

(No. 7878.)

"KNEBWORTH" (S.S.)

THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894.

REPORT OF COURT.

In the Matter of a Formal Investigation held at the Moot Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on the 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 26th and 27th days of May, 1930, before DAVID THOMAS HOBKIRK and ERNEST LEONARD BECKINGHAM, B.Sc., Esquires, two of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, acting in and for the City and County of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, assisted by Captain C. B. GRAVES, O.B.E., F.R.G.S., Captain D. F. MACDONALD, O.B.E., A.I.N.A., Admiral C. GREATOREX, C.B., M.V.O. (Nautical Assessors), and Mr. JOHN McLAREN (Engineer Assessor), into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "Knebworth," of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, official number 142,856, at or near Biarritz, France, whereby she became a total loss, and loss of life ensued, on the 27th day of January, 1930.

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 loss of the vessel, whereby loss of life ensued; was the failure of the anchors to hold, and an insufficiency of steam to get under way when at anchor off a dangerous coast during a W.N.W. gale by which the vessel drove ashore on the rocks and became a total wreck.

The Court finds the master, Mr. Joseph Schofield, in default for (1) allowing steam to be reduced unnecessarily without satisfying himself on the point, and (2) not getting his ship under way earlier on the 27th January when weather was obviously getting worse. The Court also finds that it was contributed to by the default of the chief engineer, Mr. Thomas Cuthbert Gorman, in giving the master a wrong impression regarding the urgency of repairing a leaky steam joint, and by his delay in carrying out this work.

The Court accordingly censures the master and chief engineer for such default, and attaches no blame to the second and third engineers.

Dated this 27th day of May, 1930.

D. T. HOBKIRK, }
E. L. BECKINGHAM, } *Judges.*

We concur in the above Report.

C. B. GRAVES, *Assessor.*
D. F. MACDONALD, *Assessor.*
C. GREATOREX, *Assessor.*
JOHN McLAREN, *Assessor.*

ANNEX TO REPORT.

This was an Inquiry into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "Knebworth," of Newcastle, and was held at the Moot Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on the 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 26th and 27th days of May, 1930, before David Thomas Hobkirk and Ernest Leonard Beckingham, B.Sc., Esquires, assisted by Captain C. B. Graves, O.B.E., F.R.G.S., Captain D. F. Macdonald, O.B.E., A.I.N.A., Admiral C. Greatorex, C.B., M.V.O. (Nautical Assessors), and Mr. John McLaren (Engineer Assessor), Mr. E. N. Robinson appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. F. E. Raw, Barrister-at-Law (instructed by Messrs. Ingledew & Co., Solicitors), represented the master, and the chief, second and third engineers appeared in person.

The "Knebworth," official number 142,856, was a single-screw steamship, built at Port Glasgow by Messrs. Dunlop, Bremer & Co., Ltd., of Port Glasgow, in the year 1919, and was of the following dimensions:—Length, 302.9 feet; breadth, 42.95 feet; and depth in hold, 20.7 feet. She was of 2,555.08 gross, and 1,409.56 net registered tonnage, and was owned by the Dalgleish Steam Shipping Co., Ltd., Mr. Robert Stanley Dalgleish, of Watergate Buildings, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, being designated manager on the 29th day of April, 1929.

She was, on the voyage in question, well-found and fitted with lifeboats and life-saving appliances in accordance with the Act, and she was fitted with the necessary wireless installation with one operator, and supplied with charts and sailing-directions for the voyage.

The vessel was fitted with triple-expansion surface-condensing engines having cylinders 22 inches, 36 inches and 59 inches diameter and 39 inches stroke.

There were two single-ended steel boilers with three furnaces in each boiler, with a working pressure of 180 lbs. per square inch.

The horse-power was about 1,400, giving a speed of about 9 knots.

The boilers were fired from the forward part of the stokehold. They were fitted to burn either coal or oil fuel. There was one donkey-boiler with a working pressure of 100 lbs. per square inch.

The "Knebworth" left Blyth for Bayonne on the 18th day of January, 1930, with a cargo of 3,600 tons of coal, her draft of water, on leaving, being 19 feet 6 inches forward, and 19 feet 7 inches aft. She was under the command of Mr. Joseph Schofield, who held a certificate of competency as master No. 0010432. He had had 20 years' experience at sea, and had been with his present owners since 1922, and in command of the "Knebworth" for 3½ years. She had a crew of 24 hands all-told, including a donkey-man, Robert Tait, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, who unfortunately was presumably washed overboard and drowned at the time of the casualty. The chief engineer, Mr. Thomas Cuthbert Gorman, who held a chief engineer's certificate, joined the vessel in that capacity in June, 1929.

Nothing of moment occurred on the voyage out to Bayonne, the vessel arriving off the Bar at midnight of the 22nd January. This was the master's first visit to the port, and he anchored in a safe position off Point St. Martin to await a pilot. The master had on board the Admiralty Sailing-Directions for the west coast of France, Spain and Portugal, and stated he made himself conversant with them on the voyage and was aware of the dangerous nature of the coast.

The pilot came on board about 9 a.m. on the 23rd January, and moved the vessel to what he considered a better anchorage. Neap tides prevailing at the time, and there being insufficient water on the bar at the entrance to the River Adour, it was arranged the pilot should leave the vessel and return on the 25th. During the night of the 24th, a fresh to strong breeze prevailed from the westward, with a considerable swell, but the vessel rode comfortably, and this may have lulled the master into a false sense of security as to his position.

However that may be, the weather improved on the 25th with a steady barometer, and about 4 p.m. on that day the pilot returned on board and shifted the vessel to another berth about 1½ miles W.N.W. from Point St. Martin Lighthouse. He remained on the ship that night, and on the following morning, the 26th, he left to take in another vessel, leaving word that he would return about 1 p.m. to take the "Knebworth" in, and he ordered steam to be ready at that time. He did not return, however, presumably because the water did not rise to the required height, as no signals were noticed to that effect.

The "Knebworth" at this time was lying to her port anchor with 60 fathoms of chain, in about 9 fathoms of water, in a place regarding which the Admiralty Sailing-Directions state that "in fine

"weather in summer, a temporary anchorage while waiting entry may be obtained in 9 to 10 fathoms, . . . but, on the least sign of bad weather, vessels should get under way."

The weather on the 26th was fine, barometer still steady, and, when the pilot did not return as promised, it was recognised that no movement towards port could be made until near high water the following afternoon.

About 6 p.m., the chief engineer reported to the master that he had a leaky joint on the dynamo stop valve on the starboard boiler, and that it must be repaired as it might get worse and possibly scald someone. The master asked if it could wait until the vessel entered port, but the chief engineer gave him the impression that the repairs were urgent and necessary, and that it would take about 24 hours to do the work. The master thereupon consented, but the Court considers that he did not sufficiently appreciate the danger of remaining at anchor where they were under reduced steam, nor did he take any steps, after steam was reduced, to keep himself in touch with the progress of the work. As a matter of fact, the work was entered upon in a slack and leisurely manner, and the fires were allowed to die down. It may be convenient here to describe the position of the valves in question so far as they have any bearing upon the case.

On the top of each boiler there was fitted a 2½-inch stop-valve for supplying steam to the engine which drives the dynamo in the engine-room. These valves were connected to one common pipe leading to the engine-room. The cover of the valve-chest was 5 inches square. It was the joint on the valve-chest cover of the starboard boiler which leaked. If the chief engineer had started blowing off the steam from the starboard boiler after shutting it off from the port boiler, the joint on the valve cover could have been made in a very short space of time. When the engineer got permission from the master to lay off the starboard boiler for 24 hours, on the 26th January, he did not do any thing towards remaking the joint; the only action taken was to let the fires die out. Then, on Monday morning, at 7 a.m., the fires were drawn and tubes and back-ends were cleaned. The joint, however, was not examined till the afternoon of the 27th January; and as, at 4 p.m., the master told the chief engineer to keep a good head of steam on the port boiler, adding that they may want steam also on the starboard boiler, nothing was done in connection with the leak. After this, steam was increased on the port boiler but the fires on the starboard boiler were not set away till 7 p.m., too late to be of any practical use. Meanwhile, as stated in the Answers, the weather had been getting worse during the afternoon; and, at 7 p.m., the master decided to get his ship away to sea.

The weather by this time was a moderate gale with high and increasing sea, and the master ordered "engines ahead" and the cable to be hove in. The evidence as to the amount of cable got in was conflicting; but it was, at any rate, only a short length. For some reason, the windlass stopped and the chief engineer was asked to put on more steam, but this had no effect. He could not explain to the Court why the steam did not get to the windlass, but stated he was aware that the reducing-valve on the steam pipe range to the dynamo was out of order. The master, seeing the imminent danger of the vessel dragging, dropped the starboard anchor at about 8 p.m. and paid out both cables until there were about 70 fathoms on the port anchor and about 40 fathoms on the starboard. During this time, the engines had been working to their full extent with steam from one boiler.

In spite of these efforts, the vessel drove ashore, stern on the rocks, about 8.30 p.m. All hands had just been ordered on deck, and heavy seas were breaking over the vessel. Shortly before, water had found its way into the stokehold thereby rendering more difficult the task of keeping steam. Life-jackets were handed out, and, in this work, the un-

fortunate donkey-man, Robert Tait, took an active part, and it was then that he was last seen. Soon after, roll was called, and again, a second time, but on neither occasion was there any response on the part of Tait. There were two life-boats on board, but it was impossible, on account of the heavy breaking sea and proximity of the rocks, to launch them.

S.O.S. signals were sent out and acknowledged and flares were shown. About 9.30 the vessel broke in two, and, about midnight, a line from the rocket-apparatus was established, but was chafed and parted on the rocks. About 9 a.m. the following day another line was got across and 8 men taken off. Further efforts during the day failed, and it was not until the next morning, the 29th, that the sea fell and a fishing-boat came alongside and rescued the remainder of the crew. The Court would like to express its appreciation of the prompt action of the French Authorities which proved successful in the work of rescue.

The lesson to be drawn from this Inquiry is the necessity for a vessel, in the position of the "Knebworth," off such a dangerous coast, to be ready to get under way on the least sign of bad weather.

In justice to the master, it may be said that he suggested to the pilot when he first came on board, that the vessel might put into St. Jean de Luz until she was able to enter the Adour. The pilot is alleged to have stated, in reply to this suggestion, that there were already vessels in the former port which would probably result in the "Knebworth" getting a foul berth, also that Pasajes was too far away.

On the master's own admission, he might have got away under one boiler before the weather became too bad, and the Court, under the circumstances detailed in the Answers, had no alternative but to find the master and chief engineer in default.

At the conclusion of the evidence, the following questions were submitted on behalf of the Board of Trade. Mr. Raw addressed the Court for his client, and Mr. Robinson replied:—

1. When the s.s. "Knebworth" last left Blyth on the 18th January, 1930:—

(a) Was the installation with which she was fitted for receiving and transmitting messages by wireless telegraphy in good and effective working order?

(b) How many operators were employed on working such installation?

(c) Was the vessel supplied with proper and sufficient anchors and chains, charts and sailing-directions for the voyage she was to undertake?

2. When did the s.s. "Knebworth" arrive off the mouth of the River Adour?

Did the master then anchor the vessel in a safe position?

Was the master aware of the warning contained in the Admiralty Sailing-Directions that vessels anchored in the Roadstead should get under way on the least sign of bad weather?

3. Did a French pilot board the vessel at or about 9 a.m. on the 23rd January? Was the vessel then moved under his direction to a different anchorage? If so, with what object, or for what purpose was the vessel moved? Was the anchorage then taken up a safe and proper one? Did the French pilot leave the vessel immediately after she had been so anchored, and what were the conditions of the weather and sea at that time? Before leaving, did the French pilot warn the master as to the possibility or probability of rapid and violent changes in the weather off that coast?

4. During the 24th and 25th January were there any material changes in the weather conditions, and/or the state of the barometer, if so, what were they, and did the master take proper measures to ensure the safety of the vessel?

5. At what time did the French pilot return to the vessel on the 25th January?

Was the vessel moved under his direction to another anchorage at or about 4 p.m. on that date? If so, to what position was she moved?

Was such anchorage a safe and proper one?

How was the vessel anchored and what were the conditions of weather and state of the barometer at that time?

6. At what time, and for what reason did the French pilot leave the vessel on the 26th January?

Before leaving, did he give orders for steam to be raised for 1 p.m. on that day for the purpose of taking the vessel into the River Adour?

Did he give the master to understand that he would return to the vessel by 1 p.m. to pilot her into the River Adour?

Was steam kept up on both boilers of the "Knebworth" from the time of first anchoring on the 22nd until the afternoon of the 26th January?

7. Did the French pilot return at any time to the s.s. "Knebworth" after leaving her on the morning of the 26th January? If not, how was it that he did not return at 1 p.m. to take the vessel into the River Adour, and how was it that no attempt was made to enter the river on that tide?

8. At or about 6 p.m. on the 26th January did the master at the request of the chief engineer consent to the starboard boiler being laid off for repair to a leaky steam joint? If so, was such repair a necessary and urgent matter, and, if not, having regard to the ship's position, weather conditions and state of the barometer, was it prudent and safe to leave the vessel under reduced steam power?

9. Were the fires of the starboard boiler allowed to die down after 6 p.m. on the 26th January? When were the fires drawn? Were the tubes and back-ends of the boiler cleaned, and, if so, at what time had this been done?

What pressure of steam was kept on the port boiler during the period occupied by these operations?

10. What were the conditions of the weather, and sea, and state of the barometer, on the morning of the 27th January?

Was there any, and if so, what change in the state of the weather and/or barometer before 4 p.m. on that day?

11. What wireless weather-warnings, if any, were received on board the s.s. "Knebworth" whilst she was at anchor off the River Adour?

If wireless weather-warnings were received, when were they received, and were they known to the master?

12. At or about 4 p.m. on the 27th January did the master inform the chief engineer that the weather conditions were changing, and instruct him to get the starboard boiler under steam as it was possible that the vessel might have to get under way? If so, was the instruction given by the master an order requiring immediate attention and so understood by the chief engineer?

13. At or about 4 p.m. on the 27th January, what was the condition of the starboard boiler? At what time were the fires of the starboard boiler lit, and did the chief engineer take prompt and proper steps to raise steam on that boiler?

Would it have been possible to raise a full head of steam upon the starboard boiler between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.?

14. What were the conditions of weather, and sea, and state of the barometer, between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. on the 27th January?

Was it possible to get the vessel under way before the latter hour? If so, why was no attempt made to do so?

15. What was the state of the weather, wind, and sea at or about 7 p.m. on the 27th January?

Did the master then give any, and if so, what instructions to the chief engineer? How was it that no useful pressure had been got up on the starboard boiler by this time?

16. What was the pressure of steam on the port boiler at or about 7 p.m. on the 27th January? Were the fires of that boiler then clean? Could a full head of steam on that boiler be maintained thereafter, and, if not, why not?

17. At that time on the 27th January, was an attempt made to lift the anchor and get the vessel away to sea? Were all proper measures taken by the master to accomplish this, and to keep the vessel off the shore?

18. When and where did the vessel go ashore?

19. What were the circumstances in which Robert Tait, donkey-man, lost his life? Could anything have been done to save him?

20. What was the cause of the stranding and loss of the s.s. "Knebworth"?

21. Was the loss of the s.s. "Knebworth" and/or the loss of life caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of the master, chief, second and third engineers, or of any, and, if so, which of them?

To which the Court replied as follows:—

1. When the "Knebworth" last left Blyth on the 18th January, 1930:—

(a) The wireless installation with which she was fitted was in good and effective working order.

(b) One operator was employed, Mr. J. A. McCarthy, who was fully qualified and had some years' sea experience.

(c) The vessel was supplied with proper and sufficient anchors and chains, and had on board the charts and Admiralty Sailing-Directions for the voyage.

2. The vessel arrived off the mouth of the River Adour at midnight of the 22nd January, and, in the circumstances, was anchored in a safe position off Point St. Martin to await a pilot.

The master was aware of the warning contained in the Admiralty Sailing-Directions that vessels anchored in the Roadway should get under way on the least sign of bad weather.

3. A French pilot boarded the vessel at or about 9 a.m. on the 23rd January, and the vessel was then moved, under his direction, to what he considered a better anchorage.

As a temporary anchorage, having regard to the weather conditions at the time, it was safe and proper. The pilot left the "Knebworth" soon after, the weather at the time being fair with a moderate sea. According to the master, the pilot did not refer to the possibility of rapid and violent changes in the weather off that coast.

4. During the night of the 24th January, there was a strong breeze from the westward, the weather improved on the 25th, and the barometer appears to have remained fairly steady. The master stated that the vessel rode comfortably, and therefore he remained at anchor in this exposed position.

5. The pilot returned to the vessel about 4 p.m. on the 25th January, and the vessel was then moved, under his direction, to a position about a mile-and-a-quarter W.N.W. from Point St. Martin Lighthouse. This anchorage was safe and proper, as a temporary measure, with a vessel ready to get under way. She was anchored with 60 fathoms of cable on the port anchor, the weather, at the time, being fine and the barometer steady.

6. The pilot left the vessel at about 11 a.m. on the 26th January in order to take another vessel into port, and, before leaving, gave orders for steam to be raised for 1 p.m. for the purpose of taking

her in. The master fully understood this order. Steam was kept up on both boilers under banked fires from the time of first anchoring on the 22nd January until the afternoon of the 26th January.

7. The pilot never returned to the "Knebworth" after leaving her on the morning of the 26th January, presumably because there was insufficient water on the Bar on that tide, no signals being displayed for this purpose.

8. At or about 6 p.m. on the 26th January, the master, at the request of the chief engineer, consented to the starboard boiler being laid off for repairs to a leaky steam joint. The chief engineer stated, at the time, he required 24 hours for this work. The Court considers that such repair was neither necessary at the time nor urgent, and that, under existing conditions, it was not prudent to leave the vessel under reduced steam power.

9. The fires of the starboard boiler were allowed to die down after 6 p.m. on the 26th January. The fires were drawn at 7 a.m. on the 27th January, at which time the cleaning of the tubes and back-ends was started; meanwhile about 165 lbs. pressure was kept on the port boiler.

10. On the morning of the 27th January the weather was cloudy with moderate westerly breeze and swell, and the barometer steady.

Shortly after mid-day the weather changed for the worse, with a freshening W.N.W. breeze, and continued getting worse during the afternoon, with the barometer however inclined to rise.

11. No wireless weather-warnings were received on board the "Knebworth" whilst she was at anchor off the River Adour.

12. At or about 4 p.m. on the 27th January, the master informed the chief engineer that the weather conditions were changing, and ordered him to get the starboard boiler under steam as the vessel might have to get under way. The chief engineer understood that this order required immediate attention.

13. At or about 4 p.m. on the 27th January, the fires were drawn and the process of cleaning was proceeding, the steam being greatly reduced. The fires of the starboard boiler were lit about 7 p.m., and, from that time, the chief engineer did take steps to raise steam on that boiler.

It was not possible to raise a full head of steam upon the starboard boiler between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.

14. The conditions of weather and sea during the afternoon of the 27th January were definitely getting worse, and the Court considers it was possible to have got the vessel under way considerably before 7 p.m., and that the master should have done so.

15. At or about 7 p.m. there was a moderate gale from W.N.W. with heavy and rising sea. About this time, the master decided to get away and gave instructions to that effect to the chief engineer;

the engines were put "slow ahead" to assist in raising the anchor. As already explained in answer to Question 13, it was, in the circumstances, impossible to have obtained any useful pressure on the starboard boiler.

16. There was about full pressure of steam on the port boiler, at or about 7 p.m. on the 27th January. Presumably, therefore, the fires were clean. As the engines were worked at varying speeds up to full, after 7 p.m., it was impossible to maintain a full pressure on that boiler.

17. At that time, an attempt was made to lift the anchor and get the vessel away to sea. All available measures were taken by the master to accomplish this. When he found there was insufficient steam for the purpose, a second anchor was let go and cable paid out on both, but they failed to hold.

18. The vessel went ashore on the rocks under Point St. Martin, near Biarritz, at 8.30 p.m., on the 27th January.

19. Robert Tait, donkey-man, was last seen handing out life-jackets on the boat-deck shortly after the vessel struck, and was presumably washed overboard. His body was not recovered.

20. The cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel was the failure of the anchors to hold, and there being insufficient steam available, whereby the vessel was driven on the rocks, broke in two, and became a total wreck.

21. The Court finds that the casualty was caused by default on the part of the master while at anchor in an exposed position in the Bay of Biscay on a dangerous part of the coast in the month of January; allowing the chief engineer to take the steam off one boiler for what, in fact, was not an urgent matter, without satisfying himself on that point; and not getting under way earlier on the 27th January with one boiler, when the weather was obviously getting worse; and that the casualty was contributed to by the chief engineer giving the master a false impression of the necessity for the work in connection with the leaky steam-joint; and delay, on the part of the chief engineer, in effecting the necessary repairs.

The Court, however, having regard to all the circumstances, does not deal with their certificates, but censures them for such default.

The Court attaches no blame to the second and third engineers.

D. T. HOBKIRK }
E. L. BECKINGHAM } *Judges.*

We concur.

C. B. GRAVES }
D. F. MACDONALD } *Assessors.*
C. GREATOREX }
JOHN McLAREN }

(Issued by the Board of Trade in London
on Monday, the 7th day of July, 1930.)

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