

LIGHTSHIP AND THE GLANRHYD

WRECK COMMISSIONER'S POINTED COMMENT ON LOOK-OUT

COAST WATCHERS' EVIDENCE OF WRECKAGE

THE Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the steamer Glanrhyd was resumed at Cardiff yesterday before the Wreck Commissioner, Mr. J. G. Trapnell, assisted by two nautical assessors, Captain A. L. Gordon and Captain A. S. Leach, and Mr. R. B. Reith, the naval architect.

During the evidence the Commissioner, commenting on the evidence as regards reports as to lights and visibility, said either the lightship was not doing its duty or there was a lack of visibility; either the lightship did not see the ship or the ship did not see the lightship. The vessel must have seen the lightship, and would have seen she was off her course if the vessel had not broken down.

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 last. 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 Seamen's Union was granted permission to examine and question witnesses.

Captain Thomas, dockmaster, Newport Docks, gave particulars of the sailings of vessels from the Alexandra Dock, Newport on January 14 last. When the Glanrhyd sailed at 2 40 p.m. the wind was S.W., fresh, and at 6 p.m. it was S.S.W., gale. On the following day there was a strong wind with heavy squalls, and eventually they had to close the lock owing to the weather conditions.

SHOALED BY TIDE

Owen Parry a seaman on the Hellwick Lightship, said there was a tremendous sea on January 15. He saw a boat, bottom up, about 60 yards off the lightship, and also a body, which was dressed in a shirt. They failed to secure, owing to the rough sea. The sea was running eastward, and the drifting boat and the body came in the same direction. He saw no signs of any casualty.

Mr. Parsey, for the Board of Trade, answering the Commissioner with respect to the question of tides, advanced the theory that the tide might have taken the vessel on the Hellwick Shoals, and therefore witness saw the upturned boat.

Witness, continuing, said that later he saw another boat full of water, also two bodies between the boat and the lightship. Both bodies had life jackets and seemed to be clothed.

Answering Captain Griffiths, he said the lightship was heading S.W., and the bodies he saw were on the starboard bow. They had no wireless transmitter to signal to shore or wireless telephone, but only a radio receiving set. They had distress signals and a gun for rocket-firing to attract Port Eynon or the Trinity ship wardens.

During his watch from midnight until 4 a.m. on January 15 he saw no lights of any kind. When he saw the bodies he called the captain of the lightship.

SHORE OBSERVATIONS

David Williams, an auxiliary watchman at Port Eynon Point, said at 4 55 a.m. on January 15 he saw a light suddenly come on the edge of the visibility, which was approximately two miles. The light was in the direction of the Hellwick Shoals. The light was visible for about five minutes. He tried to report the light over the telephone to Rhosilly Station, but could not get through.

Answering the Commissioner, he said he kept a book in which was entered anything out of the ordinary. He had entered the fact that he saw a light. He produced the book for the Court.

Albert J. Jeffers, district officer for the Mumbles Coastguard Service, said the quarterly journals were sent to him; they gave details of all observations, weather records, and times of duties of coastguards.

There was an entry stating that at 8 25 p.m. on January 15 Williams reported that he was unable to telephone to Rhosilly that at 5 p.m. a vessel was proceeding westward in heavy weather. He visited Port Eynon on January 15 at 4 10 a.m.; the visibility was about two miles and the weather was getting worse. The visibility kept changing between the squalls.

At 10 30 a.m. on January 17 two bodies were reported as being washed ashore on Rhosilly sands. There were four coastguard stations. The watch was made from the look-out and not on patrol. At times there were occasions when guards had to go out.

Captain J. Griffiths asked whether it was possible to secure evidence from those who found the bodies.

The Commissioner said the men had not been called by the Board of Trade, but Captain Griffiths was at liberty to call them.

SURVEYOR'S EVIDENCE

Mr. R. Cheetham, Lloyd's Register principal surveyor for the Bristol Channel, produced reports of surveys, including the last special survey of the Glanrhyd.

The last report of survey in 1935 stated that the steering gear was in good condition, the rudder was lifted, and numbers two, three and four pintles were renewed.

The special survey was completed in May, 1937, at Newcastle. The vessel was placed in dry dock, cleaned and examined. The steering gear and connections were reported as being in good condition. The Glanrhyd was classed A1 without any qualifications.

When the vessel left Newport the engines and boilers were surveyed and were found after repairs were effected to be in an efficient condition.

Answering Captain Griffiths, he said that 20ft. of new chain was fixed to the steering gear, which was in good condition.

Walter Llewellyn, coastguard in charge at Oxwich, reported the finding of various wreckage and a lifeboat bottom upwards. There was a hole in the side, and the plug of the boat was missing.

Answering Captain Griffiths, witness said he was connected with the Telephone Exchange.

Answering the Commissioner, witness said there was no number on the boat.

Captain H. J. Esford, Board of Trade surveyor, said he conducted the preliminary inquiry into the case. Measuring the stowage rate of the duff coal, he placed a ton for loading purposes at 43½ cu. ft., which meant that No. 1 hold could have been filled by the addition of another 96 tons and No. 2 hold by another 27 tons. Duff coal was a safe cargo, and there was little tendency for it to shift. As regards the bunker coals, it would require 37 tons to fill that bunker space.

He saw the wreckage at Oxwich Bay. There was a big hole on the port side of the lifeboat and no plug.

Witness gave details of all the wreckage found. From measurements, he presumed that the two wooden bulkheads were part of those between No. 3 and No. 4 holds on the starboard side of the ship. The latter was intact, but the stiffeners were strained.

The Commissioner said he would not think that this was the result of an explosion.

Witness agreed, and said that an explosion would have blown off the hatches altogether. Altogether he saw 150 hatch covers, all of which were in extraordinarily good condition. He did

not think that the loss of the vessel was caused by the hatches being stove in. He was of the opinion that the lifeboats must have been washed away. There might have been an attempt to get them away, but probably there was no time. Assuming the vessel foundered as a result of the shifting of the bunkers, he would not expect the bulkheads to break up.

He had considered the possibility of a boiler explosion, but if that happened the hatches would have been blown off the ship. An explosion of gas would have blown off the hatches.

If the captain of the vessel had the slightest suspicion he was running into danger, he would have taken more precautions than he appeared to have done. The captain must have got badly out of position; he might not have made due allowance for tides during the gale.

The Commissioner said one would have expected the captain to have seen the lights of the lightship before the vessel struck. If that was a possibility, there would have been time for the captain to have sent up distress signals.

Mr. Parsey said from particulars they had gone through, it could be assumed that the vessel was broken up by Hellwick, but in that assumption the difficulty was that there was nothing at Hellwick for the vessel to break up on.

The Commissioner said that the vessel might have struck some submarine object.

Mr. Parsey then formally handed in the questions of the Board of Trade, and the inquiry was adjourned until to-day.

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