

(No. 3915.)

"FLORENCE" (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at St. George's Hall, Liverpool, on the 24th, 25th, and 26th days of October 1889, before THOS. STAMFORD RAFFLES, Esquire, Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captains KNOX, R.N., and BAIN, Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "FLORENCE," of Liverpool, off the Calf of Man, on or about the 19th September, whereby loss of life ensued.

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 tarpaulins over the after hatch probably got adrift, when a large quantity of water found its way into the after hold.

Dated this 26th day of October 1889.

(Signed) T. S. RAFFLES, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) HENRY KNOX,
Captain R.N., } Assessors.
JOHN BAIN,

Annex to the Report.

This was an inquiry into the loss of the British steamship "Florence," of Liverpool, off the Calf of Man, on or about the 19th September last, whereby loss of life ensued.

Mr. Paxton, solicitor, appeared for the Board of Trade, and Mr. Dickinson for the owners of the "Florence."

She was an iron screw steamship, built at Rutherglen, county of Lanark, in 1882, of 267.73 tons gross and 115.37 tons registered, and of 56 horses' power combined, registered at Liverpool, the property of the Steamship "Florence" Company, Limited, Mr. William Durant Mack, of Liverpool, being appointed to manage the vessel. She was commanded by Mr. Archibald Cameron, and she had a crew of 10 hands all told, and one passenger. She was employed in the coasting trade. She loaded a cargo of 280 tons of coals in Garston Dock, and 17 tons of bunker coals, beginning to load at 9.15 a.m. on the 18th of September last, and finishing at 3.15 p.m. on that day. About 5 p.m. she sailed from the dock. According to the evidence of William O'Neill, A.B., the sole survivor from the wreck, who was an intelligent man and gave his evidence very clearly, both hatches were properly secured before they left the dock, the bunker coals were all in, and the decks were washed by 6 p.m. At the time they left the dock the weather was fine, and there was nothing to indicate the gale they shortly experienced. O'Neill went below at 6 p.m., and came up at 10 p.m. It was then blowing a strong breeze from S.W. The man O'Neill, on coming up, went to the wheel, and the mate was with him on the bridge. The other hands went below and the master followed in twenty minutes. The wind increased, and at 11 p.m. it was blowing a moderate gale, the sea was worse, and they began to ship heavy water forward and aft. All this time he was steering N.W. At midnight the Chickens were four points on

the starboard bow, the weather still continuing very bad. At 1 a.m. on the 19th the mate took the wheel, telling O'Neill to get the binnacle lamp trimmed, and he went to the engine room for this purpose. A few minutes after he had returned to the bridge with the lamp, the second engineer, followed by the fireman, came up and said "The ship's full aft," upon which the whistle was blown to call the master, who was up in a minute in his shirt and drawers. He immediately ordered the helm to be put hard-a-starboard, to bring her bow to the sea, and the starboard lifeboat to be got out, which was in the chocks. They cut the lashings and were getting it out, when the unfortunate vessel went down. O'Neill next found himself in the water, and presently he got hold of the lifeboat, bottom upward, and found a man partly dressed, Grace, A.B., clinging to the other end. For 24 hours they clung to this boat till she righted, and they were picked up about 4 p.m. by the Isle of Man steamer "King Orry." Grace was still alive, but in spite of all efforts to resuscitate him on board the steamer, he died soon afterwards from exhaustion, so that O'Neill only survived to tell the tale.

At the close of the evidence, Mr. Paxton put the following questions:—

1. When the vessel left Garston, was she in good and seaworthy condition as regards hull and equipments?
2. Was she overladen?
3. Was she properly supplied with boats, and were there means of lowering them in case of emergency?
4. Was she properly and sufficiently manned?
5. What was the probable cause of the casualty and subsequent loss of life?
6. Does blame attach to Mr. J. S. Mack, or any other person, in regard to any of the above matters?

Mr. Dickinson addressed the Court for the owners.

The Court gave judgment as follows:—

1. When the "Florence" left Garston, she was in good and seaworthy condition as regards hull and equipments.
2. The Court could not say that she was overladen. She had 297 tons of coals, including bunker coals, which left the centre line of the deck about an inch above the water, which would give a freeboard of 17 inches. The Board of Trade and Lloyd's surveyors both agreed that she had an ample freeboard.
3. She was properly supplied with boats, which were in chocks and placed under davits, and tackles were hooked on.
4. As far as numbers go, she was properly and efficiently manned, but the Court thought that it was not satisfactory that the mate's watch should be left with only one A.B., which was the case here, the fourth A.B. being allowed to be below at night, in consideration of his acting as cook.
5. The Court could only arrive at a theoretical conclusion as to the cause of this casualty. It was of opinion that probably the tarpaulins over the after hatch got adrift, when a large quantity of water found its way into the after hold.
6. The Court did not consider that blame attached to Mr. J. S. Mack, as managing owner, or to any other person, beyond the remark they had already made in their reply to the fourth question.

(Signed) T. S. RAFFLES, Judge.

We concur.

(Signed) HENRY KNOX,
Captain R.N., } Assessors.
JOHN BAIN,

Liverpool, 26th October 1889.