

## "JOSEPH MEDILL" LOSS

### Evidence as to Vessel's Construction

#### B.O.T. INQUIRY CONCLUDED

From Our Own Correspondent

NEWCASTLE, Wednesday

The Board of Trade Inquiry into the loss of the all-welded motorship *Joseph Medill* was concluded to-day before Judge Richardson, Wreck Commissioner, sitting with Commander H. Stockwell, Captain Peirs De Legh and Mr. J. L. Scott as assessors. The Court will deliver its findings on July 29.

Mr. Owen L. Bateson appeared for the Board of Trade; Mr. G. St. Clair Pilcher, K.C., for the builders, Swan, Hunter & Wigham Richardson, Ltd., of Wallsend; Mr. E. W. Brightman, for the owners of the vessel, the Quebec & Ontario Transportation Company, Ltd.; and Mr. Alexander Ross for the Navigators and Engineer Officers Union and the National Union of Seamen.

Mr. THOMAS YOUNG TIMMOUTH, a Tyne pilot, said he took the *Joseph Medill* on her trials over the Hartley Mile off the Tyne when the vessel steered well.

Mr. GEORGE DANIEL, a surveyor to the Board of Trade, said he was perfectly satisfied with the construction of the vessel and the 9 ft. freeboard allowed.

Mr. W. W. HARRIS, also a Board of Trade surveyor, said he issued certificates for life-saving appliances. As to the drydocking of the vessel it was not common practice to dock a vessel when loaded, but it was not unusual.

#### SURVEYOR'S TRIBUTE TO WELDING

Mr. A. G. AKESTER, senior Lloyd's Register surveyor at Newcastle, said the welding was as good as any he had seen. There was very little distortion—only a little here and there.

In answer to a question, witness said his Society had been rather conservative about welding. The Society had had considerable experience of welding since prior to the War. He personally saw nothing wrong in welded construction, but thought that butt welding was superior to lap welding.

Mr. THOMAS WILLIAM REVANS, chief ship surveyor in the Consultative Branch of the Mercantile Marine Department of the Board of Trade, said he made calculations as to the vessel's draught. There was a maximum of 14 ft. and 9 ft. freeboard. Welding was a satisfactory form of construction. For some time he had held a conservative opinion as to welding and he had doubts about it now, unless the system adopted in the construction of the *Joseph Medill* was carried out—conscientious welders and a high class of supervision were essential, otherwise there was a liability of something worse than an ordinary riveted job. He thought that welding was going a long way. He did not see that any harm would result from the vessel being drydocked while loaded as she was flat bottomed, providing the centre line blocks were in a plane with the bottom of the ship. It was a common thing to drydock battleships with heavy armour plating on them.

In answer to Mr. Scott, Mr. Revans said that the difference in the inertia between an all-welded ship such as the *Joseph Medill* and a similar riveted ship would be very little indeed.

#### THE WIRELESS EXEMPTION

Mr. WILLIAM GRAHAM, principal in the Marine Department of the Board of Trade, said he was responsible for granting the wireless exemption for the vessel's Atlantic voyage. The application for exemption had been considered on its merits and within the limitations of the Act of Parliament and regulations as to wireless installations in ships. Witness considered the decision to grant the exemption a proper one. He had taken into consideration the fact that a large number of vessels built in this country for service on the Canadian Lakes had crossed the Atlantic with safety and he knew that all proper steps would be taken before the ship left. He had also taken into consideration weather conditions in July for which application had been made. Although the *Joseph Medill* did not sail until August, Atlantic conditions were not unduly severe at that time.

In answer to Judge RICHARDSON, Witness said that so far as a wireless installation was concerned no material difference was considered between an all-welded ship and a riveted ship.

In answer to Mr. Ross, witness said the application was considered by himself and the assistant-secretary of the Department. They knew the routes which such a vessel as the *Joseph Medill* was likely to take in crossing the Atlantic. They had had reports of ice conditions in the Atlantic in August. The *Joseph Medill* was the only vessel built for the Canadian Lakes to cross since 1933, and there had been two in 1932. Since the passing of the 1919 Act 71 similar vessels had crossed the Atlantic.

Counsel pressed witness as to the circumstances he had taken into consideration. Witness pointed out that the vessel was only just in the size where a wireless installation was compulsory. They had realised that the vessel was all-welded, and had sought advice from the technical staff as to welding in ships so far as safety was concerned and the granting of an exemption certificate, and they were advised to regard the *Joseph Medill* the same as a riveted ship.

Evidence was then given by Mr. JAMES ADAMS as to the loading of the vessel's cargo of coal at Grangemouth, which he said was carried out by his firm. The main hold was filled to the top and fully trimmed, and the coal levelled in the other two holds. Some steel boats were loaded in the remaining space in No. 1 hold.

Mr. WILLIAM WATT, principal surveyor on the chief ship surveyor's staff of Lloyd's Register, said that since 1934 the notation "experimental" had been removed from the classification of all-welded vessels and the notation was now "electric welded." Witness referred to the all-welded vessel *Cedros*, ex *Fullagar*, which, he said, had charged a rock at speed in 1930, but the welding had proved itself satisfactory.

Referring to questions asked by Mr. Scott, Mr. G. ST. CLAIR PILCHER, K.C., said the builders were anxious that nothing prejudicial as to the efficiency of the welding system should be contained in the Court's report. If Mr. Scott had a certain idea in mind he would like to recall two witnesses, who would enlarge on the system and on the extra support provided when the vessel was drydocked loaded.

Mr. Scott said he had merely been seeking information.

#### QUESTIONS FOR THE COURT

Closing the case for the Board of Trade, Mr. BATESON submitted a number of questions. Among other things, the Court was asked to say whether the method of construction by welding was prudent and should it have resulted in producing a seaworthy ship; was her main and auxiliary steering gear in seaworthy condition; was the Board of Trade justified in granting exemption under the Merchant Shipping Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1919; was the vessel in a safe and seaworthy condition when she sailed and was she safely loaded; was she properly and sufficiently manned; when and where was the vessel lost and what were the ice and weather conditions; and what was the Court's opinion of the most probable cause of the loss of the vessel?

Mr. Ross said he wished to address the Court on the points relating to the wireless exemption and the manning of the *Joseph Medill*. It seemed that the discretion which the Board of Trade had under the Act had been lightly exercised without full consideration of the full circumstances. It was not known by the Board exactly what route the vessel would take and the ice conditions were not known. It was desirable that any ship on a voyage where ice might be encountered should have a wireless transmitting and receiving installation. The master had considered a receiving set desirable although the Board had exempted both. There had been little evidence as to the manning of the vessel, and, although he was not suggesting that any regulations had been contravened, the manning of the sister ship *Franquelin* was superior to that of the *Joseph Medill*. He suggested that the manning was inadequate for the voyage.

Mr. E. W. BRIGHTMAN said that the manning was left entirely to the master, to which remark Mr. Ross agreed.

Mr. BATESON replied to the points raised, and Judge RICHARDSON said it seemed a question of whether the wireless regulations were satisfactory.

That concluded the hearing, and the Court will deliver its findings on July 29.

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