

(No. 5938.)

“ ARDMORE ” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Debts Recovery Court, County Buildings, Glasgow, on the twelfth day of September, 1899, before THOMAS ALEXANDER FYFF, Esquire, Sheriff Substitute of Lanarkshire, assisted by Captains GEORGE RICHARDSON and ALEXANDER WOOD, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship “ ARDMORE,” of Glasgow, on the Ness Reef, near Duncansby Head, Pentland Firth, on 20th August, 1899.

*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 cause of the casualty was that whilst the vessel was being steered through the Inner Sound close to the Caithness shore in accordance with the instruction in the Sailing Directions applicable to the locality, she encountered an unexpected tidal influence which rendered her unmanageable and drove her ashore.

Dated this twelfth day of September, 1899.

T. A. FYFF, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

GEORGE RICHARDSON, } Assessors.  
A. WOOD, }

*Annex to the Report.*

This inquiry was held at Glasgow, on the twelfth day of September, 1899.

Mr. Alexander McGrigor, writer, Glasgow, appeared for the Board of Trade; Mr. James Mackenzie, writer, Glasgow, for the master; and Mr. Glen, writer, Glasgow, for the owners.

The “ Ardmore ”—official number 62,666—was a British screw steamship, built of iron by Messrs. Bartram, Haswell & Co., at Sunderland, in the year 1872, and was of the following dimensions:—length, 215·8 ft.; breadth, 30 ft.; depth of hold, 15·25 ft. She had two masts, was schooner rigged, and was propelled by two surface condensing engines of 90 nominal horse-power combined. Her registered tonnage, after deducting 361·49 tons for propelling and crew space, was 541·42 tons nett. She was formerly registered at Maryport and at Liverpool, but at the time of the casualty she was registered at Glasgow. She was owned by Mr. Lawrence Glen and Mr. Ralph Wardlaw Thomson Walker. Mr. Lawrence Glen, of 107, St. Vincent Street, Glasgow, being designated managing owner.

The “ Ardmore,” under the command of Ole Johan Andersen, with a crew of fifteen hands, all told, left Gothenburg on the 16th of August last, with a cargo of pit props bound for Ayr. Part of the cargo was stowed on deck, to a height of from 10 to 12 feet above the deck. She had three boats, and carried the life-saving appliances required by the statute. She had three compasses, which were in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and was fully provided with charts and sailing directions applicable to the navigation of the Pentland Firth. All went well on the voyage till August 20th, when the vessel arrived in the Pentland Firth. At 4 p.m. Duncansby Head was sighted distant about 17 miles, when a W.N.W. course (magnetic) was steered until 6·30 p.m., when Duncansby Head was abeam distant, by estimation, three-quarters of a mile. The master was on the bridge, the mate on deck, an extra hand was put to the helm to assist in steering, while the chief engineer was in the engine-room, along with the engineer on watch, and all precautions seem to have been taken to ensure the vessel's safe navigation

through these treacherous waters. The vessel was steered according to the instruction contained in the Sailing Directions along the Caithness shore. There was a considerable amount of evidence as to the distance from the shore at which the vessel was navigated, and the witnesses, both from the ship and from the shore agreed that this distance was about three-quarters of a mile. William Cook, Fisherman, and pilot of the locality, said that he watched the vessel pass Duncansby Head and until she stranded, and that had he been in command he would have steered her just as she was steered, and at the same distance from the shore. The vessel proceeded along the shore, her course being directed by the land, and steering very well until 7 p.m., by which time she was abreast of Duncansby Ness, when a tide was said to have caught the vessel on the starboard bow, and turned her head towards the shore, against the helm, which was hard-a-port. The engines were then reversed, but before the headway could be got off the vessel she ran ashore. There is some difference in the evidence as to when the vessel took the ground, the master stating that the engines were astern some time before she struck, whereas the chief engineer said he felt the vessel strike the ground forward of the engine-room before the telegraph rang for the engines to be put astern. The engines were kept going astern for a short time, and then stopped. They were shortly afterwards again started astern, but the vessel remained fast and the ship began to leak, the water rising so rapidly that the boiler fires were soon drowned out. Salvage operations were subsequently undertaken, but without success, and the vessel was finally abandoned as a total loss.

The following questions were submitted by the Board of Trade, to which the Court gave the answers appended:—

1. What number of compasses had the vessel, were they in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and when and by whom were they last adjusted?—The “ Ardmore ” had three compasses—a standard and a steering compass, both on the bridge, and another steering compass aft. They were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted in July, 1899, by Messrs. White and Thompson.

2. Were proper measures taken, at or about 6·30 p.m. on the 20th August last to verify the position of the vessel?—About 6·30 p.m. on 20th August last the vessel passed Duncansby Head at a distance of about three-quarters of a mile. This distance was estimated by the eye, and considering the nearness of the vessel to the land and the clearness of the weather, the Court considers the position of the vessel could be thus ascertained with sufficient accuracy.

3. Whether, having regard to the weather, and state of the tide, the master should have proceeded through the Inner Sound?—According to all the evidence, including that of the two local pilots, the master was justified in proceeding through the Inner Sound at the time he did.

4. Whether after 6·30 p.m. on the 20th August last, safe and proper courses were set and steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?—Safe and proper courses were steered to bring the vessel into a proper position for passing through the Inner Sound. Proper allowance was made for the tide and current.

5. Whether at or about 7 p.m. the vessel refused to answer her helm, if so, what was the cause of it, and were prompt and proper measures taken to prevent the stranding?—About 7 p.m. the vessel refused to answer her helm, the cause of which, according to the evidence, was that the vessel was overmastered by the effect of the tide on her starboard bow, sheering her head towards the shore, against the helm, which was hard-a-port. So far as possible prompt although ineffectual efforts were made to avoid the stranding, by reversing the engines so soon as it was found that the vessel was not answering her helm.

6. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?—The evidence in regard to the stranding is that it was caused by an unexpected tidal influence rendering the vessel unmanageable and driving her ashore.

7. Was a good and proper look-out kept, and was she navigated with proper and seamanlike care?—A good and proper look-out was kept, and, assuming the vessel's

distance from the shore to have been as stated, she was navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

8. Was the loss of the vessel caused by the wrongful act or default of the master and mate, or of either of them?—Neither the master nor mate is in default. The master had made himself conversant with the Sailing Directions for this dangerous channel, and he followed them in navigating his vessel close to the Caithness shore, although, as the result proved in this particular case, it

might have been better had he not kept quite so close to the land.

T. A. FYFE, Judge.

We concur

GEORGE RICHARDSON, } Assessors.  
A. WOOD, }

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 6th day of October, 1899.)



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