

SIDNEY EDWARD CHEESEWRIGHT

was sworn and examined as under:-

Q. What is your full name, please? A. Sidney Edward Cheesewright.

Q. You are an Engineer Surveyor in this Department? A. Yes, Sir.

Q. I see from the papers that you surveyed the s.s. 'Fitzroy' in May last? A. Yes, Sir.

Q. The declaration as customary certifies that the hull and machinery of that vessel were left in a sufficient and good condition and thoroughly seaworthy, is that correct? A. Yes.

Q. I have no doubt whatever but that after she was passed by you, the vessel was as the declaration states in good order and condition, but there were three seamen saved out of her. The first two spoke very highly of the ship in every shape and form, both as regards the vessel herself and also their treatment, but the third one rather surprised me by stating that the foredeck was in a bad condition. A. It was not in a bad condition, Captain. It had a few patches on, but it was good. I examined it myself.

Q. You deny that the forward deck was defective? A. Yes, I do decidedly.

Q. The witness told me that he took the rather unusual procedure in my opinion, of chipping some rust off the deck with a top mawl, and he banged on the deck, with the result that it made a certain amount of vibration that should not have existed. A. The deck was in good condition. I went all over it myself. There were small patches on it and that called my attention to it and I went over it and over the deck beams too.

Q. I presume that an iron deck if patched it would be just the same as renewing a plank in a wooden deck? A. Yes.

Q. It would mean no more? A. No.

Q. The witness also said that after knocking the rust off he found a pin hole in one place and that was ordered to be covered with a little paint. Do you know anything about that? A. No. Of course I did not go over every inch of it, but I gave it a good hammering and a good sounding.

Q. And you were satisfied that the deck was all right? A. Yes, that it was in a good condition.

Q. The deck openings, did you see any dangerous deck openings about her? A. No. The deck openings on the foredeck, the wash ports and ash doors abaft the bulkhead on the main deck were all in good order.

Q. I might tell you that the chief witness in regard to the loss of this vessel states that he was sent along to the engine room to request the Engineer to pump out the port tank. That is the fresh water tank, and that when he got to the engine room the water was pouring down through the engine room door. He stated that he was of opinion that it was coming through the ash shoot, running along through what he termed the paint locker, until it met this bulkhead and then into the engine room. Note - A plan of the ship was here produced.

That witness was of opinion that there were no coamings to that door. The next witness assured me there was a

coaming/

coaming of anything from 1 ft. to 18" high. Do you remember that? A. Yes distinctly. Coming from the fore deck you come to a ladder and step down to go into the Chief Engineers room.

Q. So that you assure me there was a door and also a coaming? A. Yes.

Q. I might tell you that the second witness also observed water coming seriously into the engineroom although it was all enclosed and he also went so far as to say that he saw bedding being washed in there. A. I can understand that.

Q. At this time the vessel had shipped a heavy sea and washed the cattle on deck down here to leeward and then she took this heavy list. Whether she would have done so without water being in the vessel or not, I cannot say, but it has come out in evidence, also that the tarpaulins on this forward hatch were on, but not battened down. I say it is impossible for a vessel lying low in the water the same as the 'Fitzroy' was, to have shipped a sea heavy enough to have washed cattle around the deck, without water going down the hatch. She then fell over on her side and went. Two witnesses stated that they thought water could come in through the ash shoot, and also that there was a fastening on this ash shoot, but it was not fastened. Another witness thought that perhaps one of the ports had been left open, or got broken by the timber. Do you think those statements are feasible from what you saw of the vessel under survey? A. If the ash shoot was left open I could not see that she would get much water, it was only about 2 ft. square.

Q. Well, that is the case. A. Yes, but there are bigger doors for letting it away. A. It could go right along the deck.

Note: A plan of the vessel was then referred to and it was seen that a bulkhead extended on the fore part of what is termed the trunk hatch which would prevent the water going along towards the saloon.

A. I do not think you would get enough water through the ash shoot to put the fires out. Of course you would if you left it open, but surely they could get the door shut before the fires were put out.

Q. I asked that question but the witness stated that the force was too strong. A. They could have eased the fires by opening the saloon door.

Q. But even then the water would still be pouring in on the side of the vessel. I take it that generally you are of opinion that hardly sufficient water would come in through the ash shoot to have caused the casualty? A. Generally that is my opinion.

Q. But you must admit that the ash shoot, being on the main deck if the vessel fell over sufficiently a fair volume of water would come in and all that weight running along the lee alleyway until such times as there was sufficient accumulated to go over the coaming or the engine room here (as indicated) if it were opened, it would certainly be a good weight. A. They should have shut that door if it were open.

Q. How did the engineroom door open? A. Outwards into the alleyway.

Cheesewright, S.E. Engineer Surveyor

Q. Would you think from what you remember of the vessel while surveying her that if the water all came through the ash shoot as stated and not through a port which might have become broken or was unclosed, it would have the effect of washing the bedding out? A. No.

Q. Would you be more inclined to think it was through the port the water was coming? A. Yes, I would.

(Witness retired).