

LOSS OF THE SUTTON.

FORECAST OF THE EVIDENCE.

INQUIRY INTO COAST WATCHING SYSTEM.

[FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.]

CARDIGAN, Tuesday.

A Board of Trade inquiry was opened in the Guildhall, at Cardigan, to-day, into the circumstances attending the loss of the Liverpool coasting steamer Sutton on the night of November 27, in Cardigan Bay, while on a passage from Aberystwyth for Antwerp with a cargo of lead and zinc ore, as a result of which the whole of her crew of ten men and the master's wife and daughter lost their lives.

Mr. H. Claughton Scott, K.C., as Wreck Commissioner, conducted the inquiry on behalf of the Board of Trade, and was assisted by Commander C. A. Smith, C.B.E., R.D., R.N.R., Captain H. P. Learmont, R.D., R.N.R., Younger Brother of Trinity House, Vice-Admiral E. L. Booty, C.B., M.V.O., R.N., as Nautical Assessor, and Mr. F. H. Alexander, M.S.C., M.Inst.N.A., as Naval Architect Assessor. Mr. A. T. Bucknill, O.B.E., M.A., instructed by Mr. T. J. Barnes, C.B.E., solicitor to the Board of Trade, represented the Board of Trade. Mr. K. S. Carpmael, instructed by Messrs. Bateson and Co., Liverpool, appeared for the owners, the Overton Steamship Co., Ltd., and Mr. L. S. Holmes, Messrs. Miller, Taylor and Holmes, Liverpool, appeared for the relatives of Captain Wm. Harrison Terretta, instructed by the Mercantile Marine Service Association, of Liverpool. Captain H. G. Innes represented the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

Mr. Bucknill said notices of the investigation had been served upon Captain Hurst, inspector of coastguards at the Mumbles, Lieut. Marsh, district officer of coastguards at Fishguard, Mr. T. Brading, coastguard at Penrhyn, Mr. Huxtable, station officer of coastguards at Newquay, and Mr. Pearson, coastguardsman at Newquay. All these people would be called as witnesses. The Board of Trade wished the court to most thoroughly inquire into the system of coast watching on that part of the coast, and the duties of the coastguardsmen, and the way they performed their duties on the night in question.

The Sutton left Aberystwyth on the night of November 27 last, in command of Captain Terretta and a crew of nine men, and in addition to the crew the master's wife and one of his daughters were also on board. The Sutton was bound for Antwerp with a part cargo of zinc and lead concentrates. She was never seen again, but on the same night lights were seen off Aberporth, and these were taken to be signals of distress. When day broke the Sutton had disappeared, and on that day no one realised that a disaster had occurred within sight of the land.

TWO MAIN QUESTIONS.

On the morning of Sunday, November 29, the body of an able seaman named Booth, who sailed in the Sutton, was found on the coast near Aberporth. Close to him was found a ladder with a lifebelt attached to it, and according to the medical evidence

Booth had died from exposure and not from drowning. On the morning of November 30 the body of the wife of Captain Terretta was found near Aberporth, and a lifeboat with the Sutton's name on it was found on the beach. Beyond these two bodies nothing had ever been heard of anyone who sailed in the ship.

It seemed obvious that two main questions arose:—first of all, what caused the loss of the ship; and secondly, what caused the loss of life? The court wanted to know the cause of the second part of the question, and dealt with as fully as possible.

On behalf of the Board of Trade, he read some of the questions which the Board of Trade proposed to ask the court to answer:—

(1) What was the system of coast watching from Newquay to Penrhyn existing on the night of the 27th-28th November last, and did the system provide for a reasonably sufficient watch being kept, having regard to the requirements of this part of the coast? Were there means of communication between the lookout stations when in proper working order, and were such means adequate? Were proper measures taken to ensure that they should be in good working order? Were they in good working order on the night in question?

(2) Were the coastguard and other watchers who were engaged for the service of coast watching from Newquay to Penrhyn properly instructed in the duties which they were expected to perform, and did they know and understand the duties?

(3) Were rockets, flares or lights seen by the coastguard or other watchers, or by any other person or persons on shore; if so, by whom? At what time or times and in what position or positions, and from what point or points on the coast were they seen, and what appearance did they present?

(4) If seen from the shore, were any such rockets, flares, or lights recognised by anyone seeing them as signals of distress made by a vessel at sea requiring assistance? If not, why were they not recognised as signals of distress, ought they to have been so recognised, and if so, by whom, and what action, if any, ought he or they to have taken?

COASTGUARDS' WATCH.

(5) Was a good and proper lookout kept on the night in question by the coastguards and other watchers from Newquay to Penrhyn? Did the persons responsible for the coast watching service carry out properly the duties entrusted to them?

Mr. Bucknill, continuing, said, as regards the first question, the loss of the ship, the direct evidence was at present extremely scanty. The only evidence that they had at present which bore on the possible cause of her loss related to the possibility of her cargo shifting, which was a point that must be carefully considered.

The Sutton was built of steel in 1920, at Selby, and had a total deadweight carrying capacity, of 520 tons on a draft of 11 feet 7 1/2 inches. She was one of four sister ships, all built at Selby, and was designed by the well known firm of Messrs. Rosco and Little, of Liverpool, who also supervised the building of the ship. She was built under Lloyd's special survey, and was classed 100 A1. They would get the exact figures of the cost of her building, but it was certainly in the neighbourhood of £30,000, and at the time of her loss she was insured for £15,000. The Sutton was specially strengthened to take the ground.

In the course of her work in April, 1925, she passed her No. 1 Lloyd's survey about six months before her loss, so that at that time she was thoroughly overhauled. Captain Terretta had been her master since she was built.

At the time the Sutton left Ayr she had had about 50 tons of bunkers to take up a

charter at Aberystwyth for the British Metals Corporation to carry a maximum cargo of 260 tons. Loading proceeded satisfactorily until 5.10 p.m. on the morning of November 27, when the vessel was hoisted to 10 tons of lead concentrates in the fore part of No. 1 hatch, 52 tons of zinc concentrates in the after part of No. 1 hatch, and 170 tons of zinc concentrates in the No. 2 hatch. That made a total of 272 tons, and adding the 50 tons of bunkers made a total of 322 tons, whereas her weight carrying capacity was

NOT DOWN TO LOAD-LINE.

It followed, therefore, that the vessel was nothing like down to her load-line. Her draft when she left Aberystwyth was 8ft. 4in. forward and 11ft. 6in. aft, giving a mean draft of 9ft. 11in., and an excess of freeboard of something like 1ft. 8in. Those figures he thought showed quite clearly that there could be no question as to the instability of the ship when she sailed. She had ample freeboard, and was in a stable condition. The cargo had not been trimmed. The process of loading consisted of gangways being run out from the quay, and the barrels were shipped straight into the hold, where they formed a pyramid-shaped mass. The lead and zinc concentrates were separated by tarpaulines. That was all that was done to the cargo itself.

At 5.10 on the afternoon of November 27, the pilot went on board, and the loading was stopped, although 20 tons of zinc concentrates were in the warehouse, and was left behind.

In turning round at the quay the vessel touched the bank, but an examination revealed that no damage had been done to the ship. They had been able to obtain weather records kept by Trinity House at Bardsey Island and Strumble Head, which showed a strong northerly wind blowing throughout the 27th up to Force 8 at Strumble Head, and Force 7 at Bardsey Island. The coastguard record at Newquay showed a northerly wind of about Force 6, but they had no exact record of what the weather was like at Aberystwyth, and the statement of the pilot was that there was a calm sea and no wind at the time the vessel left. Most of the cargo consisted of zinc concentrates, and this was comprised mainly of zinc sulphide, which was known as blende, which was purchased from the Cambrian Electrolytic Zinc Co.

One hundred and seventy tons of it was obtained from the Lisburn Mines, and was loaded into No. 2 hatch, of which 162 tons had an angle of repose of 30 degrees, and eight tons was softer and had an angle of repose of only about 10 degrees. The other 52 tons was drier, and had an angle of repose of about 42 degrees. The lead concentrate was very much drier than the blende, and it was important to ascertain what the exact percentage of moisture was when it was loaded.

Since the Sutton disaster a remarkable casualty had occurred to the steamer Maralie. In February of this year she loaded with 238 tons of blende from the same mine as that which was loaded in the Sutton. In addition the Maralie had about 34 tons of lead concentrates in bulk, and about 50 tons of lead concentrates in bags, and the blende of the Maralie had a

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lower percentage of moisture that that of the Sutton, the cargo of the Maralie was trimmed and took five days to load. She sailed on the same day as the Sutton and encountered some bad weather, the cargo shifted and the vessel only just managed to get into Milford Haven with a very heavy list.

When the cargo was examined was found to be standing on top of the cargo. The cargo had settled down and left its angle of repose. It had bodily shifted to one side and had cracks. The Board of Trade had an affidavit from the master of the steamer Fluor, who also carried a cargo of blende from Spain. He experienced very much the same trouble; the cargo shifted, and the vessel took a very heavy list.

He thought it was only fair to say that a large quantity of this cargo had been carried in safety apart from the case of the ship Trevecca, which was known to many of them, where the crew made an extraordinarily long voyage in a boat and reached port. The Board of Trade did not know of any other case beside the Maralie and the Fluor where the cargo had behaved in that extraordinary way. They would have to inquire very carefully into the steps to dry this cargo, if any steps were taken, and what the percentage of moisture was when it was put on board.

As regarded the second part, the only lights seen were all off Aberporth, and a number of witnesses had told the Board of Trade of lights which they had seen. Mr. Jones, a farmer, of Aberporth, saw lights at 7.30, 9, and 10 on the night of November 27th, all in the same place. Mr. Lewis saw a light for ten minutes at 10 o'clock at Aberporth; Master Jenkins, a boy of 15 years, saw a reddish flame at about 10 o'clock, and he apparently was the first witness who was alarmed by the nature of the light, and thought it was a distress signal. Jenkins' father also saw the light from 10.30 to 11.

Then they came to Evan Davies, a valuable witness, who saw a flare for about ten seconds at about 11 o'clock, and he was also impressed by the nature of the light that he rushed back and told some friends, who also saw the flare. He also called his brother, who was a mercantile marine officer, and they kept watch until about three o'clock in the morning.

At two o'clock they called their father, Captain Davies, of the mercantile marine, and he also turned out to see if they could render any assistance to anybody who might be in distress, and they put a light in their window to be some kind of guide.

On the following day they made a search along the coast, but they were not able to find any wreckage.

At Newquay Coastguardsman Pearson at 9.50 saw a light bearing about N. 70 W., which would probably be off Aberporth, but Officer Huxtable, whose duty it would have been to call out the lifeboat, had no reason to suppose the light was of a vessel requiring assistance, but thought it was a trawler working.

In April, 1923, the coast watching duties of the coastguards were taken over from the Admiralty by the Board of Trade, whilst the duties of the coastguards, which dealt with the detection of smuggling, were taken over by the Customs.

At the time of the disaster there was a coastguard station at Newquay, and there was a rowing and sailing lifeboat, which was under the control of that magnificent voluntary association, which looked after their lifeboats. There was a coastguard station at Penrhyn, and on the morning of November 27th there

was a continuous watch being kept from these two points.

When the Board of Trade took over the scheme there was an auxiliary lookout kept at Aberporth, and a life-saving apparatus and a lookout at Mount Verwig, but those two places were abolished by the Board of Trade for various reasons. One important reason was that it was considered that the concentration of forces at Newquay and Cemaes Head was likely to be more effective than the scattering of isolated points along the coast. There was a rocket apparatus and volunteer company at the mouth of Aberystwyth river, but there was no look-out kept there.

Richard Robert Clark, registered manager of the Overton Steamship Company, the owners of the Sutton, said he had been in business for many years, and had had a large number of vessels engaged in the home trade under his control.

The Sutton cost her owners to build £29,436, and at the time of her loss her value in the books was £24,248. The total insurance at the time of her loss was £15,000.

Captain Terreta never reported unfavourably to him about the ship, and the master was thoroughly satisfied with her. He did not know at the time that the master's wife and daughter were on the ship. He could not find any trace of having purchased rockets for the vessel, which did not possess wireless.

Replying to Mr. Carpmael, witness said that Captain Terreta had been in his service for 19 years, and his opinion of the master was that he was a thorough seaman, steady, and thoroughly reliable. The master was left to superintend his own stowage.

Mr. Victor Grey, chief draughtsman of Messrs. Cochrane and Sons, the builders of the Sutton, said the vessel had three watertight compartments. No shifting boards were supplied to the vessel at the time of building, or at any other time.

She carried two lifeboats, fitted with the ordinary davits, and which were lowered by hand.

Mr. George Clark, marine superintendent of the Overton Steam Ship Co. since June, 1918, said he last saw the Sutton in September last year at Birkenhead, when she was in a good and seaworthy condition. He did not receive any complaint as to her condition and equipment.

Each lifeboat was certified to carry about the complement of the crew, and the boats and life-saving appliances were in good order.

Joseph Hugh Watts, manager of the ore department of the British Metal Corporation, and Mr. Stanley Perry, of the clerical department of the company, gave evidence as to the quantities of ore loaded into the Sutton.

The inquiry was adjourned until 10 o'clock this morning.

MASTER PRESUMED TO BE DEAD.

In the Probate Court, before Lord Merrivale, the President, leave was granted to presume the death of Captain William Harrison Torretta, of Weeksten-drive, Run-corn, master of the Sutton.

Mr. Geoffrey Tyndale, counsel making the application, stated that the captain, who was accompanied by his wife and daughter, left in his vessel on the night of a terrible storm and blizzard. It was reported that the vessel had been seen off Aberporth showing distress signals, but she was never seen again. The body of the wife and a seaman had been washed up in Cardigan Bay.

Lord Merrivale, in granting leave to presume the death, said there was no doubt about the facts of the case.

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