

"SAM" SHIP INQUIRY**Question of Desirability of Carrying Rafts****EXPERTS SAY "NO"**

The M.O.T. inquiry into the heavy listing and abandonment of the Liberty-type steamer *Leicester* (ex *Samesk*), owned by the Federal Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., London, was continued in London yesterday, when evidence was taken towards elucidating facts regarding the usefulness of rafts. Both the Senior Nautical Surveyor of the Ministry of Transport and the owners' marine superintendent were of opinion that they were not necessary in peacetime.

The inquiry is being conducted by Mr. Kenneth S. Carpmael, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, with three assessors, Captain J. P. Thomson, Commander W. A. Williamson and Mr. E. F. Spanner. The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S List of June 28, 29, 30 and July 1.

Mr. Waldo Porges appeared for the Minister of Transport; Mr. Roland Adams, K.C., and Mr. H. V. Brandon, for the owners, the Federal Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., London, and the master; Mr. J. V. Naisby, K.C., and Mr. Guy N. Boyes for R. & H. Green & Silley Weir, Ltd., shiprepairers; Mr. P. F. Broadhead, of Messrs. Ingledew, Brown, Bennisson & Jarrett, for the Navigators' and Engineer Officers' Union and the Radio Officers' Union, on behalf of the second and third officers and the dependants of the deceased radio officer; and Mr. Neil Maclean for the National Union of Seamen and dependants of deceased members of the crew.

Captain W. A. HANN (Senior Nautical Surveyor, Ministry of Transport), reported that he had had an opportunity on Thursday to inspect two ballast lighters. Unfortunately, the lock strike had prevented the loading of ballast, which he had intended to inspect. He explained experiments he had carried out on the ballast, and said, in reply to the Commissioner, that it was Thames ballast.

ANGLE OF REPOSE OF BALLAST

The angle of repose was found to be 7 degs. He had jumped on the ballast, and was able to walk down its slope without breaking the crust. Beneath the surface the ballast was dry to a depth of four inches, but below that it was damp.

The COMMISSIONER suggested that Captain Hann could possibly give the court some useful information regarding life-saving rafts, and commented that apparently there were no rafts on the *Leicester*. Captain Hann said that during the war the *Leicester*, like other ships, was required to carry rafts.

The COMMISSIONER: Did these interfere in any way with the normal working of the ship?

WITNESS: Not that I am aware.

When was that requirement abolished?—I can't give you the date. Mr. PORGES then asked Captain Hann to express his views as to the desirability of rafts.

Captain HANN: I think the listing in this case was exceptional. It is not very frequently met at sea.

The COMMISSIONER: It happened in the *Sameckon*.

[The *Sameckon*, in convoy, put into John's, NF., on Jan. 2, 1945, having developed a dangerous list through last shifting while on a westbound Atlantic voyage.]

Captain HANN, continuing, said he did not think rafts were necessary in peacetime. The lifeboats should cover all eventualities.

The COMMISSIONER: Would rafts have been useful in this case?—Yes, I think so.

Mr. P. F. BROADHEAD: Did you have anything to do with the Willodale inquiry? [LLOYD'S List, Sept. 21-25 and Oct. 13, 1948.] There was difficulty in launching boats in that case?

Captain HANN: Yes. The difficulty was chiefly because of pitprops in the water.

In the *Famagusta* case [LLOYD'S List, Mar. 24-26 and Apr. 29, 1949] was there difficulty there?—Yes.

Rafts would have proved useful?—Yes.

The COMMISSIONER (to Mr. Porges): I can tell you I am still interested in this question of rafts. I should like to have Captain Dawson's views on it.

OBJECTIONS TO RAFTS

Captain H. Dawson (Marine Superintendent, Federal Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., and New Zealand Shipping Company, Ltd.), recalled, said he considered rafts were not desirable for an ordinary occasion and that the average man on board strongly objected to them. In the case of the *Leicester* they might have served a purpose, but that was an unusual case. He could not believe it warranted fitting rafts in all cases. He said that rafts made the handling of cargo awkward, and were ugly to the sailors' eyes.

During the war their usefulness was fully recognised in the case of a ship being torpedoed, and therefore they were tolerated. He received no complaints regarding the management of ships with rafts on board. It was only the question of handling. As far as he knew they were appreciated very much during the war, but he could not see they were warranted in peacetime conditions. At the time the rafts were fitted, the ships were carrying extra crews, such as gun crews.

Captain Dawson was then further questioned as to ballast and shifting boards.

Mr. PORGES: You say the Ministry has given no direction as to the fitting of shifting boards?

WITNESS: I should like the Ministry to do the same as they do with grain cargo.

Is it your view that it should not be left to the discretion of shipowners and that each ship should be left subject to the Ministry?—I am not prepared to answer that. I think that it would be better if the Ministry laid down a system of fitting shifting boards.

Is it your view that the Ministry have more experience in regard to "Sam" ships' cargo ballast than you have.—Yes.

Mr. MACLEAN: You described the rafts as "ugly." What do you mean by that?

Captain DAWSON: Sailors don't like them; they disfigure a ship.

Don't you think a little disfiguration is worth while to save life?—I entirely agree. But I don't think they are necessary in peacetime.

Captain Dawson agreed, however, that if rafts had been fitted on the *Leicester* there might have been less loss of life.

Mr. MACLEAN: Don't you think it is worth-while budgeting for an unusual incidence, such as this.—Yes, certainly.

It would be worth while to carry rafts on all ships?—It would not, from the working of the ship, in cargo and in other matters. They lumber up the decks.

If in lumbering up the decks, they assisted in saving life?—I agree, if you can foresee that.

Is it not worth-while in trying to assist in minimising the loss of life?—I cannot say; it is an unusual casualty.

You have had a few similar to it?—I don't know.

Captain MATTHEW JOHN ANDERSON, assistant marine superintendent of the Federal Steam Navigation Company, Ltd., and New Zealand Shipping Company, Ltd., said in evidence that he was given instructions by Captain Dawson to have shifting boards fitted in the *Leicester* before she was loaded in solid ballast. He found there were no Board of Trade regulations governing the design or construction of shifting boards for ballast, or any plan for the fitting of shifting boards.

Questioned by Mr. Broadhead, Captain Anderson said he had had no previous experience of shifting boards.

Mr. BROADHEAD: Would you agree with me that, in the light of the *Samkey* and this particular case, you might be well advised to reconsider carrying as much as 1500 tons of ballast in the 'tween deck?

Captain ANDERSON: Not with the new arrangements which we have now fitted.

Would you agree that the introduction of so much ballast in the 'tween deck produces fresh dangers of its own?—No; depending on stability.

You would not agree that, as this ballast was in the 'tween decks, it had anything to do with these casualties?—No.

Captain Anderson said it was decided to fit shifting boards following the loss of the *Samkey*. He telephoned a senior surveyor at the Ministry for information as to fitting shifting boards, but did not write. He was told there was no approved plan. Later, he studied the grain regulations, but did not accept the instructions on shifting boards as suitable for sand ballast.

FITTING OF SHIFTING BOARDS

Mr. JOHN FREDERICK HOLMWOOD, assistant outside manager of R. & H. Green & Silley Weir, Ltd., stated that he normally looked after all the New Zealand Shipping Company's ships which came into London for repair. He had no previous experience of fitting shifting boards for ballast. It might have been explained to him why shifting boards were to be fitted in the *Leicester*, but "I was aware of the *Samkey* and had it in mind when I was fitting the boards." In connection with the work, he carried out the orders of the shipping company.

"The general principle is that orders are given by a shipping company," he said. "We receive them, check them, and if they are in order we go ahead with the work. If they are not, we raise it with them."

Mr. PORGES read out to the Court statements which had been made by officers of the *Cecil N. Bean* and *Tropero*, the two vessels which rescued members of the *Leicester's* crew.

In his statement, the master of the *Tropero* said: "When we left she had a list of 60 to 70 deg. to port, which increased occasionally owing to the state of the sea." The chief officer of the *Cecil N. Bean* commented: "We found her lying listing to port to an angle estimated to be about 70 deg. When we departed the *Leicester* was heeled over to port, practically on her beam ends."

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Mr. GEORGE HENRY McNEIL, former assistant contractor of the ship management of the Ministry of War Transport, was questioned concerning various letters which that Department had issued from time to time in regard to the ballasting of vessels under their control. He was asked whether it was the opinion of masters of "Sam" ships that ballast should be stowed in the holds, as recommended in one letter, and he replied: "That I cannot say." He added, "The investigations were carried out by a more technical man than myself."

Mr. ADAMS: Were any of your letters about ballasting submitted in draft to the Marine Safety Directorate before they were issued?

Witness: I cannot say.

The inquiry was adjourned until to-day (Saturday).



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