

(No. 3764.)

"SUMATRA" (S.S.)

Police Court, Valletta, Malta,
14th March 1889.

In the matter of a formal investigation held in Valletta, Malta, at the Police Court, on the 12th and 13th instant, and on the day hereof, before Dr. G. FALZON, Magistrate, assisted by Commander PERCY MORETON SCOTT, H.M.S. "Edinburgh," and Staff-Commander WILLIAM STAINER, also of H.M.S. "Edinburgh," as nautical assessors, into the circumstances attending the total loss of the British screw steamer "SUMATRA," in lat. 31.43 N., long. 31.41 E., and the loss of John Mac Govern, fireman.

Report of Court.

The Court having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds for the reasons stated in the report of the said assessors annexed hereto, that no blame whatever attaches to the captain, officers, or crew for the above-mentioned casualty, as it happened in consequence of fire, which was caused by spontaneous combustion of the cargo in the after-hold of the ship, and that every possible effort was made by them to save both the ship and the said Mac Govern.

(Signed) Dr. G. FALZON, Magistrate.

We concur.

(Signed) PERCY MORETON SCOTT,
Commander, R.N.

WILLIAM STAINER,
Staff-Commander, R.N.

A true copy.

(Signed) ANDR. VASSALLO,
Registrar.

REPORT of the Assessors on the destruction of the steamship "SUMATRA," by fire, on the 4th March 1889.

We, the undersigned, having been appointed assessors to enquire into the destruction by fire of the steamship "Sumatra," on March 4th, 1889, in lat. 32° 32' N. long. 31° 15' E., after carefully examining all the evidence brought before us, have the honour to submit this, our report.

1. The steamship "Sumatra," of 1,384 tons, built at Glasgow in 1867, with a complement of 36 officers and men, left Batoun on the 24th February 1889, with a full cargo of petroleum oil, stowed in tins, two in a wooden case.

2. On the 26th February, at about 9.40 p.m., Amastro Light south 16 miles, an alarm of fire was raised, consequent on smoke being seen issuing from the star-

board bunker; the crew were immediately summoned to their stations for fire, hoses and pumps rigged, and water played into the bunker; but its bulkhead being found cool, further search was made, and the after athwartship bulkhead was found to be warm. The hatches at the after-hold were lifted, and water played down on that portion of the cargo which was abaft this bulkhead, and additional water was pumped in from below through a hole in the screw alley.

3. The smoke subsided, and as it was considered that the fire was out, the hatches were put on, the water drained out, and the ship proceeded to Constantinople.

4. On arrival at that port, formal protests were entered, and a survey held by Messrs. Lloyd's agent. At this survey, some three or four hundred cases were removed from the after-hold, as low as the orlop deck. Some cases and the dimmage, in the proximity of the bulkhead, were found to be charred.

5. The cargo was re-stowed with every care, and Messrs. Lloyd's decision was that the ship was fit to continue her voyage; this she did, and all went well till the 4th March, when, at 6.30 a.m. another alarm of fire was raised, its indication being smoke coming from the tank-room hatch in after part of ship.

6. The captain, on satisfying himself that the report was correct, employed every means in his power to get the fire under, and continued doing so until prevented by dense volumes of smoke and gas. Seeing there was no hope at saving the ship, he directed his efforts to saving the lives of those on board by ordering them into the boats, having first provisioned them. The captain, officers, and crew remained in the neighbourhood of the ship until she was one mass of flames, finally leaving her at 3 p.m., and directing their course for Damietta, from which they were distant 67 miles.

7. The temperature of the cargo space was taken every four hours, but no indication of any increase was noticed except a small one the day before the fire was discovered, and which would be accounted for by the ship having steamed into a warmer latitude.

8. John Mac Govern lost his life through striking the gunwale and falling overboard when endeavouring to jump into a boat. Every effort was made to save him, but unfortunately without success.

9. Having called the most important witnesses, and heard and carefully considered their evidence, we are of opinion that the fire was caused by spontaneous combustion in the after hold, and that no blame whatever attaches to the captain, officers, or crew for the loss of the ship; and further, that every effort was made by them to save her.

(Signed) PERCY MORETON SCOTT,
Commander R.N.,
H.M.S. "Edinburgh."

WILLIAM STAINER,
Staff-Commander R.N.,
H.M.S. "Edinburgh,"
14th March 1889.

Sworn before me this 14th day of March 1889.

(Signed) Dr. G. FALZON,
Magistrate.