THE OFFICIAL REPORT

The officials

The senior officials to undertake the investigation into the Loss of the Mona were: -

Lieut-Commander Dutton
Mr H.C. Marfleet, Welfare Officer of the R.N.L.I.
Mr Richard Oakley, Surveyor of Lifeboats.
Lieut-Commander D. J. Wicksteed, Northern District Inspector of Lifeboats
Mr A. Cursiter, Northern District Engineer.
Miss E.N. Lloyd-Jones, District organising Secretary for Scotland, from Edinburgh.

RNLI

ON THE LIFE-BOAT SERVICE

Tel. Sloane 0031

BROUGHTY FERRY DISASTER

The Royal National Life-Boat Institution has now concluded its detailed investigation into the disaster which occurred at Broughty Ferry on the 8th December, 1959, when the whole crew of eight of the Life-boat Mona lost their lives.

It is clear from internal evidence that the Life-boat capsized. The capsize was almost certainly caused by the life-boat being thrown off course and across the sea some time between 05.15 and 06.00 in the morning. The Life-boat was probably in the shallow water just to the south of the entrance to the River Tay at the time.
The Lifeboat then appears to have drifted bottom up in a north westerly direction until her signal mast touched bottom in the shallow water between Buddon Ness and Carnoustie. This had the effect of righting the boat

It is clear beyond doubt that the condition of the hull and machinery of the lifeboat at the time of launching was first class, and the engines and bilge pumps were working satisfactorily up to the moment of capsize. The crew were experienced and had complete confidence in her Coxswain, Ronald Grant.

Weather conditions were exceptionally severe with a strong south-easterly gale blowing across the entrance to the River Tay and the flood tide flowed to the westward. The Lifeboat probably first got into difficulties when approaching the Bar.

After 04:06, when a report was received from the Lifeboat that she was abeam of the

Abertay Lightvessel, some six miles from Broughty Ferry, the crew could not have been wholly certain of her position because of the absence of navigational buoys which had been driven by the bad weather from their normal positions.

Despite the tragic outcome the institution considers that the decision to launch the Lifeboat was in the circumstances a wholly correct one.

The following are the details of the Institution's report and findings:

At 02.42 the acting Honorary secretary of the Broughty Ferry Lifeboat station, Captain Moug, received the following messages from Fifeness Coastguard - "North Carr Lightvessel broken adrift and drifting in north-westerly direction. Advise launch."
Capt Moug immediately authorised the launching of the Lifeboat, which put out at 03.13 am with a full crew of eight men.

Ronald Grant, Coxswain
George Smith, second Coxswain
George Watson, Bowman
John Grieve, Mechanic
James Ferrier, Assistant Mechanic
Alexander Gall, Former Coxswain
John J. Grieve, Son of the Mechanic, crewman
David Anderson, Crewman

The weather was overcast with frequent fierce rain squalls. The wind was from the south-east, force 7 to 9, with a very rough sea and a heavy swell. Visibility varied from 2 to 6 miles. Low water neap tide was at 02.52

The two middle buoys marking the bar at the entrance of the River had been absent from their normal positions since the 20th November.
It is also almost certain that the Fairway buoy, the most seaward lightbuoy was extinguished and adrift from its position at this time, as the buoy was found on the beach to the north-eastward of Carnoustie on the morning of the 8th Dec., having drifted 2¾ miles.

Wireless communications maintained between coastguard and lifeboat until 04.48. After that no further signals were received from the Lifeboat.

Between 05.50 and 06.50 there was an almost continuous broadcast by Fifeness Coastguard to the lifeboat on the distress frequency of 2182 hz

At first light about 08.30 a search was organised by the coastguards in which shore parties and a helicopter took part

The Lifeboat was found by a life-saving apparatus team about 08.45. She was on the beach north of Buddon Ness with her bows to the North-east in a position approx 9 cables 214º true from the coastguard lookout. The lifeboat was seen by the helicopter about the same time

The Carnoustie Coastguard Station officer first person to board the lifeboat. This was about 09.20. He found 5 bodies all wearing life-jackets.

Of these the body of mechanic John Grieve was half in and half out of the engine room. Hatch being secured in the open position.
Three other bodies in the after shelter, two with their hands to port. The fifth body was lying under the steering shaft, abaft the steering position, head to port.
The body of John J. Grieve, the mechanic's son was found on the beach near the lifeboat.
Half a mile to the southward of the lifeboat was found the body of ex-coxswain Alexander Gall. Near it was the lifejacket of George Watson along with the broken foremast of the lifeboat.
The body of George Watson was never found.
All seven men died from drowning, they suffered no injuries apart from abrasions.

Life-boat MONA was a 45'6" x 12' 6" Watson cabin Life-boat with twin engines, each of 40 h.p.
Built by Messrs Groves & Guttridge at Cowes in 1935.
Nineteen boats of that class were built between 1927 and 1935.
This was the first disaster to any of them.
Crews have always spoken very highly of their sea-keeping qualities of these boats. The sister ship to the Mona based at Longhope, Orkneys, crossed the Pentland Firth both ways against the tidal stream on the 7th December in a whole gale (force 10 to 11) which is strong evidence of the soundness of the design of the boat.

A complete survey of the hull and engines were carried out at Weatherhead's boatyard at Cockenzie between 9th December 1957 and 19th March 1958.
The hull was opened up and water-tested and no leaks were found. The general condition was good and no structural defects or decay found. Only normal maintenance work was necessary.
Both engines were removed and completely stripped down and coolers and propeller shafts were also removed. Everything was found to be in good order.
The engines were last air-tested for water tightness on 24th/25th November 1959.
No machinery failures have been reported in the boat over the past eight years.
The life boat was taken out on an exercise and tested by the Northern District Inspector on the 27th October 1959 and by the Northern District Engineer on the 5th December 1959.

The Coxswain Ronald Grant – aged 29, was appointed on 1st November 1959. He was employed at the Caledon Shipyard as a rigger and had been an able seaman and quartermaster for ten years in the Ben Line and in the Dundee, Peterhead and London Line. During his service at sea he was very highly thought of. He possessed the full confidence of the Life-boat crew and of the Institution.

The District Engineer's examination showed that: -

a) Engine controls were set as for normal running.

   i) Both engines were in ahead gear

ii) Both throttles were set at half speed

iii) Each engine was set to run on its own fuel tank.

iv) Air pressure was still present in both fuel tanks

v) Magneto advance and retard control was set to normal

b) 97 gallons of petrol were removed from the tanks. Consumption of both engines at full and half speed is 7.9 and 4.25 gallons an hour respectively. Assuming that both tanks were full on launching, 15 gallons were used, thus giving extremes of running time for the engines as approximately 2 hours and 3 hours and 30 minutes respectively.

c) Navigation lights, batteries, dynamos and lighting change-over switch were switched on. The port navigation light was still burning but the steaming and starboard navigation lights had carried away.

d) R/T was switched on for operation at the remote control position by the engine controls in the after canopy.

e) Both bilge pumps (which operate continuously when engines are running) had their suctions set normally, i.e. starboard on to the fore cabin and port on to the engine room.

There were oil marks on the engine room deck-head, and water had entered the instrument panels on the engine room after bulkhead from both sides.

The Surveyor of Life-boats' examination showed that.

i) The cabin and engine room emergency hatches were closed.

ii) The fore signal mast had broken just above the tabernacle and was lying on the beach. The masthead hoop and signalling lamp were still made fast to the mast shrouds and forestay on board.

iii) The loud hailer was missing.

iv) The searchlight was missing and the crutch shank was still in its starboard socket. The searchlight switch at the panel had been switched off.

v) Both cowl ventilators (3½" diameter) were missing from the cabin casing.

vi) Two of the three cowl ventilators (6" diameter) on the engine room casing were missing. The third ventilator and the funnel were completely undamaged.

vii) The starboard footwale and the guard-rail stanchions were adrift for about 10 feet midships.

viii) The port life-buoy was missing.

ix) The centre section of the windscreen was missing.

x) The boat's anchor was in its stowage. The cable was bent on to the anchor and still in stowage trays with lashings still fast.

xi) The drogue, drogue rope and tripping line were still in their storage position.

xii) The rudder was split.

xiii) The steering gear was in working order.

xiv) The keel was unmarked.

xv) Both propellers were undamaged.

The evidence of oil marks on the engine room deck-head and bilge dirt on the cabin deck-head indicates that the boat undoubtedly capsized; it is not possible to say whether she capsized to port or to starboard.

There are three pointers to the time of the disaster :

1 (a) It was after 04.48 when the lifeboat sent her last R/T message
(b) Evidence of fuel consumed suggests an earliest possible time of 05.15 (If full speed was used all the time) and 06.45 (if engines ran continuous at half speed).
(c) A watch in the inside pocket of the jacket of the second coxswain had stopped at 06.19½. It was half wound and full of water and sand.

2 No help is forthcoming from the life-boats clocks as one was still running and the other had stopped before the life-boat was launched.

3 It is possible that the engines were running at full speed until at least 04.06, when the life-boat was abeam of the Abertay Lightvessel. The lifeboat would then get the full effect of the seas having lost the small protection from the Abertay sands at low water, and would probably reduce speed soon afterwards. Water would also take a little time to get through the second coxswain's (George Smith) life belt, oilskin and jacket to his watch, and it is considered that the disaster most probably occurred at between 05.30 and 06.00.

In accordance with its invariable custom the Royal National Lifeboat Institution is paying from it own funds pensions to the widows and dependants of the eight men who lost their lives.
The standard scale of these pensions is that of Chief Petty Officer in the Royal Navy dying as a result of service.

Additional benefits will also be received by the families from the fund inaugurated by the Lord Provost of Dundee

When a reserve lifeboat of similar design to the Mona was sent to Broughty Ferry station a fortnight after the disaster some 40 applications to serve in a new crew were received, and the local life-boat committee had considerable difficulty in making their selection.

(Signed) HOWE
Chairman of the Committee of Management

16th January 1960


R.N.L.B. MONA