

(No. 481.)

“NORA,” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of the formal Investigation held at Westminster, on the 16th of January 1880, before H. C. ROTHERY, Esquire, Wreck Commissioner, assisted by R. C. MAY, Esquire, C.E., Captain HARRIS and Captain RONALDSON, as Assessors, into the circumstances attending the material damage sustained by the steamship “NORA,” of London, on the 12th day of November 1879, and the stranding and loss of the said ship on the following day, on the Banjaard Bank, Coast of Holland.

Report of Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances of the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons annexed,—

- (1.) That the stranding and loss of the said vessel was due to the fires having been put out by the large quantity of water which got into the engine-room, whereby she became disabled, and was then driven before the wind on to the coast.
- (2.) That the cause of the vessel making so much water was not the carrying away of the rough tree stanchions, but that it was probably due to some seam or rivet in the way of the engine-room having been started by the straining and pitching of the vessel during the gale to which she was exposed.
- (3.) That all proper efforts were made to keep the vessel afloat, and to prevent her stranding on the Banjaard.
- (4.) That the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care and skill.
- (5.) That it does not appear that any person is to blame for the casualty, and certainly not the master, officers, or anyone on board.

The Court makes no order as to costs.
Dated this 16th day of January 1880.

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

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) H. HARRIS,
A. RONALDSON, } Assessors.
” ROBERT C. MAY, }

Annex to the Report.

This case was heard at Westminster on the 16th of January instant, when Mr. McConnell appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. Potter for the owners, and Mr. Nelson for the master of the “Nora.” Six witnesses having been produced by the Board of Trade and examined, Mr. McConnell asked the opinion of the Court upon the following questions:—

- “1. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?”
- “2. What was the cause of the vessel making so much water. Was it through the carrying away of the rough tree stanchions, or from other, and if so, from what cause?”
- “3. Were proper efforts made to keep the vessel afloat, and to avoid stranding on the Banjaard?”
- “4. Was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care and skill?”
- “5. Whether the master, officers, or any other person, are, or either of them, is in default, and if so, should the certificates be dealt with?”

Mr. Potter having then produced three witnesses, the Court, after hearing counsel, proceeded to give judgment on the questions on which its opinion had been asked. The circumstances of the case are as follow:—

The “Nora” was an iron screw steamship, belonging to the Port of London, of 432 tons gross and 294 tons net register, and was fitted with engines of 100 horse-power. She was built at Cork in the year 1861, and at the time of her loss was the property of the General Steam Navigation Company. She left Amsterdam at 2.30 p.m. on the 11th of November last, bound to London, having a crew of 22 hands all told, and with a general cargo of about 300 tons, and 322 sheep and 30 calves on deck. She drew 10 feet 5 inches forward and 13 feet 5 inches aft. At about 6 p.m. she got to sea, the weather at the time being

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moderate; but at 10 o'clock the wind and sea began to rise, and by midnight it was blowing a strong gale from W.N.W. to N.N.W. At 3 a.m. of the following day she was struck by a heavy sea, which carried away a portion of the bulwarks aft and drowned most of the animals. The wind and sea increased as daylight came on, and at about 8 a.m. the master set the main trysail, with a view of keeping the vessel's head to the wind. Between 8 and 9 water was seen trickling down the sides of the ship in the engine-room. Whether the engineer reported this fact to the master as soon as he saw it appears to be somewhat doubtful, but at any rate the master was informed of it between 9 and 10 o'clock. At about 11 o'clock the wing fires were put out. Thereupon all hands were set to bale the ship, but the water continued to rise, and at 2 p.m. the two midship fires were out. In the meantime the precaution had been taken of getting up steam in the donkey boiler, and the pumps having been immediately connected therewith they were not stopped at all. At 4 p.m., the vessel being at that time under her main trysail, the master determined, if possible, to wear her, and for that purpose took in the main trysail and set the fore trysail and the fore staysail. She went off 2 or 3 points, and then fell into the trough of the sea; upon which the fore trysail and the fore staysail were taken in, and the main trysail was again set, and she was brought with her head to sea again. At this time a fishing smack was seen, and signals were made to her, the master intending to ask her to stand by them until daylight, but she did not come near them. Between 5 and 6 o'clock the master gave orders that the propeller should be disconnected, as it impeded the sailing of the ship, and this was accordingly done. At about 6 p.m. the Schouwen Light was observed, bearing S.E. by E., distant from 20 to 22 miles. The wind had now settled down into a steady gale from N.N.W., and the vessel drifted bodily to leeward until about 1 a.m., when she struck upon the Banjaard Bank, Schouwen Light bearing about E. by S., distant some 5 to 6 miles. She continued to drive over the bank for about half an hour, and then became fast; upon which signals were made, but no assistance coming, they proceeded at about 8 o'clock, it being then low water, and the sea comparatively smooth, to lower the lifeboat and cutter, and all hands got into them, and were safely landed at West Schouwen. The vessel it seems afterwards became a total wreck, and was lost together with the whole of her cargo, except some cheeses which were subsequently saved by the master, who went out to her with a tug. No lives were lost, but one man was injured before the vessel struck, when she got into the trough of the sea.

These being generally the facts of the case, the first question upon which our opinion has been asked is, “What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?” and the answer to be given is quite clear. It was due to the engines room compartment, which was in the stern of the vessel, having from some cause or other become filled with water; to the fires having been put out, whereby the ship became disabled, and to her having been thereupon driven before the gale on to the coast.

The second question on which our opinion is asked is, “What was the cause of the vessel making so much water, was it through the carrying away of the rough tree stanchions, or from other, and if so, from what cause?” This is a more difficult question, and one which it is not very easy to answer.

And, first, as to the stanchions. It seems that they were of wood, the footings passing through the covering board for about 2 feet below the deck, where they were bolted to the side of the ship. We are told that they were exceptionally long, and no doubt from the pressure to which they would be exposed they would work in their sockets, and thus some water might get down through the footings. But the evidence of all the witnesses is that, although some may have gone down that way, it was clearly not sufficient to account for all the water that was in the ship. The carpenter also, whose special business it was to see to those stanchions, told us that not one of them had been carried away until after the vessel took the ground. We can, therefore, have no doubt whatever that no great quantity of water came into the vessel through those stanchions. It was fairly admitted by Mr. White, the shipwright who superintended the repairs to this vessel, that this form of stanchion is not perhaps the best that can be devised, and that it is not such a form as we should ordinarily find in vessels of modern construction. The frames we are told are now generally carried up above the deck and the bulwarks fastened to them; so that no leakage would take place

through the footings of the stanchions, as seems to have occurred in this instance. Still we are not to blame the owners on that account, for this vessel was built in 1861, and at that time it was not usual to build them in that way.

The evidence again of the witnesses is quite clear that it did not come in from above, through the companions, the engine-room skylight, or the grating over the stoke-hole, through which they were baling her; for if it had they would have seen it. Equally certain it is that it did not come into the holds, which were separated from the engine-room compartment by watertight bulkheads, for they sounded the holds and found no water there, all the water was in the engine-room compartment.

Again, as to the engine-room compartment. There was it seems a thwartship bunker against the bulkhead, separating the engine-room from the main hold, and there were two bunkers in the wings in the fore part of the engine-room, but which did not extend right aft. The engineer, too, was quite positive that no water came in abaft the wing bunkers, except the small quantity which was trickling down from the footings of the bulwark stanchions, and that none came in by any of the sea cocks or pipes. The conclusion, therefore, to which we are obliged to come is that it must have come in by some leak or seam started in the vessel's side behind the side bunkers. We were told by Mr. White, the company's shipwright, that at the end of 1878 she had been placed on the gridiron, her bottom overhauled and blacked, and repairs done to her to the extent of 339*l.* 9*s.* 8*d.*, and again in September last she was put into dock, her bottom examined, the propeller taken out, and a new stern bush fitted at an expense of about 190*l.* more. She was also inspected by the company's officers every time she returned to the Thames. On the other hand, it must be remembered that she was not a new vessel, having been built in 1861; and I am told by the engineer assessor who sits with me on this occasion that some seam or rivet might have been started in the way of the engine-room behind one of the wing bunkers by the heavy pitching to which she was subjected for so many hours, and that thus the water may have got into her. This then is the only conclusion to which we can properly come, without seeking some other possible cause, for which there is not a particle of evidence.

The third question which we are asked is, "Were proper efforts made to keep the vessel afloat and to avoid stranding on the Banjaard?" In our opinion every proper measure was taken by the master. When the gale came on he laid her head to the wind, so as to keep her off the shore. It was suggested that possibly an anchor might have been dropped when they found that they were nearing the land, but in our opinion the master exercised a very wise discretion in not dropping his anchors; had he done so, and had the anchors held, or even had they checked her, it is very probable that the sea would have gone clean over the vessel, and that she would have foundered at once. We think that the master acted very properly, under the circumstances in not letting go his anchors.

In answer to the fourth question, "Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care and skill," I will only say that in the opinion of the Nautical Assessor she was navigated with exceptional care and skill.

The fifth question on which our opinion is asked is, "Whether the master, officers, or any other person are, or either of them, is in fault; and if so should their certificates be dealt with?" So far as we can see, no blame can properly be imputed to any person for this casualty, and certainly not to either the master, the officers, or anyone on board. The loss seems to be due to the exceptional violence of the storm, and to the very heavy sea which is always found to prevail on that coast when there is a strong gale from the N.W.

Mr. Nelson, on behalf of the master, asked for costs against the Board of Trade, but the Court was of opinion that no costs should be allowed, Mr. Nelson having admitted that the case was a very proper one for an inquiry; and it appearing also that the master would receive detention money as a witness at the usual rate. Under the circumstances no order was made as to costs.

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

We concur.

(Signed) H. HARRIS,
" A. RONALDSON, } Assessors.
" ROBERT C. MAY, }