

THE LOSS OF THE CALDER

Board of Trade Inquiry Opened

SOME THEORIES AS TO THE CAUSE

From Our Own Correspondent

HULL, Tuesday

The Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the Goole steamer *Calder* with 18 hands in the North Sea in April was opened at Hull to-day before Mr. J. R. Macdonald (stipendiary magistrate), who was assisted by Captain R. W. B. Blacklin and Captain E. H. Mitchell as Nautical Assessors. The *Calder*, which sailed from Hamburg on Apr. 17 last, was posted missing on May 20. The vessel, which was built last year, had a tonnage of 1107 gross.

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.

Mr. SAXELBYE said the loss of the *Calder* was one of the most lamentable disasters which had ever occurred to a vessel sailing from a Humber port. It was a tragedy of the sea the secret of which had been lost, as it could only be known to those on board, and there were no survivors. It was an example of that class of case which was perhaps most difficult of all to investigate; a case in which a new and well-found ship sank with all hands in weather of no exceptional violence. Every avenue had been explored by the Board of Trade to get all possible evidence which might assist the Court in coming to some conclusion as to the probable cause of the casualty. Every assistance to that end had been given by the owners and their representatives, and by the builders of the vessel.

The *Calder* was built of steel at Birkenhead in 1930 by Cammell Laird & Co., Ltd., one of the best-known shipbuilding companies in the world, and was put into commission at the end of the year. She was 240.6 ft. in length, 34.15 ft. in breadth, and 15.45 ft. in depth. She was registered at Goole, and her net tonnage was 444.8 tons. The fact that two sister ships, the *Blythe* and the *Aire*, were built to the same specifications had proved of utility in the investigations which had been made into her loss.

A WELL-DESIGNED VESSEL

"I may say for the information of the Court," said Mr. Saxelbye, "that it has been agreed by the Board of Trade experts that the *Calder* was a well-designed and properly constructed vessel, and they have no criticism to make upon her as a ship." The mystery of her loss therefore was all the greater. She was a single-deck ship, and a point that might arise on the stability question was in respect of a book supplied by the owners, from which it might be assumed that the maximum deck load for the least favourable stability conditions was about 130 tons, whereas on the voyage in question there was a deck load of some 200 tons. The question therefore was as to whether the builders, by their diagram, meant that 130 tons was the limit of deck cargo for safety or whether it was merely an illustration of the distribution of weight under the loading conditions given in the diagram.

The *Calder* left Hamburg for Hull at 10.30 p.m. on Apr. 17 with Captain Sutherby in command and a crew of 17. Captain Sutherby, said Mr. Saxelbye, was not the regular master of the ship, but he was a man in whom the owners had the utmost confidence. Captain Sherwood, the regular master, was on holiday. The ship had a mixed cargo of 960 tons, of which 760 tons was below deck, the remaining 200 tons being stowed on deck. The cargo consisted mainly of potatoes. It might be stated that the officers of the railway company's fleet were not encouraged to load to full capacity, and it was impressed upon them that at all times the safety of the crew was the first consideration, and, further, that masters and officers would not benefit in any way by carrying big cargoes. He was instructed that the pilot would say in evidence that during the passage down the river Elbe there was a light wind, insufficient to roll or pitch the vessel, and that he noticed when he gave an order to port or starboard at turns in the river that the vessel heeled so much that it made him sway. "I am instructed," said Mr. Saxelbye, "that he will also say he noticed the deck load, which he thought was well stowed, but that there seemed too much of it, and that he passed a remark to the master, who replied to the effect: 'I may have a little too much, but I hope to get a good passage, or I hope to get clear.'"

The PRESIDENT: Was that conversation in German?

Mr. SAXELBYE: I cannot say. Perhaps it was mixed, that is why I am not certain as to the exact words that were used.

Mr. Saxelbye said the vessel passed Cuxhaven at 3 p.m. on Apr. 18. The pilot was discharged at the mouth of the Elbe, and so far as was known from that time the *Calder* was not seen again. Having regard to the statement by the master and the mate of the steamship *Nottingham*, that at 11.30 a.m. on Apr. 19 they sighted a small boat, which it was probable belonged to the *Calder*, it was assumed that the ship must have sunk some time before. Wreckage which was thought to belong to the *Calder* was picked up on Apr. 22 about four miles to the north-east of the Inner Dowsing Light-vessel.

Various theories had been advanced, said Mr. Saxelbye, as to the probable cause of the loss of the *Calder*. One was that the ship collided with the dredger *Cyclops*, which broke adrift from the tug *Norman*, while being towed from the Tyne to Havre, but he thought that improbable. Another theory was that the *Calder* might have struck a mine. Investigations showed that

an explosion occurred about 2 p.m. on Apr. 19, which must have been several hours after the *Calder* sank. As a matter of fact it had transpired that the contractors for making targets for air force practice discovered an unexploded bomb off Salt Fleet. Notice was given to the Air Force, and the bomb was destroyed. No other explosion appeared to have been heard or mines seen. Evidence would be called for the Admiralty to the effect that had the *Calder* struck a mine it was extremely unlikely that it should have exploded, experience having proved that mines recovered from the sea were safe.

The PRESIDENT: Can that be said of our late enemy's mines?

Mr. SAXELBYE: I cannot speak as to that.

At the request of the President, Mr. Saxelbye handed in a list of 25 questions to which the Board of Trade asked for answers by the Court at the close of the inquiry.

DESIGNER'S EVIDENCE

Mr. ERNEST SUTTON, the designer of the *Calder*, said the specifications were generous as to strength and more than met Lloyd's requirements. The fact that the ship would carry deck cargo was taken into consideration in the design. The diagrams as to loading were not meant to apply to an infinite variety of loading, but to a given set of circumstances. In his opinion, part of the wreckage which was picked up belonged to the *Calder*, and had been wrenched off by some considerable external force. The boats that were picked up were from the port side, and did not contain lifebuoys or anything that suggested that they had been launched. It seemed him as probable that they had been wrenched off. There were indications of a heavy rush of air from the inside of the vessel which had its freest outlet on the port side, and that the ship went down by the head.

In reply to Mr. SAXELBYE, WITNESS said he had seen the diagram of loading. He did not think the ship carried an abnormal deck cargo for her size, or that it was the deck cargo that caused her to heel when making turns in the Elbe. That might be due to other causes, especially to the effect of the helm on the ship.

The inquiry was adjourned until to-morrow.

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