

DOCKYARD FATALITY

INQUEST EVIDENCE AT PORTSMOUTH.

The Borough Coroner (Sir Thos. Bramsden J.P.), held an inquest at the Town Hall on Monday, with reference to the death of Richard Bryant aged 57, a crane driver in the Dockyard living at 37, Tokio Road, Copnor, who died as the result of an accident in the Dockyard on Thursday.— Mr. G. H. King watched the case on behalf of the Admiralty, and Mr. L. D. Hooper was present on behalf of the Home Office.

From the evidence it appeared that on Thursday morning the deceased was at work on a portable locomotive crane weighing 15 1/2 tons with a maximum lift of two tons, hoisting iron plates from a barge belonging to Messrs. Pickford and Co., at the North corner of the Yard. A man named Herbert William Kendall, a chargeman of labourers, living in Gosport, was apparently in charge of the job, but he saw only the hoist taken out of the barge, and in answer to the Coroner, said he had to visit other parts of the Yard. During his

absence a man named Henty, a signaller, directed operations. It was the duty of the man in charge to see that the crane was not overloaded, but in reply to the Coroner, Kendall admitted that the load was largely determined by the men in the barge, who, practically speaking, were left to put what load they liked upon the chain. The Coroner: In this case was the weight of the lift so heavy that the crane toppled over into the barge? — Yes.

Did anyone go down to see what weight was put on to the chain on this occasion — Not to my knowledge.

Further questions elicited that the crane was on rails, and Mr. Hooper was told that there were neither dogs nor grapples to hold the wheels to the rails.

Charles James Henty, a labourer, who was acting as signalman on this particular job said that thirteen lots of plates had been hoisted and the biggest lift was thirteen plates. He did not give a signal for this particular lift, and could not say who did. There were 25 plates, weighing 34 cwt on the lift, and he had previously specifically told two of the contractors' men not to put more than a ton on, as the crane being used was only for a lift of 30 cwt.

When the crane started off, the weight of the lift pulled it over, and there being nothing to hold it to the ground it fell into the barge.

Mr King: Witness said he had reason to take exception to the weight of previous hoists, and he had made the men in the barge take some of the plates off. He made his complaint to the men in the barge, but was told he would be chucked overboard.

Francis George Gillett, mate of the barge denied that he had been told not to put more than a ton on each lift. He did not know actually what the crane they were working with would carry. The previous witness was not telling the truth, either when he said he gave instructions for not more than a ton to be lifted, and also when he had said he had ordered certain plates from a previous lift to be taken off. Henty also gave instructions for the hoist, having said to witness in reply to a query, "It is not too much for you it is not too much for us" The responsibility for the hoist was entirely that of Henty, who earlier on the day had told witness to stand clear as he (Henty) was not quite used to the crane, which was a new one.

Two other men working with Gillett corroborated his version of the story, both as to this particular lift and the fact that they had received no instruction as to what the crane would carry. Other witnesses however, sustained the statement of Henty.

Constable James, Metropolitan Police, described how when the crane toppled over into the barge the deceased was pinned to the bottom underneath the boiler. The Main Gate of the Dockyard was communicated with, and the Surgeon Lloyd was summoned to the scene of the accident, and found the deceased was dead. There were no serious injuries, and death was due to suffocation from shock.

The Coroner, in summing up said, the evidence was contradictory, but it showed that a state of things existed in the Dockyard which should not. There appeared to him a dual responsibility with regard to the working of the crane, and he proposed to ask Mr. King to communicate with the Admiralty suggesting that some better method of working under such conditions should be devised in order that similar accidents might be avoided. He was sure that the suggestion had only to be made for

the Admiralty to take some steps in the matter.

Mr. King intimated that the matter was already in the hand, but that he would do as The Coroner suggested.

A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.