ST. IVES WRECK.

STORY TOLD AT INQUEST

COXSWAIN EXPLAINS LIFEBOAT DISASTER

THE QUESTION OF GODREVY LIGHT.

A protest against what was described as the inadequacy of the present light at Godrevy Lighthouse was made by a member of the jury at the inquest at St. Ives on Wednesday morning, on three of the members of the crew of the Alba, wrecked at St. Ives on Monday night.

Capt. R. Borlase Smart, the member who made the protest, said that he hoped that, one day, there would be an inquiry into the present state of the light. It had a very important bearing on the safety of shipping, and should be a matter for questions, either at St. Ives or elsewhere.

During the evidence, a member of the crew of the Alba said that he saw the light only once, between squalls.

The enquiry concerned the deaths of Ernest Stepanovic (50), married, of Prasak, Jugo Slavia, chief engineer; Gyula Szabo (28), single, of Tapolca, Jugo Slavia, second engineer; and George Kovacs (28), married, of Budapest, steward.

Mr. Barrie B. Bennetts, Penzance, was the coroner, and Col. J. M. Findlay was foreman of the jury. P.S. Osborne was the coroner's officer.

ENGINEER'S EVIDENCE.

Andrew Aracas, of Budapesth, Chief Officer of the Alba, identified the bodies. He said he had been chief officer since October; and, on this occasion they were going from Barry Dock to Italy. On Monday they passed St. Ives Bay in bad weather, but turned back for shelter. They dropped anchor in what they thought was St. Ives Bay, in bad visibility. There was heavy rain, and a gale. Just as they dropped anchor, they felt the ship strike rocks again and again. They wirelessed for help, and then saw the lifeboat send up rockets. The lifeboat arrived and took off twenty-three of the crew. The lifeboat then drew away the only way out round the bow of the Alba. Because of the rocks, it was impossible to go round the stern of the steamer. As the coxswain took the lifeboat towards the stern of the ship, and before he could turn towards the sea, a huge wave caught her and upset the lifeboat, throwing them all into the sea. The steward, second officer, and another man swam towards the shore, but witness returned to the lifeboat. Witness was satisfied, "quite sure," that everything possible was done to rescue the crew of the Alba.

SATISFIED WITH LIFEBOAT.

Coroner: Did you see handling of the lifeboat?—Witness: Quite satisfied.

And when you landed, everything possible was done for you?—Yes, we were treated very well.

Foreman: Did the lifeboat go alongside in reverse?—I could not say.

Coroner: When it left, was it in reverse, or did it go forward?—She went forward.

Coroner: I think, as a matter of fact, the lifeboat reversed. Could you see Godrevy Light?—Just once, on coming to turn when we got back to St. Ives. I was on watch from six to eight, and the captain was with me on the bridge when the ship grounded. Visibility was very bad, and we could see only an occasional light from Porthmeor beach. We were quite near the shore on the only occasion we saw Godrevy light.

Foreman: How did you think you were in the bay in relation to the light?—The second officer took the bearing on the light.

Are you sure it was Godrevy you saw?—Yes.

Capt. Borlase Smart (a member of the jury): Squalls must have masked the light if they saw it only once.

Mr. Nicholls (another jurryman): If we had had the old light as Godrevy, as it was before, there would have been no difficulty in seeing it.

Coroner: It appears to have been observed by bad visibility at the time.

Dr. Matthew said the cause of death in each case was drowning. Stepanovic suffered also from superficial bruising; Kovacs had inuries to the left side of the chest, with several broken ribs, and bleeding from the mouth. He was suffering from internal bleeding as a result of the injuries. Szabo was extensively bruised.

Witness added that splendid work was done by the ambulance men.

COXSWAIN'S STORY.

Thomas Cocking, of Virgin-street, superintendent coxswain of the lifeboat, said the call was received from a local fisherman at 7.15 p.m. on Monday, witness at home, heard the continuous hooting from the steamer, and remarked to his son that it sounded as if there was trouble. A fisherman ran into his house, saying that there was a steamer ashore on the Island. "I ran as quickly as I could to the lifeboat house," said witness. "We launched the boat almost at once. In view of the bad weather, we had an extra man on board, making nine in all.

"We got to the ship all right, and let the anchor go ahead of the steamer. We then got alongside the Alba. I let the anchor out with the intention of hauling the lifeboat round after the rescue, so that we could get out bow first. We got in round the bow of the steamer, and into the lee. Several men were looking over the side, and I shouted to them: 'You'd better hurry up and come in the lifeboat.' After that we did not see anyone for about six or seven minutes, and then they were coming with their trunks and gear to lower down into the lifeboat, but I made them put them all back. I said: 'Get in the lifeboat as quickly as possible. Don't trouble about the gear.' Then they began to come down over a ladder. The tide was about two-and-a-half to ebb when we got there."

Coroner: So it was important that the rescue should be effected as quickly as possible?—The quicker it was done, the better.

Witness continued: "When they were in the lifeboat, we had twenty-three aboard, in addition to our own men. Before we left the ship I spoke to the captain, and told him to make all his men lie down to reduce top-hamper; they then all lay down, and you wouldn't know there was one man in the lifeboat.

"I said to my bowman: 'Haul away on your anchor and bring your bow round.' He replied: 'The anchor isn't holding.' I said: 'Go astern on the engine, slowly.' We did so. The anchor came right aboard the lifeboat as the bowman hauled. We could not get round the steamer bow first, as, without the anchor, we should have been on the rocks, if we had tried it on the engine. The only thing left for us to do was to go astern round the bow of the steamer.

LIFEBOAT OVERTURNS.

"As we did so, a sea, every bit of 40 ft. high, fell right against the life[illegible] and turned her right over. I was thrown 100 yards towards the shore, and could have got on the beach quite easily if I had wanted to. It was my ambition to get back to the lifeboat, she was floating bottom up, and then she rolled towards me. I got alongside. M son, as engineer, was still on board, in the canopy, and he had me aboard in a second. The other men were hanging on to the lifelines, and we were getting them in one by one.

"The boat was then unmanageable. Lots of people think that the engine was out of action, and would not go. That is not so. If a lifeboat turns over, the engine cuts out automatically; otherwise, when she rights herself, the engine will drive the boat away from the crew, who are in the water.

"When we got back in the boat, my son could not start the engine because the starting gear was smashed to pieces, and that put us in the position we were in.

"Com. Coates, of the L.S.A., fired a line right over the bow of the steamer. M men caught hold of it and we were able to bring the boat along gradually to the rocks. Had it not been for this line, the lifeboat might have swung round the stern of the steamer, and every man would have been killed.

"Before we struck, I told every man to stay on the lifeboat, as we should be quite safe there when the boat was thrown on the rocks. I told them that if they got down to the rocks, the lifeboat might fall on top of them and they would be crushed.

"We have one of the best engines ever put into a lifeboat, and have had no trouble with it. I am satisfied with the engine and the boat. It is a terrible pity, and I am very sorry she is lost. At this time, the seas were very bad, with lashing rain and bad visibility.

GODREVY LIGHTHOUSE CRITICISED.

"You could not see the Godrevy light at all. We fishing people used to take a bearing on Godrevy light. It is now no bigger than a fog lighted up. It is not right as it is; it is very bad indeed. The officers on the Alba might have caught a glimpse of it between showers but, in them, it would have been impossible to see it.

Coxswain Cocking added that, in the circumstances, he could not have done more to rescue the crew of the steamer than he did. He said the reason the anchor did not hold was that the sand was churned up by the ground swell. Only six of the lifeboat crew were thrown out, three remaining on board. All the crew of the Alba were got back, except the men who lost their lives. As the lifeboat neared the rocks, one man waded out into the sea and threw a line; this was secured to the boat.

Capt. R. L. Hamer (deputy chief inspector of the R.N.L.I.): Are you quite satisfied with the equipment in the lifeboat?—Satisfied with everything.

When you say the anchor would not hold, you don't mean there was anything wrong with the anchor, but that the anchorage was bad?—The anchor itself was quite all right. It was only the loose sand which made it fail to hold.

You have said that the crew did not start to come down from the ship for five or six minutes.?—That is right.

How long was it before the last man got aboard the lifeboat?—We were there waiting for a long time. The captain came down and said all the crew were off, but one of my men counted them and said there were only twenty-two aboard the lifeboat. I said to the captain that, if this man was any time, I should shift without him. While we were talking I saw the chief engineer come on the bridge, down the ladder, and into the lifeboat. While we were alongside, waves were coming right over the steamer, falling on the lifeboat, and knocking the breath out of us. Nearly all the waves were every bit of 40 ft. high. Other members of the crew will tell you the same.

Com. Coates, who was in court, interposed to remark that he saw the whole scene from the shore, and the lifeboat was waiting alongside the wreck for between at least thirty-five to forty minutes. He (the speaker) had charge of the lifesaving apparatus, and was getting very anxious about the boat being alongside so long. All the time the lifeboat was waiting the tide was ebbing, leaving the lifeboat less room to move; also, the waves increased in size and the wind in force.

John Basset Cocking, of Bethesda-place, assistant motor mechanic of the lifeboat, and son of the coxswain, said the engine worked beautifully, and did everything it should have done. It was impossible to restart the engine after the boat capsized because gear had fallen and damaged the starting handle; fallen gear also prevented them getting the reserve handle out of the stern of the boat.

Evidence was also given by P.S. Osborn, who said he saw the rescue from the shore. He agreed that the lifeboat waited for the crew of the Alba for about thirty-five minutes; during that time, conditions were worsening. The boat capsized at 7.55 p.m. Hundreds of St. Ives folk scrambled across the rocks and did what they could.

The Coroner said he understood very good work was done by the police, and Sergt. Osborn said he could not individualise; police, ambulance men, coastguards, Sea Scouts, the L.S.A., and the fishermen, were all there. Everybody was largely represented, and all the organisations did wonderful work. Nothing was too much for the inhabitants to do, either in the rescue work or in looking after the rescued men.

The Coroner said he was informed on good authority that the conduct of P.C.'s Jones and Appleton was conspicuous; after several attempts had failed, they went out into the water and brought a man ashore.

Capt. Smart said he saw the big sea which struck the lifeboat, and nothing could have lived against it. It would have turned over a schooner.

The foreman asked what arrangements there were between the coastguard and the lifeboat crew. Who was responsible for launching the lifeboat when a call was received, who saw to the lifelines, etc.?

Com. Coates said there was every co-operation between the lifeboat and the L.S.A. people, and always had been. In the case of the Alba, she was observed at Clodgey going past at a distance of about three-quarters of a mile. Efforts were made to find out her name, but it could not be ascertained. She went past and the coastguard at Clodgey asked if she had arrived in the harbour. Looking across the dip between the two headlands, my man saw a red light. He at once telephoned Clodgey saying that there was a boat ashore and, at the same time the station officer fired the maroon. Just before that, the lifeboat maroons had gone off. Had we got that message before the coastguard we should have telephoned the lifeboat, but a fisherman had seen it and gone straight to the coxswain, with the result that the coxswain went to the lifeboat house. This is what was done. We called out our L.S.A., and got it to the scene of action as soon as possible.

Com. Coates said that sometimes they gave anticipatory messages when a ship was in a dangerous position, and then the lifeboat stood by. There was very close co-operation between the lifeboat authorities and the coastguard. The ambulance men also co-operated with them, and were always one of the first on the scene.

The foreman said the matter was impotcant, and he was sure the jury were glad to hear the statement.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death" in each case.

The coroner paid a high tribute to the work of the lifeboat coxswain and crew; their efforts, though only partly successful, were in accordance with the highest traditions of the lifeboat service.

Mr. Bernard J. Ives, representing the owners of the Alba, said the ship was really Swiss, though registered at Panama; he was part owner, and the only Englishman associated with her. He, on behalf of the owners, wished to express the very highest appreciation of all organisations and individuals of St. Ives who had worked for the crew, and in the effort to save them

ST. IVES LIFEBOAT COXSWAIN BROADCASTS.

Mr. T. Cocking, the coxswain of the St. Ives lifeboat on Tuesday broadcast the story of the disaster that occurred at St. Ives on Monday. The broadcast was arranged from the Plymouth studio, and was included in the Regional news at 10 p.m.

The speakers were introduced by Mr. J. H. Best, who briefly outlined the story of the wreck and then called upon Mr. Thomas Cocking to give his personal experience in the tragedy.

Mr. Cocking said: "I had a message at about 7.15 that there was a ship ashore at the back of St. Ives Head. I fired maroons to summon the lifeboat crew. In fifteen minutes we were afloat; there was a heavy sea running, but I've been out in worse.

"The sea was breaking right over the ship; she was dead aground and, as the tide ebbed, mountainous seas broke over the steamer right into the lifeboat.

"We managed to get all the crew, twenty-three of them, into our boat.

"We moved away at our anchor," he said, "but it did not hold owing to the ground seas stirring up the sand. That prevented us hauling the lifeboat round to go ahead. We came astern on the engine and got away clear of the steamer.

"A wave 40 feet high turned the lifeboat right over and threw us all out. When I came to, I was 100 yards from the lifeboat and saw her bottom up.

"In a few seconds she turned herself over towards us, so I swam towards her. 'I shouted to my son Jack, who had not been thrown out, 'Jack, take my hand.' He did so, and in two seconds I was aboard. Other men were swimming towards us, and as they came in we helped them on board.

"We found that the mast in coming down had damaged the starting handle, so that we could not restart the engine.

"The lifeboat was unmanageable and we drifted towards the shore.

"A man waded out to the rocks and threw out a lifeline and we got hold of it.

"Com. Coates, of the L.S.A., had fired a lifeline over the steamer and that was a great help to us."

Mr. W. Peters, second coxswain, supplemented this story.

Following this, Major J. Daniel, chairman of the Harbour Committee of the Town Council, said the need for a National Harbour of Refuge was once again emphasised by the tragedy, which resulted in the loss of the ship and five members of her crew. There was no such harbour between South Wales and Land's End, and eminent engineers thought that St. Ives was the ideal place for a refuge of that kind. Three ships had been lost near St. Ives within the last 15 months, and they might have been saved if they could have gone into such harbour.

Mr. W. J. Jacobs, J.P., said: "I saw the wreck and I agree with Major Daniel on the need for a refuge harbour. I believe also that if Godrevy light was restored to its former power wrecks such as this would be avoided. All St. Ives is proud to-day of Coxswain Cocking, second coxswain Peters, and the crew of the St. Ives lifeboat for their heroic efforts last night. We are glad, too, that we have a good life-saving apparatus and searchlight, with men always willing to work them.

THE GODREVY LIGHT

ST. IVES PROTESTS AGAINST REDUCED POWER.

Ever since Trinity House decided to reduce the power of the light in Godrevy Lighthouse, there has been considerable adverse feeling at St. Ives in regard to this action.

The wreck of the Genoa-owned steamer Alba, with the loss of five lives, the disaster to the lifeboat, and the narrow escape of its crew and that of the steamer, has once again brought the matter to the notice of the public.

Mr. W. J. Jacobs, J.P., a prominent tradesman, gave expression to his views on the matter on Monday, and undoubtedly he voiced also the opinion of a large section of the inhabitants and of almost everyone connected with the fisheries and the maritime trade of the port.

Mr. Jacobs drew attention to the coincidence that since the Elder Brethren had reduced the power of Godrevy Light as an economy measure, there had been three wrecks in the vicinity—the Bessemer City, the Aida Laura, and the Alba. If the light had been full strength he believed the steamers would have had a better chance of finding their positions.

There have been persistent appeals from Cornwall to Trinity House against the decision of the Elder Brethren to abolish the Godrevy Light or to curtail its power. In November, 1932, six Cornishmen, representing 500 St. Ives fishermen, handed in a petition to Trinity House on "the great danger of removing the lighthouse at Godrevy, on the eastern end of St. Ives Bay."

At that stage the Government proposed to remove the lighthouse and to substitute a lighted buoy in its place. The lighthouse, it was stated, cost £1,100 a year to maintain, whereas the lighted buoy would cost only £50.

Capt. William Guppy, St. Ives secretary for the National Lifeboat Institution, pointed out that the authorities dealt a serious blow which would be dealt to lifeboat work at St. Ives by the removal of the light.

The Elder Brethren promised to review the facts.

Coxswain Thomas Cocking, of the St. Ives lifeboat, stated at a meeting of St. Ives Town Council that "from 20 years' experience of fishing in St. Ives Bay, removal of the Godrevy Light would bring disaster to the local coasting trade and to the fishing industry."

The sequel to these representations was that Godrevy Light remained, but its power was curtailed.

FAILURE TO PROVIDE A BREAKWATER

MR. BEECHMAN ON ST. IVES WRECK.

Criticism of the failure to provide St. Ives with a breakwater to ensure safer waters made on Tuesday night by Mr. Alec. Beechman, M.P. for St. Ives, in an interview, following the tragedy there on Monday, when a motor-lifeboat overturned in heavy seas and several lives were lost.

"This terrible disaster in which, in spite of the heroism of the rescuers, lives were lost, reminds us again of the tragic failure to provide a breakwater in St. Ives so as to create an efficient harbourage," Mr. Beechman said.

"For something like 100 years recommendations have been made that a breakwater should be built for this purpose, and much to the distress of local fishermen and to the disservice of national safety, it has never been carried out. As it happens, I am at present engaged in drawing up a memorandum on this subject for Mr. Burgin, Minister of Transport, who has kindly undertaken to consider it in relation to national transport facilities.

"I do not say that the absence of a breakwater was the cause of this disaster, but its absence meant that the wrecked ship had no place in which to lay up," said Mr. Beechman.

ST. JUST DISTRICT COUNCIL

PROPOSED AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS

"They are a standing disgrace and should be closed," said Mr. G. Richards at a meeting of St. Just Urban Council on Wednesday night, referring to Nos. 19 and 20, North Row, St. Just. He added that the properties were not fit for human habitation.

It was pointed out that the owner wanted to convert the houses into garages, but he had found difficulty in getting the tenants out.

Mr K. R. Woolcock: Haven't we got to re-house these people if we get them out. We have condemned these houses and must find alternative accommodation for the tenants. There are new houses at Pendeen if you want to put them somewhere.

Mr. J. H. Ellis: We are not going to have any more St. Just people over there. (Laughter).

The Clerk (Mr. R. Jenkin) said the Council could issue notices to quit, but as Mr. Woolcock had said there was a moral obligation to find another shelter. There was no direct legal obligation.

The Council decided to point out to the owner that the houses could be converted into garages, but they could not be re-let as dwelling-houses.

AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS.

Mr. H. M. Giles thought the Council should do something with regard to air raid precautions, as in the case of hostilities St. Just would be attacked. There was now an aerodrome and the Land's End radio station in the district, and he considered that a man should be sent to an instructional centre. There should be proper arrangements for fire brigades, and the cutting off of the electricity and gas. The Government had now guaranteed the expenses of such a scheme.

On the proposition of Mr. K. R. Woolcock, it was decided that representatives from various organizations in the parish should be co-opted on the Council's committee dealing with the matter.

The medical officer (Dr. Wilkinson) reported that during the month there had been one birth and seven deaths. A case of scarlet fever had been notified.

Mr. J. Creek (rate collector) reported collecting rates amounting to £321 during the month.

The sanitary inspector (Mr. W. J. Lawry) reported that 927,000 gallons of water had been pumped to the reservoir during the month, an average of 29,677 gallons a day. During the same period 569,000 gallons, an average of 18,355 gallons a day, was used. The depth of water in the reservoir had increased from 7ft. 6ins. to 11ft. 3ins.

Members and officials present were: Mr. J. T. Angwin, J.P., C.C. (in the chair), Messrs. K. R. Woolcock (vice-chairman), J. Oats, J. R. North, H. M. Giles, J. Rowe, J. H. Ellis, G. J. Richards, H. Bovns, W. Mitchell, with the clerk (Mr. R. Jenkin), medical officer (Dr. Wilkinson), sanitary inspector (Mr. W. J. Lawry), and the rate collector (Mr. J. Creek).

FARM AND GARDEN

FARMERS AND WAR TIME FOOD.

The "Daily Express" "Grow More Food, Stem More Flood" policy was endorsed by the President of the National Farmers' Union, Mr. G. Gibbard, at Dorchester on Monday. "We call on the Government," he said, "to push forward with all speed the plans to increase the fertility and production of this country. Food and armaments may one day make all the difference between life and death to us. We are spending many millions on armaments, rightly so. But the National Farmers' Union assert that it is folly not to use every means to maintain the country's agricultural industry in such a state of efficiency as to be always ready for extra demands that may be made. The farmers are definitely not satisfied with the position they find themselves in."

OUR DECLINING FOOD ACREAGE.

In 1921 the arable acres of England and Wales amounted to 14,942,258. Today the figure is 12,018,000.

In 1921 wheat acres were 1,976,004. Today, 1,731,000.

In 1921 barley acres were 1,435,620. Today, 823,000.

In 1921 oats acres were 2,148,943. Today, 1,222,000.

In 1921 potato acres were 357,800. Today, 455,100.

In 1921 workers on the land were 869,000. To-day, 631,000.—"Daily Express."

INSPECTOR REFUSED ADMISSION.

A fine of £5 and £1 1s. costs was imposed at Devizes on a farmer at Marston for refusing admission to his farm to an inspector of the Ministry of Agriculture under the foot-and-mouth disease regulations.—"Farmer and Stockbreeder."

THE ST. IVES WRECK

A vivid picture of the s.s. Alba, which went ashore on St. Ives Island on Monday night, with the St. Ives lifeboat in the foreground, which was smashed to pieces on the rocks.

Photo: NEGUS, Penzance.