

## LOSS OF "WARREN GROVE"

### M.O.T. Inquiry Opened

#### COURT TOLD NO AID SENT TO SHIP

A Ministry of Transport inquiry into the loss of the West Hartlepool collier *Warren Grove*, of 351 tons gross, off the Firth of Forth on Nov. 9 last was opened at West Hartlepool yesterday. The inquiry is being conducted by Mr. J. V. Naisby, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain J. H. Grimston, Mr. J. Shand and Mr. L. C. Burrill as assessors.

The *Warren Grove*, which was owned by Challis, Stern & Co., Ltd. (Warren Shipping Company Ltd., managers), was on voyage from Hartlepool to Buckhaven, carrying a cargo of coal and when she foundered on Nov. 9 her crew of 10 were rescued. It was stated that previous to the disaster the ship had been repaired but the repairs were not submitted for classification. Counsel for the Ministry of Transport asked the Court might interest itself in the question.

Mr. ARNOLD BAKER, representing the Ministry of Transport, in outlining the nature of the disaster, referred to a belief that there was a certain amount of feeling about the fact that no lifeboat or rescue appliances were sent out to help the *Warren Grove*. He said that two ships had been seen by her and on sighting the second vessel she let off rockets of one sort or another to attract attention, but nothing happened. Statements had been taken from the masters of two ships which were likely to have been in the neighbourhood at the time. Mr. Baker suggested that steps might be taken to establish the exact course of the *Warren Grove*, as it might well be that she sank at a point where it would be impossible for anyone on land to see her signals. It might in fact have been a mistake when it was stated that she was believed to be "fairly close to land."

#### LISTED IN BAD WEATHER

The *Warren Grove*, he said, left Hartlepool at 5 p.m. on Nov. 8 in good weather. Later the weather deteriorated and eventually blew very hard indeed. There was a sudden lurch and the ship took on a list to starboard from which she never recovered. After several unsuccessful attempts to right the vessel by keeping the weather on her starboard side, it was decided to make for the nearest land—Montrose. "As dusk fell," said Mr. Baker, "it was realised that the ship was in serious difficulty, and distress signals were sent up." The vessel, he said, had no wireless transmitter, which she was under no obligation to carry. She had a wireless receiver.

At 10 p.m. the order was given to abandon ship and the whole crew of 10, including the master, "jumped for one of the lifeboats at the same time and capsized it." Three of the men got back to the ship, and the remaining seven were last seen drifting away in the storm, clinging to the lifeboat. The three men stayed on the ship and tried to launch the jolly boat but lost it. They then decided to stay on board until the vessel sank and to drift away in the remaining lifeboat. This they succeeded in doing.

#### UNSURVEYED REPAIRS

Mr. Baker told the Court that while the *Warren Grove* carried a high specification, when she left port he understood that she had previously suffered a certain amount of damage and that the subsequent repairs had not been seen by a classification surveyor. On this point he said the Ministry frowned very much on the practice of not submitting repairs for classification survey, and he wondered whether the Court might interest itself somewhat in the general question of surveys after repairs. He added that the vessel appeared to have been well looked after and that the trimming of the ship at Hartlepool had been done satisfactorily and had been passed by the mate.

The COMMISSIONER: You say "by the mate." Are you satisfied?

Mr. BAKER: Yes, I think so. I understand that everybody who saw the state of the coal after the teeming and trimming had been finished considered it was done as well as it could be.

Mr. ARTHUR STUART BARNARD, of Messrs. Barnard & Sedgwick, consulting marine engineers, of Newcastle, said he examined the ship in June and August of last year and that minute tests revealed no sign of a leak, although the master had twice reported that the vessel appeared to be shipping more water in the bilges than she should.

Mr. GEORGE L. SEDGWICK, a partner in the same firm, said he examined the ship in January and in June, 1947, and considered she was in good condition for her age.

Mr. EDGAR SCOTT, a director of the Warren Shipping Company, Ltd., of Mark Lane, London, said that reports on the *Warren Grove* were satisfactory with the exception of one report in July last year when the master had reported that there was more water in the hold than he thought there should be. It was not his practice, witness said, to call in Lloyd's surveyors except

in cases where the seaworthiness of the ship was in question.

To Mr. Arnold Baker he said that the *Warren Grove* was due to go into dry dock for stability tests in January of this year. In the meantime, he said, the master and the chief engineer had been quite satisfied with the vessel.

Mr. BAKER: Why was the ship not drydocked after a collision in the Caledonian Canal?—Because the damage was of a slight nature and because there was a certificate from Lloyd's saying the repairs were quite satisfactory until her next drydocking.

To further questions by Mr. Baker, Mr. SCOTT said that the master of the *Warren Grove*—Captain D. S. Miller, of Aberdeen—had been with the company since 1942, and had been in command since 1944. "He was a man I knew very well personally and a man whom we respected and in whom we had very great confidence."

To Mr. Neil Maclean (for the National Union of Seamen) Mr. Scott said the company bought the vessel for £11,750. [The *Warren Grove* was built in 1921 and purchased in 1947.] He considered that out of 18 months' voyaging, six to eight weeks for repairs was a reasonable period.

Mr. MACLEAN commented: "I cannot agree with you, Mr. Scott, but that is for this Court to decide."

Mr. McLean: Am I right in saying this master had no certificate?—He had no certificate.

Do you think he was qualified to give you an opinion on his ship's stability?—Yes, I think so. Captain Miller was sailing in the ship and could tell, I am quite certain, how she handled while loading and in the seaway.

The inquiry adjourned until to-day.



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