

**"JOHN HARRISON" INQUIRY****A Boatswain's Evidence.****CAUSE OF SINKING.****From Our Own Correspondent.****MIDDLESBROUGH, Thursday.**

When the Board of Trade inquiry into the loss with all hands of the self-trimming collier *John Harrison*, entered upon its third day at Middlesbrough to-day, the first witness was Thomas West, a former chief bosun, who gave evidence regarding the ship's behaviour on previous voyages in bad weather. He said she shipped a lot of water over the boats, and the fore well deck was scarcely ever clear. None of the water got into the holds, the wash ports being sufficiently large to drain off.

Asked by Captain Tait, one of the assessors, if, as a seaman, he considered the *John Harrison* a satisfactory vessel, Witness replied that he did, and that he was, in fact, sorry to leave her. He would be quite prepared to take a job on a ship identical in every respect with the *John Harrison*.

**MANNING REGULATIONS.**

Captain Tait proceeded to question West as to the circumstances in which he signed on. Witness explained that when he joined the ship he understood that he was to be second mate, but when he got to Blyth, after leaving the builders, he was told that the Board of Trade complement was six seamen, and as the owner had authorised the captain to engage only five men, he had to sign as bosun. "That would appear to be a scheme to defeat the manning regulation," suggested Captain Tait. "Evidently it was a scheme to do without a man," replied Witness. West proceeded to state that he kept his watch and navigated the vessel. There were only two seamen in each watch, and the look-out man was dispensed with.

Captain Tait: How many times did that happen?

Witness: Four or five.

Captain Tait: "Do you actually mean to say that this vessel was run for four or five voyages without a look-out man?"

Witness: "We never had any look-out man while I was on the ship." "That would have been a very serious matter for the owners if there had been a collision," Captain Tait commented. When witness narrated that on one occasion he repaired the tarpaulins, Captain Tait interjected, "So, in addition to being bosun and able-seaman, you were second mate and sailmaker. Four persons rolled into one. It's a bit of a comic opera." Witness answered that he had served in self-trimmers before, and he was quite satisfied with them.

Mr. Muir, for the owners, asked witness if he was aware that the ship carried the full complement required by the Board of Trade; also, as there were two men on each watch, if there was any reason why one should have not taken the wheel and the other keep look-out.

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

Captain Tait: "Have you any idea how this vessel came to her end?"

Witness: "Of course I have formed my own opinion. I disapprove of the goose necks to the ballast tanks. Personally, I think the steering gear was carried away and smashed up, and the ship filled her deck up and burst the hatches in. Likely enough water would get down the goose necks and fill the ballast tanks."

Captain Tait: Did you think the steering gear chains were too light? — "Personally, I thought they were," answered Witness. With regard to the hatches, which were of white pine, 3 in. thick double planks, Witness thought that they were strong enough to sustain the weight of a heavy sea, although it was hard to say what the power of the sea could not do. The ship had no after-steering gear. He agreed that there was a possibility of the water getting into the forecabin and filling the forepeak. On her trials the vessel seemed quite satisfactory.

**TRIM OF THE SHIP.**

ROBERT TEASDALE, who joined the ship as donkeyman at Blyth on Oct. 20, said that a great deal of water accumulated in No. 3 hold on the ship's voyage to Bayonne, but after that he saw little trace other than on the first day of a voyage, and he attributed that to water in the coal cargo. Judging by the eye, he had formed the opinion that every time the ship went to sea she was down by the head. Continuing his evidence, Teasdale described the *John Harrison* as a dirty vessel against a head sea. He told the chief engineer that he would have to take his notice, as he did not intend to sail in her again.

Mr. Burton: Why did you decide to leave the ship?

Witness: One reason was because of the accumulation of ashes in the stokehold. I said to the chief engineer that I did not consider her to be seaworthy, and that I did not, therefore, intend to sail in her.

Why did you not consider her seaworthy?

Witness: Because she had started to dip at the head then.

Mr. Burton: Had she been down at the head on other voyages? — Witness: Yes, on every loaded voyage. Witness left the ship in the early hours of Dec. 25, his place being taken by another man. He admitted telling his successor that the *John Harrison* was a cosy little ship, and a good job.

THOMAS GARDINER, fireman, of South Shields, said he joined the *John Harrison* on her first voyage, and described the occasions 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.

Mr. Burton intimated that he proposed to call evidence respecting the steamer *Vale of Pickering*, which is a sister ship to the *John Harrison*, and similar save for a few minor details. On Jan. 2 the *Vale of Pickering* had encountered a gale 65 miles south-west of Beachy Head, and had hove to. Two successive seas swept over her, smashing part of No. 1 hatch and doing other damage.

The inquiry was adjourned until to-day, when it is understood that the proceedings will be in Chambers.



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W687-0139