

## LOSS OF THE JOHN HARRISON.

### BOARD OF TRADE INQUIRY.

#### SEVERITY OF THE GALE.

[FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.]

MIDDLESBROUGH, Tuesday.

THE Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the steamer John Harrison opened at Middlesbrough to-day.

Mr. Griffith Jones, the stipendiary magistrate, presided, and had as assessors Captain P. W. Tait, Leith, and Captain Owen Jones, Armlwch Port, North Wales (Admiralty assessors), and Mr. F. H. Alexander, of Newcastle. Mr. J. Burton appeared for the Board of Trade, while Mr. Corbyn, of Middleton and Co., represented the Furness Shipbuilding Co., Mr. Muir, of Newcastle, the Harrison Shipping Co., Ltd., London, and Captain E. V. Hugo the Imperial Merchant Service Guild.

At the outset Mr. Burton mentioned that the John Harrison was similar in many respects to the steamer Hartley, the loss of which formed the subject of an inquiry a few months ago. The John Harrison loaded up with 228 tons of coal at Howden Dock, Tyne, on December 25th, but being short of two firemen did not leave until shortly after midnight on the 26th. She sailed with seventeen hands. From the time the pilot left her off the Pier she was never seen or heard of again.

On January 10th there was washed ashore at Amriem, North Holland, an undamaged lifeboat and lifebuoy bearing the name "John Harrison." This was well north of Heligoland and pretty much in the same latitude as Whitby.

Dealing with technical details, Mr. Burton said the vessel was a self-trimmer and the cargo was, in fact, not trimmed on this occasion. There was evidence that she was not overloaded.

A donkeyman and fireman who did not sail on the last voyage would be called to say that when they left on December 23rd and on the 26th there was an accumulation of ashes in the stokehold which awaited removal when the ship got to sea. If something prevented their disposal it was quite possible that their presence would impede stoking and prevent a full head of steam being kept on.

#### SEVERITY OF GALE.

Depositions had also been taken from the masters of eight other vessels which left North-east ports on the same day, but some hours later than the John Harrison. All met with an exceptionally heavy gale from the south-west and kept close in to the shore. It was so bad that two ships took shelter in the Humber. The John Harrison would meet this gale in the North Sea on the way to Amsterdam.

The master of the Vale of Pickering, a ship built by the same firm on similar lines to the John Harrison, would say that on January 2nd, while loaded and outward bound off Beachy Head he met a south-westerly gale, and though the ship was hove to she took two heavy seas over her bows. The after end of No. 1 hatchway was smashed in and the cabin bulkhead set back, with the result that the vessel took in a large amount of water; her decks were awash, but she managed to make the lee of Dungeness, and later proceeded to Dover for temporary repairs.

The court would be asked to say whether the hatchways were properly covered, secured and protected, and whether the cargo was secure from shifting.

#### THE SELF-TRIMMING PRINCIPLE.

Mr. W. T. Butterwick, a naval architect of the Furness Shipbuilding Co., gave details of the ship's construction. The self-trimming principle was making the hatches as large as possible so that the coal could be teemed into them without much trimming. The hatches were covered with three-inch boards and the tarpaulins of the best material. The fore hatch was strengthened with locking bars. Five vessels of a similar type, differing only in detail, had been built by his firm.

Examined by Mr. Muir, witness said the securing was at least as strong as those suggested by the Court of Inquiry into the loss of the Hartley. The ship was double bottomed, but in three places the wells were sunk in the upper skin.

He agreed that should the ship strike a sunken wreck at one of these places a great deal of water would enter.

Have you ever heard of a ship's hatchcovers blowing off through ship panting? asked Capt. Tait, who on receiving a negative answer, remarked, "It happens through building elastic ships. It never troubled us when ships were built of iron and steel in the old-fashioned way."

Mr. Harold Harrison, the company's owner-manager, stated that in a letter the master had expressed the opinion that the ship had not sufficient power when there was a wind on her beam, she made leeway and lost headway.

The inquiry was adjourned until to-morrow.

#### M.P.'S QUESTION.

##### THE EVIDENCE AS REGARDS SEAWORTHINESS.

In the House of Commons, yesterday, Lieut.-Com. Kenworthy asked the President of the Board of Trade whether at the inquiry into the loss of the steamer John Harrison he would consider the advisability of calling as witnesses persons whose appointments would not be jeopardised as the result of the evidence they might tender; and whether his Department had received information from the Mercantile Marine Service Association that considerable doubt as to the seaworthiness of these vessels existed amongst men who had sailed in them.

Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister.—The limitation which the suggestion would impose on the conduct of wreck inquiries might be embarrassing, and could not, I think, be accepted, but there is no reason so far as the Board of Trade are aware to suppose that the question of jeopardising appointments will in fact arise in connection with the present case. A communication has been received from the association mentioned about the seaworthiness of the particular vessel.

Commander Kenworthy pointed out that the Minister appeared to have misunderstood his question and said he wanted to know whether he would consider the possibility of calling other witnesses other than those whose professional duties might be jeopardised.

Sir P. Cunliffe-Lister said he had rather misunderstood the hon. and gallant member's question. It was a common practice he thought to call all evidence which could be relevant not only to a particular case, but as regarded the general aspects of it. He would certainly see what evidence was available in this case.



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