

LLOYD'S LIST & SHIPPING GAZETTE, Tuesday, Feb. 22, 1949

## INQUIRY INTO LOSS OF YACHT

### Fate of the "Aarla"

#### EXPLOSION THEORY

From Our Own Correspondent

GLASGOW, Monday

A suggestion that the ex-Admiralty motor yacht *Aarla*, which sank in the Firth of Clyde on June 17, 1947, might have foundered as a result of an explosion, was made at a Ministry of Transport inquiry which opened at Glasgow to-day. The *Aarla*, which was bought by Park Lane Court, Ltd., London, from the Director of Small Craft Disposals, was taken over by a crew of eight, and after refuelling at Ardrossan, sailed on the evening of June 16, 1947, for Torquay and Lowestoft. She was not seen again, and it was presumed that she was lost with all hands.

Opening the inquiry, Mr. T. W. DONALD, representing the Ministry of Transport, said the *Aarla* was 44 years old, her plates were thin and she leaked. Her life-saving appliances were not in good order, her wireless was out of order and she was overdue for survey. On the other hand, her loss might have been due to an explosion. She was believed to have sunk about nine miles SW. of Ailsa Craig, and about 10 miles south of where she was lost, there was a large dumping area for surplus ammunition. There was also evidence that a fishing vessel was lost off Ailsa Craig in May, 1947, and there appeared to be evidence that she had struck something in the sea which exploded. There was also a considerable amount of evidence of ammunition, which had presumably been dumped, going ashore on adjacent coasts.

The *Aarla* was 186 ft. in length, was built at Glasgow in 1903, and was taken over by the Admiralty in 1939 and extensively altered before sailing for Freetown as pilot and examination vessel. She was last drydocked at Dakar about the end of 1944, and returned to the United Kingdom in 1945. During the voyage she underwent engine and other repairs at Leixoes, Portugal, and was given a certificate that she was eligible to continue to Falmouth. There she was again surveyed and given a certificate to continue to the Clyde, where she was moored at Tighnabruach in September for maintenance. In June, 1947, she was purchased for £6000 by Park Lane Court, Ltd., who insured her for £15,000. "I am not suggesting she was over insured or that in any way there was any question about her being cast away," said Mr. Donald. It was stated that her owners intended to use her as a passenger vessel on the East Coast of England. After leaving Ardrossan she was never seen again.

#### THE "LAIRDSDALE"

Evidence of her sinking was got from the officers and crew of the *Lairdsdale*, which sailed from Ardrossan for Belfast late on June 16 over much the route the *Aarla* would have taken. The evidence of the *Lairdsdale* was that about 2.45 a.m. the helmsman saw a flash on the starboard bow. A few minutes later the second officer saw the lights of a steamer about five miles distant. Shortly after three o'clock the second officer saw the starboard light and other lights of a vessel about two miles away, and then they vanished. The *Lairdsdale* searched the area for several hours, during which two bodies and wreckage were seen; one body was recovered. The position where the *Aarla* was lost was 55 deg. 8 min. N., 5 deg. 17 min. W. There was a moderate SSW. gale and the sea was rough.

