

# SHIP'S BACK BROKEN ON A SHOAL?

## BOARD OF TRADE THEORY OF GLANRHYD DISASTER

### EVIDENCE OF LOADING AND EQUIPMENT

### FORMER DECK HAND'S ALLEGATION OF STEERING DEFECT

THE Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the Swansea steamer *Glanrhyd* was opened at Cardiff yesterday before the Wreck Commissioner, Mr. J. G. Trapnell, K.C., assisted by two nautical assessors, Captain Gordon and Captain Leach, and a naval architect, Mr. R. B. Leith.

The Board of Trade Counsel advanced the theory that the ship may have broken her back on a shoal.

The owners of the vessel, Messrs. Harries Bros., Ltd., Swansea, were represented by Mr. Noel Davies (instructed by Messrs. Vaughan and Roche) and the Board of Trade by Mr. E. M. Parsey.

Mr. Parsey, outlining the case for the Board of Trade, said the steamer *Glanrhyd* left Newport on January 14 with a cargo of 2,173 tons of coal and 48 tons of bunkers for Irlam, Manchester, and was mysteriously lost on January 14 or January 15 in the Bristol Channel, the vessel disappearing with all hands, the officers and crew numbering 17.

The *Glanrhyd* was built by Messrs. Vickers Ltd. at Barrow in 1924 to Lloyd's Register class, and cost £35,000. She was designed as a self-trimming collier, her gross tonnage being 1,524.61 tons, and net tonnage 820.34 tons. She was a steel built transverse framed well-deck steamer, having engines amidships. The life-saving appliances and light and sound signals were inspected on May 26, 1937, at South Shields. No wireless transmitting set was carried as the vessel was under 1,600 tons gross. The history of the ship was then given in detail, the vessel completed her No. 3 survey in May of 1937, and the owners would be in a position to say that there was no defect which would cause a possible loss.

The vessel arrived at Newport from Bristol on January 12 last, and finished loading, and left on January 14, and was sighted by the steamer *Maywood* which had left Cardiff that day.

#### HEAVY WEATHER

The weather got worse, and the *Glanrhyd* steered towards the coast abeam the Foreland Light on the Devonshire Coast. The master of the *Maywood* decided to turn back and shelter in Minehead Roads. He then lost sight of the *Glanrhyd*.

That was the last definite evidence of the sighting of the vessel. On January 16 two lifeboats marked *Glanrhyd* and other wreckage was picked up at Rhosilly Bay on the Gower Coast.

During the night of January 15 coast-guards in the neighbourhood of the Hellwick Shoals, off the Gower Coast, saw a vessel which may have been the *Glanrhyd*. In addition to wreckage a number of bodies of the officers and crew of the

*Glanrhyd* were discovered on the Gower Coast, and other bodies were subsequently washed ashore.

When the lifeboats were discovered it was noticed that the plugs were not in place; that and other factors pointed to the probability that the casualty was a violent one. Had she been sunk by heavy weather the chances were that she would not have been so damaged inside as to release the bulkheads in the condition they were found in the wreckage, and it may have been that if she had been in the neighbourhood of shoal water she was picked up by the waves and bumped so heavily that her back was broken.

#### COAL EXPLOSION UNLIKELY

The Board of Trade surveyors were of the opinion that may have happened in the neighbourhood of the Hellwick Shoals, and they were inclined to discount the theory that the damage might have been caused by an explosion of coal gas, as an explosion of that kind would not be likely to break the vessel so that portions of the bulkheads would be released as in this case.

Captain James Griffiths, representing the Seamen's Union, was granted permission by the Court to examine and question witnesses.

A statement handed in by Mr. John Garton, a former deck hand on the *Glanrhyd*, stated *inter alia* that the steering gear on the ship was always maintained in good condition, but had defects which could not be remedied on the particular type of gear. In bad weather the steamer pitched badly by the head, and in consequence there was a lot of vibration about the quadrant, and on at least two occasions when he was in the ship the vibration set up in the quadrant shook the nuts off the bolts altogether.

It was common talk aboard the *Glanrhyd* about the way in which the vessel would continuously fill the foredeck at any time even when the weather was moderate, and there were occasions when some of the crew expressed themselves as being scared at the way she was kept down by the head by the weight of water on the foredeck.

Mr. Owen Lewis Harries, director of Messrs. Harries Bros. Ltd., the owners, said the vessel was classed 100 A1 before she was lost. Her last special surveys were carried out in April, 1936, and May, 1937. Since that time he did not know of any damage or defect of any kind in the vessel, and nothing was ever reported.

The vessel was chartered by Messrs. T. Beynon, Ltd., of Cardiff, and the coal cargo was Tredegar washed duff. The vessel was classed as a self-trimmer, but on the last voyage was not treated as a self-trimmer. Two or three years ago verbal instructions were given for the vessel to be regarded as an easy trimmer.

Mr. Harries said it was never reported to him that there was excessive vibration of the steering gear, which on occasions shook nuts off. He had never heard that the vessel was partly flooded in heavy weather. He considered that all the officers were satisfactory and knew their jobs. He did not remember a deck hand named Garton; he only knew the officers. If there had been any complaints as to defects they would have been reported to him.

Mr. T. S. Clark said he was senior partner of Messrs. T. S. Clark and Co., consulting engineers, Swansea, and had acted for a number of years as superintendent for Messrs. Harries Bros., Ltd. The *Glanrhyd* had been under his supervision since she was built. The vessel had very satisfactory stability. He never had any complaints even with difficult cargoes. He was very satisfied with the condition of the vessel.

When No. 1 hold was completed there was a little more space forward than aft. There was no space left in the wings. About 40 to 50 tons of coal would be required to fully fill the No. 1 hold. The hatches were strong and lashings were secured to the deck.

#### NO MANNING COMPLAINTS

Answering Captain Griffiths, witness said the vessel was well supplied with signals, which were kept in the chart-room. The lifebelts were stored on the bridge. The vibration had been remedied, and since May, 1937, they had no complaints of vibration. The steering gear was in good order. He had never received any complaint that they were not carrying enough men or officers.

Mr. Walter John Bie, who was chief officer on the *Glanrhyd* for four years, said he never received any complaint that the number of men engaged were inadequate. He never experienced any trouble with the hatches. The vessel was wet forward.

Mr. R. C. Orphan, chartering clerk to Messrs. Mordey, Son and Co., Ltd., the agents at Newport for the owners of the *Glanrhyd*, said he overlooked the loading and bunkering of the vessel whilst she was at Newport. He had verbal instructions some years ago to regard the vessel as an easy trimmer, which was a cheaper rate than when regarded as a self-trimmer.

The Tredegar washed duff cargo was a fine coal, practically dust, and rather sticky. He saw Captain Sewart every day, who was satisfied with the condition of the vessel and its loading.

Mr. E. C. Baker, chief supervisor for the Employers Clearing House at Newport, said the *Glanrhyd* was classed as a self-trimmer. They had loaded this vessel about 45 times at Newport. He did not see the vessel when she sailed, the last time he saw her being at 11 30 a.m. on January 14. The No. 2 hold was completed, and had tarpaulins and lashings. There was no cargo or bunkers on the deck. The coal was wet when loaded.

#### TRIMMING CONDITIONS

By Captain Griffiths.—The chief foreman and supervisor on duty would stow the coal into the sides to the satisfaction of the chief officer. The trimming was done at a seaworthy angle of 40 degs. both ways.

James Casey, a coal trimmer, said he saw No. 2 hold completely filled, but he did not see No. 4 hold completed. No. 3 hatch was completed and battened down.

A. Pole, a trimmer, said that when loaded the water height was by the summer mark of the Plimsoll Line. All the hatches appeared to be in good condition.

John McCarthy, trimmer, said he saw No. 2 hold filled and covered. In No. 1 hold there were empty spaces, and the vessel could have taken a further 10 tons at the after end and 30 tons forward. They bunkered the vessel with 40 tons, which was not trimmed. The chief officer said he was quite satisfied with the loading of the vessel.

Mr. W. T. Basset, berthing officer, said he saw no cargo on the decks when the Glanrhyd sailed.

Mr. T. B. Foley, district secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, said a self-trimmer was the less expensive form of trimming. An angle of 40 degrees was considered as safe for the coal when trimming was completed.

#### NOT DUE TO LOADING

The Commissioner. — The Court is entirely satisfied that the loading was properly done and that the cause of this unhappy disaster was not due to the loading.

Mr. A. J. Edwards, a dock pilot, said he noticed that the hatches forward were all battened down and lashed. The weather was dirty on January 14, with strong S.S.W. winds. There was no bumping in berthing or leaving.

Mr. E. J. Perkins, Board of Trade surveyor, gave evidence relative to the technical details of the ship's holds.

Captain W. S. Harrison, master of the steamer Maywood, said he saw the Glanrhyd in the Channel. Between Barry Roads and the Foreland a sudden squall came on and continued with increasing force. The Glanrhyd was drawing towards the land owing to the severe weather. He felt it was too dangerous for him to go on, so he returned. Whilst turning he saw the Glanrhyd, and then lost sight of her with the heavy rains.

Answering the Commissioner, he said in his experience duff was one of the safest cargoes to carry. As the water dried out of the duff it settled and adhered well.

The Court adjourned until this morning.

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*J. J.*



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