

(No. 3155.)

“SARAH ANDERSON.”

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of the formal Investigation held at Cardiff on the 10th and 11th days of February 1887, before H. C. ROTHERY, Esquire, Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Vice-Admiral PICKARD and Captain COSENS, as Assessors, into the circumstances attending the loss of the sailing ship “SARAH ANDERSON,” of Liverpool, with her crew of 15 hands, off Tintagel Head, in the Bristol Channel, on the 17th of October last.

Report of Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances of the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons annexed, that when the said vessel left Falmouth she was in all respects in a good and seaworthy condition; that her cargo was properly stowed and secured; that her loss was due to the extreme violence of the gale which she encountered on the 16th-17th of October last; and that every effort was made to render assistance to the crew by the coast-guard, who were in charge of the life-saving apparatus at Boscastle and at Port Isaac, and by the coxswain of the lifeboat at Port Isaac.

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

Dated this 11th day of February 1887.

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

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) BENJ. S. PICKARD, } Assessors. WILLIAM COSENS, }

Annex to the Report.

This case was heard at Cardiff on the 10th and 11th days of February instant, when Mr. Howard Smith appeared for the Board of Trade, and Mr. Downing for the managing owner of the “Sarah Anderson.” Sixteen witnesses having been produced by the Board of Trade and examined, and the depositions of two witnesses, taken at Falmouth and Cardiff respectively, having been put in and read, Mr. Howard Smith handed in a statement of the questions upon which the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court. Mr. Downing then addressed the Court on behalf of his party, and Mr. Howard Smith having been heard in reply, the Court proceeded to give judgment on the questions upon which its opinion had been asked. The circumstances of the case are as follow:—

The “Sarah Anderson,” which was an iron barque, belonging to the Port of Liverpool, of 589 tons gross and register, was built at Liverpool in the year 1865, and at the time of her loss was the property of Mr. Robert Glaister Sharp, of Maryport, in the County of Cumberland, and others; Mr. Sharp, being the managing owner. She left the Tyne on the 4th January 1886, with a cargo of 848 tons of coal and coke; and on the 4th April following arrived safely at Valparaiso; and having there discharged a portion of her cargo she proceeded to Carrizal, where the remainder was discharged. From Carrizal she proceeded in ballast to Coquimbo, and there took in a cargo of 966 tons of manganese ore and 15 tons of dye, and on the 11th July following sailed, having on board a crew of 14 hands all told, beside the captain’s wife, bound to Falmouth for orders. On the 1st of October following she was in about latitude 41° 9’ north, and longitude 24° 14’ west, and was proceeding under all plain sail, making about 8½ knots an hour, when at about 6 p.m. of that day the main topgallant and royal backstays broke, bringing down the main topgallant mast and breaking the parral of the main topsail yard. Having got the mast with yards and rigging attached on deck, they continued their course and about

10 a.m. of the 9th of October they were off the Wolf Rock, where they took on board a pilot, and the same afternoon anchored in Falmouth Harbour. There they remained till the 13th of the same month, when having received orders to proceed to Fleetwood, she sailed again, the wind blowing a moderate breeze from about W.N.W. The pilot left her about a mile and a half outside the harbour; and the next time that we hear of her is at about 10 a.m. on the 16th when she is seen a little to the eastward of Tintagel Head, and at a distance of about two miles from the shore, with her head to the westward under fore and main topsails, the wind blowing a whole gale from north to N. by W., but apparently making little or no progress. The tide at the time was ebbing, and was setting to the westward; and at about 11.30 a.m. she had passed Tintagel Head, and was about half-a-mile to the southward of it, when the crew were observed to be cutting away the fore rigging. Soon afterwards the fore mast went over the side, and in about a quarter of an hour the main and mizen masts followed. In the meantime the anchors had been let go, and she was brought up opposite to Trebarrow Sand, and at a distance of about two miles from the shore. At about half-past one the tide turned, and from that time she seemed to ride more easily, the tide being opposed to the wind. She remained there at anchor until about 8 p.m., when she was observed to shew a light, which was at once answered by the coastguardsmen on shore with a signal rocket, and from that time until about 9 p.m. the light was occasionally shewn. At 11 p.m. it became a little clearer, the moon having come out, and they could then distinguish her hull, and by that time she had drifted about a mile nearer to the Otterham Rocks. They continued to see her at intervals until about 1.30 a.m., when a flare-up was observed, and almost immediately afterwards a spout of white water shot up into the air, from which they concluded that she had gone down, nothing more having been seen of her. Very little wreckage from her came to shore, but some few days afterwards a masonic certificate, with the captain’s name upon it, a night shirt, with his wife’s name upon it, and the ship’s flag were picked up on the beach, which clearly shewed the vessel to have been the “Sarah Anderson.”

These being the facts of the case, the first question upon which our opinion has been asked is, “Whether, when the vessel left Falmouth, she was in all respects in a good and seaworthy condition?” The vessel was, as I have said, built in the year 1865, by the well-known firm of Messrs. Royden and Son, of Liverpool, who are, I believe, one of the first shipbuilders in this country. She was built under special survey of Lloyd’s, and was classed ^A1, which is the highest class she could get, and which shews that she was built extra strong, and beyond the requirements of Lloyd’s. Mr. Sharp told us that she was always kept up in a state of thorough efficiency; and a certificate has been produced, shewing that she was specially surveyed by Lloyd’s in 1877, and in December 1885, very shortly before her departure from this country on her last voyage, and that she was continued in her original class. There is, therefore, no reason to think that she was not in a thoroughly good and seaworthy condition, so far as the hull was concerned, when she left this country in January 1886. It does not appear that she met with any damage on the way out, but on the homeward voyage, and a few days before her arrival at Falmouth, she lost, as I have said, her main topgallant mast. We were told also by a man named Trunks, who had served on board as boatswain and acting second mate for about 15 months from January 1885, and who had left her at Carrizal, that he did not think that the rigging was fit to trust his life to; that on the first voyage the foot ropes to the lower yards had carried away when he and the chief officer were on them, and that on the last voyage out he was frequently obliged to secure the head gear, the martingale, back ropes, and stays. He admitted, however, that the defective foot ropes and rigging had been replaced with new, and on further examination it came out that the reason of his leaving her at Carrizal was because he had exchanged places with the boatswain and acting second mate of a vessel called the “Endymion,” who had asked him to do so, as he could not get on with his captain; and it further appeared that whilst his pay on board the

"Sarah Anderson" was £4 5s., he was to have £4 10s. on the "Endymion," which would be a very good reason for his making the exchange. Some letters were also produced, which had been written by an apprentice named Putt to different members of his family, and in which he made various complaints of the state of the vessel, but as he was only 19 years of age, and in his letters not only contemplated making another voyage in the vessel, but also wrote to ask that a brother or other relative of his should come out in her, we do not think that very much weight can be given to his complaints. But if we had any doubts on the subject they would be entirely removed by the evidence given by Mr. Bissett, engineer and shipwright surveyor to the Board of Trade at Falmouth, who, hearing shortly after her arrival that the vessel had met with some damage, went on board her, in the discharge of his regular duty, to see in what condition she was; and he has told us that all that he found wanting was the main topgallant mast, the main topmast and topgallant backstays, and the parral of the main topsail yard broken. He said that all these damages were repaired, with the exception of the main topgallant mast, and that in his opinion, from the examination he made of the vessel, she was, when she left Falmouth, in a perfectly good condition, so far as he was able to judge, the vessel being loaded and afloat; and that as regards the masts and rigging, they appeared to be in a perfectly good condition. His evidence was confirmed by Mr. Blainey, a shipwright surveyor and shipbuilder at Falmouth, who, hearing that the vessel had sustained some damage, went on board for the purpose of getting the job, and who told us fairly enough that he looked over her to see if he could not find some defects which he might be required to repair, but could find none. So far, therefore, as the hull, masts, and rigging of the vessel are concerned we have no doubt that she was, when she left Falmouth, in a thoroughly good and seaworthy condition.

It remains, however, to be considered, whether she was or was not too deeply laden, and in that respect therefore in an unseaworthy condition. The cargo, as I have said, consisted of 966 tons of manganese ore and 15 tons of dye, making a total of 981 tons, which would be about 50 per cent. above the registered tonnage, *prima facie*, therefore, not an excessive cargo for a first-class vessel. It appears further from the deposition, which the master made before the receiver of wreck at Falmouth, that she drew 16 feet 3 on leaving Coquimbo, and the pilot at Falmouth told us that that was the draft which the master gave him, but what her freeboard was he was not able to say—It appears however that, although the centre of the disc was placed 3 feet below the deck it was Mr. Sharp's practice never to allow any portion of the disc to be submerged, and that this was well known to Captain Puxley, who had been in his employ for many years, and in command of this vessel since the 30th of December 1831. If then Captain Puxley acted upon this knowledge, she would have had a freeboard of at least 3 feet 6. The case, however, does not rest there, for Mr. Bissett has told us that this vessel's moulded depth was 19 feet 2, and adding 3½ inches for the thickness of the deck, and 7½ inches for the depth of keel, that would give a total depth at side from the upper line of the deck to the bottom of the keel of 20 feet 1 inch; and if her draft fore and aft, was, as we are told, 16 feet 3 inches, that would give her a freeboard of 3 feet 10. Now was that a sufficient freeboard for her for such a voyage? Mr. Bissett has told us that from the calculations which he has made, he finds that under the existing rules, which have been approved by Lloyd's and the Board of Trade, her freeboard, assuming that she had the normal amount of sheer and camber, would be for a summer as well as a winter voyage 3 feet 4½, and for a winter voyage across the North Atlantic 3 feet 8 inches. If then she had a freeboard of 3 feet 10, or even 3 feet 6, she would have had an amply sufficient freeboard, when she left Falmouth, for a voyage from there to Fleetwood even in the winter time. She was therefore in our opinion in all respects in a good and seaworthy condition.

The second question which we are asked is, "Whether the cargo was properly stowed and secured?" Mr. Sharp has told us that his instructions to Captain Puxley were, that, whenever she carried heavy dead weight cargoes, which it seems she frequently did, he was always to construct a strong substantial trunk to hold it. That trunk, he told us, used to be formed in this way; there were three-inch planks placed upright with their heels resting against the sister kelsons, the

upper parts being supported by fore and aft planks secured to the 'tween deck beams; these planks were inclined somewhat inwards, with the object of raising the centre of gravity and of keeping the cargo out of the wings of the vessel. And that this was done on the present occasion, we have the evidence of the apprentice Putt, who states in one of his letters that there was such a trunk constructed, but he adds that the captain put a portion of the cargo between the trunk and the side of the vessel. That, however, we are not disposed to believe, for, if so, we could hardly see with what object the captain had constructed a trunk at all. Moreover it is clear from the evidence of Mr. Bissett, Mr. Blainey, and the pilot, that she had no list at Falmouth, which it is probable that she would have had, if the cargo had been placed where Putt says it was; nor is there any evidence to shew that she ever took a list or got out of trim during the time that she lay at anchor off Trebarrow Sand. We have therefore no doubt that the cargo was properly stowed and secured.

The third question which we are asked is, "What was the cause of the loss of the vessel?" The vessel left Falmouth on the 13th of October, with the wind blowing a moderate breeze from the W.N.W., but after rounding the Land's End she must have encountered the gale, which it is well known prevailed on that coast during the 15th and 16th of the same month. What happened in all probability was this; the gale, which commenced from the S.W., seems to have gradually worked round to the west and then to the north, which would have the effect of blowing the vessel into the Bristol Channel, and ultimately putting her on a lee shore. The loss of the vessel was in our opinion due to the exceptionally violent gale, amounting almost to a hurricane, which prevailed in these parts during the 15th and 16th of October last.

The fourth question which we are asked is, "Whether blame attaches to the owner?" In our opinion no blame whatever attaches to Mr. Sharp, the owner. He appears to have done everything in his power to keep his vessel in a thoroughly good and seaworthy condition, and to have seen that she was supplied with everything necessary, and that she was not overladen.

The fifth question which we are asked is, "Whether every possible effort was made by the officers in charge of the life-saving apparatus at Boscastle and Port Isaac, and by the coxswain of the lifeboat at the latter port, to render assistance?" And first as to the conduct of the coastguardmen at Port Isaac and Boscastle. Mr. Corkhill, the chief boatman in charge of the coastguard station at Port Isaac, told us that hearing at about half-past 11 of the 16th from one of his men that there was a vessel in distress, he went out, and then saw two barques, one of them about due north of Port Isaac, the other to the north-eastward near Tintagel. The former vessel had her head to the westward, the wind blowing a heavy gale from north to N. by W.; and seeing that she was bearing up for the shore, he telegraphed to the officer at Boscastle to take his apparatus to Tintagel, whilst he himself proceeded with his apparatus and men to the westward, to Portquin Bay. He arrived there at about 1.15 p.m., and found that the vessel had come to anchor under Mousls Island, and that the men had immediately taken to their boat. The boat, however, capsized under a cliff some 300 feet high, upon which some of the men got down the cliff with the help of ropes, and succeeded in saving one of the crew, but the others were unfortunately drowned. Finding that nothing more was to be done there, he started at about 2.45 p.m. to go to the assistance of the vessel which he had seen off Tintagel Head, and which by the road that he would have to take with his apparatus, would be about 12 miles distant. He arrived off Trebarrow Sand at about 5 o'clock, and there found the vessel, which proved to be the "Sarah Anderson," at anchor at a distance of about two miles from the shore, and consequently beyond the reach of the apparatus. There they were soon afterwards joined by Mr. Dixon and the coastguardmen from Boscastle. It seems that Mr. John Dixon, the chief boatman in charge of the coastguard station at Boscastle, had received intelligence from Tintagel at about 11 a.m. that there was a vessel in distress, upon which he immediately got his men together, and proceeded with the life-saving apparatus to Tintagel, when he saw the "Sarah Anderson" about two miles to the north of Tintagel Head with both anchors down, the foremast and main topmast gone, and Ensign Union down at the mizen; and soon afterwards he saw the main and mizen masts also go. After remaining there till about 5 p.m., he proceeded with

his apparatus to that the vessel would parted from her and Mr. Corkhill and he arranged to distribute distances of from 2 to be able to render coming within reach time, saw her she 8 and 9 p.m., and they made out the saw the flare-up, and then knew that she the spot till about render no further home. Nothing, proper or more judicious guard both at Port that it was possible it would not have then blowing, to 125 yards, and the shore, and therefore

Let us next proceed persons in charge to the people on board Haynes, the coxswain receiving information was a vessel in vessel nearly due westward and within wards he sighted off Tintagel Head go, and about a quarter and mizen masts the crew of the to consult Mr. T Association at Port surgeon in the 1 horses to take to being the only would be possible was then blowing of that and the piece of wreckage about boat-house. This in removing, got what is called the in any direction In the meantime Lifeboat Association mittee to consider himself, also, who under the impression Trebarrow Sand men, who would on the subject. came to the conclusion there, it would not to Trebarrow Sand in doing so, it would a gale, to launch be better to keep advantage of any possible to launch his crew together distributed the earliest information remained there to in the violence of in for about an hour was informed that which he dismissed evidence it is quite blame attaches to boat. In the first the lifeboat, weighing 5 tons, to Trebarrow horses he could authority of the of the Lifeboat

his apparatus to Trebarrow Sand, where he expected that the vessel would probably come ashore in case she parted from her anchors; and on his arrival there found Mr. Corkhill and his men from Port Isaac. They then arranged to distribute their men along the shore at distances of from 2 to 300 yards from one another, so as to be able to render her assistance in the event of her coming within reach. They remained there from that time, saw her shew a light from time to time between 8 and 9 p.m., and answered it with rockets; at 11 p.m. they made out the hull of the vessel, and at 1.30 a.m. saw the flare-up, and then the water spout up, and they then knew that she had gone down. They remained on the spot till about 3 a.m., when, seeing that they could render no further assistance, they left and returned home. Nothing, in our opinion, could have been more proper or more judicious than the conduct of the coast-guard both at Port Isaac and at Boscastle, they did all that it was possible for them to do; but we are told that it would not have been possible in such a gale as was then blowing, to have thrown the line more than about 125 yards, and the vessel was some two miles from the shore, and therefore, necessarily beyond their reach.

Let us next proceed to inquire, what was done by the persons in charge of the lifeboat, to render assistance to the people on board the "Sarah Anderson." James Haynes, the coxswain of the boat, told us that on receiving information, at about 11.30 a.m., that there was a vessel in distress, he went out, and found a vessel nearly due north of Port Isaac passing to the westward and with a top sail set, and shortly afterwards he sighted the "Sarah Anderson" to the N.E. off Tintagel Head. He told us that he saw her foremast go, and about a quarter of an hour afterwards the main and mizen masts went overboard. Having collected the crew of the lifeboat and the beachmen, he went to consult Mr. Trevan, the Secretary of the Lifeboat Association at Port Isaac, and who is a retired staff surgeon in the Royal Navy, with a view to getting horses to take the lifeboat to Trebarrow Sand, that being the only place on that coast from which it would be possible to launch the boat in such a gale as was then blowing. It seems that, owing to the gale of that and the preceding day, there was a good deal of wreckage about, which blocked up the road to the boat-house. This however they ultimately succeeded in removing, got the lifeboat out, and placed her on what is called the Town Plat, ready to be despatched in any direction that might be deemed advisable. In the meantime the Honorary Secretary of the Lifeboat Association had called together the committee to consider what had best be done. Haynes himself, also, who seems at that time to have been under the impression that the boat could be got on to Trebarrow Sand and launched from there, consulted the men, who would be likely to give him the best advice on the subject. They all, including the committee, came to the conclusion that, even if they took the boat there, it would not be possible to get it down the cliff to Trebarrow Sand, and that, even if they did succeed in doing so, it would not be possible, in the face of such a gale, to launch her; and they decided that it would be better to keep the lifeboat at Port Isaac to take advantage of any lull in the gale which might make it possible to launch her. Mr. Haynes accordingly kept his crew together ready prepared to man the boat, and distributed the beachmen along the shore to give the earliest information of anything that might occur. He remained there till about 4 a.m. without any abatement in the violence of the gale, and then went and turned in for about an hour, and on coming out again at 5 a.m. was informed that the vessel had gone down, upon which he dismissed the men. Now, in the face of this evidence it is quite impossible for us to say that any blame attaches to Mr. Haynes, the coxswain of the lifeboat. In the first place, he would not be able to take the lifeboat, weighing as it did with its carriage about 5 tons, to Trebarrow Sand without horses, and those horses he could not obtain without the sanction and authority of the committee and the Honorary Secretary of the Lifeboat Association, and all those gentlemen

were opposed to the lifeboat being taken there on the ground that, if it were, they could not get it down to the Sand, and that, even if they did, they could not have launched it. Now, we have had a number of witnesses produced before us from Boscastle and Port Isaac, and they all, with, I think, one exception, and that a landsman, have told us that in their opinion it would not be possible to get so heavy a boat down to Trebarrow Sand, and that, if it was there, it would not have been possible to launch her on that day, seeing that, even at low water, the waves were washing right up to the foot of the cliffs, and would have at once smashed the boat; they added, further, that, with such a gale as was then blowing, the boat would never have lived had they got her out, and that the men could not have pulled against such a wind. Haynes also, although he seems at first to have been of opinion that it would have been possible to have taken the boat off from Trebarrow Sand, told us that since the casualty he had been there, and that he is now quite convinced that it would not have been possible to have got her down to the beach. What, too, weighs very strongly with us is the evidence of Mr. Corkhill, the chief officer of the coastguard at Port Isaac, who told us that he has had very great experience on that coast, having been stationed at Port Isaac for the last nine years, that he has saved 117 lives in lifeboats as well as with the rocket apparatus, and that he is quite satisfied that it would not have been possible during any part of that day to have launched the boat from any part of that coast; and his evidence was fully confirmed by Mr. Dixon, the officer in charge of the coastguard station at Boscastle. The evidence of these officers is the more valuable, for we all know that there is not always a very friendly feeling between the coastguard and the lifeboatmen, owing to the fact that they are frequently competitors in the same services.

That it was not possible to launch the boat from Port Isaac is admitted by all, but it was suggested by one of the witnesses, a Mr. Bastard, a retired master mariner, who had seen a good deal of service, that it might be well if an anchor were laid out at a distance of some 300 or 400 yards from the shore with a block attached to it, and a buoy to mark its position; and if a light wire rope were then passed through the block and carried to the shore, the lifeboat with her crew in her might be hauled out to the buoy by the hands on shore, and then cast off. The assessors are of opinion that the suggestion is worthy of consideration, as there might be occasions when it would be possible by these means to launch the lifeboat from Port Isaac, although it would be quite impossible to do so under present arrangements. The assessors are therefore of an opinion that nothing can have been more creditable than the conduct of the coastguard as well as of the lifeboat men on the present occasion.

The sixth question which we are asked is, "What was the cost of the vessel to her owners?" We were told by Mr. Sharp that she was built for him in the year 1865, and that she then cost 12,000l.

The seventh question which we are asked is, "What was her value at the time she left on her last voyage?" Mr. Sharp has valued her at the sum of 4,650l.; not indeed, he told us, that that would be her value if sold in the open market, but it would be her value to him; and we are quite prepared to believe him.

The eighth question which we are asked is, "What were the insurances effected, and how were they apportioned?" Mr. Sharp told us that the hull was insured for 4,650l., the amount at which he valued her. The freight, which was 1,509l. 7s. 6d., was insured for 1,500l. In addition to which there was an insurance of 1,000l. on outfit and disbursements.

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

We concur.

(Signed) BENJ. S. PICKARD, }
WILLIAM COSENS, } Assessors.