

(No. 6542.)

“GLOUCESTER” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Sheriff Court House, Aberdeen, on the 24th and 25th days of June, 1903, before Sheriff J. HENDERSON BEGG, assisted by Captains WILLIAM BARNETT BIGLEY and WILLIAM ERSKINE, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship “Gloucester,” of Aberdeen.

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 there is no evidence before the Court as to what was the cause of the loss of the s.s. “Gloucester” and all hands on a voyage from Montrose to Cardiff.

Dated this twenty-fifth day of June, 1903.

J. HENDERSON BEGG, Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

WM. BARNETT BIGLEY, } Assessors.
WILLIAM ERSKINE, }

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was held in the Sheriff Court House, Aberdeen, on the 24th and 25th days of June, 1903. Mr. Peterkin appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade. Mr. J. E. Lawie, managing owner, Mr. William Stephen, former master of the “Gloucester,” and Mr. William Skinner, stevedore, were made parties to the inquiry, but they were not represented by counsel or solicitor. The s.s. “Gloucester,” official number 96112, was a British steamship, built of steel and iron at Stockton-on-Tees, in 1892, by Messrs. Craggs & Son, of Stockton. She was fitted with one compound direct acting vertical engine, which gave her a speed of 10½ knots, and was owned by the North Eastern Shipping Company, Limited, of No. 1 North Street, Elgin, in the County of Elgin; Mr. James Elsmie Lawie and Mr. James Richard Forbes Elsmie being designated managers by advice from Liverpool, dated the 27th of November, 1902. Her dimensions were as follows:—Length 150 ft., breadth 22 ft. 6 ins., and depth of hold, from tonnage deck to ceiling, at midships 9 ft. 5 ins.; her gross tonnage was 308.26 and, after deducting 167.35 for crew space, &c., her net tonnage was 140.91 tons. She had three boats, two of which were lifeboats placed aft on skids, the remaining one being a jolly-boat, which was carried secured upon one of the hatches, and the vessel was supplied with all necessary life-saving appliances in accordance with the Act. She had a water-tight bulkhead fore part of the engine room, and another collision bulkhead forward; her cargo hold was in one, extending from the engine room and stokehole bulkhead to the fore-castle bulkhead forward, and in this hold there were two hatchways, the fore one being 19 ft. 3 ins. in length and 10 ft. wide, with combings 2 ft. 6 ins. in height; the after one was of the same dimensions, with the exception that the combings were one foot less in height. She had four water ballast tanks of the

capacity of 110 tons, placed as follows: One tank forward before the collision bulkhead, which held 12 tons; two tanks under the cargo hold, which held 37 and 53 tons respectively; and one after peak tank of 8 tons; these tanks, together with the bilges, were stated to have been thoroughly cleared of water at the time the vessel sailed from Montrose. She had four ventilators from the deck into the hold, each being 12 ins. in diameter and about 6 ft. 6 ins. in height above the deck. They were placed as follows, two forward just abaft the fore-castle and two abaft the bridge. She had also six ports on each side in her bulwarks for relieving the decks of water in heavy weather. On the morning of the 21st February, 1903, the s.s. “Gloucester” finished loading a complete cargo of oats in bulk, viz., 2,045 quarters, weighing 306 tons; at the completion of her loading, 67 sacks were put in the combings of the main hatch and 37 in the fore hatch, and then levelled up with loose grain to the hatches. The ventilators into the hold were also filled with oats and the cowl covers were put on. The Court, however, is of opinion that the cowls should have been unshipped and the ventilator-combings properly secured for a winter passage. At about 7.30 p.m. of the 21st February she sailed at tide time for the port of Cardiff, under a new master, Mr. James Wright, with a crew of 10 hands all told, and her draught of water was about 10 ft. 1 in. forward and 12 ft. 2 ins. aft. Mr. George West, licensed Montrose pilot, stated that at the time he left the s.s. “Gloucester” off the port she was in good trim, had no list, and everything was secured for sea; that there was a moderate breeze from the westward, and that the master said to him that he was going north about. One of the witnesses, Mr. John McNeil, who is master of the s.s. “Princess Maud,” stated that he left Montrose on the same tide as the s.s. “Gloucester,” bound for the port of Liverpool, to which place he was a regular trader, and that on the morning of the 22nd February he sighted a vessel ahead of him in the Pentland Firth, but further out from the land than his steamer. He eventually passed her off Cape Wrath, and at dark lost sight of her astern. He could not say positively she was the s.s. “Gloucester,” but some of his crew who knew the vessel have since told him that they had recognised the vessel as they passed her and were of opinion that it was the said steamer. After rounding Cape Wrath the master of the s.s. “Princess Maud” describes the weather as having come on very bad, blowing hard, with heavy squalls from West to S.W., with a heavy sea. On Monday morning it blew a perfect gale from the West, and eventually the weather became so bad that he was compelled, on Thursday morning, to put into Ramsay Bay (Isle of Man) for shelter and come to an anchor.

The Court is unable to say what was the actual cause of the loss of this vessel, but having regard to the stormy weather prevailing at the time of her disappearance, and her cargo consisting of oats in bulk, without any provision having been taken to prevent it from shifting in heavy weather, the Court is of opinion that the cause of her loss may have been the shifting of her cargo; however, any conclusion as to the ultimate fate of this vessel can only be conjecture.

The following are the names of the unfortunate men who lost their lives by the casualty:—

- James Wright, master,
- A. Ross, mate,
- Robert Moon, 1st engineer,
- M. Allen, 2nd engineer,
- J. Paton, cook,
- R. Hughes, boatswain,
- C. Simpson, A.B.,
- T. Kaumrad, A.B.,
- W. Hastings, fireman,
- W. Valentine.

The Court desire to express their sympathy with the relatives of the above missing men.

At the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Peterkin, on behalf of the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions for the consideration of the Court:—

1. Was the vessel in good and seaworthy condition as regards hull and equipment when she left Montrose on her last voyage?
2. Who was responsible for the proper stowage of the cargo of oats shipped on board the "Gloucester" on or about 20th February last at Montrose?
3. Was the cargo properly stowed and trimmed, and, as laden, had the vessel sufficient stability?
4. Were all necessary and reasonable precautions taken in the loading and stowage of the cargo to prevent it from shifting?
5. On leaving Montrose on or about 21st February last, had the vessel the freeboard required for a winter voyage?
6. What is the cause of the vessel not having been heard of since the pilot left her on or about 21st February last?
7. Was the loss of the s.s. "Gloucester" caused by the wrongful act or default of Mr. William Stephen, former master, or by the neglect of Mr. James Elsmie Lawie, registered manager, and Mr. William Skinner, stevedore, or of either of them?
8. What was the cost of the vessel to her owners? What was her value when she last left Montrose? What insurances were effected upon and in connection with the ship?

The Court replied to the questions as follows:—

1. The Court answer this question in the affirmative.
2. In the opinion of the Court the person responsible for the proper stowage of the cargo of oats was Mr. William Stephen, who continued to act

as the master of the vessel till after the stowage was completed.

3 & 4. There is no evidence whether the vessel as laden had or had not sufficient stability. The cargo was stowed and trimmed in the manner customary in the coasting trade. In the opinion of the Court, however, proper and reasonable precautions were not taken in the stowage of the cargo of oats in bulk to prevent it from shifting. Such a cargo cannot be properly stowed without the use of shifting boards, and nothing of the kind was used in the present case. The Court feel bound to express the strongest condemnation of the proved custom of coasting vessels dispensing with shifting boards when carrying grain cargoes in bulk.

5. The Court answer this question in the affirmative.

6 & 7. There is no evidence to enable the Court to answer these questions.

8. The cost of the vessel to her owners was £5,012; and there is no reason to suppose that her value was less when she left Montrose. An insurance for £4,000 was effected on her hull and machinery, and another for £500 on freight and disbursements, both with Lloyds. Another insurance for £1,000 was effected with several clubs against total loss.

J. HENDERSON BEGG, Judge.

We concur,

WM. BARNETT BIGLEY, } Assessors.
WILLIAM ERSKINE, }

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade, on the 28th day of July, 1903.)

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