

(No. 3250.)

"ALLAHABAD."

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of the formal Investigation held at the Sessions House, Westminster, on the 9th of May 1887, before H. C. ROTHERY, Esquire, Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain HARLAND and Captain KIDDLE, R.N., as Assessors, into the circumstances attending the supposed loss of the sailing ship "ALLAHABAD," of London, with a crew of 20 hands, whilst on a voyage from Glasgow to Dunedin.

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 ship left Glasgow in July last she was in a good and seaworthy condition so far as regards her hull and equipments, and was not overladen; and that there is reason to suppose that her loss was due to her cargo of coal having become spontaneously ignited.

Dated this 9th day of May 1887.

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

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) ROBERT HARLAND, } Assessors.
JAMES KIDDLE, }

Annex to the Report.

This case was heard at Westminster on the 9th of May 1887, when Mr. Butler Aspinall appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. Botterell for the owners of the "Allahabad," and Mr. Leck for the Bent Hartley Colliery Company. Eleven witnesses having been produced by the Board of Trade and examined, Mr. Aspinall handed in a statement of the questions upon which the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court. Mr. Leck then produced a witness, and having addressed the Court on behalf of his parties, and Mr. Botterell having been heard for the owners of the vessel, and Mr. Aspinall for the Board of Trade, 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 "Allahabad," which was an iron sailing vessel, of 1,190 tons gross and 1,143 tons net register, was built at Liverpool in the year 1864, and at the time of her loss was the property of Mr. Thomas Wall Stephens, of No. 39, Lime Street, in the City of London, and others, Mr. Stephens being the managing owner. She left Glasgow on the 2nd of July last, with a crew of 20 hands all told, and a cargo of 1,712 tons, of which 1,635 were coals, bound to Dunedin, in New Zealand. Having been signalled on the 7th off the Tuscar, she was, on the 4th of September following, spoken, in about latitude 29° south and longitude 28° west, by the "South Australian;" but from that time she has not been seen or heard of; and as she never arrived at her destination, there is every reason to suppose that she has been lost; and the object of the present inquiry is to ascertain, if possible, what has become of her.

These being the facts, the first question upon which our opinion has been asked is, "Whether the coal shipped on board the 'Allahabad' is dangerous for shipment on long voyages?" The coal which this vessel had on board came, we are told, from the Ell and Main seams of the Bent Hartley Colliery in the Hamilton district—some ten miles from Glasgow. It seems that the Ell seam is about 7 feet thick, the upper two feet being of inferior quality, largely mixed with brasses, or iron pyrites, stones, &c., whilst the lower five feet is very good coal. The seam is worked on what is called the stoop and room system, which consists in driving

tunnels through the lower five feet of the seam leaving large supporting pillars of coal, which are afterwards removed; and when this is done, the upper two feet of the seam, with the rubbish above, comes down, choking up the floor of the colliery. The Main seam is likewise about 7 feet thick, but in this seam the upper five feet consists of good coal, whilst the lower two feet is of inferior quality, and contains brasses, stones, &c. It is the duty of the men who work the coal in both seams to see that none of the inferior coal is sent up to the pit's mouth with the good; it seems, however, to be impossible to prevent some admixture of the coals, and accordingly precautions have to be taken at the pit's mouth to separate, as far as possible, the pyrites, stones, or other foreign matter from the coal, before it is put into the wagons and sent away for shipment. The mode in which this is done is by passing the coal over screens, by which the large is separated from the small coals, and then the former fall upon what are called the picking tables, on either side of which stand three men and three boys, whose duty is to pick out any iron pyrites or other foreign matter which they may chance to see. Of course, if the operation is carried out perfectly, so that every piece of iron pyrites is picked out of it, the coal becomes well fitted for shipment on long voyages; but this, we are told, it is almost impossible to do, as it depends on the vigilance and care of the men and boys at the picking tables. This was admitted by Mr. Dixon, the owner of the colliery; and Mr. Moore, the Government Inspector of Mines for the eastern district of Scotland, a gentleman of very large experience, and within whose district the colliery is situated, told us that, owing to the large quantity of iron pyrites in these seams, and especially in the Ell seam, and to the extreme difficulty of separating it, the coal is in his opinion not well suited for shipment on long voyages; indeed, he told us that it is in his opinion the worst coal for the purpose in Scotland. And perhaps we could hardly have a better proof that it is so, than the fact mentioned by Mr. Dixon that out of about 80,000 tons shipped during the year, all, with the exception of about 2,000 tons, are sent to European ports and on short voyages.

The second question which we are asked is, "Whether the coal was properly screened and cleaned from pyrites and brasses before it left the pit?" Whether the coal which was put on board this vessel was properly screened and cleaned from pyrites, it is not possible to say; but we were told by Mr. Moore that the precautions taken at this colliery for this purpose are exceptionally good, and we have no reason to think that they were not taken in this case. No precautions however would, in Mr. Moore's opinion, insure that some iron pyrites would not be sent away with the coal.

The third question which we are asked is, "Whether the coal was shipped dry and in good condition; and whether breakage was prevented as far as possible?" The coal was shipped between the 8th of June and the 1st of July, and we are told that during the whole of that time the weather continued to be fine, and there is therefore every reason to believe that the coal was shipped in good condition. We are also told that the coal was put on board in the way generally adopted at Glasgow, namely, by lowering the truck by a crane as near as possible to the hatchway, and then tilting it, and shooting the coals into the hold. Some breakage, we are told, would necessarily occur, but not more than might reasonably be expected.

The fourth question which we are asked is, "Whether proper means existed on board whereby the temperature of the cargo could be ascertained from time to time?" It seems that there were two thermometers on board, but so far as it appears there were no tubes down which the thermometers could be lowered so as to test the temperature of the body of the coal, as recommended by the Commissioners on Spontaneous Combustion on board Ships. Such tubes, we are told, ought to be placed in the hatchways, where the small coal would accumulate, and where, consequently, we might reasonably expect that spontaneous combustion, if it occurred at all, would be developed. One of the assessors tells me that whilst he was stationed at Portsmouth he had large quantities of coal under his charge stowed in coal hulks, and that it was the practice to test

the temperature every four hours by means of thermometers let down tubes passing through the body of the coal to the bottom of the vessel, by which means any change in the temperature was at once detected. This should have been done on board this vessel before she left, but there is no evidence that it was.

The fifth question which we are asked is, "Whether, when the vessel left Glasgow, she was in all respects in good and seaworthy condition?" The vessel, no doubt, was an old vessel, having being built in 1864; but she was an exceptionally good vessel, having been built under special survey, and classed **A** at Lloyd's.

In 1882 she passed her No. 3 survey, and appears to have been always thoroughly well kept up. Previous to her departure on her last voyage she had for a considerable time been lying in dock at Liverpool; but before sailing for Glasgow to take in her cargo she was thoroughly overhauled and repaired at a cost of 600*l.*, and was on the 2nd of June last surveyed by Lloyd's, and continued in her class. She arrived soon afterwards at Glasgow, and was there examined by Mr. Jago, the senior shipwright surveyor to the Board of Trade in Scotland; and from his evidence, as well as from that of Captain Richards, the marine surveyor employed by the owners of the "Allahabad" to look after the repairs and outfit at Liverpool, there can be no doubt that, when she left Glasgow, she was in all respects in a thoroughly good and seaworthy condition.

The sixth and seventh questions which we are asked are, "Whether she was overladen," and "whether she had sufficient freeboard?" I have never yet been able to understand the difference between these two questions. I should have thought that if a vessel was overladen, she would have too little freeboard, and if she had an insufficient amount of freeboard, she would be overladen. I presume, however, that there must be some distinction, for the Board of Trade, notwithstanding the remarks which the Court has thought fit to make in these and similar cases, continues to put the questions, although counsel have never yet been able to explain to us in what that distinction consists; and until they do, I must regard them as one and the same question. It seems that before the departure of the vessel on her last voyage, the owners applied to Lloyd's to assign her a freeboard, and that Lloyd's thereupon assigned her a freeboard of 4 feet 3 inches in salt water, of 3 feet 10½ inches in fresh water, and 4 feet 7½ inches for a North Atlantic winter voyage; and that whilst she lay at Glasgow, the load line was, under the supervision of Lloyd's surveyor, placed at 4 feet 3 inches below the deck, which was just one inch lower than the Board of Trade would have required. Now the stevedore has told us that, when the loading was complete, he observed that the centre of the disc was about one inch out of water, and if so, that would give her a freeboard of 4 feet 4 inches; and as she was then at Glasgow, and therefore in fresh water, so that she would rise some 4½ inches on getting to sea, it is obvious that she had an ample freeboard, and was consequently not overladen.

The eighth question which we are asked is, "Whether the ventilators were so constructed, fitted, and arranged as not to become a source of danger in the event of the vessel shipping a heavy sea?" Captain Richards, the owner's manager or overlooker, told us that she had three ventilators, one forward on the topgallant forecabin, another just abaft the mainmast, and a third on the poop aft. Mr. Jago, however, stated that when he went on board her at Glasgow he saw only two ventilators, one just abaft the break of the forecabin, and another on the poop aft. He told us also that if the ventilator had been placed, as Captain Richards stated it was, on the top of the forecabin, he should have called attention to it, as being, in his opinion, in a

very improper place. He also stated that there might have been a third ventilator near the mainmast, but that he did not see it, and that his attention was not called to it by the mate. Mr. Jago, however, told us that he thought the two ventilators were quite sufficient, as they had each of them a diameter of 18 inches with strong iron coamings standing about 2 feet above the deck, and that they were in his opinion very well placed. According to Captain Richards there were no plugs to fit into the sockets when the cowls were unshipped, but only covers for them; but it was afterwards stated by Mr. Botterell that Captain Richards had not understood the question, and that by covers he meant plugs; and if so, they would have been so constructed, fitted, and arranged, as not to become a source of danger in the event of the ship shipping a heavy sea.

The ninth question which we are asked is, "What, in the opinion of the Court, from the evidence before them, is the cause of the vessel not having been heard of since she was spoken by the 'South Australian' on or about the 4th of September last in or near latitude 29° south?" It was suggested by Mr. Leck, who is anxious for the reputation of his clients, the colliery owners, that in all probability her loss was due to her having encountered a very severe gale, and having foundered in it; but there is no evidence that it was so, or that, even if she had encountered a very severe gale, she would not have been able to weather it, being, as she was, a first class vessel and thoroughly well equipped in all respects. Evidence, however, was given that a vessel called the "Himalaya" left Glasgow on the 30th of June last, just two days before the "Allahabad," for Dunedin, with only 250 tons of coals, which had come from an adjacent colliery, the Silverton colliery, and from a seam exactly similar to the Ell seam in the Bent Hartley Colliery; and that on the 21st of August spontaneous combustion shewed itself, which they only succeeded in keeping down by flooding the hold with water, and jettisoning some 50 tons of the coal. If then spontaneous combustion was developed in the 250 tons shipped on board the "Himalaya," it is reasonable to suppose that it might equally have been set up in the 1,635 tons of exactly the same quality of coal, which was shipped under the same circumstances on board the "Allahabad," and if so, and if there were no means of testing the temperature of the coal, it is very probable that the fire might have got so far ahead before it was discovered as to make it impossible to extinguish it. It is to this, in our opinion, that the loss of the vessel was probably due.

The tenth question which we are asked is, "What was the cost of the vessel to her owner?" We are told that she cost them 9,200*l.* in 1882, and that after they had purchased her they spent a considerable sum upon her to enable her to pass her No. 3 survey.

The eleventh question which we are asked is, "What was her value at the time she left on her last voyage?" It was stated by Mr. Aspinall that the vessel was probably worth about 8,000*l.*; and the assessors are not disposed to dispute that estimate of her value.

The twelfth question which we are asked is, "What were the insurances effected, and how were they apportioned?" The ship, we are told, was insured for 7,000*l.* On the other hand, the freight, which amounted to 1,800*l.*, and of which one-third was payable ten days after the vessel sailed, and the remaining two-thirds on arrival, was not insured at all; and there were no insurances on either outfit or disbursements.

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

We concur.

(Signed) ROBERT HARLAND, } Assessors.
JAMES KIDDLE, }

"ITALIA"

The Merchant

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