

(No. 5433.)

“CARMEL.”

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal Investigation held at the Magistrates' Room, Liverpool, on the 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st days of November 1896, before W. J. STEWART, Esquire, assisted by Captain PARFITT and Captain RICHARDSON, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British sailing ship “CARMEL,” of Waterford, on or near Great Burbo Bank, Liverpool Bay, on October 10, 1896, 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 loss of the said vessel, and the subsequent loss of life, were due to some disaster sustained by the vessel due to stress of weather, which caused her to drive on to the Burbo Bank, where she became a total wreck.

Dated this 21st day of November 1896.

(Signed) W. J. STEWART, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) WM. PARFITT, } Assessors.
GEORGE RICHARDSON, }

Annex to the Report.

The “Carmel,” official number 20,736, was a British schooner of the port of Waterford. She was built of wood at Exmouth in 1858. She was 88'3 ft. long, 20'5 ft. broad, and 11'3 ft. deep. Her registered tonnage was 97'48 tons, and she was owned by Mr. Patrick Curran, of Dungarvan, county Waterford.

The “Carmel” left Fleetwood between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. on October 10, bound for Runcorn, with a cargo of 180 tons of soda ash in bags, and a crew of five hands all told, under the command of her captain, Mr. Michael Galvin. Two other schooners, the “Wellington” and the “Henry,” left Fleetwood for the River Mersey shortly before the “Carmel,” and she was a little astern of them the whole way, and was seen by them to cross the bar of the Mersey about 6 o'clock the same afternoon. The wind, which had been moderate from E.N.E., suddenly changed at 6.30, and blew a heavy gale, with squalls and rain, from the N.N.E., and those on board of the “Wellington” lost sight of the “Carmel” when the latter was about half way between the Bar Lightship and the Formby Lightship. What happened to the “Carmel” after that is mostly a matter of surmise; but about 7.45 p.m. the look-out on the Formby Lightship saw a white light burnt, to the S.W., apparently from a vessel in distress, on the Little Burbo bank. Unfortunately, the electric cable from this lightship to the lifeboat station at Formby, which had parted on the 17th September, was still unrepaired, and exact information of the position of the vessel could not be given. A rocket was sent up from the lightship, and answering rockets were immediately sent up from the Waterloo Coastguard Station, the Crosby Lightship, and New Brighton. The vessel, which was undoubtedly the “Carmel,” continued to show a flare-up light from time to time, until 9.30 p.m., by which time she had driven to the S. and E. of the Formby Lightship.

Meanwhile the crew of the steam lifeboat, stationed at New Brighton, had been mustered by signal, and shortly after 8 p.m. the crew were all on board. At 8.20 p.m., the delay being necessary in order to get up steam, the New Brighton boat started and made for the Crosby Lightship. By this time direct telephonic communication between the various stations, which is only permitted by the Post Office authorities between the hours of 8 p.m. and 8 a.m., had been established, and each station was aware what was being done.

At Hoylake the lifeboat crew were equally smart, and had mustered and brought the boat out of the house by 8.3 p.m. In order to launch her, it was necessary to take her on a carriage, drawn by seven horses, across the gut or lake which lies between Hoylake and the Rock Channel. Unfortunately, when nearly across, one of the horses sank in a sand hole, out of which it took ten minutes to extricate it. By that time the wheels of the carriage had sunk into the sand as far as the axletrees, and, in spite of every effort, the carriage could not be moved. At 8.45, however, the tide, which had begun to flow at 7.20 p.m., had risen sufficiently to float the boat off, and the crew at once took her down the Rock Channel as far as H5 red buoy. The coxswain was not aware that the flare-up light proceeded from a vessel in or near the Formby Channel, but if he had known it, it would have been impossible for him to have reached in the then conditions of weather, sea, and tide. He, however, did his best by skirting along the northern side of Spencer Spit to see whether the signal of distress proceeded from any vessel in that neighbourhood. While doing this the boat was struck by a heavy sea, thrown on her beam ends, and almost capsized. She fortunately righted, and shortly afterwards—it being apparent that further search was useless—the boat returned to Hoylake, dropped anchor in the lake at 12.20 a.m., and was subsequently beached at 12.45 a.m.

The same smartness and despatch does not seem to have characterised the action of Mr. John Aindow, the coxswain of the Formby lifeboat. Although the telephonic communication with the Formby lightship was interrupted, the coxswain does not appear to have provided for a careful look-out; and neither saw nor heard of the signals until 8 p.m., when one of his sons brought in the news. Instead of at once firing the signal to muster his crew, he proceeded to the telephone which is fixed in his house at the lifeboat station, and put himself in communication with New Brighton, and learned that both the New Brighton and Hoylake boats were on the point of starting. In reply to a message from New Brighton, inquiring if he was going to launch his boat, he replied that he would wait and see if further assistance was required. What his reason was for adopting such a course, he was unable clearly to explain, but by 8.25 p.m. he had come to the conclusion that he might possibly be of use, as his boat drew less water than the New Brighton boat.

Accordingly the signal was fired, and the crew and horses were mustered at the boat-house in about three quarters of an hour. This delay was due to the fact that, owing to a scarcity of houses near the shore, most of the crew are forced to reside at a distance of half an hour's walk or more from the station, and it usually takes from three quarters of an hour to an hour to muster the crew, and a farther 20 to 30 minutes, according to the state of the tide, is required to launch the boat. One the present occasion some slight delay was also occasioned by the fact that a quantity of sand had quite recently drifted up in front of the boat-house, and had to be removed before the boat could be got out. By the time, however, that the crew had mustered, the sand had been nearly all cleared away. The boat was drawn out of the house for a distance of three or four yards, and there it remained. The coxswain stated that he came to the conclusion that, as he had seen no light for the last 20 or 25 minutes, it would be impossible to find the vessel, and that he had better wait, on the chance of seeing the steam lifeboat. The horses remained yoked to the carriage for three-quarters of an hour, and were then unharnessed and put into the boat-house stables. The crew were kept at the station till 1.30 a.m., when the coxswain received a message from New Brighton that the lifeboat had returned. It is difficult to account for this course of action, or to comprehend the reasoning on which it can have been based. The coxswain admitted that at 8.10 p.m. he saw the flare-up light bearing W. ½ S., and apparently on the Little Burbo Bank, and saw it more than once afterwards, the last time being some 20 or 25 minutes before the boat had been got out of the house.

From this it is plain that if the crew had been summoned at 8 p.m. (and they might have been summoned before that if a good look-out had been kept), the boat might have been launched about the time that the last flare-up was seen, and considering the quarter in which the wind was, the Formby boat was in a not unfavour-

able position for reaching the "Carmel." Once launched, they could have reached the Crosby Lightship in 20 minutes, or about 9.35 p.m., and would have heard that a flare-up had been seen, bearing S. W. $\frac{1}{2}$ S. Of course, it is impossible to say whether even then a search for the unfortunate vessel would have been successful; but at least the attempt might have been made.

At 9.48 p.m. the New Brighton boat reached the Crosby Lightship and received the intimation above mentioned, and were also told that the vessel was just west of the Gas Buoys C3. They proceeded there, but found nothing. They then coasted along the Great Burbo Bank, burning white lights, but neither heard nor saw anything. They then crossed the Little Burbo and proceeded to the Formby ship, but failed to get any further information, and having given up all hope of finding the vessel, they returned to their mooring at New Brighton, which they reached about 1 a.m. At daylight of that morning those on board the Crosby Lightship saw the dismantled wreck of the vessel on the Burbo Bank, being S.W. $\frac{3}{4}$ W., distant about two miles.

All hands were lost; the bodies of the captain and mate were afterwards found on the shore at the New Brighton, and those of two others of the crew on the Hoyle banks.

At the conclusion of the evidence Mr. Paxton, for the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions for the opinion of the Court:—

1. Whether when the "Carmel" left Fleetwood she was in all respects in a good and seaworthy condition, and was she supplied with the life-saving appliances required by the statute?

2. Whether the hatchways and companions were properly covered, and could they be effectively secured?

3. Whether the "Carmel" was overladen?

4. Whether her cargo was properly stowed, and secured from shifting?

5. Was the "Carmel" in distress in the vicinity of the Formby and Crosby Lightships on the evening of the 10th October, and, if so, what, in the opinion of the Court, was the cause of such distress and of the subsequent loss of the vessel?

6. At what time were distress-signals seen by the Formby and Crosby Lightships on the evening of the 10th October, and what was the position of these signals?

7. What was the direction and force of the wind and tide?

8. Were signals promptly displayed by the Formby and Crosby Lightships in order to obtain assistance from the shore?

9. When was the cable between the Formby Lightship and the shore broken, and why had it not been repaired before the 10th October?

10. Whether, in the opinion of the Court, the electric communication for signalling between the Formby and Crosby Lightships and the several lifeboat stations is satisfactory, and, if not, in what direction do the Court consider that the electric communication should be amended?

11. What was the cause of delay in mustering the crew of the Formby lifeboat and getting the boat ready for launching?

12. Whether, having regard to the relative positions of the Formby lifeboat-house and the residences of her crew, the crew can assemble with reasonable despatch?

13. At what time were the distress signals from the "Carmel" last seen?

14. What were the circumstances in which the coxswain of the Formby lifeboat failed to launch the boat on the evening of the 10th October?

15. Whether the New Brighton lifeboat was promptly despatched? Was there any undue delay in attempting to render assistance, and did the crew make every possible effort to find the vessel from which distress signals had been exhibited?

16. Is it desirable to supply for the use of the boat at Hoylake a carriage of modern construction, and what are the circumstances in which delay has arisen in supplying such a carriage?

17. Whether on the evening of the 10th October prompt and proper measures were taken to assemble the crew of the lifeboat at Hoylake, and to launch the boats?

18. What was the cause of the delay in launching the boat?

19. Was any intimation of this delay sent to the coxswain of the Formby lifeboat?

20. Whether, when the Hoylake lifeboat was ultimately floated, prompt and proper measures were taken with a view to find and to render assistance to the vessel from which distress signals had been exhibited?

21. What was the nature of the service then performed? Did the crew of the boat take her outside the lake, and did they make proper effort to find the wreck and save life?

22. Whether, in the opinion of the Court, any and, if so, what changes are desirable in the working of the lifeboat service for Liverpool Bay with a view of promoting its efficiency?

Mr. Cunningham Grahame, on behalf of the National Lifeboat Institution, and Mr. James Samuelson, on behalf of the Local Committee of the Institution, having addressed the Court, the Court gave judgment as above, and returned the following answers to the questions of the Board of Trade:—

1. The "Carmel" appears to have left Fleetwood in all respects in good and seaworthy condition, and her owner informed the Court that she was supplied with the life-saving appliances required by the statute.

2. The main and after hatchways were properly covered and secured before the "Carmel" started from Fleetwood. The fore-hatchway could have been effectively secured before the tug-boat left the vessel.

3. The "Carmel" was not overladen.

4. The cargo was properly stowed and secured from shifting.

5. At 7.45 p.m. a white flare-up light was observed by those on board of the Formby Lightship and taken to be a signal of distress. It bore S.W., distant about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles. This position is also confirmed by the evidence from the Crosby Lightship, the Formby Lifeboat Station, and the Hoylake Lifeboat Station, and from subsequent events it turned out that the light was no doubt exhibited from the "Carmel." About an hour before this the "Carmel" was seen by two schooners in the Crosby Channel, between the Bar Lightship and the Formby Lightship, and about that time the wind suddenly shifted to N.N.E., blowing hard. In all probability the "Carmel" must have met with some disaster at that time, and helplessly drifted to the position where the distress signal was first observed. From this position she subsequently drifted to the south-eastward until she grounded on the end of one of the spits of the Great Burbo Bank, bearing S.W. $\frac{3}{4}$ W. from the Crosby Lightship, where the wreck was seen dismantled on the following morning.

6. The first distress signal was observed from the Formby and Crosby Lightships at 7.45 p.m., and other signals were also seen from the Crosby Lightship from time to time up to 9.30 p.m., when the last signal bore N. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S.

7. After 6.30 p.m. the wind was N.N.E., with a force from 7 to 9. About 7.20 p.m. it was low water, after which the flood made, gradually increasing in force to 3 or 4 knots an hour.

8. Signals were promptly displayed from the Formby and Crosby Light-vessels.

9. The cable between the Formby Light-vessel and the shore was broken on the 17th September last. Attempts which had been made to repair it had been greatly retarded by stress of weather, and also by the absence of the marine superintendent on other duties. It was subsequently repaired on November 12th.

10. The electric communication for signalling between the Formby Lightship and the several lifeboat stations is satisfactory so far as the exigencies of the public service will permit. At present there is no telephonic communication permitted by the post office before 8 p.m., in order not to interfere with messages transmitted by the public. The Court considers that it would be desirable to have an independent wire between both lightships and the several stations, so as to insure rapid communication by day as well as by night.

11. The coxswain of the Formby lifeboat, who saw the signal of distress from the "Carmel" almost as soon as it was observed from the lightships, delayed making the usual signal for mustering the crew of his lifeboat for some 25 minutes, during which time, as he stated, he was engaged attending to the telephone in the boat-house, and, as a portion of the crew reside some distance from the boathouse, a further delay necessarily ensued after the signal for mustering was made.

12. As the residences of one-third of the crew are some 30 minutes' walk from the lifeboat, it cannot be

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said that the crew can assemble with reasonable despatch.

13. The distress signals from the "Carmel" were last seen at 9.30 p.m. from the Crosby Lightship.

14. So soon as the crew of the Formby lifeboat had assembled, and the horses were in readiness, the boat was drawn out of the house a few yards, when the coxswain decided to wait, assigning as his reason that as no distress signal had been seen for 20 or 25 minutes he intended to wait for the chance of seeing the steam lifeboat. The horses remained yoked for three quarters of an hour, and were then taken back to the lifeboat stables.

15. The New Brighton lifeboat was promptly despatched. There was no delay in attempting to render assistance, and the crew made every possible effort to find the vessel.

16. An improved carriage for the Hoylake lifeboat is in course of construction; any delay there may have been in commencing it was due to uncertainty as to some local improvement scheme which, if carried out, would necessitate the removal of the lifeboat house.

17. Prompt and proper measures were taken to assemble the crew of the lifeboat at Hoylake and to launch the boat.

18. The delay in launching was caused by one of the horses getting into a hole of soft sand, from which it took ten minutes to extricate it, by which time the wheels of the carriage had sunk into the sand and all efforts to remove it were fruitless, so that they had to wait till the tide rose and floated the boat.

19. No intimation of this delay was sent to the coxswain of the Formby lifeboat.

20. When the Hoylake lifeboat ultimately floated, prompt and proper measures were taken to find and to render assistance to the vessel in distress.

21. The crew of the Hoylake lifeboat took their boat out of the lake and down the Rock Channel as far as the west end of the Spencer spit, and returned along the north side of the spit into the lake. They made all possible efforts under the circumstances to find the wreck and save life.

22. In addition to the suggestion already made for an improved system of electric communication, the Court approves of the proposal made by Mr. Samuelson for the appointment of a superintendent who should have supervision of the three lifeboat stations, with whom the several coxswains could readily communicate. The Court thinks that some effort should be made to get the crew of the Formby lifeboat within reasonable distance of the station. At present there are no facilities either at Formby or Hoylake for manning a steam lifeboat in shelter. The steam lifeboat at New Brighton has done such excellent service that it is eminently desirable that similar boats should be placed at other stations in the bay as soon as proper accommodation can be provided.

(Signed) W. J. STEWART, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) WM. PARFITT,
GEO. RICHARDSON, } Assessors.

Liverpool, 23rd November 1896.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 3rd day of December 1896.)