

(No. 1398.)

“HAZELWOOD.”

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of the formal Investigation held at Westminster, on the 21st of June 1882, before H. C. ROTHERY, Esquire, Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain HARLAND and Captain VAUX, as Assessors, into the circumstances attending the foundering of the sailing ship “HAZELWOOD,” of Aberystwith, on the 18th of April 1882, whilst on a voyage from Philadelphia to St. Thomas.

Report of Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances of the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons annexed, that the foundering of the said ship was due to the giving way of the topmast back stay owing to its having become corroded; that the topmast having then no support, the foremast broke and went over the side, carrying with it the yards and rigging attached, and striking against the vessel's side caused her to make water; and that a portion of the casing of the pump well having given way, and the pumps having then become choked with the small coals, the leak gained so much as to cause the vessel to fill and go down.

The Court is not asked to deal with the certificate of the master or to make any order as to costs.

Dated the 21st day of June 1882.

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

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) C. VAUX, R.N.R., } Assessors.
ROBERT HARLAND, }

Annex to the Report.

This case was heard at Westminster on the 21st of June 1882, when Mr. Kenelm Digby appeared for the Board of Trade, and Mr. Botterell for the master of the “Hazelwood.” Four witnesses having been produced by the Board of Trade and examined, Mr. Kenelm Digby handed in a statement of the questions upon which the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court. Mr. Botterell having then produced a witness addressed the Court on behalf of the master, 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 “Hazelwood,” which was a wooden barquentine belonging to the Port of Aberystwith, of 380 tons gross and 354 tons net register, was built at Mount Stewart, Prince Edward's Island, in the year 1875, and at the time of her loss was the property of Messrs. Thomas and William Daniel and others, Mr. Morgan Owens, of Aberystwith, ship agent, being the manager. She left Philadelphia on the 4th of April last, with a crew of 9 hands all told, and a cargo of 601 tons of coal, bound to St. Thomas, in the West Indies. In crossing the Gulf Stream she encountered rather unsettled weather, but nothing particular occurred until the night between the 9th and 10th. On that night it was the chief mate's watch from 8 to 12 o'clock p.m., but as he was laid up sick the master took his watch. The master remained on deck till 1 a.m., when he went below, leaving the deck in charge of the boatswain, the vessel at the time being under two mainsails, foresail, upper and lower fore topsails, fore topgallant sail, foretopmast staysail, main and middle staysail and jib, and heading about S.S.E., the wind blowing a fresh breeze from about S.W. The vessel was continued on that course until about 3 a.m., when all of a sudden the foremast broke about one foot above the spider hoop and about 12 feet below the cap, carrying with it the

main topmast and all the yards and gear attached. The captain hearing a crash immediately ran up on deck, and at once ordered the helm to be put hard down so as to bring the vessel's head up into the wind, and all hands then set to work to cut away the wreckage lest it should damage the ship's side. By 3 p.m. they had cleared away the wreckage, and on sounding the well it was found that she had from 2 feet 5 to 2 feet 6 water in her; and from that day it was necessary to pump her two or three times every watch, with spells of 20 to 25 minutes each time. On Sunday, the 16th, she was found to be making rather more water, but they were still able to get the pumps to suck; but early on the 17th finding that the pumps would not suck, the master ordered the well to be sounded, and it was then found that there were from 2 feet 8 to 2 feet 10 inches of water in her. Shortly afterwards the pumps began to choke with small coal, and on getting down to the well it was found that one of the stanchions of the pump well had broken, and that a portion of the casing had given way, thus letting the coal into the well. They tried to keep the coals out by letting down a couple of pieces of planking and shoring up the casing, but all in vain, for after clearing the pumps they became choked again after a few strokes. At about 11 a.m. the crew came aft and asked the captain what he intended to do, the pumps being choked, but he told them to go forward, and that he would tell them when it was time to get the boats out. They accordingly went forward and tried to work the pumps, but at length they became entirely choked up; and at 3 p.m., finding that there were 3 feet 6 inches of water in her, the captain ordered the remaining boat to be got out, one of the boats having been smashed when the foremast fell. At 5 p.m. there were 5 feet 6 inches of water in her, upon which they all got into the boat and remained alongside of her during the night. Early on the following morning the captain and chief officer went on board, and found that she had about 10½ feet of water in her, and after remaining on board for half an hour or three quarters of an hour, they returned to the boat. They remained by the ship all that day, and about 7 p.m. she went down head foremost. They were then in about latitude 23° 30' north, and longitude 62° west, and accordingly a course was steered for the West Indies, but on the following day they fell in with and were taken on board of a vessel called the “Majoriam,” which brought them to London, where they arrived on the 28th of May last.

These being the facts of the case, the first question upon which our opinion has been asked is, “Whether when the ‘Hazelwood’ left Philadelphia she was in good and proper order and condition, especially as to her masts, spars, and rigging?” The vessel, as I have said, was built in 1875, and although only a Prince Edward's Island ship, she seems to have been a good ship, being classed A1 at Lloyds for 9 years. The master, who is also a part owner, told us that he had been in her for the last six years, and that during that time she had been docked in London, again at Newport, and that in June of last year having met with some damage, she had very considerable repairs done to her at Philadelphia. The total amount of the average statement, which has been brought in is between 2,600 and 2,700l, but that includes the wages and provisions of the crew during the detention, and a number of other items not relating to the repairs; at the same time it is clear that she had very heavy repairs done to her. There is also one item in the average statement, to which I may refer as appearing to have some bearing on the present case; it is in these words: “To taking out and pulling in main mast, sending up main topmast, setting up and rattling down and seizing rigging, sending down and up fore topgallant mast, stripping, refitting and sending up fore topmast, and setting up rigging.” Taking these circumstances into consideration we should have been disposed to come to the conclusion that she must have been, when she left Philadelphia, in good and proper order and condition as regards her hull, and even her masts, spars, and rigging, were it not for the giving way of the foremast, the cause of which will form the subject of a separate question.

The second question upon which our opinion has been asked is, “Whether the cargo was properly stowed, and whether the pumps were properly protected?” We

have been told by the chief officer that, before the coals were put into her, he saw that the limbers were cleaned out, and the air holes properly stopped up; and there is nothing to shew that the cargo was not properly stowed, or the pumps properly protected.

The third question that we are asked is, "Whether the pumps were sufficient, and in good order?" We are told that she had two pumps, each fitted with a flywheel, and they would appear to have been sufficient and in good order, for they were able to keep the water under until the pumps became choked.

The fourth question upon which our opinion has been asked is, "What was the cause of the foremast giving way on the 10th of April; and whether proper measures were taken after the mast had given way to clear away the wreckage and prevent damage to the hull?" The vessel it seems had wire rigging, and after the accident it was found that the backstay at the place where it broke, which was just above the splice, and where it was covered with the service, was corroded; according to John Gordon, the able seaman, part of the backstay was "pretty good," and part of it "pretty bad." The place, too, where it broke, which was just above the splice, is, I am informed by the assessors, where they are generally found to go. It seems that in order to make the splice they must open the strands, and the splice being then covered with the service, the water is likely to lodge there and thus corrode the rigging. I am told that this is so well known, that it is now the practice to turn the stay round a dead eye, and seize it up to its own back, so as not to have to open the strands. In our opinion the giving way of the foremast was due to the deteriorated condition of the topmast back stay at the place where it gave way, a little above the splice, and where it was covered by the service. And in answer to the further question, whether proper measures were taken after the mast had given way to clear away the wreckage and to prevent damage to the hull, we have only to say that nothing more could in our opinion have been done than was done to prevent damage to the vessel.

The fifth question which we are asked is, "Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain the position of the leak, and to keep the water under between April

10th and the time when the vessel foundered?" It seems that there was one leak right in the bows of the vessel close to the stem, where the water came in when the vessel pitched heavily; but there was a much more serious leak abaft the forward bulkhead, where they could hear the water coming in, but which they could not get at, as it was in that part of the hold which was filled with coals. This leak was no doubt caused by the beating of the wreckage against the vessel's sides during the 12 hours that elapsed before they could clear it away. Everything, however, seems to have been done to keep the water under, and to repair the pump casing, and they did manage to keep the water under until the pumps became choked, when nothing more could have been done.

The sixth question that we are asked is, "Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?" So far as appears the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike skill as well before as after the accident.

Lastly, we are asked, "What was the cause of the casualty; and whether the master and mate, or either of them, is in default?" The casualty arose, as I have already stated, from the deteriorated condition of the back stay, which parted owing to the heavy pitching of the vessel; the topmast having then lost its support, the foremast broke and went over the side, and the wreckage beating against the side of the vessel caused her to leak; and then, unfortunately, the casing of the pump well giving way, the small coals got into the pump well and choked the pumps. In our opinion no blame whatever attaches either to the master or to the mate of this vessel for anything that was done on board of her, either before or after the casualty.

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

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

We concur.

(Signed) C. VAUX, R.N.R., } Assessors.
ROBERT HARLAND, }