SS CHARLES HOWARD

Official Number 56748

Author – Bill Swift  Date 18 May 2017

Build Data

Type – Schooner rigged iron screw steamer.
Built by - William Pile & Co. of North Sands, Monkwearmouth, Co Durham.
Launched - 24 November 1866
Dimensions as built - Length 205.9ft, breadth 30.1ft, depth 16.9ft
Registered Tonnage – 751 tons gross, 511 tons net
Engines as built not known, but rated at 120hp

Working Life

The first owner of Charles Howard was Ryde & Co of 155 Fenchurch Street, London. She was put to work (initially with her sister ship, SS Thetis) on a fortnightly service between London and Marseilles, calling at Lisbon and, when required, other ports in the western Mediterranean, as the example advertisements below indicate. On some trips out she called at Cardiff to collect an export cargo of coal.

Captain for her first round trip only was William Stocker but he was succeeded by Captain Jones (Mar ‘67 to Feb ‘68), Captain Masters (Feb ‘68 to May ‘69), S Trott (Jun to Oct ‘69), J Newton (Oct ‘69 to Jan ‘70), Joseph Robinson Pim (Jan to Apr ‘70), Withers (Apr to Jul ‘70) 1.

1 Throughout this period LRS shows her captain as W Stocker, which is demonstrably incorrect. Captains Hennan and Holbrook also each took one return trip in 1868.
Indication of the produce carried back to England can be seen in the examples below.

In July 1869 Charles Howard ran aground near Alicante under Master’s command and needed dry dock repairs to plating in Marseilles.

At the beginning of July 1870 Charles Howard was taken to William Clelland’s shipyard at Willington Quay, Tyneside, where she was lengthened by some 44 ft. At the same time the engines were modified or replaced by R & W Hawthorn & Co, and the boilers replaced.

The extent of mechanical work is a little unclear. The report right suggests that the engines were modified, changed from simple to compound. Lloyds 1874 says she was re-boilered in 1870 whilst LRS 1876 says she was both re-boilered and re-engined in 1870.

Key measures after the refit were:
- Length 249.0ft, breadth 30.1ft, depth 16.9ft
- Engines – 2 cylinder compound 200hp

On returning to service Charles Howard resumed her regular runs between London and the Mediterranean, the first trip under Captain Scarlett, then Captain R Way (Dec ‘70 to May ‘72), Captain Stewart (Jun ‘72 to Nov ‘72) and Captain William Ayles (Nov ‘72 to Jun ‘73).

On 15th April 1872 she grounded on the breakwater entering Carthagena harbour but got off with assistance and without apparent damage.

On 11 Feb 1873 she put into Weymouth (Mediterranean for London) short of coal and with part of the crew of the sunk steamer Talisman aboard from Lisbon.
Between June and September 1873 Charles Howard seems to have been out of service in London. She then made one more trip to Malaga under Captain Lunham before being chartered to the Belgian Post Office for their mail service to Brazil and the River Plate, from which she returned in June 1874.

Charles Howard was then again out of use for several months before reverting to the Mediterranean service. In December she made a trip to the Tyne for a cargo of coal and two crew members were drowned as described below.

A trip to the Mediterranean followed, then another trip to Brazil (Captain Lunham still) from which she returned in May 1875, after which she lay unused in Millwall Docks. It was to be January 1877 before she put to sea again. We might assume that the slowing of the economies in Europe was responsible for the poor utilisation of the ship.

In January 1877 Charles Howard sailed light to Greenock for repairs. We know that by August she was owned by Pile & Co of London, ship brokers and ship owners run by the late builder’s brother John Pile2. It seems probable that Pile bought the ship from John Ryde at the end of 1877 and sent her for re-fitting. In April she was taken out of Garvel dry dock and sent to Messrs Kincaid, Donald & Co for new engines of 120hp. She made her trial trip on 11 August and her compasses were adjusted in Garelock the following week. The clippings

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2 John Pile (1820-1903), elder brother of the builder of SS Charles Howard, and formerly in partnership with their father as William & John Pile, shipbuilders of Monkwearmouth. He later moved his business to Hartlepool, trading as John Pile & Co., then Pile, Spence and Co. That business collapsed in 1866 and John Pile moved to London and established his brokerage.
below say that she was re-boilered at this time as well, though LRS (See Appendix A) shows new engines in 1877 (NE77), but new boilers in 1873 (NB73). This is unexplained but must it is assumed that LRS be in error.\(^3\)

At the end of August Charles Howard loaded with general cargo in Glasgow and, on 1 September, sailed for Piraeus under Captain William Chater. She returned to London in late October.

After unloading she sailed in ballast for Cardiff. Near Dungeness Charles Howard ran down and sank the fishing vessel Zeal; the crew were saved (below right). She loaded a cargo of coal in Cardiff and sailed to Port Said, returning the Grimsby with cotton seed and on 25 Jan 1878 arrived in Sunderland.

Soon afterwards a run of advertisements appeared for Charles Howard to sail to Jamaica on 23 Feb (below left). These advert continued until 27\(^{th}\) Feb, but the voyage never happened.

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\(^{3}\) Alfred Holt (1829-1911) developed a new type of tandem compound marine steam engine in the mid-1860s, using higher pressure steam. To realise the benefits of the new engines, it seems that new boilers, pressed to a higher pressure would have been necessary. Having said that, the new engines fitted in 1870 were compounds and the boilers appear to have been rated at 65lb/in\(^2\).
Indeed, all the indications are that this was the point at which she was sold by Pile & Co to Messrs William Briggs & Sons of Sunderland.

As noted above, she sailed for Malta and Alexandria with a cargo of coal on 28 Feb 1878, still under Chater’s command, and on 1 March a 22 year old fireman named James Green fell overboard to his death off Lowestoft.

Through 1879 to 1884 Charles Howard was continuously employed, sailing between North Sea and Baltic ports, and Mediterranean/Black Sea ports. In May 1881 she broke her main shaft near Lisbon and was towed all the way to Leith for repair. In about August a crew member named John Hoygand died in hospital in Antwerp of enteritis. In September 1881 Charles Howard was in collision at Cronstadt roads and sank; she was refloated and repaired. The owners of the other ship, the Nettlesworth, later successfully took action for damages against Messrs Briggs (see Appendix B).
In August 1882 William Chater was replaced as captain by Captain Atkinson and around this time LRS began to show the owner as F Lycett\(^4\). However, the Mercantile Navy List continued to show the owner as Briggs until 1885. As indicated in the footnote, Lycett was the managing owner, the ship being owned in shares.

The ship suffered 3 fatalities amongst its crew in 1883. On 27\(^{th}\) February, fireman Anthony Dunkin died in hospital Malta. On 23\(^{rd}\) August the ship’s Chief Engineer, 51 year old Edward Paterson died of meningitis in the British Hospital, Cronstadt. On 22 October the same year a fireman named John Jones drowned in port at Glasgow. He was returning on board “the worse for drink” and fell from the gangway ladder.

From mid-October 1884, when we know that she sailed from England for Sebastopol, until the end of April 1885 when she was in Newport loading coal for Malta there is a complete gap in shipping news reports. This may be because Lloyds List after mid-1884 is yet to be scanned, or it may be that she was laid up for a time. The Mercantile Navy List for 1885 shows ownership still with Briggs, but Lloyds Register for 1885 (correct at Jun 30\(^{th}\)) shows ownership with Alfred Suart. We might assume that Charles Howard was sold sometime in the first half of 1885. Like Forrest Lycett, Alfred Suart & Co. at this time occupied offices in 29 Great St Helen’s, so it is possible that Lycett was associated with Suart in some way.

As already mentioned, Charles Howard was in Newport at the beginning of May 1885, having arrived from London. Her captain, William Augustus Wallis (56), checked into a hotel and the following morning was found dead. It was concluded that he had unwittingly consumed a lethal mix of alcohol and chlorodyne, the latter taken as a treatment for Bright’s disease.

In September 1885 Charles Howard was unloading in Antwerp when fire broke out causing much damage to ship and her cargo of wool and linseed from Taganrog. She arrived a week later in West Hartlepool so was, presumably, repaired there.

During 1886 Charles Howard sailed between Genoa and Phillipville (presumably in Algeria), and the east coast ports of Hull, Grimsby West Hartlepool and Leith. According to Lloyd’s Register, she was re-boilered again in 1886.

Alfred Suart was a pioneer in the bulk carriage of petroleum by sea. He had four ships converted to carry oil in bulk, SS Chigwell (O/N 89491), SS Titian (O/N 63581), SS Bakuin (O/N 91944) and Charles Howard. Oil was shipped from the Black Sea port of Batoum (Batumi). Batoum was connected to the oil fields of Baku, Azerbaijan, by rail in 1883 opening up access to European markets. The oil industry in Azerbaijan was bankrolled by Rothschilds and we might note that in 1901, Azerbaijan accounted for over 50% of world oil production.

\(^4\) 1883 death register reports show the owner as F Lycett of 29 Great St Helen’s, London. A later report shows Forrest Lycett (ship broker) was “Managing Director” of the shareholders of Charles Howard and had owned 9 shares himself. By Feb 1883 he had entirely disposed of his interest in the ship but used 2 shares he no longer owned as security on a loan. In 1886 he was charged with fraud in the Crown Court. He was found guilty and sentenced to 4 months imprisonment with hard labour.
Charles Howard was fitted with oil tanks in 1887, with a capacity of 1,540 tons of oil. At the same time she was converted to burn oil instead of coal. Fuel oil was carried in the ballast tanks and the boilers used a burner system patented by Percy Tarbutt. Previous attempts to burn oil for fuel on ships had used steam to atomise the oil, but this wasted precious fresh water. Tarbutt used compressed air for atomisation as the article right describes. She signed on a new crew at South Shields in April and it was noted in reports that no firemen had been employed. She sailed immediately for Batoum.

In the same year – 1887 - a new company was incorporated with the intention of taking over, as a going concern, an existing business of carrying petroleum and other oils in tank steamers, specially adapted for the purpose. The new company was called the Petroleum Transport and Storage Company Limited, had an authorised capital of £200,000 and Alfred Suart and Co were appointed managers. The company was to buy the four Suart steamers already mentioned. The company prospectus envisaged Charles Howard making 14 journeys per year between Batoum and Trieste with earnings of £4,326. She duly spent the next few year on this run, but 14 trips seems to have been somewhat optimistic!

In 1890 Charles Howard was renamed as Mineral.

On 4 Nov 1895 Mineral was at Zorritos, Peru, loading a cargo of crude petroleum for San Francisco. The ship was destroyed by an explosion and two crew members perished, both Frenchmen, George Sabastin (35) the boatswain, and able seaman Henri Savigny (21). The Board of Trade report on the loss is included in Appendix C.
The image above is from the collection of the National Maritime Museum. It is a painting by William Foster titled “The Screw Steamships Charles Howard, Richard Cobden and Rhone”. All three ships were built by William Pile and, as launched, had almost identical net tonnage, so presumably were all to the same design. This would, therefore have predated the lengthening of Charles Howard.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX B – Inquiry into collision with SS Nettleworth

LOCAL ADMIRALTY ACTION.

THE S.S. NETTLEWORTH & S.S. CHARLES HOWARD.

This was an action brought by Messrs. Gordon and Stamp, the owners of the a.s. Nettleworth, against the owners of the Charles Howard, Messrs. Briggs, to recover damages arising out of a collision between the above vessels which took place near Cronstadt, in the Gulf of Finland, on the 12th September, 1891. Both vessels were at the time in question on a voyage from Sunderland to Cronstadt, laden with coal, and the version of the affair as told by the Nettleworth’s party was as follows:—Shortly before 11.30 a.m. on September 12th, the Nettleworth, with a crew of 19 hands, and a cargo of coal, was in the Gulf of Finland. The wind was about ESE, and the weather was fine, but rather foggy. The Nettleworth, under steam, was proceeding about E by S, at the rate of from three to four knots an hour. Whilst so proceeding, as she was drawing up towards the London Shale ship for the purpose of taking on board pilot, the Charles Howard was seen about two or three miles off, and four or five points on the port quarter, rapidly coming up. Immediately afterwards the engines of the Nettleworth were stopped to wait for the pilot boat. The Charles Howard came on, overhauling the Nettleworth, and angling towards her, and causing danger of collision. The helm of the Nettleworth was thereupon put hard aport, and her engines reversed, and the Charles Howard was hailed to starboard, but she came on, and in her starboard midship struck the port side of the stem of the Nettleworth, knocking the stem off to starboard, and making a hole in the bow compartment, which filled with water. She got into Cronstadt safely, however, where temporary repairs were effected, and she then returned to Sunderland, where the vessel was permanently repaired. On the other hand the defendant’s case was that at the time of the collision the C. Howard, with a crew of 21 hands, and laden with a cargo of coals, was on a voyage from Sunderland to Cronstadt, was in the Gulf of Finland about two miles north of the London Chest Lightship, and she was heading about east-south-east, and making about five knots an hour.

At this time she observed the Nettleworth about three miles off on the starboard quarter following her up. Shortly afterwards her engines were eased, and then stopped for the purpose of taking a pilot on board. Whilst the pilot was boarding, the Nettleworth was observed to be coming up very rapidly on the starboard quarter, and was a short distance off; she approached under her starboard helm. Although hailed to go astern she continued her course, and with her stem struck the C. Howard on the starboard side, did her much serious damage that she commenced to sink and had to be beached. She was eventually towed off the ground under an agreement, and after some temporary repairs she left for Sunderland, where she was put in proper order. The action was tried at Westminster before Sir Robert Phillimore and Captains Lambert and Burns, Trinity Brethren. Mr. Rutti, Q.C., M.P., and Mr. W. Phillimore, instructed by Messrs. Botterell and Roche, appeared for the Nettleworth, and Mr. Webster, Q.C., Mr. Myburgh, Q.C., and Mr. Rackes, instructed by Mr. Thomas Steel, for the C. Howard. The case lasted over three days, viz., Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday of last week, and a great number of witnesses were called on both sides, who substantially corroborated the cases of their respective parties. On the part of the Nettleworth several independent witnesses were called, viz., the master and chief mate of the Hidalgo’s, of Hull, and the master of the Rosmini, of Sunderland, all of whom were close to the scene of the collision at the time. On the other hand the Charles Howard’s advisers secured the attendance of two of the Cronstadt pilots in their client’s interests, and also examined the master of a foreign barque under commission. After the conclusion of the evidence the Court heard the arguments of counsel, and then pronounced the Charles Howard solely to blame for the collision, and liable for all the consequent damage.

We understand that the owners of the Charles Howard have given notice of their intention to appeal against the decision herein.
APPENDIX C – Board of Trade report into the loss of Mineral

(No. 5274.)

"MINERAL" (S.S.)

Findings and Order of a Naval Court held at the British Consulate, Callao, on the second and third days of December 1886, to investigate the circumstances attending the fire and explosion, causing loss of life, that occurred on board the British ship "MINERAL," official number 56,748, at Zorritos, on the 4th day of November 1886, and the consequent sinking of that vessel; also the cause of said fire and explosion, and to inquire into the conduct of the master and officers on the occasion.

The "MINERAL," of Sunderland, was an iron screw steam vessel, schooner rigged, of 849 tons registered tonnage, official number 56,748, built at Sunderland in 1886, and owned by the Petroleum Transport and Storage Co., Limited, of 25, Great St. Helen's, City, London.

It appears, from the evidence given before this Court, that she was at the port of Zorritos, on or about the 4th day of November last past, for the purpose of loading a cargo of crude petroleum for San Francisco, that she had on board at the time twenty hands all told, and three passengers.

That on the deck mentioned she had taken in about 900 tons of the said cargo, and that at about 10.15 a.m., it was discovered that the vessel was on fire. That such measures were immediately taken by the master to extinguish the flames as it was possible to do, such as throwing sand on all parts where at all likely to be of service, and afterwards stopping all ventilating points. That, finding all efforts in vain, the boats were taken to and all hands were put on shore.

That the master, with some of the officers and crew, returned to the ship for the purpose of sinking her, and having opened the top of the injection valve and the directing box, again left the ship. That later on in the day the master, seeing no smoke on the "MINERAL," went on board the second time with a volunteer crew to see how matters stood and to act accordingly, and that they had been on board but a short time when a terrific explosion took place in the fore part of the ship, whereby the vessel became a total wreck, and three of the crew, namely, the boatswain, George Salinas; an able seaman, Henri Savigny; and an able seaman, José Rodrigues, were severely injured, the two first mentioned dying subsequently.

That having heard and carefully considered the evidence given before this Court in the presence of the master, the Court is of opinion that the "MINERAL" appears to have been well manned and found with all things needful and necessary. That the crew conducted themselves in a proper manner, and that no blame whatever is due to the master, officers, engineers, and crew, who seem to have done all that was possible to extinguish the fire after it was discovered. That the Court has therefore much pleasure in returning the certificates of the master, first, and second mates, and first and second engineers; and the Court is also of unanimous opinion that the vessel has been lost by the oil which had leaked into the coffer dams having caught fire (the said oil being of a very dangerous and inflammable nature), but as to how the fire had been communicated, there is no evidence to enable the Court to decide. And that from the plan of the ship produced before the Court by the master, the Court considers that the coffer dams were not sufficiently protected from the ordinary risks of fire being communicated to the oil in them.

The expenses of this Court, fixed at 12s. 13s. 6d., are approved and are to be borne by the Board of Trade.

Dated in Her Britannic Majesty's Consulate at Callao, this third day of December, one thousand eight hundred and ninety-five.

(Signed) GEORGE G. WILSON,
Her Britannic Majesty's Acting
Consul, President of the Court.

W. B. MCMURDO
Comm. S.S. "Retriever."

N. MCALLEN,
Master, ship "Killrannan."

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 23rd day of January 1887.)