

THE JOHN HARRISON INQUIRY.

EVIDENCE OF FORMER MEMBERS OF CREW.

"A PROPER DEATH-TRAP."

[FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.]

MIDDLESBROUGH, Thursday.

"UNSEAWORTHY," "A dirty ship against a head sea," and "A proper death trap" were amongst the descriptions used by former members of the crew when the Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the John Harrison was resumed here to-day.

Thomas West, formerly chief Bo'sun, said that in bad weather the ship when loaded took a lot of water over the bows, and the fore well deck was scarcely ever entirely clear of the water. None of the water, however, got into the holds, and the wash ports were large enough to clear the deck of water. She was quite satisfactory, and he was sorry to leave her. Witness kept his watch and navigated the vessel. There were only two seamen in each watch, and as one was at the wheel, the look-out man at the bow was dispensed with.

Captain Tait asked—Do you actually mean to say that the vessel was run four or five voyages without a look-out man?

Witness.—We never had a look-out man while I was on the ship.

"A very serious matter for the shipowners if there had been a collision," commented Captain Tait.

When witness mentioned that he repaired the tarpaulins on one occasion, Captain Tait interjected "So in addition to being bo'sun and able seaman, you were second mate and sailmaker, four persons rolled into one. Its a bit of a comic opera."

Witness said he had served in self-trimmers before, and was quite satisfied with them.

Mr. Muir pointed out that as they had two men in each watch there was no reason why one should not have taken the wheel and the other kept the lookout.

Witness replied that the second man was kept on hand to run errands and do odd jobs.

In reply to Mr. Burton witness said they never had an opportunity of having the lifeboats out either at sea or in port.

Asked for his theory of the loss of the vessel, witness said he disapproved of goose necks to ballast tanks. He thought steering gear was carried away and hatches burst in, probably water got into the goose necks and filled the ballast tanks. It was possible that water might get into the forepeak. The steering chains were too weak.

SHIPPED A LOT OF WATER.

Robert Teasdale, South Shields, said he served as donkeyman from the time she left Blyth on 20th October last year on her first voyage until the time she arrived in the Tyne prior to her last voyage. She shipped a lot of water on deck, and it did not get away quickly.

Asked if the John Harrison was a kindly vessel, he said she was dirty against head sea.

Mr. Burton.—Why did you decide to leave the ship?—One reason was because of the accumulation of ashes in the stokehold, and I said to the chief engineer that he did not consider her to be seaworthy, and therefore did not intend to sail.

Mr. Burton.—Why did you consider she would not be seaworthy?—She started to dip at the head then.

Mr. Burton.—Had she been down at the head on other voyages?—Yes; on every loaded voyage.

Witness further explained that there was a fearful lot of ashes in the stokehold, and he thought the firemen should have been kept on to get them away. He left the ship in the early hours of December 25, his place being taken by another man. He told his successor that the John Harrison was "a cosy little ship and a good job."

"A PROPER DEATH TRAP."

Thomas West Gardiner, fireman, of South Shields, who said he joined the ship for her first voyage, described the occasion when he had seen her down at the head in bad weather. She always had water on the deck, and she also shipped water in the stokehold.

Witness explained that the accumulation of ashes in the stokehold would have taken four hands three hours to remove. On one voyage the chief engineer told him that he wished his time was up, as he thought the ship was a proper death trap.

Captain Richard Thompson, of the Vale of Pickering, a ship of similar construction, said that on one occasion, as the result of heavy seas, the whole front bridge cabin of his vessel was set back an inch.

The hearing was adjourned until to-morrow.

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