

THE LOSS OF THE CALDER

Admiralty Expert's Evidence on Mines

BOARD OF TRADE INQUIRY CONTINUED

From Our Own Correspondent

HULL, Wednesday
The Board of Trade Inquiry into the loss of the steamer *Calder* in April last was continued at Hull to-day before Mr. J. R. Macdonald, who was assisted by Captain R. W. B. Blacklin and Captain E. H. Mitchell as nautical assessors.

Mr. H. L. Saxelbye represented the Board of Trade; Mr. T. C. Jackson appeared for the owners, the London Midland & Scottish Railway Company, and several of their officers who were parties to the inquiry; Mr. G. Bilham represented the relatives of the late Captain Sutherby and Mr. Gordon Harman, second officer; Mr. J. Hearfield appeared for a witness who is not a party to the inquiry; and Mr. Tarbitten represented the National Union of Seamen.

Commander E. V. JEFFREYS, R.N., of the Torpedo and Mines Department of the Admiralty, said he had examined the records at the Admiralty and found that a mine was reported on Apr. 13. He believed it was trawled up by a Grimsby trawler, and he believed it was thrown overboard. A mine was reported on Apr. 20 as having been washed up two and a half miles south of Withersea, and it was destroyed. Another mine, stated to be in a fairly good state of preservation, was reported as having been seen floating two and a half miles S.E. by S. of Spurn on Apr. 26, but he thought the pilot probably had mistaken it for a mooring buoy that had got adrift and was painted red. No British mine was painted red.

Mr. H. L. SAXELBYE: Assuming that the *Calder* struck a mine, what would have been the effect?

WITNESS: Our evidence shows that the mine would sink, and that it would not have exploded.

Mr. SAXELBYE: Would it have holed her?—No.

The PRESIDENT: You say that its horns would not have penetrated the ship's plates, and that it would not have exploded?—That is so.

Mr. SAXELBYE: What is your experience of mines recovered from the sea?—That they have invariably been safe. Since 1918 I have not heard of one exploding.

"SAFE IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES"

Mr. T. C. JACKSON: You agree that British mines may break adrift from their moorings?—Yes.

Do you say they are perfectly safe in all circumstances?—Yes, unless you get somebody who has no knowledge of mines pulling them to pieces.

Mr. JACKSON: Unless someone or something touches the detonator?

WITNESS: You have to hit the detonator pretty hard, and it is a difficult thing to do.

Do you suggest that momentum at which a fully-loaded ship would strike a mine would not explode the mine?—Certainly I do.

If it broke a horn, would that not complete the electrical circuit and fire the detonator?—No.

WITNESS agreed with Mr. Jackson that there were big minefields off the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire coasts during the War. Questioned as to the mines, he said he would not dispute that another mine had been seen.

Mr. JACKSON, quoting from LLOYD'S LIST, said a mine was reported on May 5 by the steamer *Albano*, not far from Spurn.

WITNESS: I have not the records for May here.

Mr. JACKSON: You will agree that LLOYD'S LIST is a reputable nautical paper?—Certainly it is.

And that reports in it are authentic?—Yes, certainly.

Will you accept that statement in LLOYD'S LIST?—Yes; I accept the statement that a mine was reported, but whether it was a mine or not, I am not prepared to say. I have a recollection, from my examination of records, that as a fact a mine was reported on the date you mentioned.

Mr. JACKSON: It is only right to say that as far as possible the minefields have been cleared?—Yes; all moored mines have been cleared.

WITNESS said there might be mines on the bed of the sea, but he did not think they would be dislodged by bombs dropped during Air Force practice off the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire coasts. If the mines were dislodged and came to the surface they would be safe. German mines, like British mines, were fitted with a device to make them safe directly they broke adrift from their moorings.

Mr. JACKSON: Are you sure?

WITNESS: Yes.

May I take it that the British Admiralty has taken all reasonable steps to reduce any danger to the minimum?—Yes.

Notwithstanding those efforts danger remains?—In the opinion of the Admiralty the danger is infinitesimal.

Mr. JACKSON remarked that there appeared to be a difference of opinion between the Board of Trade and the Admiralty, and he quoted warnings to fishermen issued by the Board of Trade as to the danger of mines.

WITNESS said the danger was from the weight of a mine doing damage to a trawl and not by explosion.

Mr. JACKSON: Are you quite certain an unexploded mine is not harmful?

WITNESS: Yes, if you do not put in a fresh detonator. A mine that was put down in 1918 is not dangerous.

The PRESIDENT: You are being asked to say that if a mine were recovered and brought into Court you could hammer it and it would not explode?

WITNESS: That is so.

During an adjournment of the Court the President and the Assessors inspected a

sister ship of the *Calder*, built to same specifications, which was moored at Riverside Quay.

On the resumption of the inquiry, Commander JEFFREYS said the warnings issued by the Board of Trade as to the danger of mines, to which Mr. Jackson had directed his attention, were being re-drafted. When he first saw the warnings he was surprised, and orders were given for re-drafting. That was before the casualty to the *Calder*. The re-drafting would have been completed had it not been for pressure of other work.

THE CARGO

Mr. WILHELM HERMAN HINSCH, of Hamburg, representing the agents of the owners of the *Calder*, said the quantity of cargo taken by the *Calder* was at the discretion of the captain. He told him there would be about 900 tons. There was more cargo than the ship could take, and goods were left on the quay. The *Calder* was not loaded to more than normal capacity, but he believed it was the biggest cargo she had carried. He could not recall that she had had 200 tons deck-cargo before. Neither the captain nor the chief officer made any remark about the size of the cargo.

Mr. WILHELM CLANS HENRICH KOSTER, of Hamburg, a master stevedore, who was in charge of the loading of the *Calder*, said the cargo was properly stowed. Bags of potatoes were included in the deck cargo. Every precaution was taken to prevent any of the cargo shifting at sea. There was no reason why they should overload the *Calder*. A relief ship was in dock at the time the *Calder* was loading.

Mr. JACKSON: In your opinion was the cargo well stowed and well secured?

WITNESS: It was.

Did the *Calder* leave Hamburg in a perfectly sound and seaworthy condition?—She did.

Mr. OTTO SCHAET, a Hamburg pilot, in reply to questions as to whether he had stated that when in the Elbe the *Calder* heeled when he gave orders at the turns in the channel to port or starboard, said the ship only heeled slightly and not more than any other ship would have done. When he left her 10 miles from the open sea there was nothing in the ship's demeanour to indicate anything but a safe passage across the North Sea.

The inquiry was adjourned until tomorrow.

© 2020

Lloyd's Register
Foundation

W015-0220