

(No. 7258.)

"CLAN RANALD" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

REPORT of a Court of Inquiry held at Port Adelaide, South Australia, on the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th, and 9th days of February, 1909, into the circumstances attending the loss of the s.s. "CLAN RANALD," of Glasgow, off Troubridge Hill, Gulf St. Vincent, on 31st January, 1909.

An inquiry was held at the Marine Board Offices, Port Adelaide, on the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th, and 9th February, 1909, before Arthur Searcy, Esquire, J.P., President of the Marine Board of South Australia, and W. Berry, Esquire, Angus Campbell, Esquire, J.P., R. Fricker, Esquire, F. W. Vasey, Esquire, A. S. Neill, Esquire, J.P., and P. D. Haggart, Esquire, J.P., into the circumstances connected with the loss of the British steamship "Clan Ranald," in the Gulf St. Vincent, off Troubridge Hill, on the night of the 31st January, 1909.

The "Clan Ranald," registered at Glasgow, Official Number 111290, was a schooner rigged turret steamer, built of iron in 1900, 2,286 tons register, owned by Messrs. Cayzer, Irvine & Co., of Glasgow, and under the command of A. S. Gladstone, who held a certificate of competency as master, No. 010424, issued by the Board of Trade.

The first information of the casualty that reached the Board was a telegram, dated the 31st January, from the Harbour Master at Edithburgh, stating that a steamer was drifting towards shore, about two miles out, abreast of Troubridge Hill, and shortly afterwards a further telegram was received from the same source that she had sunk and that most of the crew were drowned.

The "Clan Ranald," laden with grain and flour, left the harbour of Port Adelaide, bound for South Africa, via Albany, Western Australia, at 7 a.m. on the 31st of January, the weather being fine and clear, with a strong breeze from the S.S.E.

At the time of departure she had a list of four degrees to starboard, but the evidence shows that upon reaching the open sea the list increased to six degrees; this list, however, did not further increase as the vessel proceeded down the Gulf, and was no greater when abreast of Troubridge Island Light at 12.10 p.m. The course steered from the time of leaving the Semaphore Anchorage at 9.10 a.m. until noon was S. 50° W., true, when it was found that the ship had been set northward and westward, and the chief mate, who was in charge, hauled her out half a point, making the course S. 45° W., true. At 12.50 the course was again altered to S. 73° W. (by compass) to pass three miles to the southward of Althorpe Island.

At about 2 p.m., when on the last-mentioned course, the vessel suddenly heeled over to starboard, placing that side of the turret deck under water, and she never righted again.

The ship was still on her course, rockets were fired, and then the helm was starboarded with a view of counteracting the list, but it had no effect. About 5 p.m. the helm was put hard aport, the propeller still continuing to revolve slowly, hoping that it would put the ship towards shore. About 8 p.m. the anchor was let go with 90 fathoms chain outside, which brought the ship's head to wind and sea which was described as moderate; the anchor held, but the vessel still maintained her dangerous angle until about 9.30 p.m., when the tarpaulin covering of No. 5 hatch came off, and she began to settle down and increase the list, and about 10 p.m. she sank out of sight.

(13158—4.) Wt. 59—57. 120. 5/09. D & S.

The vessel's ballast tanks, it is proved, were pumped dry before leaving Port Adelaide, and the well was sounded in the river shortly before reaching the anchorage, and the witnesses examined all affirm that there was no possibility of water getting into the vessel. She was practically a full ship, having approximately 6,600 tons of cargo on board, and in addition had 70 tons of coal on the turret deck—50 on the starboard side and 20 on the port side—and about 50 tons on each side of the fiddle deck. It was stated that the ship was well found, in good condition, and had a crew of 64 all told, 24 of whom reached the shore by such boats, &c., as were available, or by swimming. Forty were drowned, including the master, chief engineer, second mate, third engineer, fourth engineer, and chief steward.

There is no evidence as to the value of the vessel, or what amount, if any, she was insured for, or as to the value of the cargo or insurance thereon.

The Board having taken all evidence available, extending over five separate meetings, and after the fullest investigation, have failed to elicit any evidence which clearly accounts for the sudden careening of the "Clan Ranald" on Sunday, 31st January.

A theory is advanced by experts that no shifting of cargo occurred as a cause of the wreck, and, again, that entrance of water into the vessel, unknown to her officers, could alone account for her suddenly heeling over about 2 p.m. on the above date.

It has been thought, on the other hand, by some members of the Board, and this view is supported by the first and third officers and the second engineer (who survived), that although coal had been safely carried on her bridge and main decks on previous voyages—that when she left Port Adelaide on her final voyage the weight of coal on her deck, coupled with her six degrees of starboard list on starting, was apparently sufficient to endanger her stability. The Board are satisfied that the "Clan Ranald" was well found in every respect, and that her cargo was properly stowed. The Board have to regret that the master (who has not survived) had to leave the performance of his duty as master, through indisposition, to the chief officer.

The Board, after this full investigation, cannot find any valid ground for suggesting charges against any of the surviving officers, and as regards the deceased officers who were on watch, there exists no evidence to show that they neglected their duties.

The Board, having received a sworn statement from the master of the s.s. "Uganda" in explanation of his not having gone to the assistance of the vessel when passing up the Gulf St. Vincent, accept the same as satisfactory.

In all probability had the officers of the "Clan Ranald," at once after the disaster, fired the distress sound signals, assistance would have been forthcoming.

As reflecting on the discipline of the ship, it was elicited during the inquiry that two fires had occurred in the port coal bunker during the ship's stay in port and had not been reported to the authorities.

The Board are of opinion that an error of judgment was committed in anchoring the ship after heeling over at 2 o'clock.

The Board find that the surviving officers and men behaved well after the accident at 2 p.m.

The Board further desire to express their sympathy with the relatives of the lost officers and members of the crew.

The loss of all the officers on watch at the time of the disaster has necessarily rendered the task of the Board more difficult in trying to get at the actual cause of the accident.

JOHN DARBY,
Secretary to the Marine Board
of South Australia.

Marine Board Offices,
Port Adelaide,
12th March, 1909.

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4th day of May, 1909.)