

"JOHN HARRISON" LOSS.**Inquiry Opened at
Middlesbrough.****From Our Own Correspondent.**

MIDDLESBROUGH, Tuesday.

Lost with a crew of 17 while on a voyage from the Tyne to Amsterdam, with coal, some time between Dec. 26, 1924, and Jan. 10, 1925, the steamer *John Harrison*, owned by the H. Harrison Shipping Company, of London, formed the subject of a Board of Trade Inquiry which opened here to-day. Mr. M. P. Griffiths Jones presided at the inquiry. The assessors were Captain P. W. Tait, of Leith, and Captain Owen Jones, of Amlwch Port, North Wales, Admiralty Assessors, and Mr. J. Alexander, of Newcastle.

Mr. J. Burton, of Newcastle, conducted the inquiry for the Board of Trade; Mr. Corbyn, of Messrs. Middleton & Co., represented the builders, the Furness Shipbuilding Company; Mr. Muir, of Newcastle, represented the owners; and Captain E. V. Hugo appeared for the Merchant Service Guild. The inquiry is expected to last four or five days.

In opening the case for the Board of Trade, Mr. BURTON said that the case of the *John Harrison* was similar in many respects to that of the s.s. *Hartley*, the loss of which involved an official inquiry at Middlesbrough three months ago. The vessel was of the self-trimming class. She was loaded with 2298 tons of coal at Howden Dock, on the Tyne, on Dec. 25, but did not leave immediately, being short of two firemen. Actually she left the Tyne shortly after midnight or in the early morning of the 26th, and from the time her pilot left her off the piers she was never seen or heard of again.

On Jan. 10 there were washed ashore at Aamriem, North Holland, one lifeboat which was undamaged and one lifebuoy bearing the name "John Harrison." This spot was north of Heligoland, and pretty much in the same latitude as Whitby. There was evidence that the vessel was not overloaded when she left the Tyne, and that the cargo, in fact, was not trimmed. The evidence would also include letters put in by the owners, together with one from Captain Beeching, the master, who made references to her behaviour. There would be called a donkeyman and a fireman who did not sail on the last voyage of the vessel, they having left her on Dec. 23 and Dec. 26 respectively. They would say that at the time they left there was an accumulation of ashes in the stokehold, which awaited removal until the ship got to sea.

If something prevented the disposal of those ashes on the vessel getting clear of the river, it was quite possible that their presence would impede stoking, and so prevent a full head of steam being kept on.

Depositions had been taken, he continued, from the masters of eight other vessels which left the Tyne and other North-East ports on the same day but some hours later than the *John Harrison*. All of them met with an exceptionally heavy gale from the south-west, and kept close in to the shore, and it was so bad that two of the ships took shelter in the Humber.

The *John Harrison* would encounter that gale in the North Sea. One witness to be called was the master of the steamer *Vale of Pickering*, a ship built by the same builders on very similar lines, though not quite a sister ship, to the *John Harrison*. He would say that on Jan. 2 this year, while loaded and outward bound off Beachy Head, his vessel had met a south-westerly gale, and though the master hove to she took two heavy seas over the 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.

Among the questions the Court would be asked to answer were whether the hatchways on the *John Harrison* were properly secured, covered and protected; whether the cargo was secured from shifting, and the vessel was seaworthy.

Mr. W. T. BUTTERWICK, naval architect of the Furness Shipbuilding Company, gave details of the vessel's construction, and stated that she was delivered to the owners after her trial trips in October, 1924. Explaining the self-trimming principle, he said that the principle was to make the hatches as large as possible, so that they could come under the spouts and the coal be teemed into them without the necessity for a great deal of trimming.

The hatches were covered with 3-in. boards and tarpaulins of the best material obtainable. The fore hatch was strengthened with locking bars, this being the direct outcome of an inquiry into the loss of a vessel called the s.s. *Rawlinson*, and he understood that a similar suggestion was made at the *Hartley* inquiry. In all the firm had built five vessels of a similar type, differing only in detail.

Answering Mr. Muir, WITNESS agreed that all the recommendations made by the Court of Inquiry into the *Rawlinson* loss were incorporated in this ship on the authority of the owners. The ship was double-bottomed, but in three places wells were sunk in the upper skin, and at these places in effect the boat was single-skinned.

"Have you ever heard of a ship's hatch covers blowing off through the ship panting?" Captain Tait asked this witness. Witness: "No." "It happens through building elastic ships," continued Captain Tait. "It never troubled us when ships were built of iron and steel in the old-fashioned way."

Mr. HAROLD HARRISON said the vessel cost £31,290.

The inquiry was adjourned.



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