Basic Detail Report

MV Stephen Brown

Vessel number

HV000060

Date

1954

Primary Maker

Hall Russell and Co Pty Ltd

Description

STEPHEN BROWN's description as one of the '60 miler' fleet comes from the approximate distance of the vessel's passage between Nobby's Head at Newcastle and North Head at the entrance to Sydney Harbour. The 60 milers carried coal from the Hunter region and when discharged in Sydney the coal was often loaded on to larger bulk carriers for export. The 77 metre collier was designed and built at Hall, Russell and Co. in Aberdeen, Scotland in 1954. It was ship number 844 at that yard and was launched on the 26th of August 1954,. The ship was christened by LADY HOME. STEPHEN BROWN is steel construction throughout and was owned by the J & A Brown and Abermain Seaham Collieries Ltd. Draft at that period was limited to 14 ft 6 inches (4.42 m) so that it could get up the Hunter River as far as the Hexham Bridge. Ernie Hewett, a senior executive at Hexham Engineering in the Hunter region of NSW contributed to the ship's design as well. His original plan included cargo cranes mounted on the hull, but when launched it was decided not to install this gear, because shore-based facilities would be sufficient for its intended purpose. This decision was to have an important consequence early in the career of the STEPHEN BROWN. The ship's complement was 15: a master, two mates, two engineers, six able-seamen, two motor men, a cook and steward. The officers had single cabins while the crew shared double cabins, later converted to single cabins. STEPHEN BROWN usually made four trips per week from Newcastle and Hexham, off-loading coal in Sydney at the wharves for the North Shore Gas Company, CSR, Jones Bros and at Ball's Head. At one stage it was working with three other vessels in the fleet, with a simple rotation system that saw one loading, the second heading south, the third discharging its cargo and the fourth on the return trip. In its last few years STEPHEN BROWN also carried blue-metal and sugar as bulk cargoes, loaded on from wharves at Ballina and Harwood near Yamba. This involved negotiating the bar entrances on the Richmond and Clarence Rivers. Ross Curline was the ship's master from 1954 until the mid 1960s. He recalls that STEPHEN BROWN was a reliable vessel, but came close to being lost early in its career. Tony Robinson the Chief Engineer also had vivid recollections of the incident. With a load of steaming coal aboard STEPHEN BROWN left Hexham for Sydney sailing into a strong southerly gale. As the voyage progressed the air-vents that had been closed off and some of the deck hatches that had all been dogged-down before departure lost their covers in the stormy seas, and the vessel began to fill gradually with water entering its holds. This became apparant as the ship became deeper in the water and from the bridge it could be seen that the deck was not shipping water properly in the heavy swell. As STEPHEN BROWN approached Sydney the extant of the

problem became obvious as it developed a list, which became very significant when the hull sides at deck level began to go underwater. Aware of the danger, the skipper Don Turner initially proposed to beach the vessel inside South Head at Lady Jane Beach. However in the end this was not needed, instead they stood off the beach and organised to pump some of the water out before limping up the harbour to the CSR berth to discharge their cargo. Subsequently the air vent openings aft were raised to remain clear of deck wash, and the hatches were strengthened, but what probably saved the vessel in the first place was its high stability, known in naval architecture terms as a high GM (the vertical centre of gravity to metacentre distance). This is the typical measure of a vessel's stability. STEPHEN BROWN was originally planned to have the deck-mounted cargo gear proposed by Hewett, and this weight was factored into the original design calculations and proportions of the vessel. However, without this heavy gear on deck, the vessel operated with greater stability than originally planned, and this greater margin allowed it to remain afloat despite the additional water and extreme list it had developed. The negative side of this high stability was that it had a quicker rolling period and its transverse motion was not as comfortable as other vessels. When the STEPHEN BROWN was retired from service it was saved from being scrapped and sunk as an artificial reef to instead become an educational vessel for the Australian Maritime College in Launceston, Tasmania. The vessel was donated to the college in April 1983 by the owners, Coal and Allied Industries Limited (who had taken over the original firm of owners). A mixed crew including retired former Chief Engineer Tony Robinson and students of the college sailed on the vessel for its 50 hour trip south from Sydney. Moored on the Tamar River at Beauty Point, students use the vessel to learn about and practice ship operations and vessel management. It is connected to shore power and water to enable the propulsion plant to be operated for training purposes, and Holds 1 and 2 have been installed with various fully-operational machinery. An R5 fast rescue boat and davit is located on board and courses are conducted for the offshore and shipping industries for the crews of vessels that carry a fast rescue boat.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 77.26 m x 73.15 m x 12.28 m x 4.42 m, 1015 tonnes (253.5 ft x 240.01 ft x 40.29 ft x 14.5 ft, 1031.24 tons) Registered Dimensions: 74.61 m x 12.25 m x 4.36 m, 1464.25 tons (244.8 ft x 40.2 ft x 14.3 ft) Engine dimensions: 947Kilowatts, 8No. (1269.93Horsepower)