

"ITALIAN PRINCE" LOSS**Board of Trade Inquiry
Resumed****MR. CAMPS'S VIEWS ON STEAM
SMOTHERING**

The Board of Trade Inquiry into the loss of the British steamer *Italian Prince*, which was abandoned on fire off Finisterre in September last, was resumed at the Institution of Civil Engineers yesterday. The Inquiry had adjourned on Feb. 13 to enable Mr. Pilcher, for the owners of the vessel, to call evidence on certain points on the oil-fuel installation raised by the Wreck Commissioner. On the resumption yesterday Counsel intimated that such evidence as could be obtained was of such a general character that it was decided that it would be useless to put it before the Inquiry. Mr. Welch, a Board of Trade surveyor, was recalled. Later evidence was given by Mr. H. E. J. Camps, a consulting engineer and ship surveyor, who expressed the opinion that steam smothering would have been quite ineffective. He suggested that the fire might have been due to a leak in an oil pipe due to a latent defect which could not have been examined. Mr. Pilcher submitted that the leak could not be attributed to lack of care on the part of the owners nor could the failure of the ship's personnel to extinguish the fire be attributed to any failure on the part of the owners to provide the necessary fire-fighting appliances or to maintain them in proper order.

The inquiry is being held before Mr. K. S. Carpmael, K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, with whom are Captain W. E. Whittingham, Commander J. R. Williams, Engineer Lieut.-Commander T. A. Pearson and Mr. A. M. Robb, Assessors.

Mr. O. L. Bateson (instructed by the Solicitor to the Board of Trade) appeared for the Board of Trade. Mr. G. St. C. Pilcher and Mr. W. W. Porges (instructed by Messrs. Middleton, Lewis & Clarke) represented the owners, the Prince Line, Ltd. Mr. E. E. Addis (instructed by Messrs. Rehder & Higgs and the Mercantile Marine Service Association) represented the master of the vessel, Captain James Halloway. Mr. R. A. Clyde (instructed by Messrs. Clyde & Co.) appeared for the cargo underwriters. Mr. C. R. Havers (instructed by Messrs. Charles G. Bradshaw & Watson, acting for the Marine Engineers' Association) appeared for the chief engineer, Mr. R. J. J. Smith, and the second engineer, Mr. A. M. McNeil. Messrs. Nordon & Co. watched the inquiry on behalf of Mrs. M. M. Brown, a passenger. Messrs. Winter & Co. on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Bovill, passengers, and Mr. J. B. Hewson on behalf of the British Mexican Petroleum Company, Ltd.

The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of Feb. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 14.

Mr. BATESON said that on Friday Mr. Pilcher had put in a letter from Messrs. Richardsons, Westgarth & Co. Mr. Welch had dealt with that point. Regarding the test pressure, he said he got it from Lloyd's surveyor's journal.

He said that pressure showed 300 lb. The entry referred to the *Lancastrian Prince*. Her name was changed to *Italian Prince*.

Mr. PORGES said that Mr. Pilcher had thought that further evidence might be obtained to assist the inquiry in these matters. Inquiries had been made and the evidence that could be obtained was of such a general character that it was decided it would be useless to put it before the inquiry. They could not get direct evidence about the test of 400 lb. Therefore there would not be any further evidence about that before them. Regarding the packing, it had also been impossible to obtain evidence except of a general character about that.

Mr. CARPMAEL stated that Mr. Welch had seen some of this other packing in the *Egyptian Prince*. It had not been made clear in evidence where he saw that—whether it was in position or among the ship's supplies.

MR. WELCH RECALLED

Mr. WELCH, recalled, said he found both kinds of jointing in the *Egyptian Prince*, a sister ship to the *Italian Prince*. Four joints were taken out of their positions in the packing. He found them when he made his first examination in the *Egyptian Prince*, and found one of the joints in about the centre of the length of the boiler lying close up against the boiler and unsupported, and although the ship had not been on oil for some time there was a leakage from a joint on to the side of the boiler. He followed this clue up and with the agreement of the owners all joints on the pipe line were removed. There was leakage from oil lying in the pipe. From the amount of paint in the flanges compared with the amount of paint in parts that would not have been disturbed he gathered the packing had been in probably for the life of the ship. The *Egyptian Prince* was fitted with the same kind of fender plates as the *Italian Prince*.

Regarding viscosity, Mr. Welch stated that there was definitely a clear run through for the oil from the tank to the burner when it was being pumped. Even if the strainers were partly choked there was still an area there and the oil was bound to flow.

Mr. CARPMAEL remarked that the position of the pipe alongside the starboard boiler had not been made clear.

Mr. WELCH said it was close to the boiler in the *Egyptian Prince*.

Mr. PORGES: On the *Egyptian Prince* you saw some of the right kind and a lot of other packing?

Mr. WELCH: Yes.

Other packing would have to be there for other joints?—Yes.

Referring to Lloyd's Register rules, Mr. PORGES then asked, "If the words 'where practicable' do apply to the question of visibility, can you suggest any places where the pipes could have been put in this ship when she was

built where all parts of them would at all times have been visible?"

Mr. WELCH: I can suggest a position where, though I might not be complying with the strict letter of the rule, I would be fitting the pipes in accordance with the spirit of the rule.

Mr. Welch added that if placed between the centre and starboard boiler over the passage they would have been completely visible.

Mr. PORGES: You would not attribute blame to the owners for leaving these fender plates in the *Italian Prince* in position if they had the intention at some time of returning to coal?—I would not criticise severely.

Mr. PORGES remarked that these fender plates served a very useful purpose even in an oil-burner. Was it not true to say they were very useful from the point of view of cleanliness?

Mr. PORGES: The space between the boiler and the ship's side is inclined to be used for a sort of depository for waste material. Have you found that?

WITNESS: In coal burners only.

Mr. CARPMAEL: The rules are made to be complied with, aren't they?—Yes.

I agree that sometimes there may be a reasonable compromise. I want to know your view—did this vessel comply with the rules or didn't she?—She did not comply with the rules which were brought out after her plans were approved.

Did she comply with the rules when the plans were approved?—I understand, yes.

NO SUGGESTION OF TEST

Mr. RHYNAS, joint superintendent of the Prince Line, recalled, said that when the new Todd burners were fitted in West Hartlepool in March he was in attendance. No suggestion was made by Todd, Richardsons, Westgarth, or Lloyd's Register surveyor that any test of the oil fuel supply should be made. When he went up to Hartlepool he took the size of the supply pipe and the external diameter. He worked out the formula and found they had a working pressure of 1000 lb.

By Mr. Carpmael: During a trip to Antwerp the installation was tested under working conditions. They were experimenting with various pressures on the pump and oil temperatures. He had in mind the requirements of Lloyd's rules. The pipeline was on the starboard side between the boiler and the ship's side. He had looked on many occasions to see whether there was a leak. That was because the pressure had been increased.

Mr. CARPMAEL referred to the vessel changing over from coal to oil, and asked whether he made inquiries as to whether the ship complied with the rules.

Mr. RHYNAS replied that as they had vessels of the same type built to Lloyd's rules he did not go farther into it.

Mr. CARPMAEL: The fact is that you did not make any inquiries at all. Orders were just given to transfer from coal to oil?—Yes.

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Did you consider at the time that the fender plates should be left there when she was burning oil fuel?—I don't know I gave them particular attention.

He had no instructions in the matter of the change over, but arrangements were discussed. He could not remember specific instances of being given instructions as to testing. What was discussed was what was necessary for modifications. Questions of extra pressures were not discussed. He received no instructions on that matter.

Mr. H. E. J. CAMPS, consulting engineer and ship surveyor, past president of the Society of Consulting Marine Engineers and Ship Surveyors, said that to a certain extent he was in agreement with Mr. Welch. If the flames were from fuel oil and actually on the tank top near the ship's side, steam smothering might have been effective. If it had been anywhere except on the tank top it was doubtful whether it would have been. His impression was there was no fire in the tank top. Steam smothering applied to the fire above the boilers would have been useless. No one could say what effect the explosion had on the parts above the boiler, but he thought it was fairly evident that the result of the explosion was a considerable extension of the fire, which, in his view, was probably due to the dispersion of the fuel oil over a considerable area above the boiler. It was highly probable that the effect of the explosion might have been considerable. On the evidence, it appeared the explosion occurred about 20 minutes after the fire was discovered. Steam smothering could not be applied while there was anyone in the engine or boiler room. After what he had heard, he doubted whether the steam smothering could have been opened in any case. The minimum time required to batten down sufficiently to make steam smothering effective was, in his view, not less than three-quarters of an hour to an hour.

Mr. PORGES: To sum up, can you say whether, in the circumstances of this fire, it is likely or unlikely that steam smothering would have been effective?—In my view it would have been quite ineffective.

A MATTER OF OPINION

The question as to whether the fender plates should have been removed when the vessel was converted to oil was a matter of opinion. His experience was that the more protection given against deposit of waste material the better. On the evidence he could not imagine what else might have been done. Regarding testing, he thought the most satisfactory test was that which must have been applied when the change over was made to the Todd burner. As to whether there was anything the owners should have done in order to discover whether the joints in the oil fuel discharge pipe were packed with proper material, he said that if the

joints showed no sign of leakage under working conditions it would be foolish to dismantle the pipe.

Questioned by Mr. Porges regarding testing the steam smothering arrangements on the *Italian Prince*, Mr. Camps said there was nothing to test except the pipe itself. The main thing was to see that the valve itself was in proper condition. He considered five 2-gallons of foamite as good as a 10-gallon. In fact, he would prefer the former because they were more easily portable.

A LATENT DEFECT

He thought the origin of the fire was from the oil fuel and was the result of some leakage from the pipe running by the boiler, but it was difficult to visualise the sort of leakage that was taking place. They might get a latent defect in a pipe which no sort of test would disclose. The only thing he could suggest was a latent defect of the pipe which could not have been examined.

Mr. BATESON: Is it because of the shortness of time interval that you have expressed the view that steam smothering would have been of doubtful efficacy?

Mr. CAMPS: Not the only thing—the difficulty of getting the machinery space closed up to be of use.

Mr. Camps added that it was his firm view that steam smothering in the machinery spaces as a whole would have been useless. The source of the fire was fairly low down below the discharge pipe near the bottom of the boiler.

Mr. BATESON: Would not the steam smothering have been very effective?—I do not think so, because there was nothing to confine the steam in the spaces where the fire was.

It was his view that the explosion might have caused a disturbance of the pipe which might have caused it to leak more freely.

By Mr. Carpmael: The leakage must have been going on for some days.

Mr. CARPMAEL: That does emphasise the necessity of having such pipes always visible?—Yes, so far as it is possible to make them visible.

Where they had the fuel units in the engine-room and the burners in the stokehold there was almost bound to be some part of the pipe line more or less invisible. He did not think the position of the fender plates made any difference whatever. It would have been possible to take the pipe between the centre of the starboard boilers but he thought the position in which it was carried more desirable than below the centre of the boiler in the alley way.

The closing of the ventilators was a proper thing to do in the case of fire but it was the sort of thing which should be left to the discretion of those in charge as to when it was done. In the circumstances of this fire, by the time the foam extinguishers were ineffective the fire had developed to such an extent that there was not time to do anything else.

Mr. WELCH was recalled on the question of the use of steam smothering and said he had no actual experience of using steam to extinguish fires. The only experience was actual tests made at routine surveys. He quoted a number of cases of fires but said they had no actual parallel case in which they could say exactly what would happen.

Mr. CARPMAEL said to Mr. Bateson that if steam smothering was not effective if there was a fire in the engine-room all means of dealing with it except with extinguishers were finished.

Mr. BATESON: Apart from hoses.

Mr. CARPMAEL: Well, progressively finished. If it is not effective people are relying on something on which they ought not to rely.

Mr. PILCHER said the owners were as anxious as other parties to the investigation to discover, if they could, what was the cause of the fire and why when the fire had developed it proved impossible to extinguish it. The owners had wed themselves to no theory. He would like to adopt the theory which appealed to Mr. Welch, namely, that this fire was an oil fire and the source was supplied by some leak in a fuel discharge pipe.

TWO SUBMISSIONS

Assuming the fire occurred from the ignition of fuel oil or fuel oil gas, he made two submissions. First that the leakage of oil from that pipe could not be attributed to lack of care on the part of his clients. Secondly, the failure of the ship's personnel in spite of their best endeavours to extinguish all the fire was not due to any failure on the part of the owners to provide proper fire-fighting appliances or to maintain them in proper order.

Although the views of Mr. Welch had been available to the Board of Trade from the first moment he started making inquiries into this matter the Board had not thought fit to make any criticism to the owners in connection with this pipe. It might well be that they would come to the conclusion that this pipe or its packing failed. The fact that the pipe or its packing might have failed did not mean the owners were guilty of any lack of care in its maintenance. He submitted there was not one jot of evidence before them that the owners had been lacking in care with regard to the original installation or subsequent upkeep of the pipe.

Mr. Pilcher remarked that there had been Lloyd's surveyors in and out of this ship's engine-room throughout the ship's life. The owners really had done their best to keep the vessel in "tip-top" condition.

The hearing was adjourned until to-day.

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