

"SAM" SHIP INQUIRY

M.O.T. Surveyor's Inspection at Bermuda

SOME FEATURES OF SHIFTING BOARDS NOT APPROVED

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 for a full session on Saturday, when the last of the witnesses to be called by the Ministry was heard. The inquiry was then adjourned until to-morrow. The M.O.T. surveyor who inspected the vessel on her arrival in tow at Bermuda, outlined a number of features in regard to the layout and fitting of the shifting boards, of which he did not approve. Counsel for the Minister intimated that it was not his intention to suggest any actual fault on the part of anyone.

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 and 2.

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, Bennison & Garrett, 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.

Mr. WILLIAM JAMES GEORGE HAWKINS, a senior ship surveyor of the Ministry of Transport, gave an account of how he inspected the vessel after she had been towed to an anchorage at Bermuda. On Oct. 4, he said, he went out to her in a launch with a number of the owners' representatives. Before he went on board he formed the view that she had a list of about 45 degs. Her port sheer strake was completely under water.

Mr. PORGES: Were you able to see as you approached her whether she appeared to have any kind of damage?

Mr. HAWKINS: We made a complete circuit of the ship and as far as we were able to see there was nothing untoward about the shell, rudder or propeller. The water was clear and we were able to see the form of the rudder, which at that time was over to port.

LIST OF 39½ DEGREES

Mr. Hawkins said they also measured the draught at the stem but it could not be measured at the stern. It was 8 ft. 6 in. on the port side and about 7 ft. 4 in. starboard. On going on board, he and Mr. Beattie (a naval architect) obtained as accurately as they could the angle of list by hanging a weight on the after end of the mid-ship deck-house. It was a list of 39½ deg. He clambered along the decks with the help of ropes and found

nothing to suggest that the decks had suffered from the weather. He next went into the 'tween decks, and saw no indication of sagging.

With the aid of photographs, he then gave a detailed report to the Court as to the condition in which he found the shifting boards. To him, he said, the welding did not appear to be first class, or the shoring a very good job. In his opinion, the shores were not placed to give the best support. If all the shifting boards had failed, he estimated the ship would have listed to about 44 deg., and it was likely she would have rolled over.

POINTS OF CRITICISM

Mr. PORGES: You have had very considerable experience of this type of inquiry and ship, and, as a general proposition, what would you think of the layout of the shifting boards on this ship?

Mr. HAWKINS: There are a number of features I would not have approved had I been asked to do so. One is the absence of continuous shifting boards fore and aft in Nos. 3, 4 and 5. Secondly, the shoring of the athwart ship's bulkheads in No. 2, and the means of closing the doors in these bulkheads. Regarding the dropping of the stiffeners into slots, I think that, like the people responsible for the layout of the job, I should have thought it, at the time, a satisfactory thing to do. To my mind, one of the weaknesses in the ballasting was lack of proper trimming. I think it is necessary in carrying ballast, to level the ballast athwartships and fore and aft. . . . I think it is the surface ballast which shifts.

Mr. Hawkins went on to say that a small shift of ballast would cause a list, and the weight of ballast would increase the list. It was his impression that the spacing of the stiffeners was rather large, but he did not wish to criticise that too much, because some of the shifting boards had held, and had held with the ship listing at 39½ deg. He also suggested that the height of the shifting boards was insufficient. He thought the start of the trouble might have been the shifting of ballast in No. 5, where they knew it was not properly trimmed, but left fairly steep at the after end.

Asked by Mr. PORGES to develop the importance of height of shifting boards and ballast, Mr. HAWKINS said that if the shifting boards were of sufficient height above the ballast, there could be little chance of it spilling. In this case, there was evidence of ballast spilling over the top. The order in which events occurred in the *Leicester* could only be little more than a guess. He thought the movement of the ballast where it was not properly trimmed, possibly started the list. With this type of ballast, shifting could start slowly and grow very quickly. Coupled up with the shifting of ballast was the maintaining of a satisfactory G.M.—maintaining a satisfactory G.M. ensured a safe ship. With the fitting of shifting boards the master should maintain as much G.M. as he could in the ship, particularly in a light or ballast condition.

QUESTION OF THICKNESS

Mr. Hawkins agreed with the Commissioner that if very stout shifting boards could be built around the hatch, that would give one hundred per cent. protection against shifting of ballast.

Mr. PORGES: Had you considered any means by which the ballast could be completely prevented from any

movement at all?—It could be done by putting a flooring over the ballast.

When the investigation resumed in the afternoon, Mr. Porges told the Commissioner that a cable had been received from New York stating that no message was received from the vessel.

Mr. HAWKINS, continuing his evidence, said, in reply to Mr. Maclean that he did not think the ship would have given such an angle of list had shifting boards been fitted deck to deck.

Mr. MACLEAN: In the light on your experience of the *Samkey* inquiry, if you had been consulted in the fitting of these shifting boards, would you have put them deck to deck?—Yes, with my experience of the *Samkey* I should have been particularly careful.

Replying to Mr. R. ADAMS, who asked questions about the behaviour of ballast, Mr. HAWKINS said he believed it moved more on the surface, and as long as the ballast below remained solid, it was forming a wall to the shifting boards, providing it had been properly trimmed.

Mr. PORGES said that the last witness completed the evidence for the Ministry.

Captain H. N. LAWSON, master of the *Leicester*, recalled to give his view on the advisability or otherwise of a ship carrying rafts, said he would like time to think over the matter thoroughly.

The COMMISSIONER: If you like to think it over until Tuesday there is no objection. I realise there are a lot of considerations. I would like to have your considered view.

To Mr. BAWLEY, one of the men employed on the welding of the lug to which the stiffeners were bolted, Mr. PORGES quoted Mr. Hawkins as stating that the welding was not a first-class job in some respects, as the lug had been welded on three sides only. Had Mr. Bawley any observations to make about that?

Mr. BAWLEY: So far as I know there was sufficient welding there.

He said the fourth side of the lug was not welded because the shifting boards were in the way. His union had ruled that its members must not move the boards.

The COMMISSIONER: Could you not have asked someone to get it done?—I do not know about that and it was rather late. We were the only trade on the ship and in all probability in the dock.

Mr. MACLEAN: Do you still say you thought the job was strong enough?—Yes, sir.

Were you in a tremendous hurry to finish this job?—No.

NO ONE AT FAULT

Mr. PORGES told the Commissioner that as the evidence stood at the moment it was not his intention to suggest any actual fault on the part of anyone.

Mr. R. ADAMS said it would be his submission that the listing of the *Leicester* was caused by a deflection in No. 2 'tween deck which was sufficient to bring about the failure of the uprights. This allowed a shift of ballast in the hold which in turn led to shifts in the other holds, either quickly or afterwards. "Our unhappy experiences in these 'Sam' ships have given us sufficient knowledge to enable skilled people to prepare specifications for shifting boards which will secure a safe distribution and securing of ballast. One of the most important things in this case is that we know what good ships these really are in spite of the tremendous changes of force within

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them. Both the master and a number of the crew have gone back to the ship."

The next witness, Mr. ARCHIBALD WALKER, a naval architect and marine surveyor, said that deflection experiments which he had made on the *Leicester* led him to believe it was reasonable to assume that the trouble started through the No. 2 'tween deck sagging under the weight of the ballast, causing failure of those uprights which had been secured at both ends.

The inquiry was adjourned until to-morrow.

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