

THE third day's sitting of the Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the Swansea steamer *Glanrhyd* took place at Cardiff, yesterday, before the Wreck Commissioner, Mr. J. G. Trapnell, K.C., assisted by two nautical assessors, Captain A. L. Gordon and Captain A. S. Leach, and Mr. R. B. Reith, naval architect.

The *Glanrhyd*, owned by Messrs. Harries Bros., Ltd., Swansea, left Newport on January 14 with a cargo of washed duff coal for Irlam, ran into heavy weather and disappeared with her crew numbering 17 on or about January 14-15. Ten bodies were washed up on the Gower Coast, as well as a large quantity of wreckage.

Mr. E. M. Parsey appeared for the Board of Trade; Mr. Noel Davies (instructed by Messrs. Vaughan and Roche) for the owners of the *Glanrhyd*, Messrs. Harries Bros., Ltd., Swansea; and Captain James Griffiths, of the National Union of Seamen, was granted permission to examine and question witnesses.

LOOK-OUT ON LIGHTSHIP

Before the proceedings commenced the chairman said his attention was directed to a newspaper (not *The Journal of Commerce and Shipping Telegraph*—Ed.) report attributing to him that the look-out on the part of the *Hellwick Lightship* was "shocking." He did criticise the look-out kept on the lightship in the sense that the men did not do their duty or that the visibility was such that they could not see.

Captain James Griffiths, representing the National Union of Seamen, said the *Glanrhyd* left Newport in a seaworthy condition. The Board of Trade regulations with respect to the boats, signals and lifebelts were properly carried out. He was not in agreement with the storing of the lifebelts on the bridge. Every member of the crew ought to have a lifebelt given him so that he could keep it in his quarters. A certain number of lifebelts should be kept on the bridge.

With regard to the manning of the vessel, he was of the opinion that there was no reserve in the case of emergency, and that at least one officer and three men should be on every watch. The ship should also have carried a carpenter, and it was not fair to fix the responsibility of hatches and soundings on a certificated officer who had plenty of work to do otherwise.

THE STEERING GEAR

The evidence with respect to the steering gear was disquieting. He thought the Board of Trade should be asked whether the time had not arrived to do away with obsolete types of steering gear. It was very necessary that the law should be altered whereby every ship should carry a wireless installation.

He was not impressed with the evidence of the men on the *Hellwick Lightship*. A better system of observation was necessary. He was not enamoured of the Coastguard system. All the men employed should be permanent men and not auxiliaries. There should not be less than two men on the watch on stations. The telephone system at stations should be overhauled and reports sent to a centre for fear of breakdowns. All the men employed should have sea experience.

Mr. Parsey, in a lengthy summing up, said he could not agree with Captain Griffiths that the lifebelts should be given to the crew rather than being stored on the deck near the bridge. It was more satisfactory to know definitely where the lifebelts were, and if the men were given them, in times of emergency they might not be able to find them. Besides, if there was water in the vessel it might be difficult to reach them.

MANNING QUESTION

As regards manning, they all knew that in an emergency an additional number of men would be helpful, but there was bound to be a limit to the number employed. Mr. Bie, a former officer in the ship never had any complaint of crew shortage, and was perfectly satisfied with the manning scale. They must remember that the vessel was on the home trade and coasting limits.

With regard to the steering gear, he thought it would be most difficult to say that the rod-and-chain gear was obsolete. Records showed that there has been a material improvement in this type of gear. So far as casualties were concerned it would be difficult in recent years to say that the cause was the result of a rod-and-chain steering gear. The Board of Trade was anxious to secure the safest type of gear.

Wireless was an expense, and it might be that some doubt existed in their minds as to whether wireless fitted to the *Glanrhyd* would have been of assistance.

Captain Harrison, of the steamer *Maywood*, had a wireless set on board, but born of his experience turned his vessel round to go to smoother waters. Though he agreed that wireless was of assistance, there was not evidence to say that it should be made compulsory on coasting vessels such as the *Glanrhyd*.

With regard to the observations of the men on the *Hellwick Lightship*, they should not forget that the primary use of lightships was to mark a dangerous position, and the question of reports was nothing like so important as the giving of proper signals and warning to vessels.

As regards the criticism of the Coastguard system, there was no doubt from the evidence that the watches were kept well. An endeavour was made to telephone the next station, but there was a breakdown in the telephone service. If another man had been with the officer he doubted whether he could render any further assistance under the circumstances.

The District Officer had said that preference was always given to men as Coastguards who had been in the Royal Navy or the Merchant Navy.

The attention of Trinity House had been drawn to statements made by men who attended the inquest on the bodies of those seamen who had lost their lives in this tragedy, and it was decided by Trinity House that the *Hellwick* buoy should be lighted and fitted with a bell. Under certain circumstances vessels passed near to the shore, and that there were no lights for mariners to determine where they were. They were between Bury and *Hellwick*, a distance of about 18 miles.

The Commissioner said that he understood that Trinity House had made arrangements to place lights on that shore.

Mr. Parsey, continuing, said one of the most important questions the Court had to deal with was whether the vessel was in a seaworthy condition. During her last voyage, there had only been one criticism, and that was in respect of the steering gear. There was the evidence of Mr. Clark, the surveyor, that repairs were made in the survey of 1937. Mr. Bie, a former officer of the ship, had stated that whilst he was on the vessel the steering gear was working satisfactorily.

MOST LIKELY CAUSE

The main question was what was the cause of the casualty. He did not think the Court could answer that question; the most the Court could do would be to give an indication of what was the most likely cause of the casualty.

There was no direct evidence of what was the real cause of the loss. Certain facts, however, were brought out which were of major assistance in trying to find the cause.

Counsel then outlined at length the evidence with respect to wreckage, the observations of the men on the *Hellwick Lightship*, and the probable location of the casualty. The master of the steamer was an experienced man and must have known the vicinity of the *Hellwick Lightship*.

It was possible that the vessel may have struck some submerged object. From the

evidence they knew that she was a wet ship forward, and may have taken some abnormal sea and plunged to her destruction in such a way that her back was broken.

It is conceivable that the vessel might have gone to the west of the *Hellwick Light* on a later tide than was suggested by Captain Belford. Evidence received ruled out the question of boiler explosion or explosion of gas from the coals. It was difficult to find some constructive theory which fitted in with known facts, and he suggested that to find one was impossible.

In conclusion, the Board of Trade would like to express sympathy with the relatives of the 17 unfortunate men who lost their lives as a result of the disaster.

THE JUDGMENT

The Court then adjourned until the evening. Upon resuming, the Wreck Commissioner gave the judgment of the Court. After describing the ship, engines and boilers, holds, bulkheads, hatch covers, hatchways and accommodation, he continued:—

"The steering gear was a rod-and-chain type, the angle of chain around the forward lead blocks being about 90 degrees, and that on each quarter about 130 degrees.

"Some trouble with rudder vibration had been experienced in the past, but this had been remedied by the time of the *Glanrhyd*'s last special survey in May, 1937, and was proved to have been in satisfactory working order thereafter.

"The vessel was equipped with adequate life-saving and signal appliances, and was in every respect well-found. The vessel was not equipped with wireless, and we have no information as to her mechanical sounding apparatus.

"The cargo loaded brought the vessel to her winter marks, and this involved some vacant space in Nos. 1 and 4 holds and the bunker space. This vacant space would permit a shift of cargo sufficient to produce a list of 5½ degrees. The cargo was described as of a sticky nature very unlikely to shift. If any shift did take place we do not think it could have been sufficient to affect the ship's stability, which was adequate. This vessel had frequently carried cargo of this description without any mishap.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

The vessel sailed at 2 35 p.m. on January 14, 1938, drawing 15ft. 6ins. forward and 17ft. 7ins. aft. She left dock without any impact or contact that could have affected her safety, and handled well in every respect. The wind was very fresh from the S.S.W., and it was raining.

"Shortly after leaving, the *Glanrhyd* fell in with the steamer *Maywood*, outward bound from Cardiff. The *Maywood* was a well-decked vessel of almost precisely similar design and approximately the same size. The vessels were in company until about 7 30 p.m., when the *Maywood* was two miles N. of the Foreland.

"At this time the barometer was falling and the weather worsening, and Captain Storm Harrison, of the *Maywood*, fearing possible damage to his forward hatches on account of shipping heavy water, turned his vessel and proceeded to Minehead Roads for shelter.

"At this time the *Glanrhyd* was observed about two miles to the northward of the *Maywood* proceeding westward, and after this was never seen again by those on board the *Maywood*, or, so far as can be ascertained, by anyone at all.

"The *Maywood*, a slightly faster vessel, had made about three knots over the ground up to this time, in consequence of the bad weather, and we are satisfied the *Glanrhyd* could not have exceeded that speed, and may not have been making as much, especially as the weather continued to get worse.

NOT GLANRHYD'S LIGHTS

"What happened thereafter is necessarily a matter of conjecture. A witness from the *Hellwick Lightship*, which is approximately 28 miles from the position

in which the Glanrhyd was last seen, claimed to have seen the masthead lights of a vessel at 11 30 p.m. on that night. We do not think the Glanrhyd could possibly have reached any such position at that time in that weather.

"The same witness speaks of masthead lights in sight of the westward end of the Lightship between 4 and 7 45 a.m. on January 15. We do not think this evidence throws any light on the casualty.

"The auxiliary Coast Watcher stationed at Port Eynon saw a light, which he considered was a steamer's masthead light bearing west of his station at 4 55 a.m. on January 15. To get to this position the Glanrhyd would have had to cover at least 23, and possibly 25 miles, in 7½ hours, against an increasing wind, by that time of gale force, and a flood tide. We do not think this light either had anything to do with the casualty.

"The only other material from which it is possible to infer the position of the Glanrhyd at the time of the accident is the evidence from the Lightvessel of wreckage and bodies which came from the west and passed her starboard side (the Lightvessel was then heading south-west) at intervals between 1 30 and 1 45 p.m. on January 15, and that wreckage and bodies drifted ashore on either side of and within a few miles of Worms Head.

"The tide had been flowing to the east for 1½ to two hours only at the time the wreckage passed the Lightvessel, the speed being probably about two knots, and this wreckage therefore started its easterly drift about four miles to the west of the Lightship.

"We do not think this can be taken as an indication that that was the scene of the casualty, because the Glanrhyd could only have reached that position by passing so near to the Lightvessel that we consider she must have been seen. It is possible that if the casualty took place to the east of the Lightship the wreckage and bodies might have been carried ultimately by the morning ebb of January 15 westward of the Lightship and returned on the ensuing flood.

PROBABLE POSITION

"We conclude, therefore, that the casualty probably happened at a point between the Glanrhyd's last known position and the Worms Head, but except that the position must have been one that would permit the wreckage under the influence of the tide to reach a point about four miles to the westward of the Hellwick at about 11 30 a.m. on January 15 we have no material to enable us to fix the locality more accurately.

"It has been suggested the ship struck the Hellwick Bank, but having regard to her probable speed over the ground she must have reached one or other of these banks so near high water that we do not think she could possibly have struck even upon the most extravagant assumptions of the height of waves in those waters. There were no such signs of wreckage on the shore as would suggest the vessel struck the shore, and there were no other dangers that it seems likely she could have reached.

"The evidence satisfies us that an internal explosion was improbable, because no damaged wreckage indicative of such has been found. The lifeboats appear to have been damaged in the way of the holding-down grips, which suggests the accident was so sudden that there was not sufficient time to clear the boats away. This view is supported by the absence of observation of any distress signal, the fact that some of the bodies recovered were almost unclothed, and some appeared to have removed their lower garments to assist swimming.

SUBMERGED WRECKAGE OR HEAVY SEA

"We are driven, therefore, to the conclusion that the Glanrhyd either struck submerged wreckage or was overwhelmed by an exceptional sea, or seas which stove in her forward hatch, put her head down, and caused her to break apart in the way of Nos. 3 and 4 hatchways, thus liberating portions of that wooden bulkhead which were found ashore.

"Notwithstanding that we think this vessel did not ground on Hellwick Sands, we are glad to be informed that the Trinity House authorities propose to put

a lighted bell buoy to mark this spot. We consider this a valuable assistance to coasting vessels.

"We think it would be an advantage if small coasting vessels were supplied with wireless telephone apparatus, and if the Hellwick Lightship could be provided with similar effective means of communicating with the shore.

"We do not think the rod-and-chain steering gear had anything to do with this accident because it was working properly on departure; had it broken down afterwards we should have expected signals. It cannot, however, be excluded as a remote possibility, and we recommend that owners should be encouraged to substitute a system of direct-action steering."

In conclusion, the Wreck Commissioner said he wished to put on record the very careful manner in which the Board of Trade had conducted the case and of the very helpful assistance extended by the witnesses. He desired also to extend the condolences of the Court to the relatives of the 17 men who lost their lives as a result of the casualty.



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