



THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894

REPORT OF COURT

(No. 7977)

s.s. "Pandora" O.N. 90948

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at Newcastle-upon-Tyne on the 30th September, and 1st, 2nd and 3rd days of October 1952, before Mr. R. F. Hayward, Q.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain P. S. Robinson and Mr. W. J. Nutton, M.I.N.A., into the circumstances attending the loss of the s.s. "Pandora" with all hands in the North Sea on the 22nd October, 1951.

The Court having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds for the reasons stated in the Annex hereto, that the loss of the "Pandora" was caused by foundering in heavy weather after probable engine and/or steering gear trouble, shifting of cargo and rapid ingress of water, probably both before and after her side was struck by the propeller of "Gripfast".

Dated this 3rd day of October, 1952.

R. F. HAYWARD, *Judge*

We concur in the above Report,

P. S. ROBINSON }
W. J. NUTTON } *Assessors*

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- Q. 1. By whom was the s.s. "Pandora" owned and managed at the time of her loss ?
- A. The "Pandora" was owned by the Merchiston Steamship Company Limited, of 25, Rutland Square, Edinburgh, in liquidation.
The "Pandora" was managed by George A. Morrison & Company (Leith) Limited, of 6, John's Place, Leith, and Mr. George Douglas Dow was appointed ship's husband.
- Q. 2. When, where and by whom was the s.s. "Pandora" built ?
- A. At Wallsend in 1892 by Messrs. Schlesinger Davis & Company.
- Q. 3. Did the s.s. "Pandora" leave Newburgh, Fife, on a voyage to the Humber on the 21st October 1951, carrying a cargo of 180 tons 4 cwts. of half-inch Whinstone chippings and with a complement of six hands ?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 4. When the s.s. "Pandora" left Newburgh on her last voyage was she seaworthy, fully equipped, and properly maintained to meet the perils of the voyage then undertaken ?
- A. Yes.

- Q. 5. Was the s.s. "Pandora" submitted for the usual periodical surveys by a surveyor of a Classification Society ?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 6. Where was the cargo of Whinstone chippings stowed on board the s.s. "Pandora" and was the cargo properly stowed and trimmed ?
- A. The cargo was properly stowed in the main hold and properly trimmed.
- Q. 7. Was the s.s. "Pandora" overloaded when she sailed on her last voyage ?
- A. No.
- Q. 8. Were the life-saving appliances carried on board the s.s. "Pandora" adequate and in satisfactory working order when the vessel sailed on her last voyage ?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 9. What wireless equipment was carried ?
- A. A broadcast receiver.
- Q. 10. What were the conditions of wind, sea and weather met by the s.s. "Pandora" on the 22nd October, 1951 ?
- A. In the morning the weather, which had been moderate, rapidly deteriorated, causing bad weather watch to be set at local Coastguard Stations at 4.30 a.m. Wind then increased to Force 8 with a heavy sea which continued till about noon, when it rapidly improved.
- Q. 11. What distress signals were exhibited on board the s.s. "Pandora", and when ? Were they seen from the shore or from other ships ?
- A. At about 6.30 a.m. distress rockets throwing red stars were fired from the "Pandora" and were observed by nearby Coastguard Stations and also by the collier "Gripfast" when she was to the northward of Whitby on a ballast voyage to the Tyne.
- Q. 12. What efforts were made to rescue those on board the s.s. "Pandora" ?
- A. The "Gripfast" proceeded towards "Pandora" and closed within 60 feet. There being no response to the hailing to the crew of the "Pandora" to jump, "Gripfast" was manoeuvred alongside to windward, with her port side alongside the starboard side of the "Pandora", and was in close contact for a few minutes. Although lines and ladders were over the side ready for the "Pandora's" crew to board whilst

the ships were in contact, none of the "Pandora's" crew took advantage of this opportunity, although the bulwarks of the "Gripfast" were at times in close contact with the rails of the "Pandora", and the "Gripfast's" crew lined along her rail waiting to assist. About 20 minutes later, after the ships had drifted about 150 yards apart, the "Pandora" foundered. The "Gripfast" attempted to pick up survivors but was unable to do so on account of damage to her propeller, and herself had to anchor off the lee shore and receive tugboat assistance.

- Q. 13. When and where did the s.s. "Pandora" sink, and at that time were six members of her crew still on board?
- A. The "Pandora" sank at 7.44 a.m. on the 22nd October 1951, in position approximately Latitude 54 degrees 36½ minutes North, and Longitude 0 degrees 41 minutes West, with all hands.
- Q. 14. How many lives were lost and in what circumstances?
- A. All hands, as detailed in the answer to Question 13 above.
- Q. 15. Have any bodies been recovered following the loss of the s.s. "Pandora"?
- A. Yes, three.
- Q. 16. Have any of the s.s. "Pandora's" boats, equipment or wreckage been found?
- A. Yes. Her port lifeboat and several lifeboat stores, 35 main hatch covers and the hatch cover of the access hatch.
- Q. 17. What was the cause of the loss of the s.s. "Pandora"?
- A. Foundering after probably engine and/or steering gear trouble, shifting of cargo and rapid ingress of water, probably both before and after her side was struck by the propeller of "Gripfast". (See Annex).
- Q. 18. Was the loss of the s.s. "Pandora" caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of the owners, managers, master, or any other person?
- A. No.

ANNEX TO THE REPORT

The "Pandora", registered at Beaumaris, was a steel single screw cargo steamer, built in 1892 by Messrs. Schlesinger Davis & Company at Wallsend. At the time of her loss she was owned by the Merchiston Steamship Company of Edinburgh (now in liquidation) and was managed by Messrs. George A. Morrison & Company (Leith) Limited, and her ship's husband was Mr. George Douglas Dow. The "Pandora" was 116 feet in length, 23 feet in beam, and 8 feet 7 inches in depth, 203 tons gross, and 76 tons net. She was fitted with three transverse watertight steel bulkheads dividing the fore peak tank and crew accommodation from the cargo hold, the cargo hold from the machinery space and side bunkers, and the machinery space from the after peak dry space and crew accommodation. Her forecastle raised 3 feet above the upper deck was about 14 feet long, and her quarter-deck, also raised 3 feet, was about 40 feet long. There were no openings in the raised quarterdeck bulkhead. Her crew were accommodated as follows:—

The cook and a sailor in the forecastle, the master and mate in accommodation under the bridge, and the two engineers under the raised quarterdeck aft. On either side of the forecastle at its after end were deck houses, on the port side a water closet and on the

starboard side a lamp room and paint locker. Immediately forward of the raised quarterdeck was a deck-house accommodating the master and mate, about which was the navigating bridge and wheelhouse. On the raised quarterdeck from forward to aft were the boiler casing with a fidley opening closed by a steel cover, the galley, and the engine room casing, over which was a wooden skylight with wooden hinged flaps. Access to the forecastle crew space was by a steel companion at the forecastle bulkhead on the centre line. Its door was a hinged wooden door 4 feet 2 inches by 1 foot 8½ inches, and its sill was 19 inches above the upper deck. Access to the engineers' accommodation aft was by a wooden companion on the raised quarterdeck. Its door was 25½ inches by 29½ inches with a sill of 5½ inches.

There was also a wooden companion in the engine-room skylight with a wooden door 20 inches by 21 inches. The forepeak tank would hold 16 tons of fresh water, the cargo hold was of 10,750 cubic feet capacity, and her side bunkers would each hold approximately 12 tons of coal. The one hold of the "Pandora" had a hatchway on the upper deck 35 feet by 12 feet 5½ inches with steel coamings 2 feet 4½ inches in height. It was fitted with six transverse steel hatch beams, wooden hatch covers 2½ inches thick and was fitted with the usual arrangement of tarpaulins, cleats, battens and wedges, and hatch lashing wires. Immediately aft of the forecastle on the port side of the well deck was a small hatchway for access to the hold which was 2 feet 3½ inches by 1 foot 10 inches with a steel coaming 1 foot 6 inches high, a 2 inches wooden hatch cover and the usual arrangements for battening down.

The ventilators were as follows: to the forward crew space one 4 inches diameter gooseneck on the forecastle deck, one 8½ inches diameter cowl type on the upper deck on the port side forward, and one 9 inches diameter cowl type on the upper deck starboard side aft. There was also a mushroom type ventilator on the upper deck port side aft.

The bridge accommodation was ventilated by two 4 inches diameter goosenecks on the bridge deck, and on the raised quarter-deck was a 7½ inches diameter cowl type ventilator for the after accommodation. There were also two cowl ventilators to the machinery space. All these ventilators were supplied with closing appliances.

The well deck was fitted with steel bulwarks 3 feet 2 inches in height with four hinged freeing ports on either side. The discharge from the forward water closet led overboard approximately 2 feet 5 inches below the upper deck, and was fitted with a storm valve. She was fitted with side scuttles to the accommodation compartments and those below the weather decks were fitted with hinged deadlights.

The steering gear was of the rod and chain type worked by hand. She was fitted with ample pumping arrangements.

The machinery of the "Pandora", which was aft, was a compound steam engine built by Messrs. Hedley & Boyd at North Shields in 1892, and she was re-boilered with a single Scotch type boiler in 1930. Her coal consumption was 3 to 4 tons per day, and her steaming speed was 7 to 8 knots.

The "Pandora's" lifeboats were of wood, placed under radial davits, one on each side of the deck aft, and were certified each to carry 10 men. She had the usual lifesaving appliances and carried a wireless broadcast receiver.

The ship was built under the survey of Lloyd's Register, and at the time of her loss was in Lloyd's Register's highest class, having completed her No. 3 special survey in March 1948, and she was subsequently maintained in a thoroughly seaworthy condition, and

passed the usual loadline certificate examinations in 1948, 1949, 1950, and 1951, and also passed surveys following repairs for damage in 1949 and 1950, when she was last examined in dry dock. The "Pandora" had recently been tested for stability, and the Court is satisfied that at all times it was ample.

On the 21st October 1951, the "Pandora" loaded at Newburgh, Fife, a cargo of 180 tons of half-inch Whinstone chippings. These were stowed in her main hold and trimmed satisfactorily. At her berth she would take the ground at low water, but at all times whilst loading she was afloat. She was piloted down the river from Dundee, and hence to sea, and her Pilot left her at about 10 a.m. on the 21st off the Abertay Light Vessel. Her draught was then 6 feet 9 inches forward and 9 feet 2 inches aft, her mean draught being $\frac{1}{2}$ inch short of her summer load line, and she was perfectly upright.

Bound for Hull she proceeded south in moderate weather which, on the early morning of the 22nd, deteriorated, causing bad weather watch to be set by the Coastguards on the Yorkshire coast at 4.30 a.m. Thereafter the gale rapidly increased, blowing at about Force 8 from a northerly direction, raising a heavy sea and swell, the visibility being about four miles. At about 6.30 a.m. distress rockets were fired by the "Pandora" and observed by the Coastguards at Staithes and at Kettleess, and also by the Officer of the watch of the collier "Gripfast" at a distance of about five miles on the port bow when that ship was north of Whitby on a ballast voyage to the Tyne. The signals were observed to be bearing 045 degrees from Staithes Coastguard Station and 011 degrees from the Station at Kettleess, placing the vessel about four miles out from the Yorkshire coast.

The Coastguard observing the signals immediately communicated with the Runswick Bay and Whitby Lifeboat Secretaries, and later on the Redcar lifeboat was also informed. The weather conditions, however, were so bad that neither the Whitby lifeboat nor the Redcar lifeboat could launch, and although the Runswick Bay lifeboat could have launched into the bay the conditions were such as to preclude her from going to sea over the bar. The more distant Teemouth lifeboat could not arrive before the "Pandora" sank, but proceeded to make a search for survivors with, unfortunately, no success.

The Master of the "Gripfast" was immediately called after the rockets were seen and he promptly altered course and proceeded through the heavy head sea towards the "Pandora". As daylight came he was able to see that the "Pandora", apparently stationary, was heading to the northward and steering between N.W. and E. She appeared to be in fairly good trim, though deep in the water, but whilst still about a mile from her she was seen to be swept by a very heavy sea. Thereafter, as the "Gripfast" continued to approach, the "Pandora" appeared to become more sluggish, to be listing to port, with her cargo derrick swinging loose, with the port lifeboat falls hanging in the water, and with the port lifeboat capsized and drifting away. All the six hands on the "Pandora" wearing life-jackets were seen to be engaged in a vain attempt to launch their starboard lifeboat. The "Gripfast" was manoeuvred to windward on the starboard side of the "Pandora", ladders were placed over the "Gripfast's" port side, her crew were lined up along her port rails with lines, and it was expected that the "Pandora's" crew would jump into the water. They did not do so, however, and the master of the "Gripfast" daringly manoeuvred the port side of his ship into contact with the starboard side of the "Pandora", whose crew were hailed to jump, and lines were thrown on board her. Two members of her crew ran down on to the well deck. One member of "Pandora's" crew started to board the "Gripfast" but changed his mind. At this

time the starboard rail of the "Pandora" was only about 2 feet below the bulwark of the "Gripfast", remaining from time to time in contact for an appreciable number of seconds before rolling apart to a distance of about 10 feet. The "Pandora" slowly drifted aft, and with the two ships' heads falling apart the starboard side of the "Pandora" canted under the port quarter of the "Gripfast" and fell heavily (it is thought that with her bilge in the way of the cargo hold) on to the propeller of the "Gripfast", breaking two of its blades and making the "Gripfast" unmanoeuvrable. At no time was anything heard from any of the crew of the "Pandora". When some 20 minutes later the "Gripfast" was about 150 yards from the port quarter of the "Pandora" the "Pandora", listing increasingly to port, sank by the head. Members of her crew were sighted amongst the wreckage, but due to her own injury and the weather conditions the "Gripfast" was unable to get towards the wreckage, and, drifting towards the lee shore, only avoided stranding by riding to both anchors until she could obtain tug assistance which, during the afternoon when the weather had improved, arrived and took her to safety after a delay of two hours during which time her attempts to make fast were thwarted by the persisting bad weather.

Subsequently the "Pandora's" capsized lifeboat, many of her hatch covers, and the bodies of three of her crew were picked up in the vicinity of Whitby.

The cause of this distressing casualty has given great concern and difficulty to all connected with the investigation of it, a difficulty greatly increased by the fact that, but for the firing of a distress rocket, no other information from the "Pandora" reached the outer world, and none of her crew survived.

After careful consideration the Court is of opinion that the most likely cause of the loss of the "Pandora" was a chain of unfortunate circumstances happening in probably the following order :

- (1) A breakdown, temporary or otherwise, of her engines or steering gear, causing her to become out of control.
- (2) The ingress of an alarming quantity of water, probably through a heavy sea, filling the crew space through the forward companionway.
- (3) The striking of a heavy wave on her side causing further ingress of water and the shifting to port of her cargo.
- (4) The probable holing of the shell of the "Pandora" in way of the bilge abreast of her hold due to it falling on to the propeller of the "Gripfast", without which it appears probable that the ship would have remained afloat for a much longer interval after that accident than about 20 minutes. There is a possibility that the initial distress of the "Pandora" was due to a drifting mine having exploded in her vicinity. There was however nothing in the evidence to support it and the Court regards the possibility of such an explosion as somewhat remote. Finally, the Court has nothing but high praise for the conduct of those on the "Gripfast"; it is satisfied that the crews of nearby lifeboats were ready and willing, as always, to do what was in their power to save life in accordance with the very high standard which has made the Royal National Lifeboat Institution so widely and much admired. The Court finds no cause whatever for attaching any blame or adverse criticism to the owners, master or anyone else responsible for the upkeep and navigation of the "Pandora". In conclusion, it need hardly be stated that the difficulties of all concerned might well have been greatly eased had the "Pandora" possessed means of speaking to the world by radio transmitter or telephone.

R. F. HAYWARD, *Judge*

P. S. ROBINSON }
W. J. NUTTON } *Assessors*

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