

(No. 2464.)

“ALLIANCE” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of a formal Investigation held at Cardiff on the 13th and 14th days of February 1885, before ROBERT ARTHUR VALPY, Esq, Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Admiral PICKARD and Captain DAVIES, Assessors, into the circumstances attending the supposed loss of the British steamship “ALLIANCE,” of Cardiff, whilst on a voyage from Cardiff to St. Nazaire, in December last.

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 said ship sailed from Cardiff on the 3rd December last and has not since been heard of. There is every reason to believe that she was lost with all hands at sea, but the Court is unable to say to what cause the loss is to be ascribed.

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

Dated this 16th day of February 1885.

(Signed) R. A. VALPY, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) BENJ. S. PICKARD, } Assessors.
T. DAVIES, }

Annex.

The “Alliance” was a screw steamship built of iron, at Sunderland, in the year 1877, of 942 gross and 611 registered tonnage. The original plans from which she was built were produced by Mr. Gad, the chief draughtsman of the builder, Mr. Laing, and his evidence went very fully into the construction of the ship. Her length was 212 feet, breadth 30 feet, and depth in hold 16 feet. She was what is commonly called a well-decked ship, having a raised quarter deck extending on to the bridge and a topgallant fore-castle. The “well” or space between the bridge and the fore-castle measured 73 feet in length, and it is calculated by Mr. Gad that this space, with the vessel on an even keel, would hold (all means of outlet being closed) 70 tons of water. To carry off this water there were three clearing ports on each side, and the usual number of scuppers. It was shown to be the invariable practice to load the ship about 1 foot 6 by the stern. There were in the ship four water-tight bulkheads, viz., a collision bulkhead placed 15 feet 6 inches from the stem, a second at the fore end of the engine room, a third at the after end of the same room, and a fourth dividing the after hold from the after peak. In addition to these there were two wooden bulkheads, one dividing the fore hold, the other dividing the main hold. The water-tight bulkheads were carried right up to the main deck and were strongly built. There were four holds—fore hold undivided would be 104 feet long, and the main hold undivided 54 feet long. She had three cargo hatchways of peculiar construction, known as Price’s self-trimming hatchways, which are meant to dispense with the labour of trimming the coals below. These hatchways were of unusually large dimensions, two having been in this case respectively 38 feet x 19 feet, and 44 feet 6 inches by 17 feet 6 inches measurement. The coamings of these hatchways were made of iron, those of No. 1 and No. 2, 3 feet 6 inches, and those of No. 3, 3 feet in height, and sloped inwards right round the hatchways. It was stated by Mr. Gad that the iron deck combined with the beams in the hatchways, which were unusually heavy, would sufficiently compensate for the great size of the hatchways. The vessel was fitted with two water ballast tanks, one extending 44 feet from the boiler

room forward, and capable of holding 97 tons of water, and the other extending for 51 feet 6 inches beneath the after hold from the engine room aft, and having a capacity of 73 tons. They are said to have been strongly built, and to have been tested so as to satisfy Lloyd’s surveyors. We were told by Mr. Boyer, the superintendent engineer, acting for the owners, that the ship was amply ventilated. His evidence removed the impression that might have been left by statements of the pilot and the people who had been engaged in loading and trimming the ship, who all failed to recollect seeing any ventilators on board. Mr. Boyer says that there was a ventilator abaft the fore-castle on the main deck, another in No. 1 hatchway, another on the starboard side immediately abaft the wooden partition or bulkhead between Nos. 1 and 2 holds, and designed to ventilate both. In No. 2 there were two ventilators in the hatchways, one in the fore part, the other in the after part. There was a large ventilator to the after hold placed near the mainmast, and there were also two in the hatches of the after hatchways, one forward, the other aft, and one other right aft. The ventilators were made of wrought iron, were about 9 inches in diameter, and were fitted with removable cowls, which it was usual to unship while in dock. Mr. Butterworth, Board of Trade Surveyor, was also examined upon the question of ventilation. He, together with another officer, Mr. Major, inspected the ship on the 3rd December, and they informed us that the usual plan is, if ventilation is found defective, to make a note of it, and to see that it is put right before the ship sails. Upon this occasion they saw nothing that called for notice, and it is to be inferred that they were satisfied with the means adopted. The vessel was fitted with two compound surface-condensing engines of 99 horse-power, and these engines, we were told, were in good order. But it seems that the Board of Trade surveyors on their visit found a quantity of water, amounting, at a rough calculation, to about 20 tons, in the bilges. The explanation given by the engineer was, that a leak had just before been discovered in the manhole of the starboard boiler, and that the water had been let out to enable the necessary repairs to be made. That leak, he thought, would account for the greater part of the water in the bilges. The surveyors mentioned the matter to the captain, and satisfied themselves, by having the donkey pump started, that there were appliances at hand to pump out the water in a short time. The surveyors at the same visit, also found on sounding, 9 to 11 inches of water in the after ballast tank. The captain’s attention was called to this also, and he assured the surveyors that the water, both in the tank and the bilges, should be pumped out before the ship sailed. The vessel appears from the evidence of the Board of Trade officers, to have been sufficiently provided with pumps, and to have had the usual complement of boats. The ship was registered at the port of Cardiff, her official number being 68,960, and was owned by Messrs. Gueret of Cardiff, Mr. Henri Gueret being the managing owner. She was classed 90 A1 at Lloyd’s. Mr. Louis Gueret was called as a witness, and informed the Court that the ship was purchased by his firm at the end of 1882, from the Alliance Steamship Company, for the sum of 12,250*l.* His firm had since expended in repairs a sum of 2000*l.* Her outfit for her last voyage cost some hundreds of pounds (the precise sum was not given). She was insured, Mr. Gueret informed us, as follows:—Hull for 7,000*l.*, machinery 4,000*l.*, freight for 500*l.*, and outfit and consumable stores, 440*l.* The premiums on insurance amounted to 200*l.* The insurances were effected on a time policy for twelve months from the 20th February 1884. Mr. Gueret also informed us that the ship was always employed in the French trade, and that the master in charge of her on her last voyage was a trustworthy man. The wages paid to him were 5*l.* weekly, exclusive of provisions, and no premium was paid to him for quick voyages. A premium was paid to the crew for keeping clear of damages. The “Alliance” was loaded in the East Dock, Cardiff, on the 2nd and 3rd December last, with 1,120 tons of coal. No. 2 hold was first loaded with 410 tons 11 cwt., 478 tons 3 cwt. were put into No. 3, or the after hold, and No. 1 was loaded with 230 tons 7 cwt. In No. 1 and No. 3 holds, vacant spaces were left, in No. 1 for some 30 or 40 tons, and for nearly the same quantity in No. 3. The foreman trimmer

informed us, that in self-trimming vessels, little pains are taken to trim the coals, and on this occasion only four trimmers were employed. The coal was trimmed, according to his statement, right up to the deck, and level with the top of the coamings in the hatchways of No. 1, 2, and 3 holds. It seems that, in addition to her cargo, the ship took 48 tons of coals in her bunkers. The weather was wet while the cargo was being put on board. The coal, of which the cargo consisted, was of the kind so well known as South Wales Steam Coal, and was raised partly from the Ocean Collieries, in the Rhondda Valley, and partly from Nixon's Navigation Collieries, in the Merthyr and Aberdare Valley. Mr. Wales, Government Inspector of Mines, explained the nature of these coals; we were informed that they are semi-anthracite coal, free from sulphur and pyrites, not liable to spontaneous combustion, but giving off an explosive gas very freely, especially when freshly wrought—this tendency being increased if shipped in a wet condition. The coal in this case was freshly wrought, a large proportion having been shipped on the day it was wrought. The loading of the ship was completed in 24 hours, and she left the Cardiff Docks bound for St. Nazaire about 6 p.m. on the 3rd December, with a crew of 16 hands all told. There was no very distinct evidence as to the state of the hatches at this time. There were none on when the trimmers left her at 4 o'clock. The draught of water, as taken by Mr. Butterworth, when she lay in fresh water in the Basin ready for sea, was 16 feet forward and 16 feet 10½ inches aft. On getting into salt water, Mr. Butterworth told us that she would probably rise about 4 inches, and assuming that the water found in the bilge and tank was disposed of, there would be a further rise of about one inch. According to this witness, the top of the disc when he inspected her was about an inch clear of the water. She had a freeboard at that time of 1 foot 7 inches, measured from the top of the deck to the water amidships. The load line was marked at 2 feet, and it was stated that no change had taken place in the position of the mark, at all events, since she had been in the hands of her present owners. In the opinion of Mr. Major and Mr. Butterworth the ship was fairly loaded and was in every other respect, so far as they could see, in a seaworthy condition. To Mr. Butterworth, the captain spoke very highly of her; and Captain Angel, who commanded her for 12 months under her former owners, said she had carried heavier cargoes than on her last voyage, and he spoke very favourably of her seagoing qualities. The pilot left the ship about 7 p.m., on the 3rd December. He had recognized all her old hands on board and noticed nothing amiss with any of them. The ship appeared in her usual trim, and not unusually deep in the water. The only circumstance that attracted his notice was that she did not steer quite as well as usual, going, as he termed it, "more against her port helm." He mentioned the matter to the captain. The pilot did not know to what cause to attribute it. The weather was moderate when she left Cardiff, but had a threatening aspect, and the pilot advised the master to anchor for the night in Lundy Roads, which he ought to have reached about 3 a.m. on the 4th. During the night of the 3rd the wind, according to the pilot's evidence,

changed from S.E. to the N.W., and blew very hard during the night and for two days afterwards. The ship has not been heard of since the pilot left her, and there can be no doubt that she was lost with all hands at sea. Some wreckage was cast up on the Cornish coast, to the westward of Boscastle, and was seen in the early part of December by Mr. Boyer, who was able to identify it from letters forming part of the name, "Alliance," and from the painting as portions of the missing ship.

The following questions were submitted to the Court:—

1. Whether, when the vessel left Cardiff, she was in good and seaworthy condition?
2. Whether the holds were properly ventilated, and if so, whether the ventilators were so constructed, fitted, and arranged as not to be or become a source of danger in the event of the vessel shipping heavy seas?
3. Whether the hatchways and all other deck openings were properly and sufficiently secured?
4. Whether the boats were sufficient, in good order, and properly equipped?
5. Whether the vessel was overladen?
6. Whether she had sufficient freeboard?
7. Whether the vessel was properly manned?
8. What was the cost of the ship to her owners?
9. What was her value when she last left Cardiff?
10. What were the insurances effected, and how were they apportioned?

And, finally, 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 left Cardiff on the 3rd December last?

The following answers were given by the Court:—

1. The ship was in a good and seaworthy condition when she left Cardiff.
2. The holds were properly ventilated, and the ventilators were so constructed as not to become a source of danger.
3. It would seem from the slight evidence before us that the hatchways and other deck openings were covered, but we are unable to say whether they were properly secured.
4. The boats appear to have been sufficient, in good order, and properly equipped.
5. We consider that she was fully, but not overladen.
6. There was sufficient freeboard.
7. She appears to have been properly manned.
8. The ship cost her owner 12,250*l.* in 1882.
9. The value of the ship when she left Cardiff was in our opinion about 11,000*l.*
10. The hull was insured for 7,000*l.*, the machinery for 4,000*l.*, the freight for 500*l.*, and the outfit and consumable stores for 440*l.*, being a total of 11,940*l.*
11. The fate of the vessel can only be a matter of conjecture, but there is evidence that a heavy gale sprang up immediately after she left Cardiff, and continued for some time; if she passed by Lundy Roads and proceeded to sea, it seems not improbable that she foundered off the Cornish coast in that gale.

(Signed) R. A. VALPY.
BENJ. S. PICKARD.
T. DAVIES.