

"EMPRESS OF CANADA" INQUIRY

Fire Brigade Officer's Evidence

"NO WORRIES ABOUT WATER SUPPLY"

From Our Own Correspondent

LIVERPOOL, Monday. Further evidence was given regarding the electrical equipment of the *Empress of Canada* to-day at the Ministry of Transport Inquiry into the loss of the ship by fire. The extent of the fire when the Bootle fire brigade arrived was described by Mr. Barlow, deputy chief fire brigade officer, who said he had "no worries about water supply." The fire occurred on Jan. 25 last, in No. 1 branch, North Gladstone Dock, Liverpool. Mr. K. S. Carpmael, Q.C., is sitting as Wreck Commissioner with Captain Lewis Parfitt and Messrs. W. J. Nutton, I. J. Gray and F. Dunn as assessors.

[The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of Dec. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 21.]

Mr. J. B. Hewson and Mr. Gerald Darling are representing the Ministry of Transport. Mr. George Bean is appearing for Bootle Corporation. Mr. J. V. Naisby, Q.C., and Mr. R. J. H. Collinson are representing Canadian Pacific Steamships, Ltd. Mr. Glyn Burrell and Mr. Norman Sellers are appearing for the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board. Mr. Trevor Davies is appearing for Harland & Wolff, Ltd. Mr. P. F. Broadhead (instructed by Messrs. Ingledew, Brown, Bennison & Garrett, London) is instructed to watch the interests of the members of the Mercantile Marine Service Association and the Navigators and Engineer Officers' Union.

"SATISFIED WITH ELECTRICAL CONDITION"

Mr. THOMAS MURRAY, first electrician, said he went on board the vessel on the Saturday and was there from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. When he left he was satisfied with the electrical condition of the ship. During the six months he had been in the ship he did not recollect any instance of fire being caused by electrical faults. Faults dealt with, generally speaking, were in places where there was water splashing about and not in the passenger accommodation. He had never heard of any faults which were hidden by false ceilings.

Witness said he did not know of any faults in the passenger accommodation through water seeping through from the deck above. He first heard at the inquiry of a bath in cabin A66 overflowing and seeping through to cabins B58 and B62. If that had been reported the normal procedure would have been to take off the panel and see how far the water had affected the wiring, and try it out.

Mr. W. R. CLARKE, fifth electrician, said he went on board at 9 a.m. on the day of the fire and spent the morning on the engine-room switchboard and in the workshop. He had lunched in the workshop because the carpenter said he wanted to use the windlass between 12 and 1 p.m. He was standing by to switch off lights which were not needed, in order to relieve the load. During that day he did not remember any lights on the switchboard going out. He might have switched off some lights in public rooms, &c., which were not needed, in order to relieve the load.

KLAXON SYSTEM

Mr. R. W. DONNELLY, assistant electrical engineer superintending the work of shore contractors, was recalled and clarified evidence he gave on Saturday with regard to the klaxon system if a fault occurred. He said that if a fault occurred in the mains obviously all the alarms would be affected, but if the fault occurred in the local wiring of one of the klaxons this would not affect the others, because the klaxons had individual fuses.

BERNARD SCOTT, greaser, said that on the day of the fire he was on duty in the ship from 7 a.m. and was due to go off at 5 p.m. He was in the engine-room, apart from when he had his lunch, until 3.55 p.m. when he went to his room on B deck port side amidships. When he left for his room at 3.55 p.m. he did not see any fire.

Mr. HEWSON: When did you first know there was a fire?—The light went out in my room about 4.30. I thought there was something wrong with the generator. I went into the working alleyway and discovered the ship was on fire.

Witness said the lights in the working alleyway were on. The alleyway was full of smoke and he tried to get back to the engine-room via the starboard side but that was full of smoke. He went to the main deck and the promenade deck and they were full of smoke. There was also smoke on the boat deck.

Mr. R. K. BARLOW, deputy chief fire brigade officer of Bootle fire service, described the scene when the fire brigade arrived. In reply to Mr. Hewson he said that in every case of a fire call to Gladstone dock the policy was to send at once four fire pumps and an emergency tender. The fire call was received at 4.17 p.m., the fire service arrived at the ship at 4.19 p.m. and he arrived about one minute later. Sub Officer Logan informed him that the ship was "well away."

He boarded the vessel through a shell door on C deck and went to the door leading to the tourist dining room. There was no light. It was very hot and thick with smoke. He went across to the starboard side door of the tourist dining room. There the smoke was considerably less and it was much cooler. He could see into the dining room. He saw flames flash across the deckhead of the dining room. From the smell he took it that paint on the deckhead was burning. The flames were coming forward from aft. He also saw flames flashing across the deckhead of the first-class dining room.

He was making a preliminary assessment of the fire and he then went on to the quay and reboarded the vessel through a shell door to B deck. There were several firemen there. The smoke was intense, and it was a job for breathing apparatus. There was a solid sheet of flame passing across the alleyway from deck to deckhead. There was also a solid sheet of flame from deck to deckhead aft. He ordered four more pumps. That was at 4.30 p.m., and at that stage there were two hoses in C deck and three into B deck.

In reply to the Wreck Commissioner he said he had no worries about water supply. Water pressure also did not matter for the fire services so long as the water was available. The pumps would deal with the pressure aspect.

Mr. Barlow said that he then decided to go aft, and on going up the gangway aft found two of his men in breathing apparatus who had just been driven out of the port alleyway. He assumed there was a solid fire there. At 4.33 p.m. he ordered another four pumps and met Mr. Smythe (the ship's officer in charge), who was of great assistance. Witness handed over to his chief officer, Mr. Greenslade, just before 5 p.m. At that time there were 12 pumps in operation.

[The remainder of the proceedings had not been received at the time of going to press.]



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