

(No. 6253.)

"CROMARTYSHIRE."

FINDING of a Court of Enquiry held at Port Elizabeth, Cape of Good Hope, on the 7th day of September, 1901, into the circumstances attending the casualty to the British ship "CROMARTYSHIRE," by reason of fire on board and the abandonment of the vessel on the 31st August, 1901, when on a voyage from Leith to Algoa Bay, Cape of Good Hope, and the alleged death by drowning of the captain of the said vessel in consequence of her being abandoned as aforesaid.

That the ship "Cromartysshire," of Glasgow, tons register 1,554, owned by Thomas Law & Co., of Glasgow, was officered by—

John Reid	...	...	...	Master,
Robert Sember	...	...	...	First mate,
David Milne	...	...	...	Second mate,
William Fraser	...	...	...	Third mate,

with a crew of 22 hands, left Leith on the 24th of June, 1901, bound for Algoa Bay, Cape of Good Hope, with a cargo of 2,338 tons of Scotch coal of "Hamilton Ell" on board.

That the vessel proceeded on her voyage, and on 12th August the cargo was found to be heated, registering 120 degrees. That a portion of the cargo was jettisoned, and the temperature was lowered; thereafter the register was varying until the 31st of August, 1901, when the heat in the testing-tube of the main hatch was so great as to burst the thermometer, and no more could be got.

The ship's papers have been lost, and, with the exception of the chief officer's log, which the Court finds has been very carefully and regularly entered up, there is no written evidence of the occurrences on the voyage; but the log in question is believed to be a faithful record of the incidents, and has been of great service to the Court. The evidence shows that the cargo was stowed in the usual manner to allow for surface ventilation, and that sufficient ventilators had been fitted to the vessel to provide for necessary ventilation; but, for some cause

not disclosed by the evidence, combustion in the coal took place, and the hold became filled with gas, and smoke was found to be issuing from every aperture from which it could obtain egress, and the captain and officers decided that the circumstances pointed to possible immediate explosion. The boats were got out and provisioned, and the signals of distress and rockets sent up on the 31st August and morning and day of 1st September having been unanswered, the vessel was abandoned at about 5.30 p.m. on the 1st September, 1901, near Plettenberg Bay. The whole of the officers and crew reached land at St. Francis and the neighbourhood of Klippen Point; but, in his attempt to save himself from the port lifeboat when in the surf at Klippen Point, the captain appears to have been washed out to sea, and there is no evidence to show that he has been recovered, and the Court has to record its regret that circumstances tend to show that he was then drowned.

It appears that on the morning of the 2nd September, about 10 a.m., the s.s. "Politician," seeing the derelict, took her in tow, and she was anchored in Algoa Bay, when her cargo was still burning and in a dangerous condition; and the evidence shows that one or more explosions had actually taken place in the hold of the "Cromartysshire" as instanced by the displacement of the hatches.

The Court is of opinion that the captain of the ship "Cromartysshire" was justified in abandoning the vessel on the occasion referred to; that she was in a very dangerous condition owing to her cargo being on fire; that she appears to have been sufficiently ventilated, and that throughout the voyage every precaution to safely navigate the ship and deliver her cargo at port of destination was taken, and that no blame attaches to any person for the occurrence which led to her abandonment

J. T. WYLDE,
President.

E. D. JENKINS,
Master of the S.S. "Manica."

HUGH DOCHERTY,
Master of the "Tinto Hill."

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 1st day of November, 1901.)