

THE LOSS OF THE S.S. BON-ACCORD.

RESUMPTION OF THE INQUIRY.

The inquiry by the Board of Trade regarding the abandonment, on 16th March off Cape Finisterre, of the s.s. Bon-Accord, of Aberdeen, belonging to Messrs J. & A. Davidson, was resumed in the Aberdeen Court House yesterday. Sheriff Brown presided, and the assessors were Captains Parfit and Anderson, and Mr Lang, engineer; Mr Peterkin appeared for the Board of Trade; Mr Bennett for Messrs J. & A. Davidson; and Mr Charles Ruxton for Captain Charles Davidson and the chief mate.

THE CARPENTER'S EVIDENCE.

Robert Munro, carpenter of the Bon-Accord, said he joined the vessel at Aberdeen. He found everything in good order so far as his department was concerned. He had nothing to do with the engine pumps. He had charge of the deck pumps, and, having examined them after leaving Blyth, he found them all in good order. He sounded the pumps night and morning. He remembered sounding them on Friday and Saturday, 14th and 15th, but found no water. At eight o'clock on Saturday night he sounded them, and did not sound them again that night. He went to bed about a quarter to nine. There was then heavy weather. He was called at twelve and told there was water in the stoke-hole. He went down and found the water over the stoke-hole plate. He could not tell where it was coming from. He looked round, but made no minute examination. He reported the state of matters to the mate and captain. There was about 2 feet of water in the stoke-hole. In the No. 2 hold he found 18 inches, and in No. 1 hold 5 inches. This was on the port side; he could not sound the starboard side for the sea. The pumps were then shipped on both sides, and the men were set to them about one o'clock. He found four inches in the after-hold. At four o'clock he found seven inches in the after-hold, two feet six inches in No. 2 hold, and nine inches in No. 1 hold. He next sounded at nine o'clock, and found three feet six inches in No. 2, 17 inches in No. 1, and 14 inches in the after-hold—all on the port side. He went into No. 2 hold, having got orders to open No. 2 and trim cargo. He saw no sign of water in it. At nine o'clock the engines were stopped. Nobody was below. There was the least list to port on leaving Blyth, but it was off in no time. On the Saturday before the foundering there was a good deal of list to starboard. He first noticed it on Friday. He was told to trim the cargo to remedy the list. At twelve he saw the firemen baling the water up from the stoke-hole, but no one was helping them. In the main ballast tank at four o'clock there was 2 feet 6 inches of water. The pumps worked well, except the starboard one in No. 2 hold, which worked badly from the first. It was right when they left Blyth. He told the master he could not get that pump to work. The captain never spoke to him about the cause of the leak. He left the vessel in the first boat for the Angle.

By Captain Parfit—Besides the starboard pump, which did not work well, three others were at work. He could not speak as to the engine pump. He did not look down the fore peak. He sounded the ballast tank at eight o'clock, as well as the hold.

By Captain Anderson—He had been 20 years at sea, and was rated as carpenter. He had charge of all the deck gear. He could not tell the size of the sluices, nor whether there was protection to the sluices. At twelve he was ordered to go to the stoke-hole, and after seeing the water he just returned to his own work.

THE FIREMEN.

James Anderson, fireman, said he joined the vessel at Aberdeen. When the vessel left Aberdeen everything was in good order. The first thing he noticed worthy of remark was the water coming up through the stokehole plates on the Saturday night. He did not see where the water was coming from. All the baling was done after twelve on Saturday night. He was one of the last to leave the vessel. He left with the captain.

By Captain Anderson. They were carrying from 140 to 150 lbs. of steam on Saturday night. At three on Sunday morning they were carrying about 100 lbs. on the starboard boiler. When he finally left the engine-room, about seven or eight o'clock on Sunday morning, there were four feet of water in the engine-room.

William Walker, fireman, went on watch at midnight on Saturday, and found the ship had sprung a leak. The water came from the thwartship bunker on the starboard side. About eight o'clock, when the fires went out and witness went on deck, there was about 4 feet of water in the stokehole.

By Captain Anderson—After he went on duty at twelve o'clock 160 lbs. of steam were carried on each boiler.

THE CAPTAIN RE-EXAMINED.

The master, re-examined, gave evidence as to the position of the vessel at midnight on Saturday. Then, as to the state of the pumps, he said he saw two of the deck pumps tried before leaving Aberdeen. He saw none of the other deck pumps tested.

Mr Peterkin—In your statement to the collector you said "The centrifugal pump was set agoing. It worked well at first, but in about an hour it became choked with coal." Can you explain that?

Captain Davidson—On giving it mature consideration, it could not possibly have become choked with coal.

Then you are not aware of any smoking?—No. If I said, so it must have been a mistake, the collector must have misunderstood me.

Mr Peterkin—No doubt after the evidence that has been led, the Court will wish a statement from you as to what efforts you made to discover the cause of this leak. Would you tell us what you did in this direction?—I knew that so far as the engine room was concerned, nothing of the leak could be seen there.

How do you know that?—From the conversation I had with the chief engineer. Then we could not possibly by any means get at the leak if it was in No. 1 or No. 2 hold, because we could not take the cargo out.

Was it not possible to take the coals out of the bunkers?—No, sir. Where could you put them? Ten or twelve tons would have filled the stokehole.

Could you have taken them on deck?—No, sir. Could you not empty the thwartship bunker?—No, we had no appliances.

Did you try to locate the leak?—As much as lay in our power.

How?—We knew it was coming from No. 1 or No. 2 hold.

Did you go to see yourself?—I had full confidence in my engineers. I considered it was my duty to remain on the upper deck. I saw through the grating water coming through the bunker doors.

Would it have been possible for you to take out a portion of the coal from the starboard bunker?—We had no means of getting at them. The 'tween decks were full of coals.

Was it plain to you that water was coming into the engine-room otherwise than from the hold?—Yes.

Did it not occur to you to try and find where it was coming from?—It did occur to me, and I have no doubt for what transpired between the chief engineer and myself that everything was done by him. I had every confidence in him. I knew that if the leak was to be found he would find it.

Assuming that the leak was in the side-pocket, was it possible to trace it there?—No, sir. If we had opened that door we would have been in a worse position than before.

Before leaving the vessel, soundings were taken with this result:—In No. 2 hold, 8 to 9 feet; in No. 1, about 9 feet; in the after-hold, about 15 inches; in the engine-room, about 8 feet. He changed the course of the vessel in order that he might make either for the port of Vigo, about 60 or 70 miles off; the Bay of Biscay, about 40 miles off; or get assistance from passing steamers. They had had canvas up, but it was taken down, the captain of the Anglia having informed them that he could not do anything as long as it was kept up. The canvas would not have increased the speed more than a knot.

By Mr Ruxton—Before he saw the water running in through the door the starboard fires were drowned out, and at that time he became alive to the peril of their position. The reason for taking off the cover of the tank was to let them set the fires agoing again. He thought they had sprung a serious leak in No. 2 hold, and he thought the proper and prudent course was to shut the watertight door to keep out the water. He could not examine the second hold without leaving the door open through which the water was coming, and, if they proceeded to make any search of that kind, the water would get into the engine-room.

By Captain Anderson—The Anglia landed them at Gibraltar on the first Thursday after they had been taken aboard. He was acquainted with the Portuguese coast, having traded along it about thirteen years on steamers. He believed there was a safe bay behind Cape Finisterre with sandy beach. At midnight Cape Finisterre was about thirty miles distant.

THE QUESTIONS.

Mr Peterkin, on behalf of the Board of Trade, then submitted the following questions for consideration by the Court:—

- (1) Whether, when the Bon-Accord left Blyth, she was in all respects in good seaworthy condition?
- (2) Whether the steel plates and other material used in the construction of the vessel were properly tested and examined; whether she was so constructed as to be free from structural weakness?
- (3) Whether the soil pipes and sea communications were properly fitted, and whether they were so arranged as to prevent the possibility of the vessel making water through them without it being discovered?
- (4) Whether the bulkheads were properly constructed, and whether the openings in them were so arranged that they could be effectually closed?
- (5) Whether the ventilators and all other deck openings were properly covered and secured?
- (6) What was the cause of the vessel making water on the 15th March, 1890, and thereafter?
- (7) Was a proper and sufficient examination then made of the soil pipes, sea connections, and deck openings, and did the water find its way into the vessel through any of these?
- (8) Were the openings in the bulkheads and the sluices closed, and if so how did it happen that the water was not confined to one compartment?
- (9) Was the ship so sub-divided as to enable her to remain afloat with one compartment full of water, and if she was so sub-divided, what occasioned her loss?
- (10) Were the pumps sufficient, properly placed and fitted for all requirements, and in good order?
- (11) Was every possible effort made to ascertain the cause of the leak, and to stop it?
- (12) Was every possible effort made to save the vessel?
- (13) Whether the master, chief officer, first engineer, or either of them is in default?

In the opinion of the Board of Trade the certificates of the master, the chief mate, and the chief engineer should be dealt with.

Mr Peterkin stated that the 13th question was framed in order that the whole matter might be before the Court for its judgment.

Mr Laing, who superintended the building of the vessel, said everything was in accordance with Lloyd's requirements, and met with his own approval. Unless the vessel had struck any wreckage the leak was a mystery to him.

Mr W. Hall, one of the builders, gave an explanation as to the web frames. He thought it quite possible that floating wreckage coming against the Bon-Accord would have caused such a leak as appeared to have existed.

After hearing parties, Sheriff Brown stated that, owing to the fact that the assessors had other engagements to fulfil, judgment would not be given till Tuesday.

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