

Basic Detail Report



00046966

Title

George Tombs, Sydney, N.S. Wales. Drowned in the MARY LAWSON (BARQUE) on Middleton Reef, June 1866

Date

1866

Medium

Black and white photographic print on paper.

Dimensions

Overall: 104 x 63 x 1 mm, 5.17 g

Name

Carte-de-visite

History

The MARY LAWSON was a wooden, three-masted barque of 432 registered tons launched from the Southwick Yards, in Durham in September 1864. It was owned by Lawson, Hodgeson and Company of Liverpool and registered in the same port. The barque made at least two voyages to Moreton Bay, Queensland in 1865 and 1866

carrying immigrants and general cargo. On its last voyage two of the ship's crew refused to work the ship and were charged in Brisbane when the vessel arrived there. The crew in turn charged Captain Thom(p)son with assault and the case was heard before a magistrate - the two crew were subsequently imprisoned in Brisbane and missed the voyage of the MARY LAWSON to Shanghai via Sydney. On 6 June 1866 the barque left Sydney, New South Wales under the command of Captain J H Thom(p)son for Shanghai with 600 tons of coal from the Bulli Coal Company. Nothing further was heard from the vessel until 15 June when John Miller, the Chief Officer of the MARY LAWSON, James Matthews, Second Mate and Samuel Wilson, seaman appeared on the northern side of the Clarence River, New South Wales where they were assisted by two local settlers Captain Muir and Mr Black. According to a letter, written by John Miller, published in the Sydney Morning Herald of 26 June 1866 the MARY LAWSON had been wrecked at about 2 am on the morning of 10 June 1866 on Middleton Reef 300 nautical miles east of Brisbane in the Coral Sea. Once the barque was on the reef a succession of huge seas swept over the vessel forcing the crew to take to the ship's boats. Despite the efforts of the crew both the gig and longboat were swept away drowning two of the occupants. A line was then floated across to some rocks which were above water and attempts were made to ferry the crew and Captain's wife ashore - the Captain, his wife and several of the crew drowned in the process with only four crew members making it safely to the rocks. The rest of the crew,

not wanting to risk the line, decided to remain on the vessel. The four sailors who reached the safety of the reef recovered one of the ship's boats and endeavoured to standby the vessel and assist in the rescue of the remaining crew - heavy seas prevented this from happening and the boat crew were driven to leeward of the reef and set a course for the coast. Andrew Renwick, the ship's carpenter, was drowned when the boat came ashore north of the Clarence River. On 30 June 1866 HMS FALCON of the Australia Station was ordered to proceed to New Zealand via Elizabeth and Middleton Reef for the purpose of ascertaining the fate of the remaining crew. The FALCON later reported (7 August 1866, Sydney Morning Herald) that it had arrived off Elizabeth and then Middleton Reef on 6 July 1866 and searched the area for shipwreck survivors. The crew of the FALCON observed three wrecks on Middleton Reef and conditions were so favourable that they were able to board the remains of the MARY LAWSON and search for survivors. Captain Parkin of the FALCON reported that the stern of the vessel had been washed away, the decks fallen in, beams given way, the hull broken open and the masts laying across the vessel. The vessel was in such poor condition that it would not have provided any shelter for the surviving crew. No evidence of the crew, except for some personal belongings, was found. Both Captain Parkin and the Master of the FALCON Alfred Thomas were of the opinion that Middleton Reef would have provided enough shelter in almost any condition for the survivors in the longboat to have stayed on station and render assistance. 'As the lagoon of the Middleton Reef is quite land locked and perfectly free from breakers with winds from N.E. to W.S.W. I cannot see that there would have been any difficulty for the men who escaped from the MARY LAWSON in the longboat to have remained in the lagoon with the hope of being able to render some assistance to their unfortunate shipmates'. Those drowned in the wreck were J H Thom(p)son, Captain, Mrs Thom(p)son, Andrew Murray, Samuel Wilson, Thomas Roberts, Joseph Benders (cook), Henry Jones, George Kirkwood, George Graham, James Lockhart, William Hanson, and George Tombs. The photographer was C H Tullett of Pitt Street, Sydney. As Tullett operated from this address post-1868, it is highly likely that this carte de visite of George Tombs was a posthumous copy of an ambrotype or carte de visite that was taken (according to the inscription on the back) in 1866.