

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 499.

The following Finding of the Marine Court, held on the 22nd instant, to enquire into the loss of the British Steam-ship *Wah Yeung*, Official No. 88,834 of Hongkong, WITT, Master, whose Certificate of Competency is 257, is published for general information.

By Command,

FREDERICK STEWART,  
*Colonial Secretary.*

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 26th November, 1887.

FINDING.

We find that the British Steam-ship *Wah Yeung*, of 313 tons register, built of wood, 3 years old, Official No. 88,834 of Hongkong, left this port for Canton at about 5 P.M. on the 15th instant, with about 500 Chinese passengers. Some passengers were on the awning deck, some on the main deck, and others in the after hold, a place not licensed for the conveyance of passengers. There is no available evidence as to what number of Chinese were on each of these places.

2. We find that at about 9 P.M., smoke was seen to issue from the hatchway of the after hold, and almost immediately afterwards dense volumes of smoke and fire came up and made their way along the between decks, burning everything with great rapidity. The fire was so rapid that the boats could not be got out, and only one life raft was put over the side.

3. We find that directly the fire was seen to take such a hold of the ship, the helm was ported and the ship's head was turned to the shore, where she grounded 4 or 5 minutes afterwards, at about 100 yards from Chuen Pee Point in the Canton River.

4. We find that many of the passengers were saved, but a large number must have perished in the after hold and between decks.

5. We are of opinion that the fire originated in the after hold of the *Wah Yeung*, from the Chinese medicines or passengers' luggage catching fire, either from lighted matches, smoking, the possible breakage of a lamp, or the use of naked lights, and that the rapidity of the fire along the between decks was the result of the main deck being saturated with kerosine oil. As the lower hold was commonly used for the storage of kerosine oil, the ballast and ceiling would probably also have been impregnated with it causing the sudden outbreak of fire in that part of the ship.

The Court have carefully considered the Master's statement in his defence, and while sympathizing with him for the unfortunate position he was placed in by being, to some extent, compelled by his Owners to commit a breach of the law, cannot allow such circumstances to exonerate a Ship Master from his proper responsibilities. The Court, however, in consideration of the Master's exertions to save life after the fire, directs the suspension of Mr. WITT's Certificate of Competency No. 257 Hongkong, for a period of three months only.

We recommend a First Mate's Certificate being given to Mr. WITT during the interval of suspension.

We are of opinion that some restriction, if not total prohibition, should be placed on ships having more than 12 passengers from carrying kerosine oil or other dangerous goods.

Given under our hands at Hongkong, this Twenty-second day of November, 1887.

H. G. THOMSETT, R.N., *Stipendiary Magistrate.*

J. BUCKNER, R.N., *Staff Commander H.M.S. "Victor Emanuel."*

J. METCALFE, *Commanding Br. S.S. "Oceanic."*

C. F. PRESTON, R.N.R., *Commanding Br. S.S. "Khiva."*

W. H. WATTON, *Commanding Br. S.S. "Batavia."*

Approved,

G. WILLIAM DES VŒUX,  
*Governor, &c.*

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 500.

The following Returns of Deaths for the week ended the 19th November are published for general information.

By Command,

FREDERICK STEWART,  
*Colonial Secretary.*

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 26th November, 1887.