

"WARREN GROVE" INQUIRY

Coastguard Weather Reports

The Ministry of Transport inquiry into the loss of the collier *Warren Grove*, of 351 tons gross, owned by Challis, Stern & Co., Ltd. (Warren Shipping Company, Ltd., managers), was continued at West Hartlepool yesterday when evidence was given by coastguard officers which indicated that weather conditions in the area varied a good deal at the time when the vessel foundered off the Firth of Forth on Nov. 9 last while on a voyage from Hartlepool to Buckie with coal with the loss of seven of her crew of 10. The inquiry is being conducted by Mr. J. N. Naisby, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain J. H. Grimston, Mr. J. Shand and Mr. L. C. Burrill as assessors. The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of July 26 and 27.

The Ministry of Transport are represented by Mr. Arnold Baker, and Mr. Neil Maclean appears for the National Union of Seamen.

Commissioner G. C. Harris, an area inspector of Coastguard, was asked to explain how it was that, while four ships which were not very far from land were experiencing bad weather on that particular night (Nov. 9) the log of the Gourdon Coastguard Station reported "A fine calm night."

Commissioner HARRIS said that it was a peculiarity of the Firth of Forth area that bad weather could "cut off like a knife." The wind would strike one area while a mile away there would be little or no wind. On the day of the disaster no signals from sea were recorded in the records of the Coastguard, and therefore he would say that no signals were seen. Immediately the report of the sinking of the *Warren Grove* was received, two lifeboats went out and an air search began.

Extracts from Coastguards' logs were quoted by Station Officer John Duff, of Usan Coastguard Station, who said he did not know until Nov. 10 that bad weather watch was being kept from Arbroath on the night of Nov. 9.

When the Wreck Commissioner asked what was the weather at Usan on the evening of Nov. 9, Duff, reading from his log, said: "Eight p.m. wind west force 4, visibility 4 miles, sea 2."

The report in the log of the Gourdon Coastguard Station at 10 p.m. was: "Wind west-south-west force 2 to 3; visibility 6 miles, sea one; moderate swell."

SIGNALS TO ANOTHER SHIP

FREDERICK W. ROBERTSON, cook on board the *Warren Grove*, said that at 8 a.m. on Nov. 9 the ship developed a list of 35 deg. He was thrown into a corner. Later in the afternoon, as the list got worse, he could not cook. Towards evening things were getting really bad. Then he noticed the lights of a ship moving towards them. The mate tried to signal the ship with the hand torch, but the vessel moved away. They then set off flares. Later, he was told to put supplies and blankets into the starboard lifeboat, and at 9.30 p.m. the order was given to abandon ship.

Mr. MACLEAN: How did the *Warren Grove* compare with other ships in your experience?—I have seen a lot worse.

Captain WALTER ALFRED HAND, Senior Nautical Surveyor of the Ministry of Transport, said he did not believe, in view of the peculiarities of Scottish East Coast weather, that weather reports from shore stations were much guide to the sea conditions experienced by the collier in her last hours. On the night of Nov. 9 the wind along the shore was mainly from the west, but a few miles off shore the gale followed the line of the land, and was from the south west.

Mr. HORACE BERRY, Lloyd's Register ship surveyor at Glasgow, reported on a survey he had made of the *Warren Grove* in 1947, at the time of her purchase by her present owners.

Mr. BAKER: She maintained her class?—Yes.

Have you any comments to make?—No.

Mr. MACLEAN: Do you consider four years is an abnormal time to pass before a further survey is carried out when a vessel reaches the age of the *Warren Grove*?—I do not make the regulations. I would not like to give such an opinion.

As these ships get older, your survey must be more meticulous?—I do not think so.

Surely, when carrying out a survey for the classification of a ship of 20 to 24 years of age you give a much more careful survey than of a ship of eight years of age?—Just as laid down by the Rules and Regulations of the Society.

As the *Warren Grove* had been involved in a collision in 1947, do you think Lloyd's surveyors should have been called in to examine the vessel?—Yes, definitely.

Replying to the Commissioner, WITNESS said at the time of the survey he was satisfied in his own mind that the *Warren Grove* was in perfectly good seaworthy condition.

The Commissioner: Do you think it would be better if the survey for your society's requirements to ships which have reached a certain age was a more stringent examination?—With your permission, I would rather not answer that.

The inquiry was adjourned until to-day.