203. I suppose you know the condition in which sheep-skins are in the bales?—Yes.

204. Where, especially in country skins, there is a considerable amount of fat about the neck and crutch?—Yes.

205. Do you think that would be much more likely to spontaneously combust?—I do not think so; it is perfectly dry and hard.

206. And you have no knowledge as to whether skins have been the commencement of any fire on any occasion?—No.

207. If there is anything in the theory of grease and fibre being more likely to fire spontaneously, I think the better conditions are in the skins—there is more grease than in the wool?—Yes, a great deal more grease.

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WELLINGTON, THURSDAY, 16TH AUGUST, 1906.

The Commission sat in the Upper Court, Magistrate's Courthouse, Wellington, at 10.30 a.m.

GEORGE GORDON SMITH sworn and examined. (No. 9.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you, Captain Smith?—I am Superintendent of Mercantile Marine.

2. I presume you know the object of the Commission, and I think you can assist us somewhat, more directly with regard to the probable causes of fires on ships loaded with wool, flax, tow, and suchlike. You have had considerable experience of this class of cargo?—Yes, I have had a little experience. I served five years' apprenticeship in wool sailing-ships trading between Sydney, Melbourne, and London, in the Aberdeen Clipper Line. I have also served as second officer and chief officer in sailing-ships trading between Port Natal and London, carrying wool. I have seen wool heated where they were breaking it out of the tiers in the London Docks; when one bale has been broken out from the top of the layer of bales it would be as much as you could do to put your hand upon the bales, the wool had become heated to such an extent. I never saw any flamed or smouldering during my apprenticeship, but I can mention a case which I saw occur in another ship. This was the case of the "Omar Pasha," a ship belonging to the Aberdeen Clipper Line. She arrived in London from Sydney or Melbourne, and when she arrived in London Docks, and the hatches were taken off, it was discovered that several bales were smouldering, and also that some of the beams of the ship were smouldering too, but there were no flames. I presume if the hatches had been taken off during the voyage for any purpose they might have caused the beams, at any rate, to flame; I do not know about the wool, but there is no doubt the wood would. That is really all my experience of wool being on fire. I have never seen anything myself of wool fires.

3. *Mr. Foster.*] By "smouldering" you mean that fire was there—alive?—Yes, live fire.

4. Not merely steam and smoke?—There must have been live fire, because it burned through the sacking on top and around the bales. It was immediately under the beams, and the ship's beams were on fire.

5. So the woolpack had actually burnt and communicated the fire to the beams?—Yes. Of course, you realise that that is now a very long time ago. It is thirty years ago.

6. *Captain Blackburne.*] You were aboard that vessel?—Yes; she belonged to the same owners as my ship, and we boys mustered up and went there to see what it was like. I remember the case very well indeed.

7. Was water applied at once to put it out?—No; they got it out without water. They may have used it, but the bales were not burnt much; but, of course, they would not allow any burning wool to land on the docks. I could not say what became of them.

8. *Mr. Foster.*] Supposing a bale, the covering of which had been burnt, had been lower down in the hold of the ship, in the body of the cargo, would there have been greater danger of a general conflagration than if it were close up to the beams?—I do not know that it would. I think coming in contact with the beam that the beams burnt when the wool would not.

9. What I have in my mind is this: that woolpack must have become alight before the wood ignited. Very well; if that bale which did ignite had been down in the body of the cargo, do you not think there would have been greater risk of its causing the fire to spread among the bales surrounding it, and thus cause a bigger fire?—Yes. I believe it would have been very serious if it had been any lower down.

10. Besides, it would have increased the temperature in the hold generally?—It certainly would, down below.

11. The fact of it being lower down would give it more area over which the heat could extend, for the heat would ascend?—Yes.

12. So that the fact that it was not a serious fire was probably due to the fact that it happened to be on top instead of down below?—Undoubtedly.

13. *Captain Blackburne.*] You were telling me of an experience you had of an oilskin coat being burnt when rolled up and stowed away?—Yes, but that is a common experience when making oilskins at sea. This was a case where I had a coat made ashore—of cotton—and I oiled it at sea with linseed-oil, boiled and raw. I oiled it and dried it in the tropics, for the purpose of using it when running down the easting. I did not use it owing to having another, so I rolled it up and put it away, and when I came to open it out I found that it was burnt through on the inside. The oil, I presume, was the cause. That is a common occurrence with oilskin coats.

14. *Mr. Foster.*] It would have the same effect on calico as it would have on oily waste, which will combust?—Yes, just the same.