

(No. 2754.)

“ VENETIENNE ” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at the Mayor's Court, Cardiff, on the 8th and 9th days of December 1885, before ROBERT OLIVER JONES, Esq., Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captain WILSON and Captain ANDERSON, as Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship “ VENETIENNE,” of Cardiff, through foundering off the Longships on the 4th day of November 1885.

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 ship foundered owing to the following causes:—

- 1. To her being overladen.
- 2. To the improper stowage and to the shifting of the cargo.

The Court also finds that the ship was undermanned. The Court attaches blame to the managing owner, Mr. John Cuthbert, for allowing the ship to be overladen and undermanned, and orders him to pay to the solicitor of the Board of Trade the sum of 50*l.* on account of the expenses of this investigation.

Dated this 9th day of December 1885.

(Signed) R. O. JONES, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) R. WILSON, } Assessors.
ABSM. ANDERSON, }

Annex.

This case was heard at the Mayor's Court, Cardiff, on the 8th and 9th December 1885. Mr. Waldron appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade and Mr. Vachell for the owners and master.

Thirteen witnesses were called by Mr. Waldron, and certain questions were submitted by him for the opinion of the Court. He at the same time intimated that in the opinion of the Board of Trade the certificate of the master should be dealt with, and he applied that an order should be made upon the owners to pay the costs of the proceedings.

Mr. Vachell having been heard on behalf of the owners and master, the Court gave its answers to the questions put to it.

The following are the facts of the case:—

The “ Venetienne ” was an iron-screw steamship of 212 tons gross and 129 tons registered tonnage, built at Penarth, Glamorganshire, in the year 1872, and owned by Messrs. John Cuthbert and others, Mr. Cuthbert appearing by the transcript of register to be the managing owner. She was registered at the port of Cardiff, her official number being 84,676.

She was built according to Lloyd's requirements, and classed 100 A.1. She was specially designed for local and coasting trade. The length was 121 feet, breadth 20 feet, depth of hold 9' 8". She had an iron deck with a short raised quarter deck and monkey fore-castle. Her engines were right aft.

She was fitted with 3 iron bulkheads, all extending up to the deck, viz.: a collision bulkhead, a second the fore part of the stoke hole, and a third aft. There was only one hold, to which there were two hatchways, the after one being 23 ft. 6 in. long by 10 ft. wide, and the forward one 18 ft. 6 in. long by 10 ft. wide. She had solid hatches, made of red wood, 3 inches thick, and supported in each case by one fore and after.

The coamings, which were of iron, were 2 ft. 6 in. high. Her bulwarks were 3 ft. in height, and were also

of iron. Three ports on either side were provided to carry off water from the decks. She had a water ballast tank forward of the collision bulkhead with a capacity of 20 tons, and bunkers on each side of the engine room with a capacity of 20 tons each. She was fitted with two ventilators 9 in. in diameter, the openings of which were protected by wooden plugs with canvas covers. She had two companions, one leading into the fore-castle and the other into the cabin aft.

She was fitted with engines of 30 horse power. She had the usual engine room pumps, and one deck pump. It was, however, stated in evidence that there were no means whatever of sounding the holes otherwise than by drawing the boxes of the deck pump. She carried only one boat, which was 16 ft. in length, and was not in any way fitted as a lifeboat. With regard to her value, Mr. Hooper, the manager, who was called as a witness on behalf of the Board of Trade, stated that he was not able to give us any exact evidence upon the point. He did no more than offer his opinion that she cost when new 4,000*l.* or 4,500*l.*, and that when she started on her last voyage she was worth 3,500*l.* This estimate of her value appears to us to be too high. Her hull and machinery were insured, he tells us, for 3,500*l.*, upon seven policies, and freight and outfit upon another policy for 125*l.* The insurances were effected in mutual clubs.

The vessel was put into a dry dock at Cardiff in March last, having sustained damage by a collision. The manager of the dock informs us that she was put into thorough repair.

The cost altogether amounted to 390*l.* 14*s.* 10*d.*; of which sum 54*l.* was spent upon her engines and boilers.

She was loaded at Newport, Mon., on the 2nd and 3rd of November last with 261 tons, 17 cwt. of coal, chiefly small or “ blacksmith's ” coal, a small portion being a larger coal known as “ brush ” coal; 19 tons of large coal were put into her bunkers, in which there was already some coal left from the last voyage, estimated by the foreman trimmer at 3 tons, but declared by the master to be much less. The total of cargo and bunker coal, irrespective of what she previously had in her bunker, amounted to 280 tons 17 cwt.

The small coal was put in first, and then the “ brush,” and was according to instructions given by the mate, kept aft as much as possible so as to keep the vessel by the stern.

The coals were filled up close up to the deck, and in the sides, and was sloped forwards, a space of some 6 or 8 feet being left clear between the coals and the forward bulkhead, although upon this point there was a contradiction between the trimmers and the mate, who superintended the loading, the latter alleging that the coal was piled against the forward bulkhead at least two feet. The foreman trimmer stated that there was room enough for another 100 tons.

The result of this method of stowing the cargo was, according to the master's evidence, to put the ship 8 inches by the stern. No shifting boards or any other appliances were used to prevent shifting of the cargo, although the prudence of making such a provision ought to have been apparent.

Her draught on leaving Newport is given as from 10 ft. 2. to 10 ft. 4. in aft, and 9 ft. 6 in. forward, giving her a mean draught of 9 ft. 10. or 9 ft. 11. Her total depth at side, as given by Mr. Munro, the builder's manager, was 11 feet 1 inch, and her moulded depth as 10 ft. 7 in. On reference to the rules we find that this vessel should have had a freeboard of not less than 1 ft. 6 in. in salt water; but on leaving the River Usk we find that she had a freeboard of 1 ft. 2 in.

Allowing 1 inch for rising when she got into salt water this would give her a freeboard of 1 foot 3 inches when she got to sea, or 3 inches less than the rules require. Looking to this, and to the fact that directly the vessel got into the seaway she shipped heavy water, we have no hesitation in saying that she was overladen.

The vessel left Newport bound for St. Malo about 6 p.m. on the 3rd November with a crew of 8 all told, consisting of Mr. Thomas Gorvin the master, who held a certificate of competency, 1 mate, 2 engineers, 1 fireman, 2 able, and one ordinary seaman. We have no hesitation in saying that this was an insufficient crew. One undesirable result was that the second engineer had

to keep a watch of 6 hours alone. It was stated by all the witnesses examined on the point that she had a very slight list to port when she began her voyage. On the 4th the vessel passed Lundy Island with the wind N.N.W., blowing a fresh breeze. About midday she is said to have laboured heavily, and to have taken a great deal of water on board.

We were assured that the hatches and all other openings were all properly secured, so that no water could have found its way below. At 10.30 p.m. she was within 6 miles of the Longships Light which bore S.S.E., and was then for the first time observed to be taking a list to starboard and going by the head. The pumps were put to work on the ballast tank but no water was found. About this time she shipped a heavy sea, and the master went forward to the fore-castle and found water about half an inch in depth washing about the deck. He applied his ear to the ballast tank, and satisfied himself that that was nearly empty. The next step was to ease the engines and bring her head to the sea, and then she was put full speed ahead with the hope of getting her into Mount's Bay, but she gave a heavy plunge forward and sank deeper by the head, and the engineer reported that all the water had left the gauge glass. He was told to drive her as fast as he could, but she soon became unmanageable, going so much by the head that the propeller was out of the water. It was then midnight. The boat was got out and all hands took to her. The ship was then very much by the head, and had a heavy list to starboard. The crew were picked up by the schooner "Village Belle," of Penzance, about 2 a.m. on the 5th, and landed at Liverpool. They lost all their effects.

No explanation was offered as to the cause of this casualty by the master or others of the crew who were examined, except that she must have been struck by wreckage or a baulk of timber and a large hole made thereby, and it was mentioned in support of this view that baulks of timber were met with, and that some 10 or 15 minutes before her sudden list a sound was heard, which the witnesses said was very indistinct, and was certainly very vaguely described by them. But it seems to us no such explanation is admissible, as no water was ever found in the ship, and that the whole circumstances point very clearly to the conclusion that this disaster was due to a sudden shifting of the cargo.

The following are the questions submitted to the Court:—

1. Whether the vessel was thoroughly and efficiently repaired in March last?
2. Whether when she left Newport she was in good and seaworthy condition? Whether her hatchways and ventilators were properly constructed? and whether they and all other deck openings were properly protected and secured?
3. Whether the pumps were sufficient and in good order?
4. Whether the vessel was properly and sufficiently manned?
5. Whether the cargo and bunker coals were properly stowed and trimmed?
6. Whether proper measures were taken before the vessel left Newport to ascertain that she was in proper trim? and whether at that time she was by the head and had a list?
7. Whether she was overladen?
8. Whether she had sufficient freeboard?
9. Whether as laden the vessel had sufficient stability?
10. What was the cause of the vessel taking a list to starboard and going down by the head about 10.30 p.m.

on the 4th November? and whether proper and sufficient measures were taken to ascertain whether the vessel had then made water?

11. Whether the holds were sounded from time to time to ascertain what water was in the ship?

12. Whether every possible effort was subsequently made to save the vessel?

13. Whether she was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

14. Whether the master, mate, and engineer are, or either of them is, in default? and whether blame attaches to the owner?

15. What was the cost of the vessel to her owners?

16. What was her value when she left Newport?

17. What were the insurances effected, and how were they apportioned?

The following answers were given to the foregoing questions:—

1, 2, 3. The vessel appears to have been thoroughly repaired in March last, and to have been, when she left Newport, in good and seaworthy condition, so far as her hull was concerned; her hatchways and ventilators properly constructed, and they and all other deck openings properly protected and secured.

4. In the opinion of the Court the ship was not sufficiently manned.

5. The cargo was not properly secured from shifting. From the nature of the cargo, and the necessity which seemed to exist for leaving a space forward in order to get the vessel sufficiently by the stern, some precaution should have been taken to prevent shifting, of which there was obvious danger.

6. It is quite clear that she was not by the head, and that she had only a very slight list to port.

7 and 8. The Court is of opinion that the vessel was overladen and that she had not sufficient freeboard.

9. There was no direct evidence upon this point.

10. In the opinion of the Court the cause of the vessel taking a list to starboard and going down by the head was—

1st. Shifting of the cargo, and

2nd. Deeply laden as she was the accumulation of water on the deck. The only measures available were taken to ascertain whether the vessel had made water.

11. There were no proper means for sounding the holds.

12. Every possible effort was made to save the vessel.

13. There is no reason to call in question the navigation of the ship.

14. The master in the opinion of the Court is to blame for not seeing that his cargo was sufficiently secured from shifting, but his conduct in this respect does not require that his certificate should be dealt with. Blame attaches to the owner for allowing the ship to be overladen and undermanned.

15. There was no evidence of the cost of the vessel.

16. Mr. Hooper stated that he considered her worth what she was insured for, viz., 3,500l., but the Court does not think she was worth so much.

17. She was insured on seven policies for 3,500l. on her hull and machinery, and for 125l. on another policy for freight and outfit. The insurances were effected in mutual clubs.

The Court orders that Mr. John Cuthbert pay to the solicitor of the Board of Trade the sum of fifty pounds towards the costs of this investigation.

(Signed) R. O. JONES.

R. WILSON.

ABSM. ANDERSON.

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