

LLOYD'S LIST & SHIPPING GAZETTE, Tuesday, Mar. 1, 1949

## "AARLA" INQUIRY FINDINGS

### Yacht Not Seaworthy When She Sailed

#### OWNERS BLAMED

From Our Own Correspondent

GLASGOW, Monday

That the loss of the ex-Admiralty motor yacht *Aarla* in the Firth of Clyde on June 17, 1947, was due to the foundering of the vessel, which was unseaworthy, possibly after an explosion, were the findings announced today at the Ministry of Transport inquiry at Glasgow. The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of Feb. 22, 23, 24 and 25. The inquiry was conducted by Sheriff Johnston, assisted by three nautical assessors, Commander W. A. Williamson, R.D., R.N.R., of Glasgow; Mr. John Wallace, of Glasgow; and Mr. William Nutton, M.I.N.A., of London.

The *Aarla*, 438 tons gross, was built by D. & W. Henderson, Ltd., Partick. She was on a voyage from Ardrossan, Ayrshire, to Torquay, when she was lost about 3 a.m. on June 17, 1947, off Ailsa Craig, with all hands. She was owned by Park Lane Court, Ltd., London, who had purchased her for £6000 from the Director of Small Craft Disposals while she was lying off Tighnabruaich, Argyllshire. Her owners intended to refit and convert her for use as a pleasure vessel on the East Coast of England. She carried a crew, in addition to her master, Captain R. D. Young, of chief officer, chief and second engineers, cook, cabin boy and three seamen.

The inquiry established that it was almost certain that a ninth member of the crew, of whom the authorities had previously been unaware, was Hector Johnson, a seaman from South Uist, in the Outer Hebrides.

#### OVERDUE FOR SURVEY

It was found that the company, before making their offer for the vessel, took no advice, but consulted Lloyd's Yacht Register for 1939 and also saw an old photograph. She was overdue for survey when purchased. She had sailed as a yacht and thus there was no need of a loadline certificate and clearance papers. She was not seaworthy when she sailed from Tighnabruaich, but she had sufficient crew for the intended run if she had been in fair shape. Of the two wooden lifeboats carried, the port boat was damaged and useless and the condition of the starboard boat had not

been established. There was ample quantity of other lifesaving appliances but their condition was not known.

It had not been established there was an explosion, though that possibility could not be excluded. If there was no explosion the loss was probably due wholly to the condition of the hull. If there was an explosion the loss might have been partly due to the condition of the hull. If all lifesaving appliances had been in good order the chances were that some lives at least might have been saved.

The owners were at fault in deciding to send the *Aarla* to Lowestoft without inspection by a qualified surveyor and a report by him that she was fit for the intended voyage. There was no evidence of fault in the master's handling or navigation, but he was at fault in taking her to sea in her existing condition.

In the annexe to the findings the condition of the hull was discussed and it was pointed out that her war service had to be taken into account. There was also a history of unremedied and untraced leakage going back at least to her last voyage in 1945. In the arguments advanced that the loss of the *Aarla* might have been due to an explosion the possibility that this could have been caused by a drifting sea mine could be virtually ruled out. This would have blown her to bits at once and the detonation would have been felt in the steamer *Lairdale*, which was in the area. There was evidence that a very large quantity of ammunition had been dumped in the Firth of Clyde and a proportion had been washed ashore. It was not clear whether the movement of this ammunition was made along the sea bed or had resulted from semi-buoyancy.

The possibility of the ship striking an object in the sea capable of producing a considerable explosion was not excluded. "Our opinion is that the occurrence of an explosion is neither established nor negated," added Sheriff Johnston. "The matter remains in the realm of conjecture." It was impossible on the evidence to say whether the loss of all the crew was due to the condition of the life-saving appliances. The owners of the *Aarla* were at fault in relying on Captain Young's opinion and the survey report made at Dakar two years earlier. They failed to take into consideration her long stay at Tighnabruaich. In the annex the comment was made, "It may be that steps should be taken by regulation or otherwise to secure that unseaworthy vessels should be prevented from putting to sea until they are rendered seaworthy."

An order was made for the owners of the *Aarla* to pay £300 towards the cost of the inquiry.



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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  
Morris, — Lloyd's Agents.