

THE "HARTLEY" LOSS.

Judgment to be Given on Wednesday.

From Our Own Correspondent.

MIDDLESBROUGH, Saturday. The Board of Trade Inquiry into the loss of the steamer *Hartley*, which foundered in the English Channel on Nov. 27 last, was concluded to-day. Mr. Griffiths Jones, Stipendiary Magistrate, presided, and the assessors were Captain D. F. Macdonald, O.B.E., Mr. J. Carmichael, and Rear-Admiral Booty, C.B., M.V.O. On Monday the Chairman and assessors will inspect a sister ship under construction at Smith's Dock, South Bank, and the decision of the Court will be given on Wednesday.

Mr. C. B. Fenwick represented Messrs. Richley, Halvorsen & Sample, Hull, owners of the vessel; while Captain E. V. Hugo, D.S.C., Middlesbrough, agent to the Merchant Service Guild, watched the inquiry on behalf of the relatives of Captain W. Pearson, who was master of the vessel.

At the opening of to-day's hearing, Mr. HAROLD HALVORSEN, one of the owners of the ship, was recalled. He said that after the disaster it came to his knowledge that the survivor Adams had offered some criticism regarding the tarpaulin and wedges. It was the first time the owners had heard any criticism of the ship, but witness was satisfied that Adams' observations could not have had any substance.

STORY OF THE VOYAGE.

FRANCIS ADAMS, Haigh Street, Dunston-on-Tyne, stated that he joined the *Hartley* on her second voyage, and on trips prior to Nov. 27 she proved to be a good sea boat. She was a dry ship on deck and was easy to steer. Witness gave particulars of the battening down of four hatchways. Nos. 1, 2 and 3 hatchways were, he said, covered with tarpaulins and rope lashings, but No. 4 was not lashed down. When heavy seas were running and washing the deck the captain hove to and extra lashings were put on. At 9 a.m. on Nov. 27 witness found the tarpaulin of No. 3 hatch ripped almost from end to end. Later a hatch board was found to have been swept away. The ship developed a list to starboard. Large volumes of water rushed into No. 3 hold, but so far as witness could see, up to the time of the abandonment No. 4 hold was intact. When the order was given to stand by the lifeboat, witness was washed off the bridge into the alley way. A wireless message was sent out, and 19 men took to the lifeboat, one man falling overboard. When the *Hartley* was abandoned the edge of her deck was level with the sea, and her bulwarks were being drawn alongside the *Machaon*. An Arab tried to jump on to the ladder, but missed his footing. He was in danger of being crushed against the side of the vessel, so he was pulled back into the lifeboat, and that, witness thought, caused the lifeboat to capsize with the loss of 17 lives. Witness added that only once previously had rope lashings been used on the hatches.

Questioned by Mr. Fenwick, WITNESS said he overheard a conversation between the chief officer and the donkeyman relating to water getting in the bunkers. He further said that some of the hatch wedges were too small and were washed away. The bunker tarpaulins were secured before leaving Barry, so that he could not account for water getting through.

CAPSIZING OF THE LIFEBOAT.

JAMES KEOGH, aged 20, another survivor, spoke of being on watch from 4 o'clock. He said that after spending an hour bailing out water from the starboard alley way he took the wheel. Their speed was 7 or 8 knots. The captain repeatedly altered the ship's course, but there were occasions when she would not answer to the helm. The captain and witness were alone on the bridge, and lifebelts had been distributed, when the former remarked, "Lad, you had better look out for yourself; it's every man Jack for himself. The ship's done." Witness got into the lifeboat, which was being lowered, and the skipper was the last to leave. In witness's opinion, the Arab who tried to climb the ladder became entangled, and fell back into the boat. The incident seemed to cause the captain to lose his head, and on his leaving the tiller the boat turned broadside on and capsized.

Mr. BURTON put in records of St. Catherine's Lighthouse, as follows:—Nov. 27, 6 a.m., wind S.S.W., force 8, squally rain; 9 o'clock, S.W., 8, squally; noon, W.S.W., squally, day's highest wind force 5.

Mr. CAIRNS, Smith's Dock shipyard manager, recalled, without binding himself expressed the opinion that the *Hartley* had a reserve buoyancy of seven to eight hundred tons. The pumps had a capacity of 164 tons.

Among the questions addressed to the Court by Mr. BURTON were several relating to the construction of the hatchways and means provided to ensure safety, the cause of the tarpaulin being damaged, of water getting into the hold, and the loss of life.

Mr. FENWICK asked that there should be no precipitate decision or recommendation respecting the use of iron bars, pointing out that when properly applied, having regard to the human element, ropes were probably as efficient. The disaster came at a moment when some anxiety was felt regarding self-trimming ships. The *Hartley* started out as well constructed and equipped as any vessel of her class. Her hatches were as strong as a wooden deck. The disaster was apparently caused by an unexplained failure of the tarpaulin. The controversy really raged about the method of keeping the hatch boards in position. The crews of ships were apparently content to risk themselves in what they believed to be perfectly good boats without adopting that little extra precaution that was so desirable.

The CHAIRMAN commented on the splendid behaviour of the crew, and the inquiry was closed.



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