

By Captain Castle: There was no possibility of any of the crew getting down into the fore peak, taking a plank out of the bulkhead, and so getting into the cargo for beer or spirits, although it was true the officers had contemplated taking out a plank or two to get through to the coals. It was a very strong bulkhead and lined with tin, and all the coal and provisions were aft, and the men would have had a long way to go for spirits. There was nothing to prevent them getting down into the fore peak except the locks, and they could be broken. Ever since he had joined the ship he had never seen the boats, other than the two life-boats, off the skids, excepting the captain's gig. It would have taken about twenty minutes to get the long-boat out under favourable circumstances.

By Mr. Turner: The shaft between the single men and the boatswain's locker was 4ft. by 3ft. The bulkhead in the 'tween decks was two inches and a half thick. The boatswain's locker was secured to the beams. There were combings, hatches, and locks to each hatch. The hatches were removed several times during the voyage, but the passengers could not have access to the hold without breaking the locks.

Thomas Lewis, examined by Mr. Cohen, said what McDonald said about the fire was, so far as he knew, all true, but he knew nothing about the cargo. He washed the starboard quarter boat every morning. He had a few boxes of lucifer matches to light his pipe. Every man had them, but none of the matches were taken down to the store.

Edward Cotter, called by Mr. Cohen, said he was an ordinary seaman on board the "Cospatrick," and that what McDonald had stated about the fire was correct. He saw smoke coming through the cracks in the forecandle where he was asleep, before he rushed on deck. It was coming up the air shaft, and came between the cracks of the boards which separated the forecandle from the air shaft. He smelt tar and ropes burning. He had been ordered some three or four weeks before the fire to go into the locker and clear it up. The boatswain was in the habit of getting some one of the crew to go there and put it in order, and he might leave him there some time without looking after him. The locker was only cleared out twice after leaving London; but the boatswain would often in the course of the day send men down for ropes or anything that was wanted. When the witness cleared up the locker, he found oils, paint, oakum, rope, brooms, and brushes. The oils were in the eye of her, right forward. It was pretty dark in the locker, and when a man went down, he would take one of those round globe lamps, always covered—one which they used for a riding light in the Downs. Oakum and ropes were spread about when he went down. A tin of oil was sometimes brought on deck; otherwise the oil was kept in the eye of her. The oakum was next to the oils when witness cleared up the locker.

By Mr. Wood Hill: He thought the fire broke out "in the fore peak—that is, in the boatswain's locker." The single-men passengers first found the fire out, and they ran into the forecandle crying "Fire," and said it was in the boatswain's locker. There was a deck between the boatswain's locker and the fore peak, but there was an opening in that deck, and the opening led down into the fore peak, where the coals were stowed. When the coals had been got up the flap was put down. There was a close hatch. The bar was put over the close hatch, and it was locked with a padlock. The thickness of the flap was about 3 inches. Coals were brought up twice a day. A lad used to go down without a light, the light from the deck shining down.

McDonald, recalled by counsel for the Board of Trade, could not undertake to say there was any oil immediately abaft the bulkhead, nor anything about fifty drums of oil. There was coal under the water tanks, but only just a little to make a level flooring. The oil must have been higher up than the coals, not touching the coal at all.

The inquiry was then adjourned till half-past eleven next morning.

SECOND DAY.

The official inquiry into the burning of the "Cospatrick" was continued yesterday at the Greenwich Police Court, before Mr. Patteson and the Assessors of the Board of Trade, Captain Castle, Captain Pryce, and Mr. Turner, Principal Shipwright Surveyor to the Board. Mr. Arthur Cohen, Q.C., and Mr. Hargrave Hamel appeared for the Board of Trade; Mr. G. Wood Hill for the owners of the "Cospatrick." The inquiry was watched on the part of the Colonial Government by Mr. Dennistoun Wood, with whom was Mr. Watkin Williams, Q.C.

The nature of the cargo was proved by the documents put in on Wednesday, and the inquiry yesterday was principally directed to the mode of stowage. As to this, the evidence of the managing stevedore who stowed the vessel did not in some points agree with the accounts given yesterday and previously by the second-mate, nor did either's statement tally with the rough plan made from memory by the ship's husband. In the end, however, Mr. Patteson declared that the Court was satisfied that the cargo was properly stowed, although he guarded against any expression of opinion as to the propriety of carrying such goods as it included. The managing stevedore had previously admitted to counsel for the Board of Trade that the eventuality of a fire on board was not in this case, nor usually, one of the considerations present to the stevedore's mind in stowing the vessel. It should be mentioned here, that the word "bulkhead" will be found below to be used by the witnesses in two senses: first, as applied to the regular partition of timber and metal in the fore part of the ship; secondly, as an arrangement of cargo in the hold, which serves some of the purposes of such a partition.

Mr. Stephen Thompson, of George Thompson, jun., and Co., the owners of the Aberdeen Clipper Line, was examined by Mr. Wood Hill. His firm, he said, was largely engaged in the China, Australia, and New Zealand trade, taking their own risks and not insuring. He had seen the manifest of the "Cospatrick," containing a list of oil, spirits, turpentine, pitch, and tar, and he saw no objection to those articles. His firm owned the ship "Samuel Plimsoll," at the launch of which Mr. Plimsoll assisted. She had sailed to Australia with emigrants on board, and loaded, as the "Cospatrick" was, with spirits, oil, and light measurement goods—a general cargo.

In examination by Mr. Cohen, he said the "Samuel Plimsoll" was an iron vessel with collision bulkheads. No precaution was taken in his vessels about the boatswain's locker, but as a rule it was on deck. A fire broke out in one of them, the "Miltiades," under the cooking range, through the excessive