

(No. 6894.)

## "HILDA" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at Caxton Hall, Westminster, on the 1st, 2nd, and 8th days of February, 1906, before R. H. B. MARSHAM, Esq., assisted by Captain RONALDSON, Commander CABORNE, C.B., R.N.R., and Vice-Admiral O. CHURCHILL, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "HILDA," at or near the Pierres des Portes, north-west coast of France, on the 18th day of November, 1905, 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 said casualty was caused by the "Hilda" striking on one of the Pierres des Portes rocks, outside St. Malo, during a snowstorm, but in the absence of definite evidence, owing to the fact that all those who could have thrown light upon the matter were drowned, the Court is unable to express an opinion as to how she got there.

Dated this 12th day of February, 1906.

R. H. B. MARSHAM,  
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

A. RONALDSON,  
W. F. CABORNE,  
O. CHURCHILL, } Assessors.  
V.-Ad.,

*Annex to the Report.*

This inquiry was held at the Caxton Hall, Caxton Street, in the City of Westminster, on the 1st, 2nd, and 8th days of February, 1906.

Mr. Pickford, K.C., and Mr. A. D. Bateson (instructed by the solicitor for the department) represented the Board of Trade, while Mr. Butler Aspinall, K.C., and Mr. J. A. Simon, M.P. (instructed by Mr. Sam Bircham, solicitor to the London and South-Western Railway Company, and Messrs. Clarkson, Greenwell and Company), appeared for the owners, Mr. D. Stephens (instructed by Messrs. Woodhouse and Davidson) for the executor and children of the late Mr. and Mrs. Wellesley, Mr. Maurice Hill (instructed by Messrs. Broad and Cheston) for the representatives of the late Colonel Follett, Mr. Ryland (Messrs. Woodcock, Ryland, and Parker) for the relatives of the late Rev. Dr. Stanley, Mrs. Stanley, Miss Stanley, Miss Norah Stanley, and a maid, and Mr. Jones (representing Messrs. Peake, Bird, and Collins) for the Honourable Henry Cavendish Butler, husband of the late Honourable Mrs. Butler.

The "Hilda," official number 86327, was a screw steamship, built of iron in 1882, at Glasgow, by Messrs. Aitken and Mansel. She was registered at the port of Southampton, and was the property of the London and South-Western Railway Com-

pany, having its principal place of business in London, and was under the management of Mr. Tom Mitchell Williams, the company's dock and marine superintendent, at Southampton, who was designated as the person to whom the management of the vessel was entrusted by and on behalf of the owners, by advice under the seal of the said company received on the 1st of January, 1902.

The dimensions of the vessel were as follows:—Length, 235.6 ft.; breadth, 29.1 ft.; and depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling at midships, 14.2 ft.; her gross tonnage being 848.06 tons, and her registered tonnage, 373.36 tons.

She was propelled by compound engines of 220 nominal horse-power, built by Messrs. John and James Thomson and Company, of Glasgow, in 1882, and designed to give her a speed of 12 knots, the cylinders being respectively 37 ins. and 69 ins., and the length of stroke 39 ins.; and she was fitted with two steel boilers, made by Messrs. Day, Summers and Company, of the Northam Iron Works, Southampton, in 1894, and having a working pressure of 85 lbs. to the square inch.

She had five water-tight bulkheads; both hand and steam steering gear were provided; and she had been furnished with an installation of the electric light in 1894.

She carried six boats, namely, two lifeboats of the aggregate capacity of 587 cubic ft. and capable of accommodating 57 persons, two boats of the aggregate capacity of 321 cubic ft. and capable of accommodating 40 persons, and two other boats capable of accommodating 57 persons. These boats were supplied with all requisite equipments, and were fitted with Messrs. Hill and Clarke's patent disengaging gear.

With regard to other life-saving appliances, she had 12 lifebuoys and 318 lifebelts, 192 of the latter being placed in the cabins, 100 being stowed on battens under the fore-castle, and 26 being reserved for the use of the crew.

In accordance with the Board of Trade regulations, she carried a signal gun, and the proper number of cartridges, rockets, and blue lights.

In the way of navigating instruments, she had three compasses, namely, one (Lord Kelvin's patent) on the bridge, which was the standard compass, by which the courses were set and steered, and two others (one of them being a spirit compass) situated one on either side forward of the after steering wheel, and she was also furnished with a "cherub" taffrail log, and the ordinary hand and deep-sea leads and lines.

The compasses were last regularly adjusted by Mr. J. Blount Thomas, compass maker and adjuster, of Southampton, in May, 1894, but since then, it was stated they had been examined and overhauled at fixed periods, the vessel subsequently making a trial trip to ascertain that all was in order. Moreover, on the 26th April, 1905, both the master and the then chief mate signed a declaration as to the good condition of the compasses, and their knowledge of their errors, as required by the Board of Trade when granting a passenger certificate.

Admiralty charts and Part II. of the Channel Pilot, found by the master, were on board, and the company further supplied the steamer with a copy of the "Annuaire des Marées des Côtes de France pour l'an 1905," published by the French "Service Hydrographique de la Marine."

On the 30th of May, 1905, the "Hilda," which originally cost £33,000, and at the time of her loss was valued at £12,000, half of that amount being covered by insurance, and the London and South-Western Railway Company taking the other moiety of the risk, was granted a passenger certificate for Home Trade limits (such limits, of course, including the Channel Islands and St. Malo), such certificate to remain in force until the 15th of May, 1906, and the number of passengers for which she was licensed being 566.

A few words should now be devoted to the personnel of the vessel.



to do so. Some two hours after the vessel sank, the cook dropped into the sea, and at about 6 o'clock the following morning, the 19th of November, the chief mate died clinging to the mast. Throughout the night, it only cleared once for five minutes, and then the shore lights were visible, but it came in thick again, the heavy snow giving place to thick sleet.

Just before the chief mate died, a pilot cutter sailed out past the wreck, but she was too far off for those on the mast to attract her attention.

About 9.30 a.m. the s.s. "Ada" (Mr. Albert Edward Howe, master), belonging to the London and South-Western Railway Company, which vessel should have sailed for Southampton on the previous evening, but had been detained in port by the snowstorm, came out of St. Malo, and observing the men on the mast, sent a boat to rescue them, a feat which was accomplished with considerable difficulty as, although the wind had somewhat moderated, it was still blowing hard from the eastward, and there was a heavy sea. The chief mate, a fireman, and two Bretons were found dead in the rigging. About the same time that the "Ada" sent her boat, a French pilot cutter which had appeared on the scene, sent her boat also, and at great risk saved one of the Breton onion sellers who had spent the night on the fore-castle of the "Hilda." Unfortunately, the name of the pilot, to whom this boat belonged, did not transpire at the inquiry. The sole survivors consisted of James Grinter, A.B., and five Bretons who were conveyed to the hospital at St. Malo.

The position where the vessel struck was on one of the Pierres des Portes rocks about six cables distant in a W.N. westerly direction from the Grand Jardin light, and about two cables, or say four hundred yards, to the westward of the Chenal de la Petite Porte.

As it was high water at St. Malo at 9.53 p.m. on the 18th of November, the vessel must have stranded when the tide had been falling for about an hour.

The first intelligence of the catastrophe was conveyed to St. Malo by the "Ada," the signals of distress shown by the "Hilda" not having been seen from the shore, although the London and South-Western Railway Company's employes were on the pier most of the night, nor from the Grand Jardin lighthouse. Even if they had been seen from the Grand Jardin, no information could have been conveyed during the night, owing to the lack of telegraphic communication with the shore.

It is true that Mrs. Eveleen Grindle, widow of Mr. J. A. Grindle, one of the passengers by the "Hilda," who was staying at St. Malo, subsequently made a deposition before the Administrateur de l'Inscription Maritime, of which the following is a translation:—

"On Saturday the 18th at half-past ten, I and my children went up to the top of the house in order to see the lights of the 'Hilda' as she came in. During a few minutes, we saw the lights, and a minute or two afterwards we saw several rockets (fusées)—my children and I counted six—and we all said: 'Oh, that is the signal to show that they are arriving,' and then the lights disappeared, but we thought that the boat had passed behind a house which is in front of this one. I ought to add that we could see the lighthouse quite distinctly."

The Court was informed that about seventy bodies had been recovered, and that most, if not all of them, had lifebelts on, secured by sailor knots.

The foregoing are the facts of the case so far as they can be ascertained, but in the absence of direct evidence, owing to the loss of all those who could have thrown light upon the matter, the Court is unable to determine the cause of this most lamentable casualty and does not feel justified in dealing with mere hypotheses.

The London and South-Western Railway Company rendered the Court every assistance in this inquiry, and it is only fair to that corporation that

two circulars issued by its marine superintendent to the masters of its steamers should be quoted.

The first is dated at Southampton on the 9th of February, 1898, and is as follows:—

"I desire to call your attention to practising your crew at fire and boat drill. I trust this matter has had your continued attention, still I wish to remind you that the drill should take place not less than once a month under your supervision, and at the same time you should see all pumps, hoses, boats, and gear in good working order. Please record the drill in the ship's log, and inform me in your voyage report each time it occurs."

These instructions appear to have been duly carried out in the case of the "Hilda."

The second circular is dated at Southampton on the 12th of June, 1899, and is as under:—

"I am instructed by the directors to send you a copy of the decision of the Board of Trade assessors in the case of the recent sad wreck of the "Stella," involving the unfortunate loss of so many lives. I must particularly draw your attention to the answers given by the Court on questions Nos. 10, 13, 16, 17, 18, and 20. Several orders have been given from this office to the captains at various times, and I am again to impress upon you that the first consideration under all and every circumstance is to be the safety of the passengers carried in the company's steamers. Comment has been made in the Press as to the company's vessels racing with the steamers of other companies to the Channel Islands. If any case of racing is proved, I am instructed to inform you that the captain responsible will be subject to immediate dismissal. It is impossible to lay down any strict rules as to what captains should do under varying circumstances, but in case of fog, soundings must be taken, and the speed so regulated that all possible risk may be avoided. Under no circumstance whatever are any unnecessary risks to be run, either by excessive speed or by attempting to take short cuts, but the vessels are to be navigated by the correct and proper courses, and by the various marks when visible. Officers and men must always be at their posts, and a good and efficient look-out kept both by the mates and men throughout the voyage; and whenever leaving or coming into port all hands must be at their posts for a sufficient and proper time after leaving or before approaching the port. It is the duty of the captain to maintain strict discipline on the part of the crew, and not to allow any unnecessary attention to passengers on his own part or the officers or crew to interfere with the due and careful navigation of the ship. Boat drill should be frequent, and every man must know his post. The boats must be frequently and regularly inspected in order that it may be seen that they are fitted for every emergency and are so placed as to be ready for use on the shortest notice. The lifebelts must also be regularly overhauled at short intervals. Be good enough to make this communication known to all chief and other officers on board your ship, and acknowledge receipt by signing and returning to me the annexed slip."

After the proceedings had practically closed, a report from a diver, and the depositions taken at a French Court of Inquiry were received, but they were of no additional material assistance. One French deposition, however,—that of Mrs. Grindle—has been quoted in the course of this Report.

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

#### Questions.

- (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?
- (2) Was the vessel supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions?
- (3) When the vessel left Southampton on the 17th November last—
  - (a) Was she in good and seaworthy condition as regards hull and equipments?

(b) Was she supplied with the requisite boats and life-saving appliances; were the boats and life-saving appliances on board in good condition and ready for use?

(4) What was the cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel on or near the Pierres des Portes rocks outside St. Malo shortly before midnight of the 18th-19th November last?

(5) What was the cause of the loss of life; was every effort possible made by the master, officers, and crew to save life?

(6) Does any blame attach to Mr. Tom Mitchell Williams, registered manager?

The various legal representatives then addressed the Court, Mr. Pickford replied on behalf of the Board of Trade; and on a later day—the 8th instant—the Court gave judgment as above, returning the following answers to the questions submitted to it by the Board of Trade:—

#### Answers.

(1) The "Hilda" had three compasses, namely, one (Lord Kelvin's patent) on the bridge, by which the courses were set and steered, and two others placed one on either side before the after steering wheel. They were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted by Mr. J. Blount Thomas, of Southampton, in May, 1894. While the date of the last regular adjustment was upwards of eleven years ago, the compasses had since been examined and overhauled at regular periods by a competent person, and the master and mate signed a certificate as to the condition and deviations of the said compasses, as required by the Board of Trade when granting a passenger certificate, on the 26th day of April, 1905.

Though the Court has no reason to suppose that there was any error in the compasses or that the casualty was in any way to be attributed to them, it thinks that it is desirable that a ship should be swung and deviations ascertained at more frequent intervals.

(2) The vessel was provided with proper and sufficient charts, sailing directions, and tide tables. The charts used were Admiralty ones.

It has been shown that in the case of steamers belonging to the London and South-Western Railway Company, the masters are required to provide their own charts; and while, in this instance, the Court has no reason to believe that the charts relied upon were not up to date, and is quite convinced that this disastrous casualty was in no way attributable to such cause, yet in its view it is better that owners should supply all charts and sailing directions.

(3) When the vessel left Southampton on November 17th last—

(a) She was in good and seaworthy condition as regards hull and equipments.

(b) She was supplied with the requisite boats and life-saving appliances. The boats and life-saving appliances on board were in good condition and ready for use.

(4) The cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel on or near the Pierres des Portes rocks, outside St. Malo, shortly before midnight of the 18th-19th November last, will never be definitely known, owing to the fact that all those who could have thrown light on the matter were unfortunately drowned. It was shown in evidence that Mr. William Gregory, the master, an experienced man who had made about one thousand voyages to St. Malo, was an extremely cautious navigator; that upon the passage in question, which commenced at 10 p.m. on November 17th, he delayed his departure from Southampton by one and three-quarter hours on account of fog; that, owing to further thick weather setting in, he afterwards anchored off Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, until 6 o'clock the following morning; that heavy snow prevailing he put his vessel's head to seaward when off Le Grand Jardin lighthouse; that, prior

to 8.30 p.m., when all knowledge of the navigational proceedings on board terminates, he was observed taking bearings and consulting his chart, and that immediately after the "Hilda" struck, he was seen on the bridge attending to his duty. Under these circumstances, whatever may have been the real cause of the disaster, the Court is not inclined to attribute it either to rashness or negligence.

(5) The cause of the loss of life was the inability to lower some of the boats owing to the close proximity of the rocks, the smashing of another boat by a wave while being lowered, the heavy sea running, the sudden manner in which the vessel broke in two, and the intense cold of the night. From the evidence of the survivors to the effect that after the vessel struck, there was no confusion or disorganisation among the passengers or crew, coupled with the fact that most, if not all, of the bodies recovered were wearing lifebelts, which, it was stated, were fastened with reef knots; the Court is of opinion that every possible effort was made by the master, officers, and crew to save life.

From the proceedings at a French Court of Inquiry, it appears that no signals of distress were seen from the Grand Jardin lighthouse during the night in question and, even if they had been seen, the news of the catastrophe could not have been conveyed to St. Malo, as it was stated that no telegraphic communication existed with the mainland. As a matter of fact, the intelligence did not reach St. Malo until the s.s. "Ada," also belonging to the London and South-Western Railway Company, which vessel left St. Malo for Southampton about 8.30 a.m. on the 19th November, returned to the former port with the few survivors whom she had rescued from the wreck with some difficulty by means of one of her boats.

A lady at St. Malo, the widow of a passenger by the "Hilda," according to a deposition made at the same French Inquiry, stated that she and her children saw from the top of her house some lights and about six rockets at 10.30 p.m. of the 18th November, in the direction of the lighthouse, but the lights shortly afterwards disappeared.

(6) No blame attaches to Mr. Tom Mitchell Williams, the registered manager.

The Court wishes to express to the French Government its great regret at the heavy loss of life of the subjects of that nation, and to thank that Government for the valuable assistance given by a pilot in rescuing at considerable risk one of those saved, and also for their kindly help in this inquiry. The Court also desires to state its high appreciation of the extremely kind and considerate attention shown to the relations of the English passengers and crew who were drowned, and of the care and trouble taken in recovering the bodies. And the Court also begs to convey its deepest sympathy to the relatives and friends of all those, both French and English, who met their deaths in this most deplorable disaster, which cost the lives of about 130 persons.

R. H. B. MARSHAM,  
Judge.

We concur,

A. RONALDSON,  
W. F. CABORNE,  
O. CHURCHILL, } Assessors.  
V.-Ad.,

List of passengers by the s.s. "Hilda," all of whom are stated to have been drowned, with the exception of five of the Breton onion sellers.

Mr. Wellesley.  
Mrs. Wellesley.  
Mrs. Eckford.  
Mrs. Gaisford.  
Mrs. Hutchinson.  
Miss Linklater.  
Mrs. Rooke.  
Master Rooke.  
Miss Rooke.

List of  
The Rev. I.  
Mrs. Stanle  
Miss Noral  
Miss Stanle  
Miss Denha  
Mr. Grindl  
Miss Vass.  
Major Pric  
Mrs. Price.  
Miss Cuzia  
The Hon. I  
Mr. I. W. S  
Miss Mary  
Col. Follet  
M. Louis R  
(of St.

85 Breton onion se

List of the crew o  
all were drowned, wit  
Grinter, A.B.

W. Gregory  
A. Pearson  
E. Greaves  
G. T. Warner

## List of passengers—cont.

The Rev. Dr. Stanley.  
 Mrs. Stanley.  
 Miss Norah Stanley.  
 Miss Stanley.  
 Miss Denham.  
 Mr. Grindle.  
 Miss Vass.  
 Major Price.  
 Mrs. Price.  
 Miss Cuziatt.  
 The Hon. Mrs. Butler.  
 Mr. I. W. Sykes.  
 Miss Mary Miles.  
 Col. Follett.  
 M. Louis Ropert,  
 (of St. Brieux).

85 Breton onion sellers (names unknown).

List of the crew of the s.s. "Hilda," of whom all were drowned, with the sole exception of James Grinter, A.B.

W. Gregory	...	...	master.
A. Pearson	...	...	chief mate.
E. Greaves	...	...	second mate.
G. T. Warner	...	...	carpenter

## List of crew—cont.

A. Grimstead	...	...	A.B.
W. Fontaine	...	...	A.B.
F. Flowers	...	...	A.B.
E. Patch	...	...	A.B.
E. Chappel	...	...	A.B.
H. Harper	...	...	A.B.
J. Grinter	...	...	A.B.
F. Winter	...	...	deck boy.
I. Topping	...	...	chief engineer.
A. Hannam	...	...	second engineer.
W. Flowers	...	...	fireman.
I. Barrow	...	...	fireman.
A. Nash	...	...	fireman.
S. Martin	...	...	fireman.
A. Lillywhite	...	...	coal trimmer.
W. Borrough	...	...	coal trimmer.
R. Baker	...	...	chief steward.
S. Marrey	...	...	second steward.
E. Spenceley	...	...	third steward.
B. Chester	...	...	fore cabin steward.
W. Murdock	...	...	cook.
E. Elwin	...	...	stewardess.
M. Hubbard	...	...	stewardess.
J. W. Courtman	...	...	pilot.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 6th day of March, 1906.)

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