

Attached to 715 Rps No 266

William Morrow, 28, Highbury Avenue, Fleetwood, Chief Engineer of s.t. "Margaret Wicks",
States:-

We left Fleetwood on the 27th September, 1957, When we started off one of the firemen had 'flu then on the 1st October I felt a bit off colour myself but I was able to carry on. At 5.30 a.m. October 2nd the second called me out to come and have a look at the thrust. When I got below I was met by the smoke arising from the thrust. I tried to cool it off by using extra oil but it made no difference. I then noted that the white metal on the thrust had run. The Skipper was informed and he gave me time to change the pads and clean out the thrust. All this time I felt really poorly. Next morning 3rd October I had a job to do on the winch warp gear, during which time I got a thorough soaking. My next bit of trouble was feed trouble. I had to change the suction and delivery valves. By this time I was about all in. The fireman kept my next two watches. The next day i.e. Friday the Skipper asked me how I was feeling and I told him I would have to see somebody soon and he told me to hang on because it wouldn't be long before I was home. About 9.0p.m. I went down below and asked the fireman if everything was alright. He said that he had the extra feed on and at that time there was about 1½" of water in the glass. I left the engine-room at 11.30 p.m. when all was in order. I kept my normal watch on Saturday morning but changed the gauge glass because of oiling up. With regards the tail pipe I hammered the end up because of leakage from the tail cock. I was unable to undo the tail pipe because the union was seized up. It was necessary therefore that each time we blew the glass, to make a saw cut across the pipe and after trying to hammer the pipe up again. During this watch air bubbles kept appearing in the glass. I have had this trouble before while in this ship and generally it happened before the feed heater primed, then it became necessary to open all drains. On this occasion however it didn't. I have had quite a bit of trouble with priming during the time I have been in this ship and I have been Chief Engineer in her for almost two years.

In an attempt to get rid of these air bubbles I worked the double shut off on the gauge glass. I might at this point state that I had been uneasy the whole trip about the water level. On Wednesday I tried the water cock with a pricker but it appeared to be alright.

On Saturday when I was attempting to clear the air bubbles I noted then that the amount of blow that I got from the water end was only poor. We carried on however until Sunday 9.30 a.m. When we were going to shoot away to have another haul they blew down for me to come and look at the winch, but I told him I didn't feel well enough to carry out a repair, but he asked me to carry out a temporary job in order to recover the gear. We laid until about 3 p.m. when we set off for Fleetwood.

When I came on watch again at 6.30 p.m. every thing appeared to be alright. There was about 1" of water in the gauge glass. Our normal water level is only about 2" otherwise she is liable to prime. When we were changing the burners at 6.40 p.m. I said to the fireman can you hear a blow, but, he said that he could not. The furnaces at that time were alright. At 7.5. p.m. I felt somehow that there was something wrong but just what, I couldn't tell. The next thing I noticed was that the steam was falling back quickly and something appeared to be blowing. I immediately shut off all fires and sent the firman up to tell the skipper that there was something seriously wrong. He blew down and asked me how long it would be before I could tell him and I told him it wouldn't take long. Just then there was a small explosion. I opened up the ash pit door on the port furnace and could then see that the furnace crown was down. I reported this to the skipper but told him that there may be further damage, but I would have to wait until the boiler cooled down a bit. I examined the port and starboard furnaces and back ends and reported their condition to the skipper. The St. Leonard picked us up at 6.0 a.m. and started towing about 7.0 a.m.

During the trip back to Fleetwood I tried with a long pricker the gauge cocks, but they all appeared to be clear and free. I took the cock handles off to see if the mark on the end of the cock corresponded with the holes in the cocks themselves, again all were found in order. This will explain why the steam cock on the gauge column was found shut.

There is a distance piece between the boiler shell and the double shut off of about 18" long. This has previously given trouble by furring up and it may be this that caused the false reading on the glass.

This is the only explanation that I can give for the accident.

Signed: William Morrow
Chief Engineer.