

(No. 2822.)

"SHANNON."

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of the formal Investigation held at the Sessions House, Westminster, on the 11th and 12th of February 1886, before H. C. ROTHERY, Esquire, Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain CASTLE and Captain KIDDLE, R.N., as Assessors, into the circumstances attending the supposed loss of the sailing ship "SHANNON," with her crew of 28 hands, whilst on a voyage from London to Calcutta.

Report of Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances of the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons annexed, that the said ship, when she left this country in January 1885, was in good and seaworthy condition, but that she was not sufficiently manned; and that there is nothing to shew how she was lost.

The Court is not asked to make any order as to costs.

Dated this 12th day of February 1886.

(Signed) H. C. ROTHERY,
Wreck Commissioner.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) JOHN S. CASTLE, } Assessors.
JAMES KIDDLE, }

Annex to the Report.

This case was heard at Westminster, on the 11th and 12th of February 1886, when Mr. Kenelm Digby appeared for the Board of Trade. The owner of the "Shannon" was present, but was not represented by either counsel or solicitor. Thirteen witnesses having been produced by the Board of Trade and examined, and the depositions of two witnesses having been put in and read, Mr. Kenelm Digby handed in a statement of the questions upon which the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court. The owner then addressed the Court on his own behalf, and Mr. Kenelm Digby having been heard in reply, the Court proceeded to give judgment on the questions on which its opinion had been asked. The circumstances of the case are as follow:—

The "Shannon," which was an iron sailing ship belonging to the Port of London, of 1690 tons gross and 1621 tons net register, was built at Port Glasgow, in the county of Renfrew, in the year 1883, and at the time of her loss was the property of Mr. James Nourse, of No. 50, Lime Street, in the City of London, ship-owner, Mr. Nourse being the managing owner. She left the East India Docks on the 17th of January 1885 with a crew of 28 hands all told, the master's wife, and a cargo of about 2,200 to 2,250 tons of general merchandize, bound to Calcutta; and on the same day brought up alongside one of the powder buoys below Gravesend, where she took in about 5 tons of gunpowder, which was placed in a magazine specially constructed for the purpose just abaft the after hatchway; and she left at about 8 a.m. of the following day, and proceeded down the river in tow of the steam tug, and in charge of a duly licensed Trinity House pilot. At about 5.30 p.m. the same day she arrived off Deal, where the Trinity House pilot left her, and a Channel pilot then took charge; but the wind coming on to blow strong from the S.W. she soon afterwards brought up, and there remained at anchor until the 3rd of February following, when she again got under way, and was towed down as far as Beachy Head, where the steam tug cast off, and she proceeded down Channel under sail. On the 6th, when she was off Berry Head, some 13 miles this side of the Start, the pilot left her, and she stood away to the S.E. under

single reefed topsails, the wind at the time blowing fresh from S.W. to S.S.W. She was next spoken, when 42 days from London, by a vessel called the "Senator," a little to the north of the line, all apparently at that time being well. The two vessels were in company for about five or six days, the wind being light and calm, but a breeze springing up the "Senator," which was also bound to Calcutta, drew ahead, and they parted. From that time the "Shannon" has not been seen or heard of, and the object of the present inquiry is to ascertain, if possible, what has become of her.

These being the facts of the case, the first question upon which our opinion has been asked is, "Whether, when the vessel left London, she was in all respects in good and seaworthy condition?" It appears that the vessel was built in the year 1883 under special survey of Lloyd's, and up to the requirements for the highest class ship, and that she was classed 100 A 1. She left Glasgow on her first voyage in December 1883, bound to Brisbane, whence she proceeded to Calcutta, from thence to Demerara, and home to London; and we are told that on that voyage she behaved admirably. On her return she was surveyed in December 1884 by Lloyd's, and left again in January 1885 under the command of the same master. According to the evidence of those best competent to judge, she was then in all respects in a thoroughly good and seaworthy condition; and we have a letter from the captain, in which he says that she is a fine and noble ship and works beautifully; and that is confirmed by the evidence of the two pilots who went down the Channel with her. The fact too that the captain after the experience of the first voyage thought fit to take his wife with him on the second voyage is, in our opinion, sufficient proof of the confidence which he had in her good qualities; for, although seamen are willing enough to risk their own lives, we do not find that they are so ready to expose the lives of their wives or families to danger.

The second question which we are asked is, "Whether the ventilators were properly constructed, fitted, and secured; and whether they were so arranged as not to become a source of danger by affording ingress of water to the holds in the event of the vessel shipping heavy seas?" The vessel having been intended for the conveyance of coolies, she was exceptionally well ventilated, having 10 coal ventilators which were fitted on iron coamings standing some 18 inches above the deck, the ventilators rising some 3 feet above the coamings. In addition to which she had one of Tier's automatic ventilators, a very ingenious contrivance, which is worked by the rolling of the ship, and which ventilates effectually not only the 'tween decks but also the lower hold. So far as appears too the ventilators were properly constructed, fitted and secured, and were so arranged as not to be a source of danger in the event of the vessel shipping large quantities of water.

The third question which we are asked is, "Whether the coal shipped on board the vessel, or any part of it, was dangerous for shipment on long voyages, and whether means existed whereby the temperature of that portion of the cargo could be readily ascertained and registered?" We are told that there were 150 tons of coals from the Tanfield Colliery stowed in the lower fore hold in two parcels, 100 tons being below and 50 tons above, separated by iron plates; there were also 100 tons of Hardwicke and Tipshelf coals in the lower after hold, and 50 tons of Hetton coals in the 'tween decks. The Tanfield and Hetton coals had come by sea, and been discharged into barges, and taken alongside the ship and shipped on board. The Hardwicke and Tipshelf coals, which were from Derbyshire, had come up in trucks and been put on board at once; but all the coals, or at least those in the lower hold, had been on board for some six weeks before the vessel sailed. Apart therefore from the very perfect system of ventilation which existed on board, it seems hardly possible that any accident could have occurred from an explosion of gas on board; and as regards danger from spontaneous combustion, we have had before us the Government Inspectors for the Durham and Newcastle districts, within which the Tanfield and Hetton collieries are situated, and they have told us that the former contains about 3 per cent. and the latter only .02 per cent. of iron pyrites, and that what little there is in them is picked out when the

coals are passed over the screen, and before they are sent away from the collieries. They said also that they had never known of an instance of spontaneous combustion occurring in either of those coals. Mr. Pringle also, who has been manager of the Tanfield Collieries for the last 33 years, stated that during the whole of that time they have never known an instance of spontaneous combustion, although they have frequently had large quantities of their coal lying in heaps for as much as nine months at a time. We have therefore no reason to suppose that there was any risk of spontaneous combustion in the Tanfield and Hetton coals. What risk there was of spontaneous combustion in the Hardwicke and Tipshelf coals we are not able to say, no evidence as to their character having been laid before the Court. We were told that there were four or five thermometers on board, but there seems to have been no means of ascertaining the temperature of the coal from time to time, at all events in the lower hold, without removing a portion of the cargo, which was stowed above them, which could not have been done easily.

The fourth question which we are asked is, "Whether the cargo was properly stowed and secured from shifting, and whether it was prudent to stow casks of tar and drums of oil on the top of the coal?" The cargo with which this vessel was laden appears to have been well suited for stowing, and in the opinion of the assessors it was well stowed, the heavy portions being placed below and the lighter portions above and in the tween decks. No doubt if the coals, over which the drums of oil and casks of tar were stowed, had caught fire, it would have been found almost impossible to extinguish it; but those coals were the Tanfield coals, in which the Government inspector told us that there was only .02 of iron pyrites before it was picked, and there would therefore be very little danger of its taking fire. Mr. Nourse, the owner, who has had very large experience both as a ship master and shipowner, tells us that that is always the way in which casks of tar and drums of oil are stowed, so as to prevent the tar and oil from getting into the bilges or damaging the rest of the cargo, and in that opinion the assessors entirely concur. Whilst, therefore, we are of opinion that danger would undoubtedly occur in the event of the coals taking fire, the assessors are of opinion that it was not an improper way in which to stow tar and oil.

The fifth question which we are asked is, "Whether the vessel was overladen?" And the sixth is, "Whether she had sufficient freeboard?" Mr. Nourse told us that the load line had been placed at 4 feet 10½ below the deck, being 2½ inches for every foot depth of hold, and that when loaded to the centre of the disc she would have a mean draft of 21 feet 3. It seems, however, that on leaving the East India Dock she drew 20 feet 10 forward and 20 feet 7 aft, giving a mean draft of 20 feet 8½ inches, and if so the centre of the disc would have been 6½ inches out of water, giving her a freeboard of 5 feet 5 inches; and this is consistent with the evidence that, when she left, the whole of the disc was out of water; moreover, upon this too she would rise on getting out to sea. Now we were told by Mr. Nourse, and the statement was not questioned by the Board of Trade, that the minimum freeboard which this vessel is required to have by Lloyd's last rules is 4 feet 9¾. With a freeboard therefore of 5 feet 5, it seems clear that the vessel would not be overladen, and that she would have sufficient freeboard.

The seventh question which we are asked is, "Whether she was sufficiently manned, especially having regard to the composition of the crew?" We are told that she had a master, three mates, a carpenter, a sail maker, 13 A.B.'s, an ordinary seaman, four apprentices, a boy, and three Lascars, one of whom was the steward and another the cook. Mr. Nourse has told us that that is the scale upon which all his vessels are manned, and that in his opinion it is sufficient. He admitted that it is not so large a crew as a vessel of her size would have had formerly, but he said that they have now appliances on board which fully compensate for the deficiency, such for instance as double topsail yards, steam power to assist in raising anchors and for other purposes. Now putting aside the master, the carpenter, the sail maker, and the two Lascars, who acted as cook and steward, and who would not ordinarily keep watch, it gives us one officer, seven A.B.'s, two apprentices, and a boy for one watch, and two officers, six A.B.'s, one ordinary seaman, two apprentices, and the Lascar for the other watch. Looking, however, at the size of the vessel, the length of the voyage, the chances of sickness on board, and the risk of being suddenly taken aback in a squall, the assessors are of opinion that this was not a sufficient crew for her; they think that she should have had four more A.B.'s, or two more for each watch.

The eighth question which we are asked is, "What in the opinion of the Court, from the evidence before them, is the cause of this vessel not having been heard of since she was seen by the 'Senator' in the month of April last?" It is of course quite impossible for us to say what may have caused the loss of this vessel. Apart from the number and composition of the crew, there is nothing for which we could fairly impute blame to the owner. She was a first class ship, admirably equipped, not too deeply laden, and with a good freeboard. It was suggested by the witnesses from the "Senator" that some time after they had parted from her, and when they were in about 8° South and 80° East, they encountered the tail of a cyclone, and they think it possible that she might have been caught in it, and have gone down. This, however, is only conjecture.

The ninth question which we are asked is, "What was the cost of the vessel to her owner?" Mr. Nourse told us that the contract price for the ship was 13l. 10s. per registered ton, and that he gave 22,333l. for her.

The tenth question is, "What was her value when she last left the United Kingdom?" She had made but one voyage since she had been built, and was apparently in first rate condition when she left on her second voyage in January 1885. No doubt she would have depreciated somewhat in that time, but not, in the opinion of the assessors, to any great extent.

The eleventh question which we are asked is, "What were the insurances effected, and how were they apportioned?" Mr. Nourse has told us that the vessel was insured for 20,000l., which in the opinion of the assessors would not be in excess of her value; and that the freight was insured for 500l., the amount which the owner would receive on her arrival at Calcutta. There were, we were told, no other insurances of any kind upon her.

(Signed) H. C. ROTHERY,
Wreck Commissioner.

We concur.

(Signed) JOHN S. CASTLE, }
JAMES KIDDLE, } ASSASSORS.