

184. You would not allow flax to be stowed on top of wool?—No, nor near greasy wool without a partition between them.

185. I rather understood from Captain Evans this morning that they did that?—That does not apply to steamers here at all times, but I understand they do do it; but where they are loading and discharging steamers, one man could not look after that sort of thing.

186. You do make a recommendation not to stow flax on top of wool?—Yes. Well, they stow flax on top of wool, but they must have something on top of it.

187. They must have hurdles or wood of some sort?—Yes.

188. Do you think that there is a risk in some steamers of an accumulation of water through the ventilators in very heavy rain or bad weather?—Well, that might be so.

189. If they neglected turning them and they were not thought of in very heavy windy weather with a good deal of rain, do you think there is danger?—There is the danger of some moisture going down on such occasions.

190. A good deal might go down and lodge about the place: it could not get away very well?—No; it could not get away, but they say they always stop the ventilators in that kind of weather, so that it cannot get down, but whether they do it I do not know. I remember a ship catching fire going Home from here from sparks from the galley, which had got down through the ventilator immediately abaft the galley, and they fell down on flax; that was the "Merope."

191. And she caught fire?—Yes, she was abandoned at sea on fire.

192. The tow, I understand, is not always covered: most of it is not?—It is covered with scrim in some cases, but I think most of it is shipped uncovered.

193. In the steamers and in the sailers as well?—Yes.

194. *Mr. Foster.*] Do you know, Captain Bendall, whether it is optional with the shipper to have it covered or uncovered?—I think it is. I think they can do as they like. The underwriters moved in the direction at one time of making it compulsory to have it covered, but I do not think they succeeded in doing anything.

195. I suppose it is a matter of freight: is there a difference in the freight between covered or uncovered?—No; it is the expense of the covering that the shippers object to.

196. But does the ship charge any different freight?—No, I do not think so. I think that might bring it about if they did.

197. *Captain Blackburne.*] Is there no difference in the insurance rate?—No, I do not think they have made any concession. As a matter of fact, it is not very much good, because before it is stowed away in the hold the scrim is torn off going down into the hatches.

198. *Mr. Foster.*] And I suppose scrim is almost as inflammable as flax, and *vice versa*?—Yes.

199. Have you any theory, Captain Bendall, as to the probable origin of these fires on ships?—No, I cannot form any theory except that if they do as I understand they do—put a lot of this fellmongered wool on board—that is very likely the cause, I should say.

200. Have you been in a position to notice this last season whether country wool has been coming down wetter than in previous years?—I have noticed coast wool and also other wool apparently from an outside examination to come in frequently very wet on the outside.

201. Did you have any indication on the outside whether it was from the inside?—No, I think it was from the rain.

202. Rain in transit?—The outside appearances are not always the worst.

203. In what way would the wet condition be shown on the outside?—There was a good deal of surf-loaded wool and also wool exposed to rain this last season: you could not see very much—you could only see wet in patches over the bales. I have not had much interest in it lately—I did last year. I know it was a very likely season for wet wool to come in, because it used to fluctuate. The number of bales I sent away to get scoured some years amounted to several hundreds, and perhaps thousands, and next year I should perhaps send very few; perhaps it would be a dry season, with fine weather for surf loading.

204. *The Chairman.*] It depended upon the length of the season?—Yes.

205. And, of course, there being now no inspection or supervision such as yours, there is no one sending this back?—The Harbour Board people are very diligent in that respect, and they rendered me great assistance in my duties. They always sent for me if they had any suspicious wool, and if I was engaged in another part, and they took in wool from trucks or coastal steamers, they kept the wool out till I returned.

206. That was before your services were dispensed with?—Yes.

207. They do not send for you now?—No.

208. Have you ever known flax heat from dampness?—Oh, yes, but we have not had very much trouble from the flax since the grading of the flax, because they have taken flax out of the centre of each bale; but we have had up to the time I was supervising a great deal of trouble with tow. Tow would come in apparently all right externally, but in the centre there would be great lumps of saturated tow that they had picked up with the dry, and I have sent apparently a good bale of tow out into the press, and when pressed the water would squeeze out of it.

209. *The Chairman.*] Do you not think it would be a good thing if the Harbour Board had an Inspector to whom they could refer any suspicious wool, and on whose decision it would be compulsory for the ship to refuse to take it?—I think it would be a very good thing indeed. I think that is what is really required. I think that would be a desirable recommendation, and would be the means of stopping a great deal of defective wool being shipped.

210. Had you any means of knowing, Captain Bendall, whether the majority of the wet wool, or a large proportion of the wool which you had to send to the scourers, came from the small places?—Latterly it was mostly from the small places, because since these large works have had artificial means of drying we have not had the trouble we used to have previously. Formerly the meat companies used to send it in heated—from the Gear Company and also from the other company, and Mr. Tyer used to send it in. He was a very careful man in putting wool through, but even from him we used to get actually heated wool that had been sent to him to be scoured.