

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

BOARD OF TRADE INQUIRY AT ABERDEEN

In the Aberdeen Sheriff Court yesterday an inquiry by the Board of Trade was opened regarding the abandonment, on 16th March off Cape Finisterre, of the s.s. Bon-Accord, of Aberdeen, belonging to Messrs J. & A. Davidson. Sheriff Brown presided, the assessors being Captains Parfit and Anderson, and Mr Lang, engineer; Mr Peterkin appeared for the Board of Trade; Mr Bennett for Messrs J. & A. Davidson, who were made parties at their own request; and Mr Charles Ruxton for Captain Charles Davidson and the chief mate. The other parties called, the first and second engineers, Mr George Chalmers and Mr Hugh Johnston, were not represented.

Mr Peterkin said the Bon-Accord was built of steel at Aberdeen by Messrs Hall & Co., in 1899. Her length was 244.85 feet; breadth, 34.2 feet; depth, 18.35 feet. She was rigged as a brigantine, and had triple-expansion engines of 160 horse-power. Her tonnage, after deducting for propelling and screw space, was 999.45. She belonged to Messrs J. & A. Davidson, and carried four boats, two of which were lifeboats. She had four water-tight bulkheads and water ballast. She was built under special survey. In addition to engine-room pumps she had a number of hand pumps. She left Blyth on 10th March last with a crew of 23 hands and 1660 tons of coals for Malta. On the 13th the wind rose, and on the 14th it increased to a gale. From the 14th to the 15th the vessel laboured heavily and shipped a good deal of water. The water rose so as to put out the fires. At 9.30 on the morning of 16th March the Anglia bore down and attempted to take her in tow, but was unsuccessful. The Anglia stood by, and in the afternoon took off the crew. Lights were left on the vessel to indicate her position, but she was lost sight of about 8.30 p.m., and appeared to have foundered about that time.

Evidence was then led.

ALEXANDER DAVIDSON.

Alexander Davidson, of Messrs J. & A. Davidson, said the Bon-Accord was lost on her first voyage. Her contract price was £19,700, and he found everything satisfactory in connection with her building. Before she left Aberdeen additional expenditure for fittings, extra accounts to shipbuilders, superintendence, stores, &c., brought her cost up to £20,500. She lay in the dock at Aberdeen for three months before she left. She was afloat, and could have received no injury. When she left Aberdeen she went to Blyth and took in a cargo of coals. She lay there for four or five days. If the firm had had to replace the vessel at the time she left Blyth they could not have replaced her for less than £23,000 or £24,000, as everything had gone up in prices. She was insured on the hull for £20,500. Her freeboard was 1 foot 6 inches in winter, and 1 foot 4 inches in summer. She carried about 1660 tons of coals, including the bunkers. The firm ordered and paid for a first-class vessel, and expected such a vessel in every respect.

By Mr Ruxton—The master of the ship had been in the employment of the firm for about 20 years.

ARTHUR FARQUHAR.

Arthur Farquhar, manager of Messrs A. Hall and Co., said the Bon-Accord was constructed to Lloyd's for 100 A1 class, and entered in their register. He gave details as to the construction of the vessel. The plates had all Lloyd's mark. The grade on which she was built would have allowed her to be of increased size for the same strength. The bulkheads were so fitted up as to completely divide the different parts of the ship, and at all times prevent water getting from one to the other. Lloyd's Committee approved of the pumping arrangements. Assuming that water was made in the forehold, and found its way from that to the engine-room when the doors in the bulkhead were closed and the sluices fastened, he could see no other way by which water would find its way to the engine-room. If the water rose in the engine-room notwithstanding this there must have been something damaged about the edge of the ship. He remembered the Bon-Accord lying in the dock at Aberdeen. She received no damage, never grounding. She had no hold beams, but what was as good—web frames. The rivets were all tested. He could not account for the vessel springing a leak. If the ship had struck on anything it would have been as noticeable as if the ship had been of iron. He did not think she could have made water through any of the sea connections. He did not think she was so divided by water bulkheads as to remain afloat supposing one of the compartments had filled. He thought a leak in one compartment would have been sufficient to sink the ship.

Captain Parfit asked what class the Bon-Accord was in at Lloyd's now.

Witness replied by remarking that he did not know if she could be classed now—(laughter). She had been classed 100 A1—(renewed laughter).

By Captain Anderson—The collision bulkhead had been tested and found tight. They could work the pumps at any time.

G. L. HINDMARSH.

G. L. Hindmarsh, Lloyd's Surveyor in Aberdeen, said the Bon-Accord was built in accordance with Lloyd's rules. The vessel being built of steel, each plate was tested. He himself found the plates very satisfactory. The vessel was a first-class vessel constructed in accordance with the rules of Lloyd's. The freeboard was assigned by his committee, though he himself had allowed a little more. If there had been a leak in the engine-room place or the stoke-hole, it would have been plain to the engineer where it was coming from. The fore hold was cleared out by a hand pump, but they could also keep down the water from the engine-room. They could pump about 200 tons an hour from the engine-room, and if that was not sufficient the leak must be a very serious one indeed. The main hold was not a water tank bulkhead. The water would find its way from No. 1 hold to No. 2 hold, and if these two holds filled, the vessel might remain afloat in fine weather, but in bad weather he was afraid she would go down with that amount of water in her and with a cargo of coals.

By Mr Bennett—The size of the Bon-Accord could have been considerably increased without increasing the scantling, and the fact that she had not been made larger made her considerably stronger.

By the assessors—Though the pumps could discharge 200 tons the sluices could not take off that amount of water. The erection of the web frames was according to the Lloyd's rules, and he had no discretion in the matter.

Captain Anderson—Were the pumping arrangements on board of the Bon-Accord in every way desirable—that is to say, the best arrangement, that possibly could be devised?—Yes, I think so.

The best arrangement that could be devised? (After a pause)—Well, I could have arranged better as regards the sluices in the engine-room. They were pumped from a cock with an open bottom. I would have preferred valve chests.

By Mr Peterkin—He never knew of a vessel with a web frame having been lost under circumstances similar to the Bon-Accord?

CAPTAIN DAVIDSON.

Captain Davidson, master of the Bon-Accord, said he supervised the deck arrangements of the vessel when building, and found everything satisfactory. After launching, the vessel was not in a position to receive damage. She sailed from Aberdeen on 5th March for Blyth, and got to Blyth all right. The joints of the pumps were found to be leaking as soon as they commenced to pump the water ballast. They were made right to his satisfaction. They had plenty of water in Blyth. The vessel touched the ground with her keel a few hours before they sailed. They had been hauling astern for the purpose of letting another steamer into the berth, and that was the only time she touched the ground. There was a flowing tide. The bottom was of soft sand. The vessel just stopped, and that was all. When they sailed they drew 16.2 feet forward and 18.3 feet aft, being about two inches under the load-line. The weather was fine, and everything working satisfactorily. No examination was made of the bottom after grounding, as that was not necessary. All the pumps were tried at Blyth except the deck pumps. They had fine weather until the evening of the 14th, when they were 120 miles from Cape Finisterre. Nothing had occurred up to that time. The weather continued bad, the wind increasing. They shipped a great quantity of water on the 15th, and they made everything firm and secure, nothing being left undone to prepare for the weather—the glass being the lowest he had seen for many a day. The vessel did not roll much till Saturday evening. About 10 o'clock the engineers sent up word to see if the ventilators were all right, as there was water in the ship he could not account for. At the time they were going 3 to 4 knots an hour. The ship was kept before the wind to get into the track of shipping. He was on deck from twenty minutes past seven on Saturday morning, and never left till seven or eight on Sunday night. The gale came from the north-west. About half-past ten on Saturday night, they were 28 to 30 miles off Cape Finisterre. He knew of nothing striking the vessel during the whole voyage. The holds were all sounded twice. The weather was so bad on Saturday night that he caused the pipes to be sounded in the holds, both inside and on the top of the ballast tanks, and they found no water in any of the holds. About ten o'clock, after the engineer came on the bridge and said more water was coming in, the chief mate went and looked all over with a lamp, and found everything right and intact. About half-past eleven o'clock word was sent from below asking for some more help to keep the struma clear. He sent the cook and steward to do it, and soon after that all hands were kept on deck. As many as possible were sent to the engine-room to bale the water out with buckets, as there was danger of the fires going out. Witness had to keep an eye on deck, and did not see what took place below at that time. He gave instructions to have the manhole cover of the water tank broken, so that the centrifugal pump might be brought into play, about half-past twelve. The other pumps were not sufficient to keep the water under. He thought everything would be all right then. The water fell on the opening of the manhole, and they saw it was principally coming from No. 2 hold. He looked down and saw it coming in. Immediately after the engineer suggested the screwing down of the water-tight doors and sluices, and that was done. There was a large volume of water coming in, from the cross bunker doors in the water-tight bulkhead into the engine-room. They could not do anything to see where the water was coming from before the closing of the doors. The water came through the coals. He did not know that any of the pumps got out of order. They continued to pump as long as they could, but the water con-

tinued to gain on them. The fires went out about half-past eight or nine o'clock on Sunday morning. About half-past five they observed the light of a French steamer, afterwards ascertained to be the Marie of Bordeaux. They asked assistance, but the steamer steamed round them and left. A Sunderland vessel, the Lucent, adopted somewhat similar tactics. Then the Anglia, a large Glasgow steamer, came up and helped them. They kept the pumps going during the day, and jettisoned about 50 tons of cargo. Attempts were made to tow the Bon-Accord, but the ropes broke, and ultimately the vessel had to be abandoned, and the crew were taken on board the Anglia. They left the vessel about half-past six in the evening, leaving lights on her. They stood by her all night. They missed the lights about eight, and as they did not see the vessel in the morning they concluded she had foundered about that hour. He had looked over the side and saw nothing wrong with the plates. The leak must have been lower down. He had no idea as to what was the cause of the leakage. The ship had shown no sign of leakage, and she was exceedingly easy at sea.

By Mr Bennett—Witness explained the position of the cargo.

By Mr Ruxton—The first boat left about half-past four in the afternoon. Did you attempt to get any of the men in the first boat to return to the ship?—Yes. What did they say?—They would not come on board; they said they were in the boat and would remain there. From ten o'clock on Saturday night until he left the ship, all the orders he gave were with the view of doing everything possible to save the ship. Looking back he considered he had done everything that was possible to save the ship, and did not leave her a moment too soon.

By Captain Anderson—At 9.30 on Saturday night the wind shifted and came down like a thunderclap from the north-west. It was more than a gale; it was a hurricane. It continued until between 3 and 4 in the morning, when it began to moderate. Coming across the bay the wind was light and variable, and a heavy sea rolling from the west. When he got the report from the engineer, he did nothing at that time as he put it down to bad weather the fact of there being water in the engine-room. He put it down to that, and made no further inquiries at that time. He apprehended no danger until he found the fires were out, and he gave order to the tank cover to be removed, but he consulted with the chief engineer in every way during that time.

By Mr Peterkin—The ship was down by the head when they left Blyth. She was going by the head when daylight came in on Sunday morning. He also knew she was going by the head from her steering.

THE CHIEF MATE.

James Williamson, chief mate of the Bon-Accord, said he held a master's certificate, and joined the vessel at Aberdeen. He found everything in order as far as he could see. He had never heard of the vessel touching the ground or coming in violent contact with anything, excepting the slight grounding off at Blyth. Everything was in good order when they left Blyth. On the engineer directing attention to water coming in, witness was sent below and he found some water in the bilges, but nothing extra. He went round the deck, and saw that the covers were all right. At half-past eleven he went to the forepeak, and saw nothing there either. He was again sent to the engineer about twelve, to see if he wanted any assistance. He believed before that the cook and the steward had been sent to assist, and afterwards all hands were called up to give assistance. At twelve the carpenter found 17 inches of water on the port side. He saw no effort made to find out the leak as he was at the pumps at eight o'clock, and shortly after the pumps had been sounded and no water found. They were out of sight of land, steering south-west, at the rate of three to four knots an hour. The course was changed south-east with the wind at twelve o'clock on Saturday night. After twelve he went down below, and the water in the engine-room was washing right across. The chief engineer told him the water was coming from the starboard bunker. He returned to the deck pumps, two of which were going in No. 2 hold. At half-past one he heard the fire was out. The engine-room pumps were going when he was down. On Sunday forenoon the water was about six feet deep in the engine-room. He spoke to the boats coming up to and then leaving the Bon-Accord, and the ultimate arrival of the Anglia. They lighted the ship, but it had no effect on her. About half-past four the captain thought it advisable to leave the ship. The second mate left about that time, he himself left at half-past five, and the captain about half-past six. They remained beside the ship all night. In the morning there was no appearance of the Bon-Accord. They lost all their boats, which were cast adrift, and the Anglia also lost one of her boats.

By the Sheriff—He first apprehended danger when the starboard fire went out. The lights on the ship disappeared suddenly about 8 o'clock. They had no sails up after the leak was discovered.

By Captain Anderson—There was about 4 feet of water in the ship on Friday morning; it had been gradually increasing, especially in No. 2 hold.

Captain Anderson—How do you account for the vessel, when going before the wind, only making three to four knots an hour at midnight?—I suppose there was no steam.

Did you inquire?—I did not. He passed remarks in the engine-room, but he reported the actual state of affairs in the engine-room.

You reported that the water had gained from 17 inches to 4 feet in No. 2 hold?—Yes.

As a practical man, I ask if you could have set a square canvas on board the ship after midnight?

—Yes, I suppose we could.

What would have been the effect on the ship?—None at all.

As a practical man, do you suggest that a square canvas in a night such as you describe would have no effect on the ship?—None at all I think.

That is your answer?—Yes that is my answer.

Taking into calculation that the wind was blowing at the time as you stated?—When we found the ship was leaking we were busy at the pumps and had little time to think of the canvas.

But think of the canvas with the wind blowing as you represent. What effect would it have on the ship?—Very little difference.

Captain Anderson—Very well, if that is your answer.

THE CHIEF ENGINEER.

George Chalmers, the chief engineer of the Bon-Accord, said he had seen the engines, boilers, and pumping gear put into the vessel, and to his satisfaction. There were two main bilge pumps connected with the main engine; one bilge injection, also connected with the main engine; two auxiliary pumps, one a Worthington, connected to the engine-room and stoke-hole bilges and the after well, and also having a connection to drain all the tanks in the ship; a centrifugal pump entirely for the tanks. He did not know about the hand-pumps. All the pumps were in good working order when they left Blyth. There was not much more than the usual quantity of water about eight o'clock on the evening of the 15th. At ten it appeared on the top of the tank. They then got the bilge injection started, having pumped before this with the two main bilge pumps. With these they were able to throw about 40 tons of water per hour. At ten the mate came, and told him to give her two extra revolutions. Witness told the mate to report to the captain that she was making an unusual quantity of water, and at the same time told him to examine the ventilators. He went on to describe the progress of the leak, stating that the water came from under the side pocket bunker on the starboard side, but that it was impossible to find out the exact scene of the defect, and also stating that everything possible had been done to keep the vessel afloat. Asked if the pumps worked well, he said they had to cut the pipe of the main bilge pump because it was threatening to choke. The centrifugal pump did not pump steady. Having no valve, it only caught the water as the water rolled towards the pump. The whole of the pumps otherwise worked well.

HUGH JOHNSTON.

Hugh Johnston, second engineer, said the first thing he noticed wrong was that between six and seven o'clock there was a little more water in the wells in the bilges than usual. An examination was made, but it discovered nothing amiss. He was called about twelve, by which time the water had gained very much on them. As to the leak, there was nothing to indicate where it was, or where the water was coming from, or what was the cause of it.

The Court adjourned till to-day at 11 o'clock.