

## "JOHN HARRISON" INQUIRY

### Experience of Sister Ship.

#### ASSESSOR AND SAFETY MARGIN.

From Our Own Correspondent.

MIDDLESBROUGH, Friday.

Captain Thomas Richard Thompson, master of the steamer *Vale of Pickering*, a sister ship to the *John Harrison*, was the first witness called when the Board of Trade inquiry into the loss of the latter vessel was resumed to-day. Captain Thompson was questioned by Mr. Burton, who conducted the inquiry for the Board of Trade, regarding the experiences and behaviour of the *Vale of Pickering*. He said that in the two days' gale between Dec. 31 and Jan. 2 the ship was in the English Channel, about 65 miles west-south-west of Beachy Head. On that occasion the *Vale of Pickering* was hove to after shipping heavy water. Overall damage was sustained to Nos. 1 and 2 hatches, the bulkhead was set back, the tarpaulins torn and five lifebelts lost, two cross tarpaulins were washed overboard, the hand-rail and bridge ladder were bent, and the accommodation flooded. The vessel ran for shelter to Dungeness east-north-east and eventually anchored.

#### HEAVY SEAS.

Two of the seas which successively struck the *Vale of Pickering* were the heaviest witness had ever seen in his 26 years' experience. The damage done did not let much water go down into the hold save where the tarpaulins had been ripped. Water got into No. 1, however, and put the vessel down by the head. Her foredeck was awash by the time she reached Dungeness. Her behaviour, considering the heavy seas, was good. Witness added that his ship was in the same gale as that during which the self-trimmer *Hartley* foundered, and was only about forty miles distant from her on that occasion. The *Vale of Pickering* never hove to. The gale which he had been describing was much worse than that which prevailed on his vessel's first voyage. The *Hartley* was lost, and she was undamaged.

Answering Mr. Muir, for the owners, Witness said that if the *John Harrison* was not seen between the time she was supposed to have been seen at Flamborough and the time she arrived near Newarp it was probable that she had taken another course.

#### MINE-STRIKING THEORY.

As regards the actual cause of the loss of the ship, Witness later said it was possible that she had gone off her course and on to the sandbanks. It was not impossible that she had struck a mine, as a certain number of mines were often found about after a heavy gale. There were also sunken battleships in that vicinity and other dangerous objects.

THOMAS WEST, a former boatswain, was recalled, and said that in his opinion the master of the *Hartley* would take the Newarp and not the Flamborough crossing.

Captain TAIT, questioning the witness Thompson regarding the manning of the *John Harrison*, said: "I do not want to put it to you that the ship was undermanned, but how do you think she got on with five men for two watches on one voyage?"—WITNESS: I do not know.

I think you will agree with me, Captain, that it is impossible to have two effective watches on a ship with only five seamen?—Yes, sir.

Now, with regard to the tarpaulins, was there no life line for a man who went and repaired them? (

WITNESS was understood to answer that there would be.

Later Captain TAIT asked: Is there not always a danger that where consideration of the inexorable requirements of trade enter a little bit of safety is sacrificed?—

WITNESS: It is the same on all the lines now, sir. Captain TAIT: No, I know of lines who would not have ships like that. Then again, these flat-bottomed vessels seem to be the new fashion.

WITNESS: Yes. There are very few now on a keel.

What freeboard had you on deck?—Fourteen inches, sir.

I see. Fourteen inches between you and Davy Jones' locker.

Captain TAIT suggested that flat plaited wire would be preferable to channel bars for the hatches, and witness agreed.

#### NAVAL ARCHITECT'S EVIDENCE.

Mr. W. T. Butterwick, naval architect to the builders, the Furness Shipbuilding Company, was then recalled, and Mr. BURTON asked: In view of the loss of this vessel, have your company considered the question of amending the type?—WITNESS: No, sir.

Not in any particular way?—So far as I know we are not making any departure. We have five or six other ships of this kind running at sea without danger, but I understand that a vessel can be classed 100 A1 at Lloyd's with freeboard having a completely flush deck with quarter deck brought right up to the forecastle, and the well filled in flush with the deck. These suggestions would be classified by the societies, but up to the present nothing has been done. WITNESS added that accommodation could be made for wireless transmission on vessels of the *John Harrison* type.

In reply to a question by Captain Tait, Mr. BUTTERWICK said it might be an advantage to have a bow line on such vessels.

Captain TAIT said when he was a marine superintendent he found that such a line checked stupid people from overloading what was known as a dangerous ship.

Mr. BURTON put in evidence and depositions from several ship captains as to the violence of the gale at about the period that the *John Harrison* is believed to have been lost. One captain described the gale as a fierce one, and added that the North Sea was not to be taken lightly on such occasions.

Captain WILLIAM JONES said he had been in charge of the s.s. *Timberham* since May last. She was a ship similar to the *John Harrison*, and was a fine vessel. He was quite prepared to go back to her.

Mr. MUIR then addressed the Court for the owners, and the inquiry was closed.

Judgment will be given on Thursday at 3 p.m.



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