

## MOTOR BOAT DISASTER.

### WATERPOLICE INQUIRY.

An inquiry was held before Mr. J. L. Barlow, J.P., on Tuesday afternoon into the circumstances of the deaths of Rita Gelling (23), Leonard Crozier (19), and William McGuire (24), who lost their lives when the awning of the motorboat Bond Fot collapsed, near the Toowong landing, on Sunday evening, 26th February.

Senior-sergeant Henderson, of the Water Police, conducted the inquiry, and Captain H. G. Shaw (acting shipping inspector) appeared on behalf of the Marine Board.

William Henry Hill, jockey, residing at Escort road, Ascot, stated that he was the owner of the motorboat Bond Fot. The boat was furnished with two side-belts. On 26th February he lent the boat to a man named Miller, he himself going on board to help in working her. Between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. they picked up some 40 picnickers at Victoria Bridge pontoon, and proceeded to 17-Mile Rocks. On the way up about six persons were on the awning. They left 17-Mile Rocks at about 6.30 p.m., there being about 18 picnickers on the awning. On the way home several began to jump about, and witness heard Miller caution two persons twice when the boat was opposite the Toowong landing a passenger said he wished to go ashore. The boat was steered towards the landing; but the passenger did not land. As the boat was turning slowly round, the awning came down. Witness was in the cockpit and was struck on the head. He came out and found half the awning hanging over the side. Amid considerable excitement, witness called a muster. Four persons were missing. Witness cruised about in a row-boat for about an hour, but did not find anybody. The tide was running very strongly at the time. He was certain that what happened was accidental, and that there was no fool play.

To Mr. Barlow: There was no dancing on the awning.

Captain Shaw: Did you consider the awning a safe place for all those people? Not for 18.

Did you say anything to Mr. Miller about removing them? No. I was not in charge, and did not think I should do it.

Herbert Miller said he was a commission agent, and lived at Teneriffe. The motor-boat nary was the Herston Tennis Club. The boat was engaged by Leonard Francis Crozier. Witness knew a good deal concerning boating, but held no certificate of competency from the Marine Board. At the time of the accident those on the awning were quiet. There was no dancing at any time. Witness was steering. Just before the boat was opposite the jetty witness heard a crash and a scream, and was thrown into the water. He called out to Hill to reverse his engine, and climbed back on board. A young woman, Miss Crozier, was extricated from underneath the fallen awning, and shortly afterwards was put ashore. She was seriously injured.

Senior-sergeant Henderson: Can you give any reason for the accident? Only a surmise. When I was going into the jetty they all seemed to get on to the one side of the awning, and as I swung out it took all the weight to that side.

I suppose you can see how what value life-saving appliances loose on the top of the awning are? They would have slipped in amongst the people who fell off? Yes.

Captain Shaw: Do you know how that awning was supported? Yes. There were six posts, three on each side, and a post in the back at the centre. There was a thwart right across the centre, and cross fixtures across the front of the awning. In the centre of the awning was another temporary post, put in especially for that party to take the weight off the middle. The side posts were 2 inches x 2 inches, those in the middle 3 inches x

middle. The side posts were 2 inches x 2 inches, those in the middle 3 inches x 2 inches, and the centre beam 3 inches x 2 inches. Those supports were fixed by galvanised nails.

Captain Shaw: They were not bolted through? No. I did not see any bolts.

You were in charge of the boat? Yes.

Did you order those on the awning to

go down? When we got on the boat to come back, there were about 30 on the awning. I told them to get off, and about 18 remained.

If you were in charge of another motor boat in the same conditions, would you allow anybody on top of a weak awning like that? I would not call that a weak awning.

Would you allow anybody on top? Not now.

Mr. Barlow: Was there room for 19 persons without getting on the top of the awning? Yes.

How big was the awning? About 11 feet by 9 feet.

John McGoldrick, of Clyde road, Herston, said that when the accident occurred he was standing on the gunwale, speaking to Rita Gelling, who was on the awning. Beside her was William McGuire. He did not see Crozier then, but had seen him go on to the awning a few minutes previously. He fell into the water, climbed back, and called Rita Gelling. Obtaining no answer witness dived in again to see if he could find her but was unsuccessful. He was eventually picked up by a row boat. Everything was purely an accident.

Captain Shaw: If anybody said that there were people standing on the gunwale trying to sway the boat for a lark, would it be wrong? It would not be right.

Glen Collin Cameron, of Aberley road, Herston, stated that at the time the awning collapsed there were about 15 to 20 persons on it. The greater number were all on one side. Witness was thrown on to the top of the engine.

John Joseph Dunning said he resided in Arthur terrace, Red Hill. He did not see any of the three deceased fall into the river. McGuire was able to swim. There was no intoxicating liquor of any kind on board that day. Witness did not hear anyone give any warning about sitting on the awning. Witness had been on many motorboat picnics, and there was generally a rush for the awning on the home trip, irrespective of what it could hold.

To Captain Shaw: Witness did not notice any persons going from one side of the awning to the other as the boat neared the landing.

Ethel Wallace, of West street, Highgate Hill, said she sat on the awning from the time the boat left 17-Mile Rocks. There was no fooling or skylarking at any time, and witness did not hear anyone complain of it.

Water Police Constables E. Hall and Smith gave evidence of finding the bodies on 28th February and 1st March, their subsequent identification, and the result of the postmortem examinations—death by drowning. Their inquiries had satisfied them that there were no suspicious circumstances.

Acting-sergeant Teusley said he had been amongst boats all his life. He had made a careful examination of the awning. It was supported by seven hoop pine stanchions, 2 inches by 2 inches. The decking was half-inch pine, covered by canvas. As an awning it was strongly enough built. The fastenings were of nails. The timber was in a very good state of preservation. Four of the stanchions were broken off, and the other three were torn from their fastenings. It was not an awning fit for 16 to 18 people to be on. In witness's opinion it had collapsed through having too much weight upon it.

Formal evidence was given by Edward

too much weight upon it. Formal evidence was given by Edward Gelling and Leonard Francis Crozier, fathers of the victims. The inquiry then closed.