

THE "HARTLEY" LOSS.

Court of Inquiry Findings.

From Our Own Correspondent.

MIDDLESBROUGH, Wednesday.

The findings of the Court of Inquiry into the loss of the steamer *Hartley*, which foundered in the English Channel on Nov. 27 last, were promulgated to-day. The Court found that the vessel was lost through water being shipped into No. 3 hold, but that in the circumstances the loss could not have been prevented. Mr. Griffiths Jones, Stipendiary Magistrate, presided, and the assessors were Captain D. F. Macdonald, O.B.E., Mr. J. Carmichael, and Rear-Admiral Booty, C.B., M.V.O.

Mr. C. E. Fenwick represented Messrs. Richley, Halvorsen & Sample, Hull, owners of the vessel; while Captain E. V. Hugo, D.S.C., Middlesbrough, agent to the Merchant Service Guild, watched the inquiry on behalf of the relatives of Captain W. Pearson, who was master of the vessel.

The Court, in the course of their finding, stated that the cost of the vessel to her owners was £41,400. Her value when she last left Barry was £42,000 to £43,000, and the insurances effected were as follows: Hull and machinery, £36,000; freight and outfit, £9,000; total, £45,000—all at Lloyd's through London brokers.

ARRANGEMENTS OF HATCHWAYS.

The Court found further that the construction and arrangement of the hatchways in themselves were good, but the means provided for covering and protecting them and for securing the hatch covers, viz., two tarpaulins battened down at the sides and ends by cleats and wedges with rope lashings zigzag across the top of the tarpaulins and through ring bolts on the coamings were not sufficient to ensure safety at sea with heavy water washing over hatchways of such large area. Subject to this the vessel was in good and seaworthy condition as regards the hull and equipment when she left Barry on Nov. 25, and she was properly provided with boats and life-saving appliances. Regarding the loading and stowage of the cargo, it was held that, the vessel being a self-trimmer, the coal, chiefly washed duff, was loaded as was customary in that type of vessel, that no trimming was done under deck, nor were any means taken to secure the cargo from shifting either athwart ship or fore and aft. From the angle of repose it had assumed when poured in the vessel there was an estimated empty space of 326 tons measurement in the hold when loaded at 43 cubic feet to the ton. It was found that the cause of the tarpaulin over No. 3 hatchway being damaged was the strong wind and heavy sea sweeping over the vessel during the gale.

All possible measures were taken by the master and crew. The means provided for protecting and securing hatchways 3 and 4, namely wooden hatch-cover tarpaulins and lashings, were the usual ones employed. They were not effective in preventing water going below, but as existing were used to the best advantage. The cause of water getting into No. 3 hold was, first, the tearing or splitting of the tarpaulin on the starboard forward end of the hatchway followed by the dislodgement of the hatchcovers—the water coming in first on the starboard side, probably followed by part of the cargo slipping to that side, caused the list to starboard. In the absence of evidence from the master as to the control of manœuvring of the ship at the time, the Court was unable to determine if everything possible was done to secure adequately No. 3 hatchway, but from the evidence of the survivors efforts were made personally by the master and crew to repair the damage done by the sea to hatchway No. 3 and to prevent water getting into the holds.

FATE OF THE CREW.

It was further found that the vessel was abandoned by her crew at or about 9.40 on Nov. 27, 1924, off Anvil Point, in approximately latitude 50° 26' North, longitude 1° 50' West. She was sinking at the time, with a list to starboard, and Nos. 3 and 4 holds were full of water.

Regarding the circumstances in which 18 members of the crew lost their lives it was found that Able Seaman Knight lost his life through falling overboard from the *Hartley* when one of the lifeboat davit guys was out or slipped. No blame could be attributed to anyone. The other 17 members of the crew lost their lives by the capsizing of the *Hartley's* lifeboat. Again no blame could be attributed to anyone.

The Court finally found that in the actual circumstances the loss apparently could not have been prevented, but that theories might be suggested. For example, as the attempt to heave to seemed to have been unsuccessful the master might have put his helm up and at full speed have tried to run before the wind and sea, thus probably relieving number three hatch of the water which was breaking over it. The loss of the *Hartley* could have been prevented, in the opinion of the Court, by (1) The substitution of water-tight bulkheads for non-water-tight wooden bulkheads dividing No. 1 from No. 2 hold, and No. 3 from No. 4 hold. By this means water would have been confined to the hold immediately under a possibly defective hatchway. (2) A more efficient method of securing the hatchways against wind and sea to prevent water getting below, such as locking or securing bars fitted across each tier of the wooden hatch covers. That the wedge-shaped portion of the hold formed by the under side of the deck, the ship's side, and the natural position assumed by the coal at the time when poured into the hold in self-trimmers and which always remains empty, should be shut off by steel plates from the rest of the hold to effectually prevent cargo shifting in an athwart ship direction when labouring in a sea way, causing the ship to list and thus expose her hatchways to the sea more than she would do when upright.

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