

LLOYD'S LIST & SHIPPING GAZETTE, Friday, Feb. 25, 1949

LOSS OF THE "AARLA"

Theory that Yacht Struck a
Case of Flash Bombs

INQUIRY COMPLETED

From Our Own Correspondent

GLASGOW, Thursday

The theory that the ex-Admiralty motor yacht *Aarla* sank after striking a case of photographic flash bombs was submitted to-day by Mr. A. B. McLetchie, representing the owners, Park Lane Court, Ltd., at the Ministry of Transport inquiry at Glasgow into the loss of the vessel. The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S List of Feb. 22, 23 and 24. The inquiry is being conducted by Sheriff Johnston assisted by three nautical assessors. The *Aarla* disappeared with all hands in the Firth of Clyde some miles SW. of Ailsa Craig after leaving Ardrossan, Ayrshire, on June 16, 1947, for Torquay.

Mr. McLetchie pointed out to-day that evidence had shown that a case of the flash bombs would be sufficient to blow up a building. What appeared to have happened was that the *Aarla* struck something which caused a white flash and blew in some of the plates. The master put the wheel hard-a-starboard to turn and run for shelter but did not have time to do so and the crew abandoned the ship.

He said the evidence showed that the amount of ammunition of a dangerous type dumped in the Firth of Clyde which had drifted ashore was completely appalling. "I make no reflection on the War Department and I do not believe there has been any carelessness on their part, but I do think that a chance of unthought-of scientific or physical phenomena caused the boxes to drift," he added. He contended there was no negligence or carelessness on the part of the owners. Evidence was given by Mr. R. J. Alexander Hamer, a director, of Park Lane Court, Ltd., that he considered the *Aarla* was tight, staunch, strong and seaworthy. He had no reason to believe that was not the case.

Mr. T. W. Donald, representing the Minister of Transport, quoted from a report of the loss of a vessel off the Lizard after she had been surveyed and said he was submitting this to show that people who bought small or old ships had to take unusual precautions before sending them to sea.

Sheriff JOHNSTON interposed to remark that it seemed to him that one might comment on the responsibility of Government departments who sold rotten old ships without satisfying themselves what was going to be done with them.

Mr. ALEXANDER HAMER said the *Aarla* was a yacht and he had always considered her as a yacht. The company had not made a penny piece out of the insurance. She had been purchased with care and after consideration and the actual purchase price of £6000 was a comparatively small item compared with the sum it was intended to spend on her. He agreed that the report of Captain Young, master of the *Aarla*, had mentioned a good many defects but he contended that none of the surveyors had given any evidence on which they based any suggestion that the *Aarla* was unseaworthy.

QUESTION OF SURVEY

When he was asked why the *Aarla* was not surveyed on the Clyde before sailing, Mr. ALEXANDER HAMER explained that it was more convenient for him to carry out the survey in a yard to which he had easier access in the South of England. He denied that he was thinking more of his own convenience when he decided to take this course than of the safety of the ship or her crew.

Mr. DONALD: Don't you think it would have been much safer to send her to a Clyde yard for survey?—I was satisfied that the vessel was sound enough to be moved to Lowestoft.

Witness considered the life-saving appliances on board were adequate. The capacity of the lifeboat was adequate and there was ample sufficiency of lifebelts and buoys. Captain Young had been told to make the crew up to 10 and witness was convinced that the *Aarla* was adequately manned for the voyage south. "None in the company is proposing to hide behind anybody," he added. "I am personally taking responsibility for judgment in the matter and I consider it is only natural that anyone should be very careful before sending people to sea in any vessel." He said he had no official qualifications but he had considerable experience of the sea in a number of ships extending over 20 years.

When asked by Sheriff JOHNSTON how he reconciled his earlier expressed opinion about the unsatisfactory reports of the surveyors with the great reliance he had placed on the report of a surveyor who examined the *Aarla* at Dakar, WITNESS replied that the Dakar surveyor had seen the vessel out of the water.

THE NINTH MAN

A photograph from a seamen's identity card obtained from the Registrar-General of Shipping was produced at the inquiry and identified by a witness, who stated he had seen the man as a member of the *Aarla*'s crew while she was lying at Tighnabruich, Argyllshire. It had been previously believed that her crew consisted of only eight, but the "unknown"—Hector Johnson, of South Uist—brought the total to nine.

Mr. J. R. HENDRY, solicitor, representing relatives of the crew, said the weight of evidence seemed to show that the yacht was seaworthy for the purposes of the voyage to the South of England, and that some minor explosion was the main factor which contributed to her foundering.

Recalling that the *Aarla* had been owned by the Admiralty, Mr. Hendry submitted that the advertisement offering her for sale on which the subsequent owners acted was misleading if it was intended to convey that she was unseaworthy. The advertisement stated that a good deal of work would be necessary to bring her back to yacht standards. If it had been intended to convey that she was unseaworthy the advertisement should have stated that she required considerable repair before she could sail. Mr. Hendry added, "Surely we are not to apply to the Admiralty the standards one would apply to a horse-coper at a fair."

Mr. DONALD, representing the Ministry of Transport, submitted that the default of the owners caused or contributed to the loss of the yacht. The possibility of an explosion had to be admitted though whether externally or internally no one could now say. This, however, might only partly account for the yacht foundering, the other contributory cause being a weak hull. He thought the evidence showed that when the *Aarla* left Ardrossan she was not in a seaworthy condition.

The findings of the inquiry will be announced on Monday.



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Lloyd's Register
Foundation

Glasgow, June 23.—Yacht AARLA.
Body identified by brother-in-law as chief
engineer, Joseph Jeffers, Castle Street
Morriston, —Lloyd's Agent.