

(No. 1062.)

“AERON VALE.”

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of a formal Investigation held at the Town Hall, Cardiff, on the 22nd and 23rd days of July 1881, before ROBERT OLIVER JONES, Esquire, Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captain FORSTER and Captain CASTLE, as Assessors, into the circumstances attending the foundering of the British sailing ship “AERON VALE,” of Aberystwith, on the 6th day of June 1881, in about latitude 18° 35' N. and longitude 25° W.

*Report of Court.*

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 said ship was occasioned by her having been overladen and unseaworthy when she commenced her voyage. The Court also finds the master in default for neglecting to see that his ship was in a seaworthy condition, and for omitting to take refuge in a port of safety when he had the means of doing so, for which default the Court suspends his certificate for six calendar months.

Dated this 25th day of July 1881.

(Signed) R. O. JONES,  
Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) GEORGE H. FORSTER, } Assessors.  
JOHN S. CASTLE, }

*Annex to Report.*

The “Aeron Vale,” whose official number was 28,297, was a brig, built of wood, belonging to the Port of Aberystwith, of 201.63 nett registered tonnage. She was built at New Quay, Cardiganshire, in 1860, and at the time of her loss was the property of the late Jenkin Griffiths, of Pantfaen, near Aberayron, county of Cardigan, and several others, Jenkin Griffiths being managing owner.

It appears that the vessel when built was classed A 1 at Lloyd's for eleven years, and in 1879 she received extensive repairs at Aberayron, and was then reclassified for eight years. From this time she appears to have been engaged in carrying heavy cargoes, ranging from 300 to 320 tons. In November 1880, whilst coming out of Bilbao laden with iron ore, she struck on the bar, and on her arrival at Cardiff she was placed on the gridiron, where she remained for two tides; it was then found that the copper was rubbed off in several places, and it was patched where necessary. She was then loaded with a cargo of coals for Demerara, from whence she proceeded to the Spanish Main, where she loaded a cargo for Havre. On arrival at that port some of the cargo was found to be damaged. From Havre she proceeded to Newport, Monmouthshire, and in April 1881 the master, who was going home on leave, gave instructions to Mr. Harriss, a ship builder of Newport, to examine the vessel and to do all that was necessary, but not to run her to any unnecessary expense. Mr. Harriss does not appear to have gone on board himself, but sent two shipwrights to do what repairs they thought proper, and he ordered them to caulk the butts where they thought it was required. This they appear to have done, and they also put a piece in the cutwater and repaired the cabin door.

A cargo of 300 tons of steel rails was then shipped; the draft of water after loading was, forward 12 feet 7 inches, aft 13 feet 3 inches, and she had a freeboard of 2 feet 3 inches.

On the 20th April, the day on which the loading was completed, she was found to be making water, and a stream of water was heard running into the vessel on the starboard side abaft the main hatchway. She was

then towed from the Alexandra Dock and placed on the west mud near the Light House, when at low water she appears to have been sunk about five feet in the mud. Whilst in this position the master and owner took Samuel Cann, a shipwright, on board and some sheet lead. Cann received instructions to do what was required, but neither master nor owner examined the vessel, and they shortly after returned to the shore. Cann has stated that he found on the starboard side, above the main hatchway, a seam which was very open; this he caulked and payed with coal tar (which the mate gave him for that purpose), instead of using pitch as he should have done. He also found some 10 or 12 through fastening bolts that required to be shifted, some were broken, others loose; of these bolts about six were in the breast hooks, those he caulked, and over the heads nailed pieces of lead four inches square. It appears that he pointed out the bad places to the mate, and he informed the Court that in his opinion the vessel ought to have been thoroughly overhauled before she was loaded.

On April the 30th she was towed to Penarth Roads, and in the log book, which has been kept and produced to the Court by the mate, is an entry which states that “she was making a deal of water.” On the 4th of May a carpenter was sent on board to shore the cargo, but nothing was done to the vessel. On May 10th she sailed from Penarth Roads bound for Caravalles, in the Brazils, having a crew of eight hands, including the master, Mr. William Thomas, who held a certificate of competency, No. 97,457. Nothing of importance occurred until crossing the Bay of Biscay, when, although the weather was fine, the vessel rolled and laboured heavily.

On May 25th she shipped a sea, and it is stated in the log book she commenced to leak more from this date, and continued to do so. On 27th Madeira was passed at a distance of about 15 miles. On 31st ship still continued making water. On Friday, 3rd June, wind from the N.E., course S.W., speed 3½ knots, at 11 a.m. 13 inches of water was found in the well, which had increased to 21 inches at noon. The vessel's position then was latitude 23° 32' north, and longitude 22° 03' west; the same course was continued, and on the morning of the 4th a hole was found in the port bow, which was plugged up, but she continued to make water, and on the 5th they were compelled to pump 15 minutes every half hour with one pump. It is stated in evidence that the course was then changed to make St. Vincents, one of the Cape de Verde islands; this change, however, does not appear in the log book, and from the position in which it is stated the vessel foundered, viz., latitude 18° north, longitude 25° west, the Court cannot accept this statement.

On the 6th the water rapidly increased, so much so that at 10 a.m. they had four feet in her, and the master ordered the boats out, and she was abandoned, as he did not consider it safe for them to remain longer on board; and it appears they saw the vessel go down stern first about 45 minutes after they left.

The following morning they were picked up by the “Strabo” and landed at St. Vincents; from thence they were forwarded to Southampton. No lives were lost.

It should be added that the master stated that the freight of 400*l.* was paid before the ship left this country, and that the vessel was insured in the sum of, as he believed, 1,200*l.*

At the conclusion of the evidence the following questions were put to the Court by the Solicitor for the Board of Trade:—

1. Whether, when the “Aeron Vale” left Newport, she was in good and seaworthy condition?
2. Whether the leaks then and thereafter discovered were properly repaired?
3. Whether, when the vessel left Penarth Roads, she was in good and seaworthy condition?
4. Whether she had sufficient freeboard?
5. Whether she was overladen, and whether, having regard to the construction and condition of the vessel, and the nature of the cargo, it was too heavy for her?
6. Whether the cargo was properly stowed?
7. What was the cause of the vessel making water on the 22nd May, and what was the cause of the leak thereafter increasing?
8. Whether every possible effort was made to ascertain the position of the leak?

9. Whether the pumps were used with sufficient frequency?

10. Whether the master was justified in proceeding to sea with the vessel in the condition she was in when the voyage commenced, and in not running for the nearest port when he found his vessel making more water than was consistent with safety?

11. Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

12. Whether she was prematurely abandoned?

And, finally,

Whether the master and mate are, or either of them is, in default?

To the above questions the Court replies as follows:—

1. The Court is of opinion that when the ship left Newport she was not in a good and seaworthy condition.

2. The leaks then and thereafter discovered were not properly repaired.

3. The vessel, when she left Penarth Roads, was not in good and seaworthy condition.

4. She had not sufficient freeboard.

5. The ship was overladen, and having regard to the construction and condition of the vessel, and the nature of the cargo, the Court is of opinion that it was too heavy for her.

6. The cargo was properly stowed.

7. The vessel was leaky when she started on her voyage, and straining from being overladen with a cargo of steel rails, the leaks were increased.

8. After leaving Newport River no attempt was made to ascertain the position of the leak. After they were at sea it was difficult to find any leak that was below the level of the cargo or under water. One leak, however, was discovered, that in the port bow, which was plugged.

9. The pumps seem to have been used when required.

10. We do not think that he was justified in proceeding to sea with the vessel in the condition in which she was at the beginning of the voyage. Further, he was not justified when he found his vessel making more water in not taking her into port.

11. Subject to the last answer, we think the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

12. She was not prematurely abandoned.

Finally, the Court considers the master, but not the mate, in default.

(Signed) R. O. JONES.  
GEORGE H. FORSTER.  
JOHN S. CASTLE.