

"QUARRINGTON COURT" LOSS

B.O.T. Inquiry Findings

MASTER'S TICKET SUSPENDED FOR THREE MONTHS

From Our Own Correspondent

NEWCASTLE, Thursday

The Board of Trade Inquiry was concluded in Newcastle to-day into the loss of the steamer *Quarrington Court* on Dec. 7 last while on her way through the Red Sea to the Suez Canal. There was no loss of life. The Court found that the loss of the vessel was due to the failure of the master, Captain Charles Henry Hurst, to take adequate steps to stop an influx of water into the engine-room after the main inlet pipe had burst. The Court suspended the master's certificate for three months.

The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of Sept. 28 and 29.

The Board of Trade was represented by Mr. O. L. Bateson; the Court Line, the owners, by Mr. E. E. Addis (instructed by Messrs. Holman, Fenwick & Willan, of London); the master, Captain Charles Henry Hurst, of Holly Avenue, South Shields, by Mr. H. L. Holman (instructed by Messrs. Bramwell, Clayton & Clayton, of Newcastle, on behalf of the Mercantile Marine Service Association); the second engineer, Mr. J. O. Orr, by Mr. E. G. Sykes; the Isthmian Line, the charterers, by Mr. K. S. Carpmal and Mr. J. V. Naisby (instructed by Messrs. Ince & Co., of London); the Fulton Bag & Cotton Mills, Incorporated, by Mr. Waldo Porges (instructed by Mr. Godfrey Warr, of London). Messrs. Ingledew & Co. have instructed Mr. Muir to watch, on behalf of the Navigators and Engineer Officers Union, the interests of Mr. T. M. Taylor, Mr. N. Coulthard, Mr. G. W. Coffey and Mr. R. G. Bell.

The Court comprised Mr. R. F. Hayward, K.C. (Chairman), Captain A. E. Dodd, Commander J. R. Williams and Mr. I. J. Grey.

Addressing the Court on behalf of the owners, Mr. Addis said that after the vessel had stranded at Yokohama a certificate of seaworthiness was granted. The inlet valve which had jammed was known to be easily closed. At Calcutta the owners had no reason to believe that any damage had been caused to the under-water fittings while the ship was aground at Yokohama; therefore there was no reason to put the ship into dry dock. Fatigue in the metal of the pipe leading to a failure could not be detected. Expert opinion of the engineers and surveyors only suggested that there was a latent defect and that part of the valve had broken off and hastened the splitting of the pipe.

NO FAULT OF THE OWNERS

The cause of the fracture was speculative, but Counsel contended it was not due to any fault or lack of care on the part of the owners in the upkeep of the ship or engines. Mr. Addis therefore submitted that the loss of the vessel could not be attributed to any act or default of the owners.

Mr. HOLMAN, for the master, said that Captain Hurst could not be regarded as a completely fit man at the time, although he assumed responsibility. Allowance, therefore, might be made by the Court as to the master's memory in respect of times. Counsel contended that the grounding at Yokohama had nothing to do with the loss of the vessel. The master had done everything a master could be expected to do. There had been a sound of knocking in the pipe, but it was never brought to the notice of the master until the fracture in the pipe was reported to him.

The accident had been described as unique, and the master had to attempt salvage methods of which he had no experience. A competent master should show initiative and energy in unusual circumstances, but could not be expected in the ordinary circumstances of navigation to be prepared to place a tarpaulin over the injection pipe inlet.

Mr. Holman pointed out that it was not a question of deciding about that, but of considering alternatives. There was the alternative of steaming for the shore, as the vessel was not far from land, and at that time the report of the pipe fracture was not serious.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that water was going into the ship through the pipe at the rate of 1000 tons an hour, and there was five feet of water over the engine plates in an hour.

Mr. HOLMAN replied that as the ship was making for the shore, and if a tarpaulin had been placed in order to attempt to stop the flow, then the engines would have been difficult to keep running.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that it seemed a question of whether when one had cut an artery one at once rushed to hospital or paused to try to stop the flow with a tourniquet.

Mr. HOLMAN said he did not agree with that analogy.

The CHAIRMAN said that the Court had to consider how effective calls for assistance might have been had an effort been made to plug the hole up. Was there ever a ship which had so much material on board for plugging, either by some gunny bags from the cargo, or a tarpaulin?

Mr. BATESON, addressing the Court for the Board of Trade, reviewed the

evidence as to the steps taken to correct the pipe defect and save the *Quarrington Court*. Counsel contended that steps should have been taken to place the tarpaulin in position and criticised the method of towing adopted by the master which resulted in the hawser breaking. Counsel suggested that the cause of the pipe fracture was probably that suggested by the witness, Mr. Binmore, that a defect had formed over a number of years by the pipe pulsating under the pressure of the pump, which would not be apparent to the engineers and surveyors.

The Court retired to consider the following questions submitted on behalf of the Board of Trade:—

What classification was assigned to the vessel?

Was the vessel in good and seaworthy condition when she left Calcutta?

Was the main circulating inlet valve in good efficient working order when the vessel sailed, and what was the state of the weather?

What efforts were made to rectify the defect in the pipe, if any, and were they adequate?

What other efforts were made to save the vessel and crew?

What further efforts, if any, should have been taken?

What was the cause of the loss?

Was the loss caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of the master, Charles Henry Hurst?

MASTER IN DEFAULT

The Court found that the loss of the *Quarrington Court* was due to the failure of the master to take adequate steps to stop the influx of water into the engine-room after the main inlet pipe had burst and the valve had failed to close more than a few times out of 14 attempts to close it. Finding the master in default, the Court suspended the master's certificate for three months as from to-day, but granted a chief officer's certificate during that period.

The Court contended that if a tarpaulin had been placed over the inlet, even four hours after discovery that the inlet pipe had burst, the vessel would have remained afloat until assistance arrived. The master had considered fixing a tarpaulin by passing ropes under the ship's bottom, but abandoned the idea in favour of a tow, in the belief that his helpless and heavy ship, without steam power and steerage, could be towed to shallow water before she sank.

The Court found that the vessel was classed 100 A1 at Lloyd's and was in this class at the time of her loss. She was in a seaworthy condition when she left Calcutta. The weather on the voyage was fine, with light winds, and on the day of the loss the wind was NW., fresh to strong.

The main circulating inlet valve was in good working order when the vessel left. When the valve failed to close after the burst in the pipe, the influx of water made efforts to repair the pipe abortive. When discovered, the pipe split was 6 in. by ½ in., but later became 18 in. by 6 in. Efforts were made to plug the hole with wood and bands, and the engines were kept running. The method of towing adopted by the master was inadequate. When the hawser broke, the tarpaulin should immediately have been got over the ship's side, and, if needed, another over that until assistance arrived.

Earlier in the proceedings Mr. HOLMAN mentioned that the owners had full confidence in Captain Hurst. He had been employed again and was still employed by them.

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