

(No. 6815.)

“ K H Y B E R . ”

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Town Hall, Penzance, on the 26th, 27th, and 29th days of May, 1905, before HENRY WILLEY WILLIAMS, NICHOLAS THOMAS WILLIAMS, and JAMES HENRY BENNETTS, Esquires, Justices of the Peace for the County of Cornwall, assisted by Rear-Admiral JOHN FERRIS, Commander B. DU SAUTOY ANSTIS, and Captain JAMIESON ROBERTSON, into the circumstances attending the stranding and subsequent loss of the British sailing ship “ KHYBER,” of Liverpool, official number 81396, at Porthloe Cove, near Tol-Pedn-Penwith and Porthgarra, in the parish of St. Levan, Cornwall, on the 15th day of March, 1905, when 23 lives were lost.

Report of the Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons stated in the annex hereto that the “ Khyber ” was lost through the cables parting in a very severe gale on the morning of the 15th of March, 1905, the ship having anchored in a very exposed position off Porthloe Cove, near Guthensbrás Point, Lands End, Cornwall.

Dated 30th May, 1905.

H. W. WILLIAMS, } Justices of the Peace  
N. T. WILLIAMS, } for the County of  
J. H. BENNETTS, } Cornwall.

We concur in the above Report and in the Annex hereto.

JOHN FERRIS, } Assessors.  
B. DU SAUTOY ANSTIS, }  
JAMIESON ROBERTSON, }

Annex to the Report.

This was an inquiry into the circumstances attending the loss of the British sailing ship “ Khyber . ”

Mr. Bateson appeared for the Board of Trade. The managing owner, Mr. John Joyce, appeared in person. Lieutenant Rowley represented the National Lifeboat Institution.

The “ Khyber,” official number 81396, was a full rigged iron ship of 2025·55 gross tonnage and 1967·23 net registered tonnage, built at Liverpool in 1880 by Messrs. W. H. Potter & Son.

Length, 276·6 ft. Beam, 40·1 ft. Depth of hold, 24·2 ft. She was owned by the Galgate Shipping Co., Ltd., of Liverpool; Mr. John Joyce, of May Buildings, 51, North John Street, Liverpool, being designated managing owner under advice received 13th day of June, 1899, under the seal of the Galgate Shipping Co., Ltd., and she was under the command of Mr. Henry Rothery, number of certificate 93070.

The “ Khyber ” left Melbourne on or about the 24th October, 1904, with a full cargo of wheat in bags, bound for Falmouth, Queenstown, or Plymouth for orders “ as per charter party . ” She was manned by a crew of 26 hands all told.

The homeward voyage was uneventful, having fine weather until she passed the Azores about

5th March, 1905, when the ship had to be hove to during a heavy gale.

The ship sighted no land until she made the Wolf Rock at about 3 p.m. on 14th March. She was on the starboard tack steering towards the Lizard, the wind being about South with strong breeze; under courses; whole topsails and main top-gallant sail.

She was seen from Porthleven about 6 p.m. by the coastguard, and did not then appear to require, nor did she at that time make any signals for, assistance.

On making the Lizard about 6.30 p.m., she found she could not weather it, and, accordingly, wore and stood to the Westward on the port tack. Soon after this the wind increased to a gale with heavy squalls, when most of the sails were blown away. Some storm sails were set but appear not to have stood. Soon after this rockets were fired. Twenty-four in all were fired during the night and flares burnt until put out by heavy seas.

It would appear that the ship drifted until 11 p.m. when both anchors were let go off Guthensbrás Point. She dragged inshore considerably during the night and was seen by a fisherman from Mill Bay cliffs at 6 a.m. on 15th March. She was then less than a quarter of a mile from the shore.

She was also seen at 6.20 a.m. from the Longships. At about 7.10 a.m. the cables must have parted, as she was lost sight of from the Longships then.

Soon after this the ship struck the rocks, broke in two, and in ten minutes was entirely broken up. Twenty-three lives were lost; 3 men were saved.

Unfortunately the rockets and signals for assistance were not seen by any one ashore or at the lighthouses during the night of the 14th or morning of the 15th March; had assistance arrived on the scene earlier, some more lives might probably have been saved.

It was impossible to launch the Sennen lifeboat, the channel being blocked by large blocks washed across it by the gale from the small breakwater; and, even if she had been launched, she could not have reached the wreck in time to have been of use to save life.

Although the utmost exertions were used by the coastguards, assisted by the lifeboat crew and inhabitants (young and old) of Sennen Cove, the rocket apparatus arrived at the scene of the wreck too late to be of any service.

Of the survivors, G. Johansen, A.B., and L. S. Harris, apprentice, jumped on to the large rock astern of the ship (shown in the accompanying photograph\*) as she broke up. John Willis, apprentice, was washed insensible on to the stones at the head of the Cove. Portions of 23 bodies were washed up later.

We visited the scene of the wreck, also Sennen Cove, etc., to assist us in making this report.

Attached is a photo\* and chart\* for explanation. The photo shows the scene of the wreck, but the ship shown in it is, of course, imaginary.

The questions submitted by Mr. Bateson for the opinion of the Court, together with our answers thereto, are as follows:—

Q. (1) When the “ Khyber ” left Melbourne on or about the 24th October last—

(a) Was she supplied with the necessary life-saving appliances, lights, and signals;

(b) Was she adequately provisioned for a voyage to Queenstown?

A. (a) Yes.

(b) Yes.

Q. (2) What were the circumstances in which the vessel was steered for Falmouth instead of Queenstown?

A. Under the charter party the master had the option of proceeding either to Queenstown, Falmouth, or Plymouth for orders.

\* Not Printed.

Q. (3) Did the provisions or any item of the provisions run short during the voyage? If so, when did this occur? Were the crew put on reduced rations; and, if so, were they, or any of them, affected in health and strength thereby?

A. There was not in our opinion any reliable evidence of shortness of provisions.

Q. (4) What was the position of the vessel on the evening of the 14th March last, when the Lizard light was sighted? At what time did the crew wear the ship and what was her position then?

A. The evidence is by no means clear, but we are of opinion that the ship was then about 7 or 8 miles W. by N. of the Lizard, and that the crew shortly afterwards wore ship. This seems to have been about 6.30 p.m., probably a little later.

Q. (5) What was the cause of the sails carrying away and the vessel becoming unmanageable?

A. The extraordinary force of the gale accompanied by squalls.

Q. (6) At what time was the first rocket fired from the vessel? What was her position at that time? What other signals were shown during the night of the 14th and morning of the 15th March, and what were the respective positions of the vessel when they were shown?

A. Apparently about or soon after 7 p.m. She was then making to the westward. Altogether 24 rockets were fired during the whole of the night. Flares were burnt for about four hours until put out by the sea. From 11 p.m. until about 7 a.m. she was anchored off Guthensbrás Point, near Tol-Pedn-Penwith. At daylight the signal N.C. was flying.

Q. (7) What were the two steamers whose lights were seen by those on board the "Khyber" after she had been brought round with her head to the westward on the evening of the 14th March last, and what were the circumstances in which no assistance was rendered by them to the vessel?

A. It is said that one was the telegraph s.s. "Dacia," and that she saw no signals of distress, but, owing to the "Dacia's" absence from England, there was no evidence as to the time and circumstances of her passing. The other was the steam drifter "Boy Archie" (a Lowestoft fishing boat), which passed about midnight and saw the flare and rockets, but owing to the gale was unable to render assistance, being obliged to lay to herself for four hours. The gale was at that time tremendous.

Q. (8) Was the vessel seen on the 14th March last by the coastguards or any other persons at Penzance, Porthleven, and Mullion? If so, at what time and by whom was she sighted? Was there anything to indicate that the vessel was in distress and required assistance?

A. Not from Penzance or Mullion but from Porthleven she was sighted about 6 p.m. by the coastguard, the coxswain of lifeboat, and the Porthleven agent of Messrs. Fox's Falmouth Tug or Salvage Co. She was not making any signals of distress or of then requiring assistance.

Q. (9) What, if any, steps were taken by the coastguards or any other persons at Penzance, Porthleven, Mullion, and Falmouth, to send assistance to the vessel?

A. The Porthleven correspondent of Fox's Tug Co. at Falmouth wired to Falmouth, thinking she might require a tug, and Messrs. Fox wired Lizard Signal Station to inform their tug, if possible. From the signal station the coastguard at the Lizard and Mullion were informed. The signal station could not communicate with the tug owing to the weather.

Q. (10) Was the vessel, or were any flares or distress signals shown by her, seen by the coastguards who were on duty at Newlyn, Mousehole, Penberth, and Sennen, on the afternoon and night of the 14th and morning of the 15th March last?

A. The vessel was seen only by the coastguard at Mousehole. This was about 6.30 p.m. She was

then bearing about S.E. and heading towards the Lizard. No flares or distress signals were seen.

Q. (11) Was a good and continuous look-out kept by the coastguards stationed at Newlyn and Mousehole between the hours of 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. of the 14th March, and by the coastguards stationed at Penberth and Sennen between the hours of 6 p.m. of the 14th and 7 a.m. of the 15th March last?

A. Yes, at the stations.

Q. (12) Was the portion of the coast between the Land's End and Penberth Cove patrolled by coastguards on the night and morning in question? If not, how was it that that portion of the coast was not patrolled?

A. Owing to the coastguard being in our opinion undermanned the portion from Penberth to Ella Point was only patrolled during the first half of the night, and the portion from Ella Point to Sennen was not patrolled at all.

Q. (13) Were any flares or distress signals seen by the keepers in charge of the Wolf Rock and Longships lighthouses? If not, under the existing circumstances, was it possible for the light-keepers to have seen the distress signals shown by the "Khyber"?

A. No, owing to the thick weather and tremendous seas breaking over the lighthouses no flares or rockets were, or could be, seen from the Wolf or the Longships. From the Longships nothing was seen until after daylight.

Q. (14) At what time on the morning of the 15th March was the vessel seen to be in distress by the keepers in charge of the Longships lighthouse? Were prompt and proper measures taken by them to inform the coastguard at Sennen?

A. About 6.20 a.m. Prompt measures were taken to inform the coastguard.

Q. (15) At what time on the morning of the 15th March was the vessel discovered by any one on shore? By whom was she first seen and what was her position at that time?

A. She was first seen from the shore by a fisherman (Charles Trenerry) from the cliff near Mill Bay about 6 a.m. She was then riding at anchor about a quarter of a mile or more off Guthensbrás Point.

Q. (16) At what time on the morning of the 15th March did information reach the coastguards at Sennen that the vessel was in distress? What were the circumstances in which the Sennen lifeboat was not launched? At what time did the rocket apparatus leave the station?

A. Information was brought by a fisherman about 6.30, almost at same time as signal from Longships. Owing to the tremendous sea and also to some large blocks having been washed from their breakwater across their channel the lifeboat crew were unable to launch lifeboat. They at once telephoned Penzance. The rocket apparatus started from the station about 6.45 and was pulled up the hill to meet the horses.

Q. (17) When and where did the vessel come ashore and at what time did she break up?

A. On 15th March about 7.15 a.m. at Porthloe, a small cove north of Tol-Pedn-Penwith and Guthensbrás Points, and completely breaking up in ten minutes.

Q. (18) At what time did the rocket apparatus arrive at the scene of the wreck? Was there any avoidable delay in conveying it there?

A. At 8.15 a.m. The delay was unavoidable, having regard to the roads and the ground to be crossed, the last mile being over rough and uneven waste land.

Q. (19) What were the circumstances in which 23 of the crew of the "Khyber" were drowned? Was every possible effort made by those who were in the vicinity to render assistance?

A. The cables parting, the ship drifted towards the cliff, struck the rocks, broke in two pieces,

and in ten minutes the crew except the coxswain were dashed against the rocks and were done.

Q. (20) What was the result of the Penzance lifeboat being sent to the wreck too late to be of any use?

A. The coxswain was sent to the wreck with information at 6.30 a.m. The crew, but they had no chance of floating of the "Lizard" was aground at the wreck. She was then towed away past the Run and pulled in towards the shore. The ship was floating.

In addition to the information sent to call the attention of the Admiralty to the matter.

Having regard to the fact that (both foreign going) the coast of Cornwall is a very dangerous coast, it is necessary for the safety of the coast that the greatest precautions should be taken to serve there at all times.

It was proved that the vessel was riding at anchor on the cliffs for eight hours although burning throwing rockets and any one on land could see her by a Sennen fisherman on the cliff and she was sighted by the lightkeepers.

It was also proved that on the morning of the 14th or morning of the 15th March coastguard patrol boats were sent from Ella Point to the wreck or five miles, though they were not able for patrolling that, notwithstanding the fact that the men were absent from the station during their absence.

It was also proved that in many places it is necessary to have a lifeboat and require assistance.

Attention was drawn to the fact that in inquiry to the coastguard between the coastguard and the mainland in question (and in heavy gales), in such weather it was necessary to have shutters, so that the vessel could be seen if possible.

We therefore

1. That the coastguard should be provided with a sufficient

and in ten minutes had completely broken up, all the crew except three being at once either drowned or dashed against the rocks. Everything that could be done was done by those on shore.

Q. (20) What were the circumstances in which the Penzance lifeboat arrived at the scene of the wreck too late to be of any assistance?

A. The coxswain of Penzance lifeboat received information at 6.50 a.m. and at once called his crew, but they had to wait until 8 a.m. for the floating of the "Lady of the Isles" steamer (which was aground at the time) to tow them out. They were then towed some twelve miles or so to some way past the Runnelstone when they cast off and pulled in towards the cliffs, but could see nothing of the ship except the wheat from her cargo floating.

In addition to the foregoing the Court desires to call the attention of the Board of Trade and the Admiralty to the following observations:—

Having regard to the enormous number of vessels (both foreign going and coasting) which pass near the coast of Cornwall and the dangerous character of that coast, it is in their opinion absolutely necessary for the safety of life and property that the greatest precautions and vigilance should be observed there at all times.

It was proved at the inquiry that the "Khyber" was riding at anchor within half a mile of the cliffs for eight hours from 11 p.m., and that, although burning a flare for about four hours and throwing rockets at intervals, she was not seen by any one on land until about 6 a.m., and then first by a Sennen fisherman who happened to be walking on the cliff and shortly afterwards by the Longships lightkeepers.

It was also proved that neither on the night of the 14th or morning of the 15th was there any coastguard patrol at all over the portion of cliff from Ella Point to Sennen Cove, a distance of four or five miles, there not being enough men available for patrolling the whole of their beats, and that, notwithstanding this fact, men are frequently absent from the station for drill without any additional men being furnished to take their places during their absence.

It was also in evidence that the coast path in many places is extremely dangerous for patrol purposes and requires more distinct marking.

Attention was particularly called during the inquiry to the present means adopted for communication between the Longships and Wolf lighthouses and the mainland, it was elicited that on the night in question (and in fact on many occasions during heavy gales), in consequence of the state of the weather it was quite impossible to open the shutters, so that out-of-door signalling is impossible.

We therefore beg to suggest:—

1. That the coastguard staff be always kept up to a sufficient and full strength at all times, so

that every part of the coast may be properly patrolled.

2. That each man when on patrol should be furnished with a small pair of light marine glasses and a suitable lamp.

3. That the dangerous parts of the coastguard paths in close proximity to the cliffs should be more distinctly marked.

4. That some improved method of communication between the mainland and adjacent lighthouses and light ship should be provided.

From the attached chart\* it will be seen where improvements are required to enable the Sennen lifeboat to be launched in all weathers and at any state of the tide. At present the channel is blocked. We saw the lifeboat and its gear, which are in good order, and she has an excellent crew, but she is almost useless owing to the difficulty in launching. Attached is a plan\* by an eminent engineer showing the required improvement at the cost of £2200.

It would also appear to us that it would be desirable that, if possible, lighter transport carriages should be supplied for the rocket apparatus for use in this hilly and rough part of the country (say two or three light carriages in place of one heavy one).

This case also brings to our notice that if possible it would be advantageous to increase the length of the hawser of the rocket apparatus for use on this cliff-bound coast of Cornwall.

We desire to state that all the witnesses gave their evidence in a very satisfactory manner and to place on record the fact that, as soon as the message was received at the Sennen station, the assistance rendered by the lifeboat crew to the coastguard in getting the rocket apparatus to the wreck, and the action of the Sennen coastguards themselves, was all that could be desired.

We also recommend that a reward be given to Charles Trenerry, the Sennen fisherman, for his energy and promptitude in bringing the intelligence so rapidly to the coastguard station, having regard to the distance and nature of the ground he had to traverse.

H. W. WILLIAMS, } Justices of the Peace  
N. T. WILLIAMS. } for the County of  
J. H. BENNETTS, } Cornwall.

JOHN FERRIS, }  
B. DU SAUTOY ANSTIS, } Assessors.  
JAMIESON ROBERTSON, }

\* Not Printed.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 14th day of July, 1905.)