

S.S. "SANDGATE CASTLE"

THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894

REPORT OF COURT

Q & A
7, 14th 21
incl.
Date

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at the Institution of Civil Engineers, Great George Street, Westminster, on the 28th day of February and the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 18th days of March, 1938, before R. F. Hayward, Esq., K.C., sitting as Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain Piers de Legh, Captain Alfred S. Leech, R.D., R.N.R. (Retired), and T. A. Pearson, Esq., M.I.N.A., F.C.M.S., into the circumstances attending the loss by fire of the steamship "Sandgate Castle," on or about the 26th day of June, 1937.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the above-mentioned shipping casualty, for the reasons stated in the Annex hereto, finds the master, Captain Hans Charles Bergen, in default but, having regard to his inexperience in command and in dealing with fire, does not deal with his certificate but censures him severely.

Dated this 18th day of March, 1938.

R. F. HAYWARD,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

PIERS DE LEGH,
ALF. S. LEECH,
T. A. PEARSON, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

The "Sandgate Castle" was a single screw steel cargo steamship built for and owned by the Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company of London. She was of 7,634 tons, 426 feet in length, 56 feet beam and 36 feet in depth. She had main and upper and shelter decks extending fore and aft throughout the ship except in the engine and boiler rooms where the stringers only of the main deck were carried through forming a platform along either side about 5 feet wide. Of her eight steel transverse bulkheads there was not one complete from side to side extending upwards from the upper deck to the shelter deck between the collision bulkhead forward and the steel bulkhead at the forward end of the crew space aft. Thus there was a length of about 360 feet of shelter deck space which was undivided by air tight bulkheads, but level with the forward end of the boiler casing and 12 feet abaft it were wooden bulkheads extending outwards to the ship's side, forming two spaces utilised for the storage of galley coal, accessible by steel doors through the boiler casing, and by trimming hatches communicating with a cargo space under the bridge deck on which there was a hatch on either side of the ship. Abaft the funnel was a so-called "saddle-back" coal shoot with openings at its sides into the shelter deck space. These openings were closed by bolted steel plates and the shoot was used for the storage of fire bars, etc.

The shelter deck space was provided with ventilators fore and aft, 16 being cowl ventilators (for which there were provided plugs and covers for their coamings) and 8 derrick post ventilators fitted with screw-down mushroom tops. There were the usual ventilators for the engine room and stokehold and other parts of the ship.

Above the shelter deck level forward was a fore-castle used as a cargo space and aft a house accommodating steering gear, etc.

Amidships was a bridge deck 130 feet long. Underneath it at the forward end was unoccupied passenger accommodation. At the after end was accommodation on the port side for engineers and on the starboard side for boatswain, carpenter,

steward and cooks. Between this after accommodation and the boiler and engine casings were alleyways on either side of the ship leading out to the after deck. In the port alleyway were doors leading down to the engine room and stokehold. Between the forward and after accommodation was a cargo space in way of No. 3 hatch.

On the forward end of the bridge deck were the master's and officers' cabins with wheelhouse and chart room above, and on the after end of the bridge deck was the galley and wireless room.

The holds were reached by six hatchways.

The "Sandgate Castle" was fitted with double reduction steam turbine engines of 642 N.H.P. placed amidships. She was fitted with three oil-fired boilers having their furnaces at the forward end. Fuel oil was carried in some of the double bottom tanks and in the deep tank at the bottom of No. 4 hold. The engine and boiler rooms were divided by a steel screen bulkhead through which the after end of the boilers projected. The two settling tanks, having a capacity of nearly 15 tons each, were situated on the fore side of the screen bulkhead above the centre boiler. They were supported by a platform riveted on either side to the engine casing. Under the bottom of the tanks which projected about 4 feet 6 inches below the platform were octagonal drip trays with pipes leading down to the bilges. The overflow from each tank ran into a common pipe so that before actually overflowing on to the casing both tanks would require to be full.

The ship was fitted with a general service pump of a capacity of 50 tons per hour and a ballast pump of a capacity of 200 tons per hour both of which were available for fire fighting, and she was fitted with the fire fighting appliances set out in the Answer to Question 7.

On the 24th May, 1937, the "Sandgate Castle," after overhaul and repairs in Hull and having been passed as to hull and machinery by surveyors to Lloyd's Register of Shipping, sailed from Hull for America in ballast. In Philadelphia she loaded a part cargo mainly of lubricating oil, kerosene and gasolene in her forward and after lower holds. She then proceeded to New York where her loading was completed and a stowage plan of the whole cargo was prepared by the ship's agents, Messrs. Barber Steamship Lines, Ltd. The information they had, and which they received from the ship's officers in New York and apparently by mail from Philadelphia, led them to locate on the stowage plan no kerosene or gasolene in No. 6 hold. During the Inquiry the master stated that his main anxiety and reason for abandoning the ship was that "petrol" was stowed in No. 6 lower hold and in this he received corroboration from his officers and several others that in fact there was such cargo in No. 6 lower hold. The matter was investigated at considerable length before the Court. No reason was suggested why the stowage plan should be in error in such an important particular and the oral evidence was such as to leave the Court in some doubt as to its accuracy. On the after deck was stowed about 80 tons of cellulose paint in fifty-gallon drums.

In the shelter deck space on the starboard side abaft the galley coal space was cargo stowed as set out in the Answer to Question 11. In the shelter deck space the hatches leading down to the lower 'tween deck and holds were in place and those in Nos. 1 and 6 holds were covered with tarpaulins. In the square of No. 3 hatch in the bridge deck space were boxed motor cars, and the broken stowage above them was filled with small packages. In the square of No. 4 hatch in the

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shelter deck space were two boxed motor cars and some cases of refrigerators. These packages were about 6 feet high and the shelter deck space from the deck to the underside of the beams above was about seven feet. The two derricks above the hatch were housed; some blocks were in position but the running gear had been unrove and stowed away.

The "Sandgate Castle" left New York in a good and seaworthy condition for South Africa via St. Vincent, Cape Verde Islands, on the afternoon of the 23rd June, 1937, laden with about 4,152 tons of cargo, drawing about 22 feet mean, trimmed about two feet by the stern, and about eight feet light of her permitted loaded draught.

At about 10 a.m. on the 26th June, the weather being fine with a light east-south-easterly wind and the "Sandgate Castle" proceeding at full speed of about 10½ knots and steering S. 53° E., the fourth engineer on watch in the engine room, who was unaware that the settling tanks communicated with each other and that the port settling tank manhole door was off in the course of being re-joined, pumped up the starboard settling tank to such an extent that the level of the oil in the port tank rose so rapidly that before the oil transfer pump could be stopped by the donkeyman, who observed the rise and promptly ran down below for the purpose of stopping the pump, oil overflowed from the manhole in considerable quantities and shortly afterwards burst into flames. Burning oil dripped down the screen bulkhead and, falling between the port and centre boilers, continued to burn on the plating below. Prompt steps were taken by the engine room staff to extinguish the fire, and the boatswain and some deck hands, who were at that time engaged in washing down the bridge deck with hoses, assisted them. This fire appears to have been extinguished within about 15 minutes by means of chemical fire extinguishers and fire hoses. At no time was the recognised fire alarm sounded on the ship's bell. The third officer, who was on watch and observed smoke rising from the fidley, sent word to the chief officer and thereby called the attention of the master who was standing on the bridge deck, and the master and chief officer gave various orders. The chief engineer, who had observed the overflow and fire from the boat deck, gave a verbal fire alarm in the engineers' alleyway. On proceeding to the engine room the third engineer noticed on the starboard side of the engine casing a little abaft the starboard ventilator and level with the bottom of the shelter deck space a patch of about two feet in diameter of scorched paint. Some 10 or 15 minutes later he observed that the patch was extending aft, and, proceeding to the starboard alleyway, observed the deck plating buckled abreast of and forward of where the scorched patch would be. He reported these matters to the chief and second engineers, who at that time were on the bridge deck, and the master overheard the report as to the scorched paint, and, inspecting the patch for himself, thought it might have been due to a fire in the engine room. Shortly after he had returned to the bridge deck he observed smoke coming out of the starboard derrick post ventilator abaft No. 3 hatch. This, to use his own words, "linked up" with the scorched paint in the engine room and led him to believe that there was a fire in the cargo in the shelter deck space and which he regarded as serious. He ordered the chief officer to open No. 3 hatch to see if fire could be detected, and himself repaired to the bridge sending down the third officer and helmsman to assist the chief officer. He then stopped the engines and under starboard helm brought the wind on to the port beam. The master knew that the fire, if in way of the burnt patch, could not be got at through No. 3 hatch. Smoke appeared out of a ventilator on the starboard trimming hatch which led down through the cargo in the bridge space to the galley coal space and, although the master knew that access to that space could promptly be made via the door in the fidley casing, valuable time was lost in opening No. 3 and removing some cargo and in taking off the trimming hatch and removing the cargo and the hatch below

it in order to get to the galley coal space. Apparently whilst work was proceeding there No. 4 hatch was partly opened with the sanction of the master and, after the light cargo had been sufficiently removed, hoses were used. Meanwhile fire had been located abaft the wooden bulkhead in the galley coal space and with difficulty a small hole was made in it and also a crack between the planks was forced open and hoses were played through. These steps increased the draught, and an observer stated that the fire seemed to brighten up. There was much smoke in the galley coal space and some evidence that before it was evacuated its after bulkhead was burning.

At No. 4 hatch some only of the hatch covers were removed and the light packages having been passed on deck it was found not possible to break out by hand the heavy packages and so clear a way into the starboard wing. No attempt was made to rig and use the derricks, and the whole operation lacked that commanding grip which could have been given by the master alone and who, remaining on the bridge, never visited No. 4 hatch or entered it to see the position for himself.

The chief engineer at No. 4 hatch did what he could with a hose over the top of the cargo but the fire was so far distant that the water could not reach it. He became concerned about the draught and, the ship's heading having changed or the wind having shifted, went on the bridge and himself put the wheel over. By this time the engine room telegraph was out of action, but by orders verbally transmitted the engines were put full speed ahead for a few minutes in order to assist the helm.

The chief officer was mainly engaged at the galley coal space; the second officer at first in refilling fire extinguishers and later in working out the ship's position for the S.O.S. which was broadcast at 10.45 a.m. and in plotting the positions of the ships which replied. The third officer assisted at No. 4 hatch and, equipped with a smoke helmet, on two occasions attempted to pass along the starboard alley way but was driven back by the heat. The starboard accommodation caught fire and shortly before noon the starboard bridge deck began to burn.

At 11.44 a.m. the American steamship "President Pierce," which had given a position distant 175 miles, wirelessed that she was coming to the "Sandgate Castle." Meanwhile the lifeboats, two on either side of the bridge deck, had been turned out and provisioned. Smoke had been coming out of the ventilators on the starboard side; one of them on the bridge deck near to No. 3 lifeboat had been covered with a canvas cover which had quickly burnt off, and the master stated that he had seen flames coming out of a starboard ventilator leading to No. 6 hold down which he thought that petrol was stowed. There was, however, no corroboration of this latter incident from any member of the crew and there was no evidence that the fire had got abaft No. 4 hatch before the ship was abandoned. The Court is of the opinion that the master was mistaken and was unduly anxious in connection with the possibility of fire reaching the after hold. At about noon the ship was abandoned in the two port lifeboats. The pumps supplying the fire hoses were left running. The boats remained in the vicinity of the ship. During the afternoon the drums on the after deck exploded at various times and by the time the crew were picked up by the "President Pierce" at about 11 p.m. on the same evening the "Sandgate Castle" was on fire fore and aft. An Italian mail boat reported having seen her still burning on the 30th June, four days later.

There was no direct evidence from which the cause of the engine room and cargo fires could be definitely ascertained. It was urged by Counsel appearing for the cargo interests that the former caused the latter. The chief engineer and an expert witness who gave evidence were of the opinion that the fire in the cargo caused the fire in the engine room. These fires might also have been caused independently of each other, though that would be

a coincidence which has no supporters. It was proved by the expert that a fire smouldering in the shelter deck space could have heated the engine room casing sufficiently to ignite any oil which might have run along the settling tank platform to its junction with the plating and so ignite the main body of overflowing oil in the way of the port settling tank. On the other hand, having regard to the fact that the evidence was overwhelming and indeed all one way that the main body of the engine room fire was on the port side, whilst at the same time there was no evidence that the cargo in the port shelter deck space caught fire at all though it was similar in nature to that on the starboard side, the Court is of opinion that there is no sufficient ground for finding that the engine room fire caused the fire in the cargo space. Moreover, this theory must necessarily leave out of account the cause of origin of the patch of scorched paint in the engine room which the Court is satisfied was visible at or very shortly after the time when the engine room fire broke out.

After careful consideration of the evidence the Court is unanimously of the opinion that at the time of the outbreak of fire in the engine room there was already a smouldering fire in the starboard shelter deck space which rapidly developed when the draught in the compartment was increased by the opening of hatches. There was no evidence to show how the cargo fire originated.

Following the investigation of this casualty it may be helpful to conclude with a few suggestions.

Fire at sea, coming unexpectedly as it usually does, requires prompt, vigorous and concerted attack for its successful treatment. Unity of control and individual and energetic command are most important. Shipmasters should not only fully organise their personnel and material but should always be prepared beforehand with plans for dealing with fire in different situations and circumstances. To do this successfully they should be thoroughly conversant with the details of the construction of their ships and especially the ventilation, and be acquainted with and have at hand a record of the disposition of various kinds of cargo, particularly that of an inflammable nature. The importance of the careful study of and adherence to every detail of such publications as the Board of Trade Regulations as to Musters and Drills on Cargo and Passengers Ships and the Prevention and Extinction of Fire on Cargo Ships cannot be over-emphasised. With a crew so large as 39 hands there is no reason why every proper step should not be taken promptly and, so far as is necessary, concurrently. It is no sufficient excuse for neglecting such an important step, for example as stopping draught, to decide that it would be ineffective. In no case should a shipmaster in taking so momentous a decision as to abandon ship rely on reports of subordinates. He, by personal observation, should satisfy himself as to the actual situation at the time. The above remarks have additional force in the case of a ship which is not fitted with steam injections in the holds or other fire smothering devices.

So far as ship construction is concerned it is suggested that in ships having large shelter deck spaces but no smothering devices the following precautions might well be considered with a view to assisting in fighting and localising fires:—

(1) The fitting of fire resisting bulkheads at each end of the boiler and engine casings.

(2) The fitting of caps in the deck above such shelter deck spaces to provide ready access for fire hoses particularly in way of machinery spaces.

(3) The fitting of hose connections on machinery casings and bulkheads in way of 'tween deck spaces.

At the conclusion of the evidence Mr. Pilcher, on behalf of the Board of Trade, submitted Questions for the opinion of the Court. The Questions and Answers are as follows:—

Q. 1. When and by whom was the s.s. "Sandgate Castle" built?

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A. She was built in the years 1920 to 1922 by Messrs. Short Brothers of Sunderland. The engines and boilers were built by the North Eastern Marine Engineering Co., Ltd., Wallsend-on-Tyne.

Q. 2. Who were the owners of the s.s. "Sandgate Castle"?

A. The Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company, Limited, of 3 and 4, Fenchurch Street, London.

Q. 3. What was the approximate market value of the s.s. "Sandgate Castle" when she left Hull on the 24th May, 1937? What insurances were effected upon and in connection with the vessel at that time?

A. Her market value was approximately £75,000. The insurances were as follows:—Hull and machinery, £62,500; Disbursements, £6,250; Anticipated freight, £6,250; Premium reducing £310.

Q. 4. What surveys had been carried out by Lloyd's Register of Shipping since October, 1935?

A. Classification Surveys.

Report No. 36387 of 18.11.35 Hull and machinery.

Report No. 2517 of 30.12.35 Machinery.

Report No. 93718 of 5. 5.36 Machinery.

Report No. 103075 of 4. 6.36 Hull.

Report No. 103075 of 16. 6.36 Machinery.

Report No. 103475 of 26. 9.36 Machinery.

Report No. 15838 of 29.10.36 Machinery.

Report No. 15838 of 9.11.36 Hull.

Report No. 2690 of 6. 3.37 Machinery.

Report No. 47850 of 21. 5.37 Machinery.

Report No. 47850 of 31. 5.37 Hull.

Surveys for Freeboard.

Report No. 200 of 20.10.36 Annual Survey.

Q. 5. Was the vessel in good and seaworthy condition when she left Hull on the 24th May, 1937?

A. Yes.

Q. 6. With what lifesaving appliances was the vessel fitted? When and by whom were they last inspected? Were they in good condition when the vessel left Hull on the 24th May, 1937?

A. The lifesaving appliances included six boats, one of class III and five of class IA, 100 life-jackets, 8 lifebuoys, and a Schermuly rocket apparatus. They were last inspected by a Board of Trade surveyor on the 15th October, 1935. They were in good condition.

Q. 7. With what fire fighting appliances was the vessel equipped?

A. A wash deck service pipe was fitted at the port side of the shelter and erection decks, nine London Fire Brigade type couplings for hoses being fitted and suitably positioned, and there was an adequate number of hoses and nozzles. Water was supplied by the general service pump and ballast pump. Ten two-gallon Foamite extinguishers were distributed throughout the accommodation, and 12 fire buckets were provided. A 70-gallon Foamite installation was fitted in the engineers' workshop with pipes leading to suitable positions on the port and starboard sides of the engine room where hose reels were stowed. Six two-gallon Foamite extinguishers were provided, four being in the engine room and two in the stokehold. Fire extinguishing steam jets were provided under the boiler fronts. A hose connection was fitted on the port side of the engine room and the usual sand boxes were in the stokehold. Two Merryweather smoke helmets with full equipment were provided.

Q. 8. What repairs were carried out to the vessel in Hull in May, 1937; and in New York in June, 1937?

A. In Hull there were various overhaul and running repairs carried out. These included the fitting of 60 new uptake tubes. The chief engineer desired a few more to be renewed but the makers at that time could not supply them. Arrangements were made for 200 new tubes to be sent to meet the ship in South Africa. Also included in the repairs was an overhaul and refitting of the smoke

box doors and catches of the starboard and centre boilers, and a cleaning out of the port settling tank. Whilst the ship was in New York a strike of ship repairers was in progress. Repairs were carried out by shore contractors to the electric wiring and fittings in the engine room and stokehold and on deck. Leakage through two rivets from the deep tank into No. 5 hold was made tight.

Q. 9. What cargo was loaded at Philadelphia in June, 1937? Into what compartments was this cargo stowed?

A. According to the stowage plan, in No. 1 lower hold was loaded drums and cases of gasoline, kerosene, turpentine and lubricating oil, and in No. 6 lower hold drums and cases of lubricating and fuel oil and grease and a few packages of other goods.

Q. 10. Were any, and if so what, precautions taken against risk of fire to the cargo during the loading operations at Philadelphia?

A. Yes. Notices prohibiting smoking were prominently displayed in various parts of the ship which, on the evidence, were strictly enforced. Spark resisting gauzes were placed in the openings of all cowl ventilators, and a watchman was on duty nightly.

Q. 11. What cargo was loaded at New York? What type and description of this cargo was loaded into the shelter 'tween deck space and, in particular, abaft the engine and boiler room casing, starboard side? When was it loaded into this space and how was it disposed?

A. General cargo consisting mainly of manufactured goods including about 80 tons of cellulose paint in drums on the after deck. In the shelter 'tween deck space were motor cars, refrigerators, glassware, condensed milk, motor parts, incubators, etc. In particular, abaft the engine and boiler casing on the starboard side of the shelter deck were unboxed motor cars stowed athwartships facing inboard. Under some of them were packages of rubber inner tubes. Between them and the ship's side were cartons of breakfast cereals and crates of folding chairs, some of the latter being partly between some of the cars. The cars were secured by battens to the deck and by shores to the casing inboard and to the ship's side outboard, and the cartons were held in position by temporary skeleton bulkheads. The above cargo was loaded into the space referred to on some date or dates between the 14th and 23rd June, 1937.

Q. 12. Were any, and if so what, precautions taken during the loading operations at New York against risk by fire to the cargo?

A. The notices and gauzes referred to in the answer to question 10 remained in position and the no smoking rule was, on the evidence, strictly enforced.

Q. 13. On what day did the vessel sail from New York for St. Vincent and South Africa?

A. 23rd June, 1937.

Q. 14. In what position were the settling tanks fitted in the vessel? Was this position a safe and proper one?

A. The settling tanks were positioned in the after end of the boiler casing space and above the after end of the centre boiler, the tops of the tanks being about 4 feet below the crown of the boiler casing. This was a safe and proper position subject to adequate arrangements being made to prevent contact by oil leakage with heated surfaces.

Q. 15. What type of oil fuel was used on board? What was its flash point?

A. The usual types of fuel oil as supplied in Mombasa, Durban, Dakar and New York were used. The flash point was about 190° F.

Q. 16. Was any trouble experienced with the port settling tank during the voyage from New York? If so, what was this trouble and how was it remedied?

A. On the evening of the 25th June, 1937, the manhole door at the top of the port settling tank was found to be leaking at the joint. It was being remedied by fitting a new gasket on the following morning.

Q. 17. Was there an overflow of oil from this settling tank? If so, when and why did it occur?

A. Yes. Oil overflowed from the port settling tank at about 10 a.m. on the 26th June. This overflow was due to the fourth engineer, who was pumping up the starboard settling tank, failing to ascertain that the tank was full and being ignorant of the fact that it connected with the port settling tank, and also that the manhole door of the port settling tank was off at the time.

Q. 18. Did a fire or fires break out at or near the settling tank? If so, when did they break out and were they successfully extinguished? How long did it take to extinguish them? What methods were used to extinguish them?

A. At about 10 a.m. on the 26th June fire broke out at or near the settling tanks. The body of this fire, which was on the port side, was successfully extinguished in about 15 minutes by the use of fire extinguishers and hoses. Some of the burning oil from this fire fell on to the floor below, and was there extinguished by similar means at about the same time. Shortly afterwards a small fire was discovered under the starboard settling tank which was quickly extinguished by two fire extinguishers.

Q. 19. Was a fire alarm sounded on board the vessel when this fire was discovered or subsequently?

A. At no time was a fire alarm sounded.

Q. 20. Did any other fire break out on board the vessel? If so, (a) when and where did it occur? (b) How was it discovered? (c) Did those on board the vessel correctly ascertain where it was at the time when or shortly after it was discovered? (d) Were proper and sufficient orders given concerning the manner in which it was to be fought? (e) Were the efforts made by those on board the vessel to extinguish it reasonable and proper in all the circumstances? If not, what additional or alternative measures should have been adopted? (f) Was such fire extinguished? If not, why not?

A. Yes.

(a) At some time before 10 a.m. on the 26th June there was a smouldering fire in the shelter deck cargo space on the starboard side of the engine room.

(b) By smoke issuing from the starboard derrick post ventilator abaft No. 3 hatch.

(c) Some delay occurred in correctly ascertaining the position of the fire. No. 3 hatches were removed and some cargo was taken out of the bridge deck space but, as the seat of the fire was apparently not near to this hatch, the trimming hatch on the starboard side abaft No. 3 hatch was removed, and cargo was taken out of the bridge deck space down to the hatch to the galley coal space beneath it, which was removed and access thereby gained to the galley coal space. In fact this space had a door leading into the fidley by which access could have been promptly gained, and one or two men at some time used it. The fire was then observed through the spaces between the planks forming a wooden bulkhead on the after side of the galley coal space extending from the engine room casing to the ship's side. At a much earlier time an engineer had noticed a patch of blistered paint on the starboard engine room casing abaft the coal shoot and in line with the shelter deck space.

(d) No.

(e) No. Fire alarms should have been sounded. All hands should have been organised in parties under the deck and engineer officers to take the following steps:—

(1) Stop the ship.

(2) Stop all draught by (a) removing all cowl ventilators and fitting plugs and canvas covers, (b) screwing down all mushroom ventilators, (c) keeping closed and battened down all hatches, making only such openings as from time to time were necessary, (d) when it was ascertained that the fire was abaft the wooden bulkhead extending from the boiler room casing to the ship's side, all draught to the space abaft that bulkhead should have been excluded, e.g., by covering the wooden bulkhead with tarpaulin.

(3) Put steam on deck, rig No. 4 derricks, break out sufficient cargo to make room for a determined attack on the fire from abaft it, and remove cargo abaft the fire to assist in preventing it from extending aft.

(4) With the exception of such hoses as were necessary (a) to play on the wooden bulkhead in the galley coal space, (b) to cool the decks in the starboard alley-way and accommodation, and (c) for use through any holes as mentioned in subparagraph (5), all fire hoses should have been concentrated into No. 4 hatch. By organisation of relays of fire fighters and full use of both smoke helmets, a determined and sustained attack could have been made on the fire from this point.

(5) Attempts should have been made to get water at the seat of the fire by making a hole or holes through the casing plates and/or in the deck above or by breaking in one or more side lights in the ship's side.

(6) During these operations the starboard boats should have been lowered and removed from the vicinity of the fire.

(f) No. Though being unable to state definitely that the fire could have been extinguished if all proper steps had been promptly taken, the Court is of the considered opinion that such steps would probably have been successful in extinguishing the fire or in limiting it to the area in which it originated until it had burnt out.

Q. 21. Were any, and if so which, of the vessel's controls damaged by fire? If so, when were they damaged and was the damage of such a nature that the vessel could not be navigated?

A. Yes, the engine room telegraph was damaged by fire between 10.36 and 11.30 a.m. The vessel could still be navigated.

Q. 22. When was the S.O.S. message sent out?

A. About 10.45 a.m.

Q. 23. When and where was the vessel abandoned?

A. About noon on the 26th June, 1937, in about 36° 55' N. Lat. and 60° 5' W. Long.

Q. 24. What was the condition of the vessel at this time?

A. She was on fire amidships on the starboard side in the shelter deck space and the accommodation above it.

Q. 25. In view of all the circumstances, was the master justified in ordering the abandonment of the vessel at the time when he did?

A. No.

Q. 26. Were any, and if so which, of the lifeboats safely launched?

A. Yes; Nos. 4 and 6 lifeboats on the port side.

Q. 27. Were the whole of the crew subsequently picked up from the lifeboats by the American s.s. "President Pierce"?

A. Yes.

Q. 28. What was the cause of the loss of the s.s. "Sandgate Castle"?

A. Fire originating in the starboard shelter deck space amidships from a cause unknown.

Q. 29. Was the loss of the s.s. "Sandgate Castle" caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of her owners, the Union-Castle Mail Steamship Co. Ltd.; and her master, Captain Bergen; and her chief engineer, Mr. Alexander McConnell; or any, and if so which, of them?

A. As to the owners and chief engineer, no. In view of the answers to question 20 it follows and the Court is of the opinion that the loss of the "Sandgate Castle" was contributed to by the default of her master, Captain Bergen.

R. F. HAYWARD,
Judge.

PIERS DE LEGH,
ALF. S. LEECH,
T. A. PEARSON, } Assessors.

(Issued by the Board of Trade in London on Tuesday, the 26th day of April, 1938.)



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