

(No. 171).

"DORIS" (S.S.).

THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894.

SIR,

Acting upon my appointment from the Board of Trade, dated the 18th day of February, 1914, I beg to inform you that I held an Inquiry into the loss of the Steam Trawler "DORIS," of Fleetwood (with all her crew), in the Grand Jury Room, St. George's Hall, Liverpool, on the 16th day of April, 1914.

Mr. Paxton, solicitor, of Liverpool, conducted the proceedings on behalf of the solicitor to the Board of Trade (Sir R. Ellis Cunliffe).

The "Doris" Official Number, 124695, was a steam screw trawler, built of steel at Aberdeen, in the year 1907, by Messrs. John Duthie, Sons & Co., Limited, but this firm ceased doing business before the vessel was finished, and the firm of Messrs. John Duthie, Torry, shipbuilding company, of Aberdeen, completed her construction.

She was registered at the port of Fleetwood, was classed 100A1 at Lloyd's for steam trawlers, and was owned by the Rossall Steam Fishing Company, Limited, of Fleetwood, her regulation Fishery mark and number being F.D.141. Mr. John D. Gibson, of 123, Carr Road, Fleetwood, being the designated manager; advice under the seal of the Rossall Steam Fishing Company, Limited, received the 10th of August, 1911.

She had two masts, was ketch rigged, and was of the following dimensions, viz:—Length 126.4 feet, breadth 22 feet, and depth in hold from tonnage deck to floors amidships 11.6 feet. Her registered tonnage was 71.94 tons. She had a wheelhouse and chart house amidships, with a verandah bridge on fore part and on each side of same, and she was fitted with electric lights throughout, including the regulation lights. The crew were berthed in a room on main deck under wheelhouse, and the skipper, second hand, chief and second engineers were berthed in cabin, below deck, abaft of engine room.

She had a flush (wood) deck, extending the whole length of the vessel, the space under the fore-castle deck being open.

With regard to deck openings, she had, on deck forward of bridge house, two hatchways to fish hold and store-room, dimensions of these being 4 feet by 4 feet, height of coamings, which were made of iron, being 12 inches.

She also had a cross-bunker hatch 3 feet by 18 inches, height of coaming 12 inches. All of these hatches were fitted with wood covers and tarpaulins, and were battened down and secured with wedges in the usual way. In addition to these, she had three round scuttles, 21 inches in diameter, to each side bunker, which, when screwed down, were flush with the deck and were then watertight.

The entrance to cabin and engine-room being through the galley house, at the after end of engine room casing. A water-tight steel skylight was fitted over cabin.

On top of engine room casing she had a teak skylight, with hinged flaps on each side, and a hatch 2 feet 6 inches by 2 feet 6 inches with 12 inch coaming to top of boiler room, also a hatch of similar dimensions over stokehold; these were fitted with iron covers, and the latter was also fitted with a grating; the firemen could use this, if required, to go in and out of the stokehold, but the general practice was to pass through the engine room.

She also had, on top of casing, two ventilators to engine room, and two to stokehold.

She carried one boat, on swivel chocks, aft, of the size and description usually carried by vessels of this class. This boat was in good condition and was fully equipped with oars, bailer, etc., etc., and was

large enough to carry more than the whole of the crew.

She had two life-buoys, one on each side of bridge, also eleven life-jackets which were kept in crew's berths. She also carried flare-up lamps, but did not carry any blue lights and rockets.

She had Gruby's patent binnacle and compass on top of wheel-house, by which the vessel was navigated. She also had a steering compass in wheel-house and was fitted with hand and steam steering gears, both in wheelhouse, but she was always steered by the steam gear.

She carried all the necessary charts and sailing directions, which were supplied by the owners. She had a patent taffrail log, also leads and lines.

She had three watertight compartments in the hold, viz:—a collision bulkhead forward, a bulkhead fore part of stokehold and a bulkhead after part of engine room.

She was propelled by one set of triple expansion engines, of 68.5 nominal horse power, diameters of cylinders being 12½ inches, 20 inches, and 33 inches respectively, length of stroke being 24 inches.

They were built by Messrs. W. V. V. Lidgerwood, of Coatbridge in 1907, and were designed to give her a speed of 10 knots.

Steam was supplied from one steel boiler, which, when loaded, carried a pressure of 180 lbs.; this was constructed and supplied by the Wallsend Slipway Company, Limited, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, in 1907.

Her steam pumping arrangements were as follows:—one air pump, one circulating pump, one feed pump, and one bilge pump; the latter was connected to engine room bilges, slush well, and fish-room bilges; she also had a 2½ inch ejector, which would take water from all places where the bilge pump took it from.

She also had a hand-pump to each hold well, slush well, and fore peak.

She was last surveyed by Lloyd's surveyor on October 19th, 1912, in dry dock at Fleetwood, and was then reported to be in a good, and efficient state.

The engines and boiler were inspected at Fleetwood in April, 1912, by Lloyd's surveyor, when the necessary repairs were effected, the safety valve was floated at 180 lb. pressure, and at this time the surveyor reported everything to be in good, efficient and safe working condition.

The boiler was again cleaned in November, 1913, and some minor repairs and overhauling were effected to engines by Messrs. James Robertson and Sons, engineers, of Fleetwood, as shown per bills for same, produced in Court. She was dry-docked for cleaning and painting bottom, in June, 1913. Her bottom was then in good condition, and there is no record of her having grounded or received any damage whatever since then and up to the time of her loss.

The "Doris" left Fleetwood on January 21st, in charge of Mr. William Wright, skipper, with a crew of nine hands, bound for the fishing grounds in the Minch.

She had on board 120 tons of bunker coals, and about 15 tons of ice; her draught of water being 14 feet 6 inches aft, and 8 feet 3 inches forward, and everything at that time was in good order.

This was Mr. Wright's first voyage in this vessel as skipper, he had, however, been in the owner's service for about six weeks as second hand, but the owner stated that he knew him all his life, and that he was a thoroughly reliable and trustworthy man, having had long experience as skipper of trawlers, and was also well acquainted with the fishing grounds in the Minch.

Mr. John Henry Talbot, second hand, had been in the owner's service for about 3 years, but this was his first trip on the "Doris"; Mathew Wood, boat-swain, had been in her for years.

The engineers and deck hands had also been in her for some time. She had always carried the same number of crew as on this voyage. When she left Fleetwood on January 21st, the weather was fine, with moderate easterly wind, but from the Meteorological daily weather reports, produced, I find that at

Barra Island on the 21st and 22nd of January, the wind was S.E., force 5, and on the 24th it was S.S.E., force 6, whilst at Stornoway on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th of January, the wind was S.S.W., force 6 and 8, and at Rona Island force 9 was registered, so that the weather on this part of the coast was very boisterous from the 22nd to the 25th of January. In the ordinary course of events the "Doris" would reach the fishing grounds in the Minch on the night of January 22nd, or the morning of January 23rd; however, as is now known, nothing has been heard of the vessel since she left Fleetwood.

The "Star of Freedom" steam trawler, belonging to the same owners, left Fleetwood the following tide after the "Doris." She arrived at the Minch on Friday, January 23rd, she encountered a gale on Saturday night, the 24th, and ran for shelter under Barra Head. She did not see anything of the "Doris."

Mr. William Barrett, skipper of the S.S. "Eileen Duncan" of Liverpool, before Mr. Charles J. Legge, Commissioner for Oaths at Liverpool, on April 7th, deposed as follows:—"At or about 10 a.m. on Sunday, the 25th of January last, my vessel, the "Eileen Duncan," was lying-to in the Minch, Hyskeir light bearing S.S.E. 12 miles distant, with the wind blowing half a gale from the S.S.W., and a heavy sea running, when I observed a life-buoy, some ice-run boards, and a fish-tub floating.

"I recovered the life-buoy with a gaff, and found it marked 'Doris,' Fleetwood. F.D., 141, but I made no effort to recover the other articles, as I considered them to be valueless. I did not know that the 'Doris' had been lost. The life-buoy was in good condition and showed no signs of damage. I brought it to Liverpool and handed it to the owners. The articles mentioned above were the only wreckage seen. The fish-tub was empty, and had apparently not been long in the water."

John Campbell, fisherman and crofter, of Glendale, stated that while fishing in an open boat, at Loch Pooltiel he observed some wreckage on the beach—including the stern of a boat marked "Doris," Fleetwood, and another piece of wood bearing the marks F.D. 141. He left the wreckage where it was; he did not report it, and he did not remember the date on which he saw it, but someone else picked it up and handed same to the police.

Donald McRaid, crofter, living at Glendale, at about noon, on January 26th, found some wreckage on the shore, including part of an engine room skylight, and what appeared to be the top of a wheel-house; he handed them over to the police.

John McLean, crofter and fisherman, at Glendale, stated that at noon on January 27th, he found some wreckage about quarter of a mile to the north of Neist Point, including two oars, a wheel-house window-frame, and a piece of railing about nine feet long, these articles were also handed over to the Police. There were no marks on the wreckage found by the two last witnesses, but from their description, Mr. John McGarva Hughan, superintendent engineer for the Rossall Steam Fishing Co., stated that, undoubtedly they belonged to the "Doris."

According to a telegram from Lloyd's Agent at Dunvegan, dated February 14th, a body was picked up at Glenbrittle, West Skye, it had a life-jacket on, and was identified as that of George Joseph Nicholson, cook of the "Doris."

Another body was picked up on the west coast of Skye, it had no life-jacket on, and it was identified by a muffler which his wife had knitted for him; it was the body of Mathew Wood, boatswain of the "Doris"; the two bodies were taken to Portree and were buried there.

The owners of the "Doris" were informed that signals had been shown from Hyskeir Lighthouse since Tuesday, January 27th, and they thought that these might have some reference to the "Doris" and her crew, so they communicated with the Northern Lighthouse Board, Edinburgh, and on February 6th,

they received a reply that the signals above mentioned had reference to one of the lighthouse keepers who was ill, and who had to be brought on shore. This keeper had stated definitely that none of the keepers on the rock had seen anything of the vessel, the "Doris."

This vessel was built to a full specification, and might be considered an up-to-date steam trawler, and she appears to have been kept in a good state of efficiency ever since she was built—but it must be noted that even this up-to-date vessel was not supplied with any blue lights and rockets, and with very few exceptions, it is found at Board of Trade Inquiries that these trawlers and fishing vessels are not supplied with them, and the reason in this case, as well as in other cases, is that it is not compulsory, although they all agree that it would be beneficial to carry them, as undoubtedly, explosive rockets are the most effective distress signals, and should be used in preference to having to resort to flares of tar or oil, which is seldom practicable owing to sprays and seas breaking over the vessels when in distress.

In this particular instance it will be noticed that one of the bodies which was picked up had a life-jacket on, and it may reasonably be assumed that some of the others had also managed to get life-jackets on, and that they floated about for some time before they succumbed, so that if this vessel had rockets and used them, someone might have seen or heard the signal, and have come and rendered timely assistance.

Now, coming to the cause of the loss of this vessel, there is no direct evidence, but a few causes may be considered. The first of which would be "Collision," but this may be discarded, for there is no evidence to show that any other vessel which was in this locality at the time, had been lost or damaged. The next would be "Foundering," but from the weather reports produced, the weather, although boisterous, was not so bad as would cause a vessel such as the "Doris" to founder, so this may also be discarded.

I have therefore concluded that this vessel struck some rocks, probably the Mills Rocks, which lie about 3½ miles W.S.W. from Oigh Sgeir Island—and that she soon broke up and eventually sank.

The following are the names of the crew, who were all lost with the vessel, viz:—

William Wright, skipper.
John Henry Talbot, second hand.
Mathew Wood, boatswain.
John George Stephenson, chief engineer.
Thomas Croft, second engineer.
Levi Leek, trimmer.
George Joseph Nicholson, cook.
Robert Bell, deck hand.
Arthur Stephenson, deck hand.
Robert William Cheffins, deck hand.

At the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Paxton, on behalf of the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions, viz:—

1. What was the cost of the vessel to her owners? What was her value at the time she sailed upon her last voyage? What insurances were effected upon and in connection with her?
2. When the vessel last left Fleetwood on the 21st January, 1914, was she in good order and seaworthy condition as regards hull and equipment?
3. Was she provided with all proper and necessary means for covering and protecting deck openings in bad weather?
4. What was the cause of the loss of the vessel, and all hands?

And I now return the following answers—

1. The vessel cost her owners in 1911 £6,046 11s. 10d. Her book value at the time she sailed on her last voyage was £5,121 7s. 10d.

She was insured for £4,000.

2. When she left Fleetwood on the 21st of January, 1914, she was in good order and seaworthy condition as regards hull and equipment.

3. She was provided with all proper and necessary means for covering and protecting deck openings in bad weather.

4. In the absence of direct evidence it is not possible to say with certainty, but for the reasons set forth in the report, I have come to the conclusion, that during the bad weather prevailing at the time this vessel struck on Mills Rocks, these being a group

of submerged rocks lying $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles W.S.W. from Oigh Sgeir Island, and that she soon broke up and eventually sank, giving the crew very little chance to save themselves.

I have the honour to be,

Your very obedient Servant,

DAVID DAVIES,

Inspector.

The Assistant Secretary,

Marine Department,

Board of Trade, London.

April 24th, 1914.

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