
Wheat, white, per bushel of 60lbs. ... ..	0	4	9	to	0	5	3
Ditto, red, ditto ... ..	0	4	3	..	0	4	9
Oats, per bushel of 40lbs. ... ..	0	4	9	..	0	5	3
Barley, ditto ... ..	0	5	0	..	0	5	6
Potatoes, per ton ... ..	10	0	0	..	15	0	0
Flour, ditto ... ..	13	0	0	..	15	0	0
Hay, ditto ... ..	8	0	0	..	9	0	0

On the 13th October, the prices quoted were:—

Wheat, per bushel of 60lbs. ... ..	0	6	0	..	0	7	0
Oats, ditto, 40lbs. ... ..	0	6	0	..	0	6	6
Barley, ditto ... ..	0	5	6				
Potatoes, per ton (scarce) ... ..	17	0	0				
Flour, ditto (ditto) ... ..	20	0	0				
Hay, ditto ... ..	7	0	0				

The retail prices of provisions quoted at the time last mentioned, were:—Beef, 10d. to 1s.; Mutton, 7d. to 10d.; Pork, 10d.; Veal, 10d.; Hams, 1s. 6d. to 2s.; Bacon, 1s. 6d.; and Butter, 2s. per lb.; Bread, 11d. the 4lb. loaf; and other things in proportion.

But, as a set-off to these very high prices, may be taken the wages paid for labor of every description:—Skilled artisans now easily obtain from 10s. to 13s. per diem. Farm servants and Station hands—Single men, £50 to £60 per annum, with rations; Ploughmen, £60 to £70; Shepherds, £50 to £60; Married Couples, £60 to £80; Female servants, £25 to £30; Dairymaids, £30 to £40; Day-Laborers, without rations, 6s. to 8s.

The total number of bales of wool shipped during the year ending October 1st, 1863, was 12,355, weighing 4,509,038 lbs., value £303,956; the corresponding figures for the previous season were 9,680 bales, value £246,500.

The total value of exports of all kinds during the same period in 1863, as derived from Customs' Returns, may be stated in round numbers at £350,000, against £260,000 in the preceding year; while the imports have reached the value of £780,000, against £600,000. The Customs' Duties, collected at Port Lyttelton, over the same period, was £61,295 : 17 : 11, being an increase of £16,971 : 12 : 1 on the amount collected in the corresponding year of 1862. The tonnage inwards, 1863, was 71,273 tons. The number of passengers, inwards, were 3,172 males (adults); 1,346 females (adults); 857 children; making a total of 5,375 souls against an emigration of 1,117 men; 273 women; and 156 children: thus leaving a balance in favor of immigration of 4,229 souls.

The number of sheep and cattle imported has not been very great; this, in connection with the extraordinary absorption of the Otago market, has caused the prices of stock to rule high. In sheep, mixed flocks may be quoted at 30s. to 31s.; ewe lambs, five or six months old, at 23s. to 26s.; and fat wethers at 35s. to 36s. per head. In fat cattle, prices at 50s. per 100lbs., have an upward tendency, while horses are declining somewhat in value.

The demand for good marketable station property with not too many high valued improvements is very great, and prices are fully maintained, many extensive runs have changed hands at large prices, during the past year.

Our narrative in last year's almanac, left the Provincial Council still in its nineteenth session; to the brief account then given of measures which had passed into law may be added,—The Executive Government Ordinance Amendment Bill, which added to the number of the Executive; the Immigrants' Barracks Ordinance, providing for the efficient management of places appropriated as temporary homes for immigrants on their arrival in the Colony; the Electric Telegraph Ordinance; the Fencing Ordinance; the Thistle Ordinance; the Local Marine Board Ordinance; and several others of minor and local importance, making in all twenty-one Bills, eighteen of which were approved by the Superintendent, and three were held over for the approval of the Governor.

Early in the session the Government laid upon the table of the House the draft of a Road Bill, dividing the settled parts of the country into districts, and providing for the erection of Boards with powers to assess, and levy a rate, not exceeding sixpence in the pound, on all the rateable property under their respective supervision, for the construction, maintenance, and repairs of the roads, bridges, &c., in such districts. There were many other contingent provisions in the Bill, which extended to fifty-nine clauses. Notwithstanding the urgent necessity of this or some similar measure, from the first it received no support, and after being remodelled by a select committee, died a natural death, rather from lack of recognition than active opposition.

The most interesting question brought before Council was the *bete noir* of the Colony—the provision to be made by Government for Education. For some years a sum of money had been granted out of the revenue to schools, under the denominational system, but the Education Ordinance of previous years having become obsolete by lapse of time, the Government, early in the session under review, submitted a draft Bill, which proposed to construct a Board of Education