

LOSS OF THE SUTTON.

SECOND SECTION OF INQUIRY.

WHAT ONLOOKERS OBSERVED.

[FROM OUR OWN REPORTER.]

CARDIGAN, Friday.

TODAY the Board of Trade inquiry was continued in the Guildhall at Cardigan 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. Cloughton 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 assessors, and Mr. F. H. Alexander, M.S.C., M.Inst.N., 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. Carpmal, 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 William Harrison Terretta, instructed by the Mercantile Marine Service Association, of Liverpool. Captain H. G. Innes represented the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

On the Court resuming this morning, Mr. Bucknill put in the weather records obtained from Trinity House of the entries made in the journal of Bardsey Lighthouse and of Strumble Head Lighthouse, Bardsey being about 32 miles north-west by north of Aberystwyth and Strumble Head, which was also about 40 miles west by south of Aberystwyth. The force of the wind was rather higher at material times; it gave up to force 8 at 9 p.m. on the 27th, and remained so right away up to noon on the 28th, and the direction of the wind was the same as at Bardsey Island at 9 p.m. on the 27th until after 3 a.m. on the 28th, which was north-north-east. If the Sutton set a course from Aberystwyth to Strumble Head he reckoned her course would be something like west by south, so that it would put the wind a little bit abait of the starboard beam of the ship. The tide would appear to be setting slightly inshore.

At this juncture of the inquiry Mr. Bucknill put in an affidavit made by Peter Allen, master of the steamer Wheatley, which set out that on November 27, while in command of the steamer Teign, he was proceeding towards the Bishop's with a loaded steamer. A strong gale was blowing at the time and a tremendous sea was running. "We were abreast of the Bishop's at 10 p.m., and had all we could do to keep the vessel straight before the sea. We were compelled to use oil and pay very careful attention to the steamer for fear of broaching to. I fancy I saw a light in Cardigan Bay once only, but could not take this as a distress signal. In any case we should have been unable to have brought the vessel round beam on to the sea."

INTO THE NIGHT.

Thomas Rees Jones, a farmer, of Aberporth, detailed how on the night of November 27 he left his farm between 7.30 and 8 o'clock. It was a moonlight night with showers and a heavy wind, when he noticed a light out at sea shortly after leaving his farm. It seemed to be moving down towards Cardigan, but he did not take much notice of it. He returned home at about 9 o'clock, when he again saw the light, but it seemed a little brighter. The light was still in the same position at 10.15 when he turned in for the night. He did not think it was a signal of distress. On Sunday, November 29, a man came and told him that there was a body of a man on Traethgyvrdon beach, between Penberth and Penpeles. He also saw two hatches and a ladder on which the body was resting. He would not have known where to go for help if he had thought the light was a distress signal.

In reply to Mr. Holmes, witness said he was not accustomed to reading ship's lights and signals of distress. The light was about two

miles from the land, and at 10.15 it was brighter still. He very often went to the Post Office, but he had never seen an official notice telling people what to do in case of shipwreck—to communicate with the nearest Coastguard Station and Post Office. He knew there was a lifeboat at Newquay, but it would take him about two hours to get to Newquay by car or bicycle, and there was no telephone at night from Aberporth. The nearest lifeboat was at Cardigan.

Mr. Bucknill then intimated that there were five parties to the inquiry, viz., Capt. R. G. Hurst, Inspector of Coastguards at Mumbles; Lieut. T. Marsh, District Officer of Coastguards, Fishguard; Mr. W. H. Huxtable, Station Officer of Coastguards at Newquay; Mr. W. Pearson, Coastguardsman at Newquay; and Mr. F. Brady, Coastguardsman at Penrhyn.

John Lewis, owner of a farm four miles from Cardigan, on the coast, said he was going back to his farm on the night of November 27 when at about 10.15 he saw a light out at sea, the appearance of which he had never seen before. He did not know anything about signals of distress. Since the wreck he had seen an official notice at the blacksmith's shop at The Mount.

Thomas Llewellyn Jenkins, 15 years of age, and son of a farmer of Aberporth, said on the night of Friday, November 27, he went out between 10 and 10.30. He saw an unusual light out to sea in that it was large and red in colour, and was going up and down. When he saw the light he called his father, who looked at the light. He watched the light for 15 or 20 minutes, when it disappeared. While watching, the light changed its colour to white. He never saw a second light.

LIKE SIGNAL OF DISTRESS.

David James Jenkins, father of the last witness, said he had seen a light like it before, and he thought it was something like a signal of distress. He did not go to the Police Station or Post Office at Cardigan on the following day to tell them what he had seen. If he had thought it was a vessel in distress he would have gone to Clynnyrnyns Farm to phone to the Gwbert rocket apparatus station. On the following Sunday he walked along the cliff and found some hatches between 35 and 40, all marked with Roman numerals. He had two of the hatches at his farm, and he thought they were stained black on one side, but there was no sign of fire. After finding hatches, lifebelts, broken ladders, and pieces of rope, came across the body of a man lying on the sand below high water mark. The body was fully dressed, a rope was round the left shoulder, and under the right arm, a dungaree jacket was lying close by, and a lifebuoy was attached to a ladder, which was lying about 30 yards from the body. The body had a wound on the forehead.

Evan Lewis Davies, a chauffeur, of Aberporth, said on the night of November 27th he saw an unusual light at sea at about 11 o'clock. He thought possibly it was a distress signal. He ran down to the house of his brother, and they kept a watch to see if they could see the light again. They both had glasses, but they did not see it again. He called his father (an ex-shipmaster) up at about two o'clock in the morning and they put a lamp in the window to attract any vessel to the shore. The moon was quite bright when he saw the lights, and he certainly saw Newquay Head and he looked towards Newquay to see if the lifeboat was approaching the lights, which certainly should have been seen at Newquay. It was not possible then to telephone at night from Aberporth, and if he had seen the light a second time he would have taken his car to St. Dogmaels to inform the lifeboat coxswain.

Mrs. Hannah Jenkins, of Aberporth, said she saw a light out at sea after being called out of her house by the previous witness. It was quite clear in the moonlight for a distance of four miles.

Thomas Hywell Davies, an officer in the Mercantile Marine, living at Aberporth, deposed that he was called out of bed by his brother at about 11.10 on the night in question. He took his glasses and went on to the cliffs. There was a heavy sea running, with a high N.N.E. wind with squalls. He kept watch until three o'clock in the morning, but did not see any lights. The next morning he went along the coast to look for wreckage but he did not find any, nor did he have anything to do with finding any of the bodies. He did not take the lights which had been seen by his brother to be distress signals.

DROWNING OR EXHAUSTION?

Dr. Handley Brooke Howell, practising in Cardigan, said he received information that a body had been washed up near Aberporth. He went with Dr. Clare and a police constable,

and found the body was lying at the foot of the cliffs, strapped to a ladder, and covered with a tarpaulin. The body was subsequently identified as that of Able Seaman Booth, who had sailed in the Sutton. It was a well-developed man, and he thought the man had been dead nine or ten hours. He concluded that the man had died from exhaustion on the shore, and not from drowning. When he saw the body there was blood on the face and in the hair. The next day he saw the body of Mrs. Terretta at Tyhen Farm, and there was evidence of death from drowning. There were a few abrasions on the body, and the only covering was a macintosh fastened round the neck, with the arms loose. The body had two stockings on one leg, a woollen and a silk stocking. On the body of the man there was a lot of fresh red paint, still wet, which looked as if he had been using paint. He could not say whether it was to burn the flares. There was tar on his hand.

In reply to the Commissioner, Dr. Howell said he had wondered whether Mrs. Terretta had reached the shore, seeing she had taken the trouble to put on two stockings. She must have had a lot of clothes on, and unless she had actually reached the shore she must have been drowned somewhere near the shore. If Mrs. Terretta had not reached the shore, or close in, he wondered how did the body come up so soon after the ship went down.

Evan Howell Bowen, a farmer near Penrhyn, detailed seeing the body of a woman on the beach on the morning of November 30. A macintosh was entangled round the head. On the following day he found a hatch, which had been burnt down.

David Phillips, a farmer of Aberporth, found a boat marked Sutton on the beach. It would accommodate about 10 to 15 people. The bottom of the boat was smashed clean off, and it was lying on the rocks, and was afterwards washed away.

Benjamin Thomas, landlord at the hotel at Llangranog, deposed to finding on the beach on the morning of November 30th two oars, one hatch, and a lifebuoy with Sutton on it.

David Davies, retired master mariner, said it was impossible to communicate with the coastguards or lifeboats from Aberporth, because there was no telephone or anything else. They were cut off from everywhere, and he had never seen a coastguard for about six months before the Sutton went down.

"QUEER SYSTEM OF WATCHING."

He considered they had a very queer system of coast watching. In his time there were coastguards at Aberporth, Newquay, St. Dogmaels, and Llangranog, and at the present time the watch houses were put in inaccessible places. Since the Board of Trade had taken over the coast watching from the Admiralty they had been studying economy.

Mr. Bucknill.—I want you to tell the court what in your opinion—and no doubt it is a valuable opinion—is defective about the present system, and how it could be remedied. There is no harm in trying to be economical so long as you produce a system that is efficient.—Well, it is putting the look-out houses too far away from public places. They are on the top of mountains, inaccessible places. If they were nearer to the public the public could help the authorities. The lower the watch houses were the better.

Witness, continuing, said before the Board of Trade erected the watch houses the coastguards at St. Dogmaels patrolled both sides of the river. It would have been much better to have left the station at Aberporth at an elevation of 70 to 80 feet above the sea, and at Llangranog it was very much higher up. There had been a coastguard station at Aberporth for nearly 100 years before the Board of Trade took it away, and the telephone should never have been taken away from Aberporth.

Mr. Bucknill.—Another point we must consider is the taking away of the telephone from Aberporth and the life-saving station, which is undoubtedly an important matter.

Mr. Holmes (to Captain Davies).—What is your opinion as to the desirability of having men in the watch houses who are mariners by occupation. I understand they are in some cases occupied by farmers?—It is a wonder with so many mercantile marine men about.

Mr. Holmes.—They are more fitted for the job?—Yes.

In reply to the Commissioner, witness said he thought the change had been a great mistake. He was in favour of putting the look-out posts at points near the population, for they could help the watcher in case of need. Also that they should not be placed at such a height, and that the watchers should be men who had had experience of the sea.

The court adjourned until to-morrow morning.