

(No. 6935.)

"BRITISH KING" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Magistrates' Room, Liverpool, on the 8th, 9th, and 10th days of May, 1906, before W. J. STEWART, Esq., assisted by Mr. HALLETT, C.E., Captain BIGLEY, Captain COWIE, and Admiral LLOYD, C.B., into the circumstances attending the foundering of the British s.s. "BRITISH KING" in Lat. 41° 40' N., Long. 60° 11' W., Atlantic Ocean, 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 was due to large quantities of water gaining access to the hold in heavy weather thereby overcoming the pumps as well as extinguishing the fires. The loss of life was due to the foundering of the vessel before assistance could be rendered to rescue those who were still on board.

Dated this 10th day of May, 1906.

W. J. STEWART,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

J. H. HALLETT, C.E.,
WM. BARNETT BIGLEY,
W. COWIE,
RODNEY M. LLOYD, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

This was an inquiry into the circumstances attending the foundering of the British s.s. "British King," of Liverpool, in Latitude 41° 40' N. and Longitude 60° 11' W. on the 11th March last, and was held at the Magistrates' Room, Liverpool, on the 8th, 9th, and 10th May, 1906, before W. J. Stewart, Esq., Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by J. H. Hallett, Esq., C.E., Captain W. B. Bigley, Captain W. Cowie, and Admiral R. M. Lloyd, C.B., Nautical Assessors. Mr. Paxton represented the Board of Trade, and Mr. Dickinson (of Messrs. Hill & Dickinson, of Liverpool) the owners. The second and third officers appeared in person, but were not represented by counsel.

The "British King," official number 97866, was a steel screw steamship, built at Jarrow in 1891, by Messrs. Palmer's Shipbuilding Company, Limited, Newcastle-on-Tyne. She was schooner rigged and of the following dimensions:—Length 405 ft., breadth 47.9 ft., depth in hold 27.9 ft., and was of 4716.61 gross tonnage, and after deducting 1674.61 tons for propelling and crew space, was of 3042 tons net registered tonnage.

She was fitted with three triple expansion engines of 500 h.p. nominal, constructed by Messrs. Palmer of Newcastle-on-Tyne, in the year 1891, and was owned by the British Shipowners' Company, Limited, of Mersey Chambers, Liverpool, in the County of Lancaster, Edwin Arthur Beazley, of 16, Mersey Chambers, Liverpool, being designated as the person

to whom the management of the vessel was entrusted by and on behalf of the owners, advice received 9th July, 1895, under the seal of the British Shipowners' Company, Limited.

On the voyage in question she was in a good and seaworthy condition, and was well found, and fitted with lifeboats and life-saving appliances, in accordance with the Act.

The s.s. "British King" left New York for Antwerp on the 7th March, 1906, under the command of James O'Hagan, who held a certificate of competency, No. 033965. Her crew consisted of 47 hands all told. There were 10 other persons on board, eight of whom were cattlemen, and the other two stowaways, making a total of 57. She had a general cargo of 4951 tons, 150 head of cattle weighing 150 tons with fittings, 783 tons of coal, shelter deck of 100 tons, 390 tons of fresh water, and 26 tons of fodder, making the total weight on board 6400 tons on a draught of 25 ft. 6 ins. aft. and 23 ft. 2 ins. forward.

All went well until the 9th March, on which day she encountered a heavy gale from the S.E., the vessel heading at the time N. 88° E. true. At noon of that date, a heavy sea broke on board which smashed the side of the wooden house on the top deck, and broke adrift the barrels of grease stowed upon the upper deck, which cargo was eventually secured again, and none washed overboard.

At about 4 p.m. the ship took a slight list to port, but by burning the coal from that side only she again became upright. At 2 a.m. of the 10th, the wind and sea being still heavy, the vessel shipped another big sea, the deck cargo was broken adrift, and again the ship took a list to port. At 7.20 a.m. water was discovered coming through the watertight door in the stokehold bulkhead—from No. 3 lower hold—and shortly afterwards the hatch covers were taken off No. 3, and water was discovered in the 'tween decks from four to five ft. above the lower deck, and was also observed to be running out from the two broken ports on the port side. Attempts were made to plug up these from the outside; these having failed, they proceeded to jettison cargo from the hold in order to reach the ports and plug them from the inside, but it was not found possible to continue this owing to the water and the cargo taking charge and making it dangerous for the men to work below. When the water was discovered leaking through the door in the stokehold bulkhead, which showed signs of straining, caused no doubt by the grain becoming saturated with water and swelling, all available pumping power, including the two bilge pumps, was put on No. 3 hold, and afterwards the ballast tanks were cleared of water. On Saturday afternoon, the 10th March, water was discovered in No. 2 hold, and subsequently 10 ft. of water was found in No. 1 hold, which was reduced by the pumps to 3 ft. 6 ins. early on Sunday morning. Shortly after this the stokehold bulkhead showed signs of severe straining, and the water in the stokehold rose rapidly, washed up the stokehold plates, and extinguished the port fires. The weather at this time was very bad, with a very heavy sea running. At 11 a.m., the water having risen to such an extent that all fires were put out, the engines stopped, and all hands left the stokehold. On the 10th the German steamer "Mannheim" was sighted, and on the 11th, the "Bostonian." Both were signalled that the "British King" was water logged, and were asked to stand by. Later on the same day, those on board the "British King" asked for a boat to be sent for the crew, as the vessel was beginning to sink. The weather was so extremely bad that the first boat from the "Bostonian" was smashed, but a second boat was safely launched. The first boat to arrive alongside was the "Mannheim's" which took off 11 hands and the third officer. Shortly afterwards the "Bostonian's" boat arrived alongside and took off 13 hands, including the Captain, whose leg had been broken the previous day by a heavy sea, which washed him under a steam pipe on the upper deck. It was afterwards found impossible to have any further communication with the "British King," and at 11 p.m. of the 11th March she foundered, at which time there were 28 of her crew on board,

five of whom were afterwards picked up by the "Bostonian," which had steamed in amongst the wreckage at once.

The result of this accident culminated in a loss of 28 lives out of a total of 57. The master, who had been taken to the "Bostonian," as before stated, died two days afterwards of the injuries he had received.

The Court would here desire to express their appreciation of the gallant way in which assistance was rendered to the sinking vessel by the officers and crews of the s.s. "Mannheim" and "Bostonian," to which public expression was given by the Court at the time judgment was delivered.

Under the circumstances attending the foundering of the s.s. "British King" the Court is under the impression, that, to account for the large body of water which found its way into the vessel, some other serious damage must have been done to the hull, besides that observed with regard to the ports.

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

(1) When the vessel left New York on or about the 7th March last

- (a) Was she in good and seaworthy condition as regards hull and equipment?
- (b) Was her cargo properly stowed and secured from shifting?
- (c) Was she upright?
- (d) Was she overladen?

(2) What was the cause of the vessel taking a list, and of the deck cargo getting adrift on or about the 9th and 10th of March last? Was the deck cargo properly re-stowed and secured, and was every possible effort made to get the vessel upright?

(3) What was the cause of the vessel making so much water on or about the 10th March last? Was every possible effort made to ascertain the cause of the leak or leaks, and to keep the water under?

(4) What was the cause of the loss of the vessel, and what were the circumstances in which so many lives were lost?

(5) Was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

(6) What was the cost of the vessel to her owners? What was her value when she last left the United Kingdom? What insurances were effected, and how were they apportioned?

The Court returned the following answers to the questions of the Board of Trade :—

(1) When the vessel left New York, on or about the 7th March last,

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

(b) Her cargo was properly stowed and secured from shifting.

(c) The vessel was upright.

(d) She was not overladen.

(2) The cause of the vessel taking a list was due to her shipping a heavy sea and shifting her deck cargo, and this list, no doubt, was increased through water getting into the vessel by the scuttles, which were carried away. The deck cargo was properly re-stowed and secured, and every possible effort was made to get the vessel upright.

(3) Water was known to be gaining access into the holds through two broken scuttles, but there is no evidence before the Court to show how such a large quantity of water got into the holds and engine room, thereby overcoming the pumps as well as putting out the fires and causing the vessel subsequently to founder. Every possible effort was made to ascertain the cause of the leak or leaks and to keep the water under.

(4) The loss of the vessel was due to heavy weather and to large quantities of water getting into her holds, overcoming the pumps as well as putting out the fires. The loss of life was due to the foundering of the vessel before further assistance could be given by the vessels which were standing by. The heavy sea which had smashed three of the boats that had been lowered to assist the crew of the "British King" had also smashed two of the four boats of the latter vessel, and as the crew could not launch the remaining two boats, they were deprived of any means of escape when she foundered, except the five who had succeeded in getting hold of the wreckage.

(5) The vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

(6) The vessel cost £70,704. Her value when she last left the United Kingdom was £36,000, for which amount she was insured. The freight at risk and charges were insured for £2,750.

W. J. STEWART,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

J. H. HALLETT, C.E.,
WM. BARNETT BIGLEY,
W. COWIE,
RODNEY M. LLOYD, } Assessors.

Liverpool, 10th May, 1906.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 1st day of June, 1906.)

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"ROYAL

The Merchant

In the matter of a f

Town Hall, Grin

days of May, 1906

by Commander G

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G. HALLATT, into

stranding of the B

of Grimsby, at

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(3) The neglect of
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period of four month

The Court finds th
was not in default.

Dated this 3rd day

We concur in th

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Samuel Pye, secon
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are :—Length, 113.8

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She was fitted by
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