

THE "SHEAF BROOK"

Board of Trade Inquiry
Concluded

FINDINGS TO BE GIVEN NEXT
FRIDAY

From Our Own Correspondent

SUNDERLAND, Friday

The Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the Newcastle steamer *Sheaf Brook* with all hands in the North Sea last November concluded here to-day. It was announced that the Court's findings would be delivered next Friday. Judge Richardson sat as a Wreck Commissioner with three assessors, Lieut-Commander F. S. Murray, Captain T. W. Hanney and Mr. J. L. Scott.

The previous proceedings were reported in LLOYD'S LIST of Apr. 22, 23 and 24.

Mr. O. L. Bateson represented the Board of Trade; Mr. G. St. C. Pilcher, K.C., appeared for the owners, W. A. Souther & Co., Ltd., of Newcastle; Mr. L. S. Holmes appeared for the master, Captain C. E. Brown, the Mercantile Marine Service Association and the Imperial Merchant Service Guild; and Mr. Herbert Bewick represented the National Union of Seamen; Mr. R. Gardner was present, representing the Transport and General Workers' Union; and Mr. A. Fell was for the National Union of Railwaymen.

When the proceedings opened to-day, Judge Richardson handed to Mr. Bateson a Board of Trade letter he had just received. The letter indicated that somebody in Lancashire also heard over the wireless the *Sheaf Brook's* SOS which Mrs. Scott, of Cullercoats, heard on the night of Nov. 19.

Mr. BATESON, after reading the letter, said he did not think it carried the matter any further.

Mr. GEORGE DANIEL, a Board of Trade ship surveyor at Newcastle, gave figures of measurements he had made this month of ships and stowage rates for coal. In a hold of the *Gimle* he found the stowage rate to be 45.39 cu. ft. per ton, and in the *Chelwood* 44.47 cu. ft. per ton. Coal was trimmed up in the *Gimle*, but the *Chelwood* was a self-trimmer. Witness said the hold of the *Chelwood* was as full as a hold of a self-trimming collier of the type could be filled without trimming.

Mr. PILCHER, for the owners of the *Sheaf Brook*, suggested that Nos. 2 and 3 holds of the *Sheaf Brook* were even fuller.

STOWAGE OF COAL EVIDENCE

Mr. JOHN P. HURWORTH, senior engineer surveyor of the Board of Trade, gave evidence of the stowage of coal in trucks which carried coal to the *Gimle*.

Mr. W. L. MENNIE gave evidence of measuring coal in trucks, first at the colliery and later at Jarrow Staiths. Of 28 trucks Witness said six had lost in weight, the maximum loss being 2 cwt. That made no material difference to the stowage rate for the whole of the trucks.

Mr. HENRY STEEL, a Board of Trade surveyor, asked by Mr. Bateson whether he had formed any opinion as to the possible cause of the *Sheaf Brook* getting a dangerous list, said that as a result of his calculations he discounted the suggestion that the flooding of the engine-room was the primary cause of the permanent list. The shifted cargo would produce a permanent list, and the first shift occurred probably in No. 1 hold, causing a list. On his moderate assumption of a movement of coal of 5.3 deg., that would not be good for the ship in bad weather. In most cases shifts occurred either from a sudden blow or from a lurch.

On the same basis of assumption, in No. 4 hold there would be a shifting causing a list of 3 deg. The maximum list through shifting in all the holds he assumed to be about 20 deg.; from 15 to 16 deg. would be a dangerous list. Water might get into the engine-room down a ventilator or through skylights and other openings.

Asked what he thought were the possibilities of the *Sheaf Brook* receiving a blow in the vicinity of the engine-room above the tank top sufficient to puncture the hull Mr. Steel said it would be to some extent a coincidence for the ship to be struck just in the engine-room, which was amidships, and not in the bow or on the bottom.

Mr. BATESON: If you get a list in the ship and then the engine-room is filled up, would that sink her?—No, it should not sink her, but it would make the deck and fittings more exposed, because they would be lower in the water.

In order to sink the ship you must flood at least the engine-room and some other compartment?—Yes.

When questioned by Mr. Pilcher upon his theories, Mr. STEEL referred to his experience, upon which Mr. PILCHER said that witness had had no experience as a navigator.

Mr. STEEL said that a well-stowed cargo might not shift even in an appreciable list.

Mr. PILCHER: The Board of Trade does not make regulations to deal with a situation where a vessel has 200 tons of water in her engine-room.

WITNESS: Ordinary rolling would not produce a dangerous list; there would have to be severe rolling or a severe blow from the sea.

When Mr. Steel said that the list of 15 deg. would give the vessel a draught of 5 ft. more, Judge RICHARDSON suggested that with such a draught the vessel would not be far

from the bottom on the south-west half of the Dogger Bank.

Mr. STEEL said he understood that the depth was 8 fathoms, but he could not give an opinion upon that point.

Captain SCOTT, an assessor, pointed out that the waves in the North Sea, which was a comparatively shallow sea, were short and steep, and on the South-West patch of the Dogger Bank they would be still shorter and steeper.

Judge RICHARDSON suggested that if there happened to be a wreck on the bottom when the ship was in the trough of a wave the vessel would be more likely to be struck.

Mr. EDWARD WILSON, consulting marine engineer, said that in many years' experience he had never known a case of a coal cargo shifting in a self-trimming collier for which he had been responsible or in connection with which he had direct access to information. Any free water in any compartment was dangerous, and it was more particularly dangerous in the engine-room. If there were 100 tons of water in the engine-room it would produce a roll sufficient to shift any cargo in the ship. He agreed that a lurch would be more likely to shift cargo than rolling.

Judge RICHARDSON pointed out that in view of the fact that they had no evidence of any similar cargo ever having shifted, it was improbable they could find that shifting cargo would cause the loss of the *Sheaf Brook*.

Mr. HOLMES said it was no part of his instructions at any time to enter on a mud-slinging campaign against the owners. Whatever the condition of the ship previously, in the early part of October it did not appear that that could have been the cause of the disaster, when she had been so extensively surveyed and repaired before her last voyage. He suggested that there had been a certain amount of laxity on the part of the owners and marine superintendent in not having the necessary repairs attended to immediately, in delaying the ship's annual survey and in their neglect to examine the log-book reports. Mr. Holmes deprecated any suggestion that there was any bad navigation on the part of the master.

Judge RICHARDSON said he was sure the Court had no intention of casting any aspersion on the master.

Mr. BEWICK suggested there was ample evidence that the vessel had a list and a tendency to list, that she was only just balanced by teeming more coal into the starboard side, and, consequently, he suggested, not much would be required to knock her off her balance, and a process would begin which would gradually increase her list.

Judge RICHARDSON said that no doubt the full effect of the vessel's natural list would have to be carefully considered.

Mr. PILCHER asked the Judge to find that the sequence of events was that through some cause or other water in large quantities got into the engine-room and that caused the cargo to shift. He suggested that the vessel was either at or in close proximity to a portion of the sea which was very shallow and liberally sprinkled with wrecks, and that in those conditions they had as clear an indication of what happened as they were likely to get in inquiries of that kind.

Mr. BATESON submitted that the vessel could not possibly have taken a dangerous list without shifting of the cargo. He suggested that it was out of the question that the ship struck a sunken wreck. There was good evidence that the ship was always on her course clear of the Dogger Bank.

Judge RICHARDSON announced that the Court would give its findings next Friday morning.

On Monday the Judge and the Assessors will inspect a sister ship to the *Sheaf Brook* at Seaham Harbour.

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