

"LADY COMBE" INQUIRY.**Boiler Water Stored in Fore Peak.****COURT FINDING TO-DAY.**

The Board of Trade inquiry into the mysterious disappearance of the Clyde-built dredger *Lady Combe*, with a crew of 18, when outward bound to take up duty at Lagos, in December, 1927, was resumed at Glasgow yesterday, Mr. G. W. Wilton, K.C., presiding.

Two days' evidence was taken in December last, when an adjournment was made to obtain the affidavit of the lighthouse keeper at Chickens Rock, Isle of Man, following statements contained in a letter handed into Court by a widow of one of the crew. The affidavit submitted to the Court yesterday showed that the keeper (Mr. John Henderson) observed a vessel sheltering near the lighthouse for 24 hours in December, 1927. He saw the vessel resume her voyage, and on passing the lighthouse he saw she was a bucket dredger and read the name *Lady Combe*. The dredger appeared under control and was steaming well.

An important statement regarding an eleventh hour discovery of extra water stored in the dredger against the builders' wishes was made yesterday by Mr. John Findlay, director of Lobnitz & Co., Ltd., who launched the vessel at Renfrew in June, 1927. The builders, he said, had no idea that any water was going to be put in the fore peak, which was not really a tank, but a hold, until their inspector went down to the vessel the night before sailing to make an examination of the compartments. When he came to the fore peak, he found water in it to the extent of 18 tons, which showed a depth of about 6 ft. 4 in. Of course, they had trimmed the coal at the other side to balance the 18 tons. Witness personally went along and got the chief engineer and told him that the builders were annoyed that their wishes had been disregarded in the matter, and insisted that if there was any probability of bad weather they had to get into shelter and pump the water overboard and trim the coal to restore the vessel's uprightness. Next morning he approached the Captain and told him the same thing, and both Captain and chief engineer promised faithfully to keep to his wishes. Witness stated that he had seen the affidavit of the lighthouse keeper. The builders formed the opinion that the vessel was sheltering to pump the water out, and trim the coal.

Mr. G. W. WILTON: Should it not have been done before the vessel sailed?

WITNESS: Well, it was rather late because they would have required to trim the 18 tons of coal as well. He added that they were to get rid of it as soon as they encountered bad weather.

When one of the Assessors asked if it was boiler water, witness replied that it was to be used for boiler feed. They told the chief engineer if necessary he could use sea water for his boilers if he found he was getting short. That had been done many times before, and there was no reason why it could not have been done then.

AN ASSESSOR: It seems an extraordinary thing that the captain or engineers should put water in the tank without instructions. It would increase her draught a good deal?

WITNESS: Yes, we did not think it should have been done.

Mr. WILTON: And you disapproved of it at once.—WITNESS: Yes. They just sailed, expecting to have fine weather as long as possible. It was a heavy risk. That is a matter of navigation for which the builders are not responsible.

After remarking that he thought that a most important point to be brought out so late in the inquiry and one that was extremely useful, Mr. Wilton stated that the findings of the Court would be announced this afternoon.

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