

# THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894

## REPORT OF COURT

(No. S.416)

s.t. "Goth" O.N. 148478

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at the Town Hall, Fleetwood, on the 12th and 13th days of April, 1950, before J. V. Naisby, Esq., K.C., assisted by J. Baird, Esq., S. Croft Baker, Esq., and F. Bee, Esq., into the circumstances attending the loss of the steam trawler "Goth" with the loss of 21 lives, off the Icelandic coast on or about the 13th December, 1948.

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 said casualty was probably caused by heavy weather, but other possibilities cannot be excluded as stated in the Annex hereto.

Dated this 14th day of April, 1950.

J. V. Naisby, Judge.

We concur in the above Report,  
Â John Baird Â  
Â Felix Bee Assessors  
Â Sydney C. Baker Â

## ANNEX TO THE REPORT

This Inquiry was held at the Town Hall, Fleetwood, on the 12th and 13th April, 1950. Mr. S. E. Pitts appeared for the Ministry of Transport, Mr. Leo Gradwell, instructed by Messrs. Hill Dickinson & Company appeared for the owners and registered manager of the steam trawler "Goth", and Commander S. L. B. Maybury for the relatives of the late skipper of the "Goth".

The "Goth" was a steel, single screw steam trawler, built in 1925 at Beverley, and owned by the Wyre Steam Trawling Company, Limited, Fleetwood. Her registered manager was Mr. J. W. Robinson. Her gross tonnage was 394.48, her length between perpendiculars 147 feet, her moulded breadth 25 feet and moulded depth 14 feet 6 inches. She had four steel water-tight transverse bulkheads separating the following compartments:—

Fore peak tank

Crew's cabin, store room and chain locker

Fish rooms

Cross bunker, machinery space and side bunkers

Crew's cabin and after peak.

There was a water-tight door at the after end of a water-tight tunnel leading from the fish room through the cross bunker to the stokehold.

The "Goth" had a raised forecastle about 25 feet long and 6 feet high, a raised quarter deck about 78 feet long and 1 foot high, and there was a super structure amidships containing a steel chart room with a wheelhouse above built partly of steel and partly of wood. The engine room casings were about 4 feet 6 inches high, and at the after end of the engine room casing was a steel house containing the galley and the companionway to the crew's cabin below. At the after end of the ship there were small steel deck houses for a liver boiler and W.C.'s.

The bunkers were carried in a cross bunker forward of the machinery space and in side bunkers at the sides of the stokehold. Both cross bunker and side bunkers were filled through scuttles in the deck. Small hatchways in the deck led to the fishrooms and there were skylights on the deck over the crew's cabins and engine room casing. Steel bulwarks were fitted round the main deck and raised quarter deck.

The vessel was propelled by one reciprocating steam triple expansion engine of 700 I.H.P., with one singleended multitubular boiler of a working pressure of 200 lbs. per square inch.

The "Goth" was fitted with two main engine bilge pumps, one donkey pump, one Duplex pump, one bilge injection, one bilge ejector, and there were eight hand pumps to various compartments. She was fitted with steam and hand steering gear, the steam steering engine being in the after end of the wheelhouse, and the steering chains ran in channels at the side of the machinery casing. She carried one lifeboat, certified for twenty-four persons (more than her total crew), which was stowed on the centre line on a raised boat deck aft and could be launched over either side. She also carried a Carley float and an adequate supply of life-jackets, life-buoys, distress signals, and a line-throwing appliance. The life-saving appliances were inspected on the 29th November, 1948, and were found to be in order.

The "Goth" was fitted with one transmitter, Marconi type T.G.Y.1/C, which could be used for both wireless telegraphy and telephony, and with two receivers and a direction finder. She was also fitted with two echometers, one Marconi type 421 A/B and one Hughes type M.S. XX, and with two hand leads. The wireless telegraphy apparatus and sounding appliances were serviced and inspected in Fleetwood between the 11th November and 1st December, 1948, and were in order.

The "Goth" was fitted with three magnetic compasses: one pole compass, one overhead compass in the wheelhouse and one spare compass. The pole and wheelhouse compasses were adjusted immediately prior to her last voyage and deviation cards were supplied, which showed very small deviations.

The "Goth" was classed + 100 A.1. "steam trawler" at Lloyd's and her survey position was as follows: Special survey 2nd No. 2 was carried out in March to June, 1945, and a docking survey had been carried out at Fleetwood in November, 1948, immediately prior to her sailing on her final voyage.

The "Goth" had been inclined for stability in June, 1945, with satisfactory results, and her stability was adequate for all stages of a normal fishing voyage without any provision of ballast.

The "Goth" sailed from Fleetwood on the 4th December, 1948, for a fishing voyage to the Icelandic fishing grounds, manned by a crew of 21 hands all told. She made good time on her outward trip and reached the fishing grounds after a voyage of about four-and-a-half days. After she had been fishing for about 24 hours the weather deteriorated rapidly and became severe. The "Goth" accordingly ceased fishing, as did other trawlers in the vicinity, and proceeded to Adalvik Bay for shelter. The evidence as to the last time that the "Goth" was sighted was to the effect that on the

11th December she was seen proceeding towards Adalvik Bay after ceasing fishing as stated in the previous sentence. By daylight on the 12th December the weather was very bad, the wind being said by one experienced witness to reach hurricane force. The weather on the 13th and 14th December remained much the same, but thereafter, on the 15th, it did moderate a little, but the wind on the 16th again reached Force 9 or 10.

The last known official communication with the "Goth" was her acknowledgment of the receipt of a wireless telegraph message sent at 2300 hours on the 10th December, but after that her wireless operator and on at least one occasion her skipper were in communication by radio telephony with other trawlers. A considerable body of evidence as to these conversations, all of which were unofficial and none of which was recorded at the time, was adduced before the Court. As was natural in the circumstances there were considerable discrepancies in this evidence, but we are of opinion that there was reliable evidence that on the night of the 13th December the "Goth" was still communicating by radio telephony with other trawlers.

The wireless operator of the "Goth" was making his first voyage in that capacity, and in the earlier part of the voyage at least was having some little difficulty with his radio telephone apparatus and with one of the echo sounders. He had advice from at least two wireless officers on other trawlers, which resulted in some improvement. The extent of his difficulties and whether they resulted solely from his inexperience or partly from some mechanical defect in his apparatus cannot be stated, but it is clear that for some days he had been able to communicate with vessels at a substantial distance, and no indication was given by him of his having had any trouble with his wireless telegraph apparatus, and the Court sees no reason to suppose that any failure by the "Goth" to send further wireless information was due to any inexperience on the part of her wireless operator or any mechanical defect in her wireless apparatus, although there is a bare possibility that the weather conditions might have brought down her aerial, and the possibility of salt water reaching her batteries cannot be excluded.

There is no reliable evidence as to what happened to the "Goth" after the evening of the 13th December. At the Inquiry there was some investigation into frequent repairs to rudder head chocks and rudder pintles, but we are satisfied that although somewhat frequent repairs to these parts of the vessel may have been made they do not indicate any weakness of the rudder or any unseaworthiness in the ship.

The evidence of a previous skipper for some nine months ending in November, 1948, was to the effect that the vessel was a good sea boat, and he gave no indication of having had any trouble with any of the steering arrangements of the vessel during that period. Between his period in command and her sailing on her final voyage the vessel had undergone a docking survey under the supervision of Lloyd's surveyor and the surveyor to the Fleetwood Mutual Assurance Company, and her steering engine had been stripped and overhauled.

In these circumstances the cause of the loss of the "Goth" must remain a matter of speculation, but in our view the most probable cause of the loss was heavy weather. A few miles to the north of Adalvik there was a minefield, which at the time of the casualty had not been declared free of mines, and in our opinion it is impossible to exclude altogether the possibility of the "Goth" having been lost by a mine, either when under way or possibly whilst fishing after the weather moderated somewhat and she was able to resume her fishing again, if she ever did. We have also considered the possibility of a boiler explosion, but, inasmuch as the boilers had just been surveyed and safety valves adjusted under supervision of Lloyd's surveyor, it seems to us that the possibility of a boiler explosion is remote. It is even less likely that there can have been any spontaneous combustion in her bunkers, although again there is a bare possibility of an explosion of gas in the coal bunkers, ignited by a naked light. In the area in which the "Goth" was last seen there are several tide races

which in bad weather would increase the difficulties of a vessel in them and be extremely dangerous, and as stated above we are of opinion that the most probable cause of the loss was heavy weather.

Systematic searches by sea and air round the Iceland coast have failed to find any trace of the "Goth", and no wreckage from her has ever been reported.

#### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Court's answers to the questions submitted by the Ministry of Transport are as follows:—

Q. 1. Was the "Goth" owned by the "Wyre" Steam Trawling Company, Limited, of Wyre Docks, Fleetwood?

A. Yes.

Q. 2. Was the "Goth" built by Messrs. Cook, Welton & Gemmell, Limited, of Beverley, Yorkshire, in 1925?

A. Yes.

Q. 3. Did the "Goth" sail from Fleetwood on the 4th December, 1948, for the Icelandic fishing grounds in charge of skipper Wilfred Elliott carrying a crew of 21 all told?

A. Yes.

Q. 4. Was the "Goth" posted as a missing vessel at Lloyd's, London, on the 23rd day of February, 1949?

A. Yes.

Q. 5. What compasses were carried on board the "Goth"?

A. One Pole compass

One overhead compass in the wheelhouse

One spare compass.

Q. 6. What wireless transmitters (telegraphy and telephony) were carried on board the "Goth", and what was the normal range of such instruments?

A. One Marconi Type T.G.Y. 1/C (both telegraphy and telephony). Range probably 500 miles at night on long wave, more on short wave for telegraphy. Range for telephony varies considerably according to conditions.

Q. 7. Was the "Goth" fitted with an electrical sounding machine in working order at the time of sailing on the last voyage?

A. Yes.

Q. 8. Was the "Goth" furnished with an adequate supply of charts and sailing directions for the last voyage?

A. Yes.

Q. 9. Was the "Goth" seaworthy when she sailed on her last voyage, and was she provided with satisfactory life saving appliances?

A. Yes.

Q. 10. Were a number of radio telephone messages received or intercepted from the "Goth" during the early part of December, 1948, and were all such messages unofficial messages of a domestic nature not requiring to be recorded?

A. Yes.

Q. 11. Was any message received from the "Goth" on her last voyage, suggesting she had received damage to, or suffered any failure of, her hull or machinery or equipment?

A. No. Except that the difficulty experienced with the radio telephone may have been the result of a mechanical defect.

Q. 12. Was the "Goth" classed at Lloyd's and was, the "Goth" visited by a Lloyd's surveyor as recently as two days before she sailed on her last voyage?

A. Yes.

Q. 13. Does it appear that during the early part of December the wireless operator of the "Goth"

had some difficulty with the operation of his wireless transmitters and electrical sounding machine, arising from his inexperience?

A. Yes.

Q. 14. Does it appear that the wireless operator of the "Goth" overcame such difficulties, with the aid of advice he received from wireless operators on other trawlers, tendered over the radio telephone?

A. Yes.

Q. 15. Was the "Goth" seen by the skipper of the s.t. "St. Melante" on the afternoon of the 10th December, 1948, about 6 or 7 miles N.W. of Straumnaes where both trawlers were fishing?

A. Yes.

Q. 16. On the afternoon of 10th December, 1948, where "St. Melante" and "Goth" were fishing, was the wind N.E. Strong, with intermittent snow and rough sea?

A. Yes.

Q. 17. By 11 a.m. on the 11th December, 1948, had the wind freshened, threatening a gale from the N.E. causing "St. Melante" to abandon fishing and make for shelter in Red Sand Bay east of Staalberg?

A. Yes.

Q. 18. When "St. Melante" was steaming South for shelter was "Goth" observed steaming in towards Adalvik, with land in sight?

A. Yes.

Q. 19. Did "St. Melante" experience wind of hurricane force and have difficulty in using her anchor when under the lee of the land in Red Sand Bay, and did she remain in shelter until 8 a.m. on the 13th December, 1948?

A. Yes.

Q. 20. Did the weather begin to improve at 8 a.m. on the 13th December, 1948, and at that time did "St. Melante" sail for Grimsby?

A. Yes.

Q. 21. Did "Goth" at any time give "St. Melante" any indication that she was in trouble?

A. No. Except for difficulty with radio telephone and echo sounder mentioned above.

Q. 22. Was the "Goth" seen later than the time when she was observed from the "St. Melante" sailing towards Adalvik?

A. Not so far as is known.

Q. 23. Did the weather improve or deteriorate in the Adalvik area after the 13th December, 1948?

A. On the 14th and 15th December the weather moderated a little, but on 16th December the wind again reached Force 9 or 10.

Q. 24. Were proper and diligent searches made to ascertain the whereabouts of the "Goth"?

A. Yes.

Q. 25. What was the probable cause of the loss of the "Goth"?

A. Heavy weather but other possibilities cannot be excluded. (See Annex to the Report).

J. V. Naisby, Judge.