

THE "LADY COMBE."

B.O.T. Inquiry Concluded.

Yesterday the Board of Trade inquiry was resumed in Glasgow into the circumstances surrounding the loss of the dredger *Lady Combe*, which sailed last December from the Clyde, and after passing Greenock was never seen nor heard of again. There was a dramatic surprise during the previous day's hearing when the widow of the third engineer, who, while on holiday at Rothesay in the summer, found a pair of her husband's trousers on the beach, handed a letter to Mr. G.W. Wilton, K.C., who is presiding at the inquiry. This was from a lighthouseman at Chickens Rock, Isle of Man, who said he saw the *Lady Combe* sheltering at the Calf of Man for 24 hours, although he could not remember the date.

Mr. T.W. DONALD, for the Board of Trade, said he had been in communication with the Board regarding the letter in question, and had asked them if it was news, and, if so, to take the necessary steps.

NO LIFEBOUYS FOUND.

It was pointed out by Mr. A. R. HARPER, for the builders (Lobnitz & Co., Ltd.), that several reports had come to hand of the dredger being seen since she left Greenock, but none of those reports had been substantiated. As a matter of fact, the *Lady Combe* had several lifebuoys lightly attached to the rails, and not one had been found anywhere.

Mr. JOHN FINDLAY, a director of the building firm, was again questioned by the Assessors on the practicability or otherwise of removing the buckets of dredgers when they were going abroad. "From an engineering point of view," said witness, "it would be impossible to do this, but it is not a matter of expense when the question of the human element arises." He added that he did not know Captain Flett intimately, but there was nothing in his mind to cause him disquietude. They were considerably surprised, however, when the captain sailed from Greenock with only two hours of daylight to go and when the glass was falling. It did not indicate to them that he was taking sufficient care in that respect. One would have expected that after the compasses had been adjusted the ship would anchor and wait for daylight.

Mr. BOYD AULD for the Imperial Merchant Service Guild, appearing on behalf of the officers and the captain of the dredger, asked if it was not brought home to the captain that he should not sail.

Mr. FINDLAY answered that he had left by that time.

Mr. WILTON: Supposing I was your brother-in-law, Mr. Findlay, would you have liked me to go out in that boat?—WITNESS: I don't see any reason why not. We have been sending dredgers abroad for years.

Mr. WILTON then touched on the question of insurance, and was given the assurance that the widows and dependents of the crew had been properly dealt with.

No further testimony was called, and before the speeches came on, Mr. DONALD submitted a list of twelve questions which he desired the Court to answer. Among these were:—

"What is the cause of the vessel not having been heard of since she left Greenock? Ought such vessels make voyages in winter months? Were the preparations for the sea voyage proper and sufficient to enable the vessel to make the voyage without endangering the lives of those on board? What number of compasses had the vessel? Were they in good order for safe navigation? Was the vessel properly supplied with life-saving appliances, and did she carry distress signals? Was the construction and equipment of the vessel satisfactory, and such as to ensure seaworthiness? Was the stability of the ship in the sailing condition completely investigated before she sailed, and the results imparted to those responsible for her safety on the voyage? What were the metacentric height, the maximum righting arm, and the range of stability when the ship sailed, and were they sufficient? Were detailed calculations as to statical stability made before the ship sailed to ensure a sufficiency of righting powers during the voyage, and if not were such calculations necessary or desirable?"

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USE OF WIRELESS.

Mr. BOYD AULD opened the speeches for the officers, and said they had no antagonism to anyone, and their desire was to facilitate the inquiry and give what ideas they could. In view of the evidence, he held it was looking for trouble if these dredgers were allowed to go to sea with the buckets up, particularly in the winter months. He considered there was an element of luck in the experience of the builders in sending out so many dredgers in the past without mishap. The recommendation should be made that the buckets should always be taken down, especially in the winter. Wireless would certainly be a precaution, for two reasons: (a) calling for help; and (b) receiving news of storms. Even a receiving set would be valuable.

Mr. HARPER (for the builders) submitted that they did everything possible to make the ship safe for its journey to Lagos. The fact that they had not been involved in any previous accident was due not to luck but to good workmanship, but they could not help admitting that it would be safer not to sail a vessel of that kind in the winter. The dredger, however, was strongly built for the nature of her work and could stand a heavier storm than an ordinary vessel of relative size.

Mr. DONALD said that no blame attached to the persons responsible for carrying out the preparations for the *Lady Combe* going to sea. It was a question whether a vessel so constructed should go to sea in December and whether it would not have been well to have endeavoured to get some greater range of stability in a vessel of that kind. He thought they were agreed that greater safety would be obtained by dismantling the buckets and either storing them in the well to give a lower centre of gravity or sending them away by another ship to get a greater freeboard. Either course would make for greater stability. It was desirable that the statical curves should be prepared before the vessel sailed. He trusted that, in the future, the firm would take the precaution of making those curves. Only the most extraordinary precautions seemed to justify sending a vessel of that kind to sea in December.

This concluded the inquiry, and the findings of the Court will be given later.

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