Report of an Inquiry into the means taken to afford assistance to the Crews of the "Nymphæa" and "Indian Chief," and into the conduct of those in charge of the Lightships and Lifeboats in the neighbourhood.

The circumstances which have led to this inquiry are as follow: at about 12.30 a.m. of the 5th of January last the screw steamship "Nymphæa," bound from North Shields to Athens with a cargo of coals and a crew of 19 hands all told, ran aground on the east side of the Sunk Sand, about 2 miles from its northern end, and between two and three hours afterwards the sailing ship "Indian Chief," bound from Middlesborough to Yokohama with a general cargo and a crew of 28 hands, and having a pilot on board, struck on the east side of the Long Sand, about the same distance from the Long Sand Head. There was a thick fog when they struck, but shortly afterwards the wind, which was from the N.E., began to blow hard, and the seas to rise. No assistance coming to them, the crew of the "Nymphæa," at about noon of the same day, launched their boat, and having got into it, succeeded in reaching a steamer which was lying at anchor in the West Swin, and they were subsequently landed in safety at Gravesend. The crew of the "Indian Chief," however, after several ineffectual attempts to launch their boats, in the course of which two of the hands were drowned, found themselves compelled, as night came on, to take to the rigging, 15 going to the mizen and the remaining 12 to the forerigging. During the night both the main and mizen masts went over the side, taking with them the 15 men who had gone into the mizen rigging; but between 8 and 9 of the following morning the Ramsgate lifeboat came up, and succeeded in saving the other 12 hands, who were safely landed at about 2.30 p.m. the same day at Ramsgate except the second mate, who died on the way there.

Under these circumstances an inquiry was ordered for the purpose of ascertaining how it happened that so long a time had been allowed to elapse before any boat had gone to the assistance of the shipwrecked crews. The case was heard at Westminster on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of February and the 15th of March last, when 27 witnesses were examined, Mr. Mansel Jones and Mr. Snagge appearing for the Board of Trade, and Mr. Baden Powell for the owners of the "Indian Chief." Some discussion then arose as to whether it would be necessary, as in other inquiries, to give in a statement of the questions, on which the opinion of the Court was desired; but after the matter had been fully considered, the Board of Trade determined to submit some questions for our consideration, and a copy of those questions was in due course forwarded to me by Mr. Mansel Jones. Before, however, we proceed to consider them, it may be well to see what was done on board the "Nymphæa" and "Indian Chief" to make known their position, and what steps were taken on board the life vessels, and by the people on shore to afford the requisite assistance; and we shall then be in a better position to return an answer to the questions which have been put to us.

We are told that, as soon as they found themselves to be hard and fast aground, both vessels began to signal for assistance, the "Nymphæa" throwing up rockets, and burning blue lights; and the "Indian Chief" sending up rockets and burning a flare-up; and this we are told continued to do till daylight.

Amongst the first, if not the first, to see the signals were the crew of the Sunk lightship. They told us that they saw at about half-past 2 a.m., what appeared to them to be a flare in the direction of the Sunk Sand; and in a little more than an hour afterwards they saw another flare from the direction of the Long Sand. These lights, which no doubt came from the "Nymphæa" and "Indian Chief," respectively, were duly reported to Mr. Dale, the chief officer, and the conclusion to which he came was, that they were only signals for a pilot, it being, we are told, a very common practice for vessels to show a flare up when they are in need of a pilot. At about half-past 7 o'clock, however, the day began to break, and they then for the first time made out the "Indian Chief" ashore on the Long Sand; upon which they began to make the usual signals for assistance, that is to say, firing two guns at intervals of half an hour, and hoisting the signal B.D.G., which signifies "a vessel on shore"; they at the same time sent off two pigeons marked with the same letters to convey the information to the shore. At 8.45 a.m. they made out the "Nymphæa" aground on the Sunk, and thereupon, about 9.30 a.m., two more pigeons were sent off, marked with letters D.V.K.Q., meaning "steamer ashore." The two first pigeons which were despatched,

Q 6329. 106.-5/81. Wr. 2442. E. & E. A
we are told, did not reach home until some days afterwards, but of the second batch, which had been sent off at about half-past 9, one reached its home at about 11, the other at about 12 o'clock. It seems that Thompson, the person who has charge of the pigeons on shore, observing at about 11 o'clock a pigeon outside the trap, tipped red, which showed him that it had come from the Sunk, immediately went to warn the coxswain of the lifeboat, but found that his information had, as we shall presently see, been anticipated, and that the lifeboat was being got ready to go out.

In the meantime the wrecks had been seen by a smack called the "Albatross," which had been lying at anchor under the Gunfleet. She also had observed the signals from the "Nymphæa" at about 2.30 a.m., and at once got under weigh to proceed to her assistance. They approached her from the north end of the Sunk Sand, and at about half-past 3 or a quarter to 4 found themselves in about 2½ fathoms water, upon which, the night being very dark, it was deemed expedient to put the smack's head off again, and to get her into deeper water, which they accordingly did. There they lay tacking backwards and forwards until about half-past 5 a.m., when finding that they could not get her, and observing the flare-up of the "Indian Chief" on the Long Sand, they rounded the end of the Sunk, and bore down towards her. Having got within three-quarters of a mile of her, they observed another smack, which afterwards proved to be the "Aquiline," coming out of Goldner's Gat, round the north end of the Gunfleet Sand. They accordingly bore away for her, and on nearing her it was arranged between them that the "Aquiline" should proceed at once to Harwich to bring out the tug and lifeboat, and at the same time to telegraph for assistance to the other lifeboats along the coast.

The "Aquiline" accordingly proceeded to make the best of her way to Harwich, arriving there at about a quarter to 11 o'clock, when Cook the master immediately went to the chief boatman of the lifeboat, and informed him that there were two vessels ashore, one on the Sunk, the other on the Long Sand; and as the wind was blowing directly into the harbour he went to Mr. Vaux, a shipbuilder residing at Harwich, to ask him to give them the assistance of his steamboat to tow the lifeboat out, which Mr. Vaux consented to do.

The lifeboat seems to have been launched, and ready to proceed to sea by about half-past 11 o'clock, but steam had to be got up on board the steamboat, so that it was not until about 1 p.m. that they were able to start. Hearing too from Cook, the master of the "Aquiline," that the vessel on the Long Sand appeared to have been deserted by her crew, but that they had seen signals from the "Nymphæa," Mr. Vaux, the owner of the steamboat determined to make straight for the latter vessel, which they reached at about half-past 3 o'clock. By this time, however, the crew, as we have seen, had left her, and after remaining there for about 20 minutes, looking in all directions to see if they could discover any boat; and seeing a steamer on the other side of the Sand in the Black Deep, they at length concluded that she had picked up the crew; and they accordingly steered towards the Sunk Sand Head with a view of rounding it and going to the assistance of the "Indian Chief." In running down the Sunk, however, they had the wind and sea dead against them, and found that they could only drive her at half speed, the sea beating right over her. A consultation accordingly took place between Mr. Vaux, Captain Cook of the "Aquiline," the captain of the boat, and another of Mr. Vaux' captains, who were all on board the steamboat, when, finding that it would not be possible to approach the wreck from the north side of the Long Sand, and that it would be necessary to go round the Long Sand Head to get at her, before which night would have closed in, it was decided that it would be better to return to Harwich, and start again at 4 o'clock the next morning, so as to arrive off the wreck at daylight; and accordingly a course was steered for Harwich, which they reached about 5 o'clock the same evening.

In the meantime the "Albatross," after the "Aquiline" had left to go to Harwich, had returned to the "Nymphæa," and lay by her. But about 1.30 p.m. observing the Harwich tug with the lifeboat in tow coming out of Goldner's Gat, and having seen one of the crew of the "Nymphæa" go up the rigging, and alter the flag, which they took to be a signal that the crew were going to leave her, they drifted away before the gale, in the hope of picking up the crew. They however failed to fall in with her, and she ultimately came to anchor in the Swin.

There was also another smack called the "Increase," whose usual duty is to take the reliefs to the lightships. She had left Walton-on-the-Naze at about 5 o'clock that morning, and on coming out of Goldner's Gat had observed the "Indian Chief" a-shore on the Long Sand, and immediately bore down towards her. Having got to within about three-quarters of a mile of her, which was as near as she could approach her it was agreed that she should come in.
with safety from the north side of the Sand, the master examined her carefully with his glasses to see if there was any one on board her, at the same time signalling to her. It was now about half-past 8 a.m., and after remaining by her for two hours, and receiving no answer, and believing that the crew had left her, they stood away to the northward of her. There they remained for some time examining her, and thinking that she had also been abandoned by her crew, they stood away and left her.

We must now return to the lifeboat. On her return to Harwich, Mr. Bray, the Secretary of the Lifeboat Association, met with William Britton, the late coxswain of the boat, the first coxswain, John Tye, being absent at the time, to Mr. Vaux's office to ask him to allow the steamboat to tow the lifeboat out again that night; Mr. Vaux, however, stated that he did not consider that it would be prudent to send the vessel out again then, but that she should leave at 4 a.m. the following morning, so as to arrive off the wreck at daylight. Mr. Bray and the coxswain of the lifeboat, however, thought it very desirable that she should leave that night, and as Mr. Vaux would not lend his steamboat for the purpose, they applied to the Marine Superintendent of the Great Eastern Railway Company to allow their steamboat, the "Pacific," which was going to start to Rotterdam, to take the lifeboat in tow, and to drop her to windward of the wreck, so that she might run down towards the wreck. Accordingly, at about half-past 9 p.m. the "Pacific" took the lifeboat in tow, but on nearing the mouth of the harbour the tow-rope slipped, and it being impossible to pick it up again, the "Pacific" proceeded on her voyage, whilst the lifeboat returned into the harbour, which she reached at about 11 p.m. the same evening.

The next morning, between 3 and 4 a.m., the crew of the lifeboat were mustered and ready to proceed to the wreck, but Mr. Vaux having on the previous evening been informed that the "Pacific" was going to tow the lifeboat out, and that there had been a telegram received from Ramsgate to say that the Ramsgate tug and lifeboat had started for the wreck, omitted to give orders for the steamboat to be got ready, and without the assistance of a steamer it was not possible, we are told, for the lifeboat to get on against such a wind as was then blowing. Subsequently, hearing that there was a vessel afloat on the Pye Sand at the mouth of the harbour, the lifeboat went out to her assistance, and in two trips succeeded in saving the whole of the crew, bringing ashore on the first occasion eight or nine hands, and on the second two or three. No further attempt, however, seems to have been made from Harwich to go to the assistance of those on board the "Indian Chief".

It may now be well to state what was done at the other lifeboat stations on the coast. It seems that a telegram was received at about 15 minutes after noon of the 5th by the chief officer of the coastguard station at Clacton, a small place some 10 or 11 miles to the south of Harwich, informing them that there was a steamer afloat on the Sunk, and a ship on the Long Sand; upon which he at once communicated with the coxswain of the lifeboat, and the crew having been mustered, they started at about 1 p.m. For the first three hours and a half they had the flood tide against them, and this, added to the heavy sea, prevented them making much progress, but when the ebb turned, they continued their course towards the Sunk, arriving off the Sunk Sand Head at about half-past 7 o'clock the same evening. They then ran down the Swin to look out for the steamer, and about 8 observed rockets going up from the Sunk Lightship, and falling in a southerly direction from her; they accordingly steered in that direction, and at about half-past 8 they observed the light of the "Indian Chief" at the distance of about half a mile off, and bearing from them S.E. by E. They were then on the north side of the Long Sand, and finding that it was impossible to get to her from that side, they tried to beat round the Long Sand Head, but as the flood had just then begun to make, they found it impossible to do so, and they accordingly came to an anchor. At about 2 a.m. the light which they had seen suddenly disappeared, but on the ebb tide making, which it did at about 3 a.m. they immediately got under weigh and proceeded to search for the vessel, but not finding her they again came to anchor until daylight, when they found that they were about two miles to leeward of the wreck. They accordingly weighed to leeward of her, and in about an hour and a half to two hours they had got as near to her as they could go; but being still on the north side of the Sand, and not being able to see any one on board they bore away for the Sunk Lightship, where they reported that all hands were drowned; after which they returned to Clacton, which they reached at about half-past 12 of the 6th, having been out very nearly 24 hours.

Let us now see how it was that the Ramsgate boat came to their assistance. It seems that about 9 a.m. of the 5th January a smack, called the "Forget-me-not," which had been out fishing in the North Sea, observed the R.E.S. (Rams) lightship signalling;
upon which she bore down to speak her, and on nearing her—her attention was called by the people in the lightship to the "Indian Chief," which was aground on the Long Sand, and they were asked to go at once to Ramsgate to fetch the tug and lifeboat.

At this time the flood tide had begun to make, and feeling satisfied that they would not be able to beat against it round the Knock Buoy, and that even if they did so, they could do little to help her, having only four hands in the boat, they set on shore away for Ramsgate, which they reached shortly before noon; and Denne, the master of the smack, then immediately informed Captain Brain, the harbour-master, that there was a vessel on the Long Sand bearing W.N.W. from the Knock lightship and distant six miles from it. It seems that at Ramsgate whenever the weather is threatening the tug is kept with its crew on board and steam up, ready to put to sea at a moment's notice, and as the lifeboat men are always on the pier looking out, no time was lost in getting the boat to sea; and we were told by Captain Brain, that within a quarter of an hour of his being informed of the wreck the tug had started with the lifeboat in tow. After rounding the Elbow Buoy, they made straight for the Kentish Knock lightship, which they reached at about 5 p.m., and were there told that the wreck bore N.W. by N. from them. Although it was then dark, they proceeded towards the Long Sand Head, and having got close to it searched along the east side of the sand, but without being able to find the vessel. They also burnt both green and hand lights, and could see the "Sunk" throwing up rockets, but they got no answer from the wreck. They accordingly came to anchor, and lay there till about 8 a.m. the following morning, when they observed the mast of the "Indian Chief" to leeward of them, upon which the lifeboat slipped her tow rope, and having hoisted her mainsail ran down towards the "Indian Chief" and came to anchor under her lee or port quarter. At this time the main and mizen masts had gone and were lying over the ship's side, which prevented the lifeboat getting up to the forerigging, where the survivors were. They were, therefore, obliged to haul the boat up under the quarter and, and to bring the men aft to the boat, and in about an hour they succeeded in getting them all, 12 in number, into the lifeboat, and having set the mainmast stood across the Long Sand Head to the steam tug, which was lying in the Knock Deep to S. W. of the Kentish Knock Buoy, and having been taken in tow, they proceeded to Ramsgate, where they arrived at noon on the same day, one of the crew of the "Indian Chief" however having died on the way there.

I have thought it better to give a detailed statement of the facts, as it will enable us the more easily to answer the questions, on which our opinion has been asked. The questions are as follow:

1. "Was every effort made by the masters and crews of the several light-vessels, by means of the signals at their disposal and otherwise, to obtain prompt assistance for the wrecked vessels?"

2. "Was a proper look-out kept on board the light-vessels, and were the rockets and other signalling apparatus in good condition and ready for immediate use?"

3. "Was the Harwich lifeboat "Springwell" well suited for the needs and duties of that station, and was she kept or moored in the most favourable and convenient position?"

4. "Was the Harwich lifeboat properly manned and ready to leave the harbour without unnecessary delay, after the receipt of intelligence of the wreck?"

5. "Was every possible effort made by the coxswains and crew of the Harwich lifeboat to reach the wreck?"

6. "Were proper means and appliances in readiness at Harwich for the speedy despatch of the lifeboat?"

7. "Did the Ramsgate tug, in proceeding with the lifeboat in tow to the supposed scene of the wreck, take the course which was most proper under the circumstances?"

8. "Are the present communications with the shore satisfactory. If not in what respects have those communications failed?"

The first question has reference to the lightships, and what we are asked is, whether every effort was made by the masters and crews thereof, by means of the signals at their disposal and otherwise, to obtain prompt assistance for the wrecked vessels! The lightships, to which this inquiry refers, would be the Knock, the Sunk, and the Cork, and probably the Gunnfleet also, although that is rather a lighthouse than a lightship; and it will be well to inquire whether they did all in their power to obtain assistance for the crews of these two vessels. It should, however, be stated that the first duty of a lightship is to keep its light burning brightly so as to warn ships from approaching too near to some dangerous sand or reef; and..."
that it is no part of its duty, nor has it the means of rendering assistance to vessels in distress. All that it can do, if it sees any vessel in danger, is to give information to any passing boat or vessel, or to the shore, leaving it to others to bring material aid.

And first, as regards the Kentish Knock lightship, which is the most easterly of all of them. She was at a distance of six miles from the "Indian Chief" and nine miles from the "Nymphæa," but when it was that those on board her first discovered either of the wrecks, we are not informed, no one from the Kentish Knock having been produced before us. All that we know is that she had discovered the "Indian Chief" before 9 a.m. of the 5th, for it was then that she signalled to the "Forget-me-not" and told her to go to Ramsgate for the assistance of the tug and lifeboat. What else, however, she could have done, it is difficult to see. So far as appears she did all that was required of her, and there can be no doubt that it was mainly to her action in signalling to and sending off the "Forget-me-not" to Ramsgate that the tug and lifeboat, which ultimately saved the hands from the "Indian Chief," were enabled to start as soon as they did.

Secondly, as regards the Gunfleet. The assistant keeper of this lighthouse has been produced before us, and he has told us that the first intimation they had that there was a wreck on the sand was at about a quarter to 8 a.m. of the 5th, when they sighted the "Nymphæa" aground on the Sunk. They were about 4 miles from the "Nymphæa," and about nine from the "Indian Chief," but had seen nothing of the lights exhibited by these vessels during the night. As soon, however, as they saw the "Nymphæa," they at once hoisted the usual signals, and they told us that they saw the smacks and the Harwich lifeboat and steamer going out to their assistance; but what more they could have done we are not able to say.

There is then the Sunk. She was at a distance of about 5 miles from the "Nymphæa," and a little farther from the "Indian Chief." She no doubt saw the lights exhibited by the "Nymphæa," as well as by the "Indian Chief," the former at about half past 2 a.m., the latter at about quarter to 4 the same morning; she was, however, too far to distinguish them very clearly, and took them for flare-ups, which it seems are frequently exhibited by vessels requiring pilots, and until she was well assured that they came from some vessel or vessels on the sands, she would not have justified in signalling for the lifeboats to come out. At half past 7, however, when daylight broke, she discovered the "Indian Chief" on the Long Sand, and she at once began to fire half-hourly guns, and despatched two pigeons to the shore to convey the information. In about an hour later she discovered the "Nymphæa" on the Sunk Sand, and she therupon despatched two more pigeons to the shore with the similar information that there was a steamer on the Sunk. Throughout the whole of that day half-hourly guns continued to be fired, and when night closed in she continued to fire a gun and to send up a rocket alternately in the direction of the "Indian Chief," and it was that which attracted the attention, as wehave seen, of the Clacton lifeboat to her. She continued to make the proper signals, until about 9 a.m. of the 6th, when being told by the crew of the Clacton lifeboat that the whole of the crew of the "Indian Chief" had perished, they ceased firing. What more she could have done we are unable to see.

Lastly, as regards the Cork lightship. No one has been produced before us, from her, and we are, therefore, not able to say who she first became aware that there were any wrecks upon the sands. She is, however, very near the coast, being about 8 miles nearer to Harwich than the Sunk; and as she was about 11 from the "Nymphæa," and 14 from the "Indian Chief," it would not have been possible for her to have seen anything of the wrecks. We are told also that, although the mastheads of the Sunk are visible from the Cork, and vice versa, it is not possible to make out the signals by daylight, and as the Sunk did not see the wrecks until after daylight on the 5th, and therefore made no signals till morning, when they would not be seen by the Cork, we do not well see what the Cork lightship could have done to convey the information of the wrecks to the shore.

On the whole, therefore, it appears to us that no blame whatever attaches to any of the persons on board the lightships, who, as soon as they became aware of the wrecks, appear to have done all in their power to obtain prompt assistance from the shore.

The next question which we are asked is, "Was a proper lookout kept on board the lightships, and were the rockets and other signalling apparatus in good condition and ready for immediate use?" There is nothing in the evidence to show that there was not a proper lookout being kept on board the lightships. When the wrecks were first discovered from the Knock and Cork lightships, we do not know, no one having
been produced from either of these vessels; but from the Sunk the lights of the vessels were seen soon after they had grounded, those of the “Nymphes” at half-past 2 o’clock, and those of the “Indian Chief” at a quarter to 4; and we think that the Sunk was quite right not to make danger signals on seeing those lights, as they might very well have been only signals for a pilot, or the flare-up of a fishing boat, and there was nothing to show that they came from vessels in distress. Nor is there any evidence that the rockets and other signalling apparatus, with which the lightships were furnished, were not in good condition and ready for immediate use.

3. The third question which we are asked is, “Was the Harwich lifeboat ‘Springwell’ well suited for the needs and duties of that station, and was she kept or moored in the most favourable and convenient position?” It seems that prior to 1876 there was no lifeboat stationed at Harwich, it being thought by some persons that it would be practically useless owing to the great distance of the sands, and to the fact that there are always a large number of fishing smacks about, which would be more amenable to affording any assistance that might be required by boats in distress. On the 6th of December 1875, however, a large German passenger steamer called the “Deutschland” ran on the Kentish Knock Sand, and lay there from about 5 a.m. of one day until about 10 a.m. of the following day, without any assistance having come to her, and during that time no less than 60 of the passengers and crew were lost. An inquiry accordingly took place into the circumstances which had led to so lamentable a loss of life, and shortly afterwards an individual was found to be the cause of the present lifeboat, the “Springwell,” was sent there. Previous to this, however, there was a good deal of discussion as to what ought to be the size of the boat, and where it should be placed; and as no suitable place could be found from whence it could be launched by a slipway into the water, it was determined to send the “Springwell,” the same which they now have, that being the largest boat that is made for carriage on wheels; and it was arranged to place it in a house specially constructed for the purpose on the Green at Harwich. According to the evidence of Mr. Bray, the Honorary Secretary, she is 34 feet long, and 9 feet beam, has 10 oars, and is manned with 12 hands. Admiral Ward, the Chief Inspector of the lifeboats of the National Lifeboat Institution, told us that the anticipations of the people, that thought that it could be of no use, have been falsified, as the boat has, since its establishment, been out 17 times on service, has saved 49 lives, the present we are told being the only case of failure.

The question, however, which we are asked is whether the boat is well suited for the needs and duties of that station, and whether it is kept in the most favourable and convenient position. Now there can be no doubt that there have been from time to time demands made for a large boat for Harwich; but at the same time, it appears that such a boat would be better able to beat to windward than a smaller one. Admiral Ward, however, told us that, whilst this was no doubt so, that a larger boat would be more useful under canvas, it would be more unmanageable with oars, and seeing that there is no steam-tug at Harwich as there is at Ramsgate always kept ready to take the lifeboat in tow, and that the worst winds for the sands are easterly and north-easterly gales, against which it would be difficult to beat out of Harwich Harbour under canvas, it may be a question whether a larger boat, and such a boat which they have at Ramsgate, which is 44 feet long and has a beam of 11 feet 1 inch, would be equally useful to them. Owing however to the very strong desire expressed by the people at Harwich that they should have a larger boat, Admiral Ward told us that he had been down there since the loss of the “Indian Chief,” and having found a place called the Lower Pound, where the boat of the harbourmaster’s office, who had undertaken to keep an eye upon her, so that she should come to no harm there, it has been since determined to send them a larger boat. At the same time Admiral Ward told us that there is always considerable risk in keeping a lifeboat afloat, and that it is quite impossible to keep the gear and apparatus in such good working order as when it is under cover; and that consequently the arrangement as to keeping the boat afloat in the Lower Pound is regarded as merely temporary, for that when the lease of Mr. Vaux’s premises which have yet three years to run is expired, they hope by arrangement with Her Majesty’s Woods and Forests, the owners of the land, to obtain a place on shore, whence they would be able to construct a slipway, so that the boat could always be kept under cover, as until her services were needed, when she could be launched into the water without delay. Whether the arrangements which have been made will be better than those which have hitherto existed we are not prepared to say; but at all events they appear to have received the approval of Admiral Ward, and of the committee of the Lifeboat
Institution, than whom no persons would be better qualified to form a correct opinion on the point.

4. The fourth question which we are asked, is whether "the Harwich lifeboat was properly manned and ready to leave the harbour without unnecessary delay after the receipt of intelligence of the wreck?" The first intimation that there were wrecks on the Sunk and Long Sands was, as we have seen, brought to Harwich by the "Aquiline," which arrived there at about quarter to 11 o'clock, and by half-past 11 all the hands were mustered and the lifeboat ready to proceed to sea; but as it was not possible for them to go out without the assistance of a steamer, they had to wait until steam could be got up on board Mr. Vaux's vessel, so that they were not able to leave the harbour until about 1 p.m. The crew consisted as usual of 12 hands, the second coxswain, Britton, having the command, owing to the temporary absence of John Tye, the first coxswain. There is therefore no reason to think that the lifeboat was not properly manned and ready to leave the harbour without any unnecessary delay after the receipt of the intelligence of the wreck.

5. The fifth question which we are asked is whether "every possible effort was made by the coxswains and crew of the Harwich lifeboat to reach the wreck?" We have seen that the steamer with the lifeboat in tow arrived at about half-past 3 p.m. off the "Nymphhea," and after examining her through their glasses for about a quarter of an hour or 20 minutes, and discovering that there was no one on board, for the crew had then left her for some hours, they proceeded down the north side of the Sunk with the intention of rounding the Sunk Sand Head to go to the assistance of the "Indian Chief." After going, however, some distance towards the Head it was decided by those on board the steamer that it would not be prudent to go that night to the "Indian Chief," as the sea was breaking over them, and the night was closing in, and accordingly the course of the steamboat was altered and she was steered towards Harwich. On seeing this we are told that the coxswain of the lifeboat waved to them to go round the Head, but either those signals were not perceived, or, at all events, they were not attended to; and the question arises, whether the lifeboat ought not even to have been sent off, as the steamer's assistance, or have lain to, until the tide enabled them to get round to the wreck. On the one hand we have the fact before us that the Clacton lifeboat without the aid of any steam vessel did somewhat later work round the Head, and lie by the "Indian Chief" through the night and until the following morning, and although owing to her being on the north side of the Sand and therefore to leeward of the wreck she was not able to get alongside, and ultimately left her thinking that there was no one on board, the conduct of the crew in lying by the vessel all night is deserving of the highest praise. The Ransome lifeboat also, which arrived on the spot between 5 and 6 p.m., lay there all through the night, and on the following morning on discovering the wreck bore down to her and succeeded in taking off the twelve survivors; but then it may be said that she had a steam tug in attendance upon her. With these examples before us, and with the fact that the Clacton lifeboat did succeed in working the "Indian Chief" from the same direction as that in which the Harwich boat went, and did lie by her all night, we are not prepared to say that the latter might not have done so. On the other hand it must be remembered that it was blowing very heavily, that darkness was approaching, and that it would have been quite impossible even with the aid of the steamer to have got to the "Indian Chief" before the night had closed in, when all that could have been done would have been to wait for daylight. That the crew too were not unwilling to go to the assistance of the "Indian Chief is proved by the fact that soon after their return they again left in tow of the steamer "Pacific," intending to get to windward and then drop down on the wreck, but which they were prevented doing by the rope slipping when they were at the entrance of the harbour; after which, having no means of getting out to the "Indian Chief," they proceeded to a vessel which was aground on the Pye Sand, and rescued her crew consisting of some 10 or 12 hands. It must be remembered too that, when the lifeboat first went out, she was in charge of Britton, the second coxswain, had she been in command of Tye, the first coxswain, who had charge of her when she went out the second time in tow of the steamer "Pacific," it is possible that she might have done what the Clacton lifeboat did, namely, work down as near to the wreck as possible, and wait for daylight.

6. The sixth question, which we are asked, is whether "proper means were used at Harwich for the speedy despatch of the lifeboat?" No time seems to have been lost in bringing the lifeboat from the Green, in launching it, and in mustering the crew; but steam had to be got up on board the steamer, and this no doubt delayed the boat's departure for about an hour and a half. It should, however, be observed that the
steamer in question is the private property of Mr. Vaux, and is used by him in his business; and although he seems to be always very ready to lend her when required to tow the lifeboat, there is no obligation upon him to do so, and it could hardly be expected that he should always keep steam up on board ready for any emergency. That Mr. Vaux, too, should have returned to the harbour from the "Nymph," instead of attempting to go round to the assistance of the "Indian Chief," can hardly be brought as a charge against him; for in doing so he acted on the advice of the master of the "Aquiline," and of two of his own captains, who would be much better able to form an opinion on the subject than he, not being a nautical man, could do. He has also explained that the reason why he did not order the steamer to be got ready to take the lifeboat out the next morning was because he understood that the "Pacific" was about to take her out, and that he had heard that the Ramsgate lifeboat and tug had started. On the whole we cannot think that Mr. Vaux was to blame, and short of having a steam tug stationed there, as at Ramsgate, for the purpose of towing the lifeboat out, we hardly see what more could have been done.

7. The seventh question, which we are asked is, "did the Ramsgate tug, in proceeding with the lifeboat in tow to the supposed scene of the wreck, take the course which was most proper under the circumstances?" The orders given by Captain Brain, the harbour-master, were to go to the Kentish Knocks, telling him at the same time that there was a wreck bearing W.N.W. from it distant from 5 to 6 miles, which is what Denne, the master of the "Forget-me-not," had reported. Accordingly the tug, with the lifeboat in tow, proceeded to the Kentish Knocks lightship, and arrived there soon after 5 p.m., when they were informed that the wreck bore from them N.W. by N., and not W.N.W. as Denne had stated. Although it was then quite dark they proceeded in the direction indicated, but were not able to discover the wreck until the following morning at daylight. It was said, however, that if instead of going round by the Kentish Knocks lightship they had made straight for the wreck passing through the Knock Deep, they would probably have reached her before dark, and have rescued the whole of the crew that night. It seems that the distance of the Kentish Knock lightship from Ramsgate is 23 miles, whence to the wreck was about 5 miles, making 28 miles altogether; on the other hand, by the direct Road through the Knock Deep the distance from Ramsgate to the wreck would have been 25 miles, a difference of 3. Seeing however, that on that night the sun went down at about 3.50 p.m., that it was after 5 before they reached the light, it would have been in the highest degree imprudent for the master, in the then state of the weather, to have gone through an unbayed and unlighted channel like the Knock Deep. In our opinion he did quite right to go first to the Knock lightship to obtain all the information he could about the wreck and its position, for it was not possible to say what might have happened since the "Forget-me-not" had seen her at 9 o'clock that morning. As a fact, too, the information which he received of her position from the lightship people was different from that reported by Denne, the master of the "Forget-me-not."
Knock on the 6th December 1875; and I do not think that I can do better than quote a passage from the report which we made on that occasion. The passage to which I refer is as follows:—“It remains for us to notice one point, which was very strongly forced upon our attention in the course of the inquiry. I refer to the question whether the means of communication between the lightships and the shore are sufficient. We have already stated that, so far as the means and appliances at their disposal allowed, the lightship people did all in their power to make the casualty known. The fact, however, still remains, that this large Transatlantic steamer, with between 200 and 300 people on board, lay on a sandbank, within 2½ miles of one of our lightships, without it being possible to communicate to the shore, from daylight on the Monday morning until after dark, that anything at all was the matter; and even after night had set in, the only information which could be conveyed to the shore was that something was wrong in the offing; but where it was, and what was the nature and extent of the disaster, no one knew until the steam tug took the people from the wreck. All that the Harwich people knew on the Monday night was, that one of the lightships was throwing up rockets, but whether this was in reply to some vessel requiring a pilot or a steam tug, or what the occasion was, no one could say. They knew that something was wrong, but not that a large steam vessel was lying on one of the sands, with 200 persons on board. If the lightship had had the means of informing the people on shore of the true state of the case, it is possible that something might have been done to save them, either the same day, or in the early part of the following night. If they had known the full extent of the disaster on Monday morning, some vessel might have been sent out to her, and having ascertained her position, have lain by until the gale abated, as we are told it did at about 9 in the evening, and then have taken the people from the wreck. At all events, whatever might have been the result in the present case, it is obviously very desirable that full information of any such casualty should, if possible, be conveyed to the shore as early as possible.”

The report then goes on as follows:—“The most obvious mode that presents itself of establishing a communication between the lightships and the shore is of course by means of a telegraph wire. We were told that there are difficulties in the way, owing to the impossibility of keeping the telegraph wire clear of the cable by which the vessel is riding. On the other hand, we were informed that there had been some such communication established between the shore and a vessel anchored away out beyond the Land’s End, and that no difficulty of the kind was experienced in that case) and the only reason, as we are informed, why the vessel was removed, was that commercially it was a failure, only three vessels having communicated with the floating ship during the six weeks that she remained at anchor there. It is not for us to point out how the difficulty, if it exists, can be got over; different modes have been suggested to us by which it would seem that the object might be attained. It is sufficient here to say that if telegraphic communication could be established between the lightships and the shore, it would undoubtedly be the best plan, as it would be available equally by day as by night.”

On this report being sent in, a good deal of discussion took place between the Board of Trade and the Trinity House as to the best mode of establishing a communication between the lightships and the shore, and a copy of the correspondence which passed between them, as well as the minutes of the officers of the Board of Trade thereon, have been laid before us. From these, as well as from the evidence of Captains Webb and Atkins, two of the Elder Brethren of the Trinity House, who as members of the Light Committee had taken a leading part in the discussion, it would appear that there were three proposals under consideration for establishing a better system of communication between the lightships and the shore, namely the improvement of the rocket system, the use of carrier pigeons, and the laying down telegraphic wires to the lightships. According to the evidence of Captain Webb, the Light Committee, of which he was the chairman, and to which the question had been specially referred, recommended to the Trinity House Board, that the establishment of telegraphic communication between the lightships and the shore was quite worth an experiment; and he told us that the views of the Board at the time were fully expressed in their letter of the 25th of January 1876, of which the following is a copy:

“Trinity House, London, E.C.,
25th January 1876.

Sir,

Adverting to the revival by a recent painful occurrence of the question of the practicability and expedition of establishing telegraphic communication between

Q 6339.

B
light-vessels and rock light-houses and the shore, I am directed to submit the
following observations for the consideration of the Board of Trade.

"It would seem from the experience obtained by the wreck of the "Deutschland,"
that at night the use of rockets fired in the direction of the wreck of vessels at
such long ranges from each other as even the Kentish Knock, Sunk, and Cork light-
vessels, is substantially adequate, and that it is only for the daytime at stations
unsuitable for the use of guns (such as Rock Stations), or where the distance is too
great (as between the Kentish Knock and Sunk, &c.) for the gun to be heard,
that telegraphic communication is really wanted, and that the need for its use,
which is happily very infrequent, may, by constant increase in the precautions of
navigators and of improvements in machinery, be still further diminished.

"Nevertheless, and although the problem of a permanent communication is beset
with great and peculiar difficulties, it has seemed to the Elder Brethren that they
would be justified by the analogy of their proper duty if they investigated the
matter somewhat closely, and have accordingly had under consideration not only
the proposals transmitted in recent letters from your Department respectively so far
as those proposals were set forth, but others which have been made directly to them,
together with suggestions emanating from members of the Board itself. Amongst
other proposals the receipt of an intimation from the Telegraph Construction
Company that they would be happy to land pieces of cable for experiments, has led
to an inquiry as to incidental charges, and from the terms of the reply it will be
seen that the Elder Brethren may count on very valuable assistance from that
company in the direction of a telegraphic cable distinct from the moorings of the
light-vessels. Another set of experiments on the basis of the telegraphic and
mooring cables being incorporate might also be tried; but as respects this plan the
Elder Brethren have not as yet any very reliable data.

"Before seeking for sanction to any expenditure in the matter, or pursuing it
further, the Elder Brethren would be glad to be favoured with the views of the
Board of Trade. Assuming that some plan could be devised by which the com-
communication could be maintained, it appears to the Elder Brethren that a very
considerable development in the public functions of the Trinity House would
probably follow; these functions have been hitherto rather for prevention than cure;
not only has the size of the vessel been kept down to the minimum for the exhibition
of the light and fog signal with a proportionately small crew quite incapable of
rendering assistance except to those who could manage to board them, but there has
also been the avoidance of any actual commercial object, but it seems to them that,
if once it were a fact that a telegraphic communication existed between such
stations, say as the Bishop Rock, Edystone, Varne, or the Kentish Knock, and the
shore, commerce would claim and not unreasonably its daily use.

"It does not seem to the Elder Brethren there is much data for forming any very
distinct ideas upon the final pecuniary outcome of such arrangements as might be
possible, if the Board of Trade, having regard to these and like
ulterior possibilities, are prepared to sanction the expenses, the Elder Brethren will,
in conformity with their habitual desire to render every service to the Mercantile
Marine compatible with their proper desire, be ready to make some experiments.

"I am to enclose herewith copies of the correspondence between the Telegraph
Construction Company, and the Elder Brethren on this subject.

"I am, &c.,

The Assistant Secretary,
"Harbour Department,
"Board of Trade."

On the receipt of this letter the matter underwent very careful consideration from
the officials of the Board of Trade, whose minutes thereon (Paper marked H. 612–1876)
have been laid before us for our information. And amongst those minutes I find one
from Mr. Gray, the assistant secretary for the Marine Department, in which he says that
he does not venture much whether there is any general need for telegraphic communication
between the lightships and the shore, to convey information that assistance is needed,
although he says there might be one or two special cases of the kind. But apart from
this Mr. Gray thought that "the physical difficulties of maintaining the shore ends of
the cable would render its efficiency in stormy weather practically nil;" he adds
however, "as regards the alleged difficulty of maintaining the ends of the cable on
board the lightships in working order, I see nothing in that; the merest child in

"me.

"I am, &c.,

Mr. Gray states that "the Rock stations, and the Kentish Knock and Sunk, are
in the flow of navigation, and the ships of the Board’s department are, as
rest." We regret that in considering the subject of the letter, the Board
have not been able to do so later, as the late death of the Elder Brethren
prevented the printing of the report, but I am confident that the Board
have been able to give the Elder Brethren a full and satisfactory reply.

"The subject of telegraphic communication between the lightships and the shore
was considered by the Board at the meeting of the 18th of August, 1876, and
their report is as follows:—

"The Board of Trade have considered the subject of telegraphic communication
between the lightships and the shore, and after careful consideration have come
to the conclusion that there is no general need for such a communication, but
that in a few exceptional cases it may be desirable to have such a telegraphic
connection, and that the Board of Trade would be willing to assist in any
such connection, provided that the expense of the same is borne by the
Elder Brethren, and that the Board of Trade do not undertake any
obligation for the payment of any part of the expense of such
connection. The Board of Trade have also considered the question of
the maintenance of the lightships in stormy weather, and have come to the
conclusion that the lightships are sufficiently provided with apparatus for
the purpose of maintaining the same in stormy weather, and that
the Elders, or their agents, are sufficiently acquainted with the
management of the lightships to enable them to do so.
"mechanics could overcome it." He then goes on to say that "in the case of the
"Deutschland," there is no doubt that a cable would have conveyed the message, and
"a tug might perhaps have been sent out earlier; but that a cable from the Sunk to
"the Cork, or from the Sunk to the Foreland would be right across the entrance to
"the Thames, and would be constantly liable to damage by the anchors of ships.
"Mr. Gray then proceeds to discuss the question of the use of an improved species of
rocket, and of the employment of carrier pigeons, which he tells us he had "bred and
flown for more than 20 years;" and he gives his reasons in favour of using rockets
and carrier pigeons rather than a telegraphic cable to communicate between the lights
and the shore. These views appear to have been generally adopted by the other
officers of the Board of Trade, and after a conference with the members of the Light
Committee of the Trinity House, a letter was on the 23rd of February 1876 written by
the Board of Trade to the Trinity House, of which the following is a copy:

"Board of Trade,
Harbour Department,

Sirs,

"Reverting to previous correspondence on the subject of means suggested for
"establishing communication between light-vessels and the shore, to your letter in
"particular of the 25th ultimo, and to the subsequent memorandum sent to Mr.
"Adderley by the Deputy Master, and to the conference at this house on the 18th instant,
"I am now directed by the Board of Trade to state that in their opinion it will not be
"advisable, for the present at any rate, to undertake experiments with a telegraphic
"cable.

"They are, however, disposed to think that the experiments suggested by the Elder
"Brethren might be tried at one light-vessel to begin with, to ascertain whether
"carrier pigeons could not be utilized for the purpose of communicating between one
"lightship and another, or the shore. A memorandum by Mr. Gray, who has had
"for some years experience in keeping pigeons, is enclosed, in case it may be useful
"to the Elder Brethren. It will be seen from it that the cost of the birds does not
"quite agree with the amount stated by one of the Elder Brethren at the recent
"conference.

"Two original papers sent to Mr. Adderley are herewith returned, together with
"Captain Halpin's model and plan.

I am, &c.

(Signed) T. H. FARRER.

The Secretary,
"Trinity House."

Mr. Mansel Jones was desirous of showing that that letter expressed the joint
opinions of the Board of Trade and the Trinity House on the subject, but Captain
Webb contended that that was not so, that it "was the Board of Trade's decision," and
he added, "We then ceased to think anything more about it; we thought that it was
as much as telling us that the expense would not be borne." Thus the matter stood,
and from that time it does not appear that there was any further question of estab-
lishing a communication between the lightships and the shore by means of telegraphic
cables.

It will now be well to see what has been the result of the last five years' trial of
the improved rocket system, and of the employment of carrier pigeons. And first, as
regards the rockets; that they have of late years been greatly improved there can
be no doubt, but as was pointed out in the Trinity House letter of the 25th of January
1876 they are of comparatively little use except at night, and as a matter of fact they
were of no use in this case in communicating the fact to the shore, the wrecks not
having been discovered until after daylight. I would add that, although rockets
might show that assistance was required, they would not indicate the position of the
wreck, nor the nature of the casualty. As regards carrier pigeons it seems to be
admitted that they are of no use either before sunrise or after sunset, or in a thick fog,
or snowstorm, or against a strong gale; and as wrecks more frequently occur on these
sands either at night or in a fog, or a snowstorm, it would seem that carrier pigeons
are of little use at times when their services are more especially needed; that they can
reach the shore quickly and with comparative certainty in clear fine weather seems
not to be a matter of much importance. Other objections to their use were also
pointed out by Thomas Thompson, the man who has charge of them on shore; he told
us that, if they are kept well fed on board the ships, they will not readily fly to the
land; and that they require to be very carefully handled, for that, if one of the
feathers of the pinions is injured, it prevents their flying; and that it is very difficult
to avoid doing this when it is blowing hard and the lightship is rolling about, as
before being sent off, certain letters have to be stamped on the wings to indicate the nature of the casualty, as for instance, whether it is a steamer or a sailing vessel. That the employment, too, of carrier pigeons has practically proved to be a complete failure, would seem to follow, from a report made by Mr. Price Edwards to the Trinity House, dated the 10th of March last, and which has been brought in for our information. Mr. Edwards, it seems, had been deputed to proceed to Harwich, and make inquiry as to the general working of the carrier pigeon arrangements during the past winter, and what he says is that "the birds have been nearly successful on two occasions, and if the weather had been clear on the 20th of February they would have done good service on that date; but," he adds, "the fact must be disguised that the birds have not yet been the direct means of assistance being rendered in a case of wreck."

The two plans, therefore, to which preference was given by the Board of Trade, namely, of improving the rockets, and of employing the carrier pigeons, and which have now been in use for the last five years, having signally failed, the question is whether the other plan, that of establishing a communication between the lights, or of some of them, and the shore, ought not now to be tried, and it is our decided opinion that it should be. Captain Webb and Captain Atkins, both of them very high authorities on such a point, are of opinion that it can be done without affecting the safety of the shipping, a matter no doubt of the first importance; and the objection that the wire would be likely to be injured by the anchors or ships is, as Captain Webb judiciously observes, one "common to all submarine telegraphs."

I should add that during the progress of this inquiry, I have received from Captain Halpin of the Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company, a letter, of which the following is a copy:

"Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Co.,
"Offices, 38, Old Broad Street,

Dear Sir,

It was in the year 1876 I submitted our scheme of connecting lights to the shore by means of submarine cables to the Deputy Master and Secretary of the Trinity House; it was discussed by them, and I received a letter stating that in the event of anything being done in the matter, I should hear from them. I made a verbal offer on behalf of this Company at that time to connect up one of the lights, any one they selected, and to maintain communication for one year free of cost, if successful, that they should take the cable at a fixed price; if on the contrary it did not succeed, we would remove it free of cost. Excepting one letter which I refer to, there was no written communication passed on the matter. I will look up the letter from the Trinity House, and let you have a copy; the letter was addressed to me, and I think I have it at my house.

I remain,

Yours truly,

H. C. Rothery, Esquire.

(Signed) ROBERT C. HALPIN.

I understood Captain Halpin to say that the Company was still prepared to carry out the proposed arrangements, and to connect any of the lights with the shore, and to maintain the connection for a twelve-month free of cost. Under these circumstances, seeing that the present means of communication have failed; that in the opinion of many good authorities a telegraph wire can without difficulty be laid from the lightship to the shore, which without endangering the safety of the vessel’s moorings, would establish a communication, available by day as well as by night, and which would give the fullest information as to the nature and character of the casualty and the position of the vessel, which it is not pretended that the present means can do, we think that no time should be lost in making the attempt, more especially if the Telegraph Company are willing to carry their proposal into effect.

Dated the 30th day of April 1881.

H. C. ROTHERY,
Wreck Commissioner.

We concur in the above Report.

R. ASHMORE POWELL.
HY. HARRIS.
A. RONALDSON.

Assessors.