

**FOR OFFICIAL USE**

(No. 7879.)

**"MOLESEY" (S.S.).**

THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894.

## REPORT OF COURT.

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at the Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, W.C., London, on the 26th and 27th days of May, 1930, and the 17th day of June, 1930, before M. P. GRIFFITH-JONES, Esq., O.B.E., one of the Magistrates of the Police Courts of the Metropolis, assisted by Captain P. F. W. BLAKE, M.B.E., F.R.A.S., Captain H. P. LEARMONT, R.D., R.N.R., and Vice-Admiral C. D. S. RAIKES, C.B.E., into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British steam ship "Molesey" of London, Official Number 112,405, on the 25th day of November, 1929, at Mid Island, Jack Sound, Pembrokeshire, whereby loss of life ensued.

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 must be attributed to a combination of causes, namely, the sudden shift of wind from S.S.E to S.S.W. which developed into a very hard gale, the light condition of the vessel which in the weather conditions encountered rendered her unmanageable, and the action of the master in passing between the Smalls and the main land in doubtful weather conditions with a vessel which he already knew was unmanageable in a strong wind.

Dated this seventeenth day of June, 1930.

M. P. GRIFFITH-JONES, *Judge.*

We concur in the above Report.

CECIL D. S. RAIKES, }  
 PERCY F. W. BLAKE, } *Assessors.*  
 H. P. LEARMONT, }

## ANNEX TO THE REPORT.

This Inquiry was held at the Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, W.C., London, on the 26th and 27th days of May, 1930, and the 17th day of June, 1930, before M.P. Griffith-Jones, Esq., O.B.E., one of the Magistrates of the Police Courts of the Metropolis, assisted by Captain P. F. W. Blake, M.B.E., F.R.A.S., Captain H. P. Learmont, R.D., R.N.R., and Vice-Admiral C. D. S. Raikes, C.B.E., as Assessors.

The parties to the Inquiry called by the Board of Trade were the Britain Steam Ship Company Limited, the owners; Mr. Edmund Hannay Watts (a director of Watts, Watts and Company, Limited), the manager; Captain George Bernard Musson, captain superintendent of Watts, Watts and Company, Limited; and Captain George Edgar Huntley, the master. The chief officer, Mr. William Henry Stocks, appeared and requested to be made a party; he was accordingly added as a party to the enquiry.

Mr. G. St. Clair Pilcher (instructed by the Solicitor to the Board of Trade, appeared for the Board of Trade; Mr. G. H. Main Thompson and Mr. H. L. Holman (instructed by Messrs. Holman, Fenwick and Willan) appeared for the owners and for the manager and Captain Musson; Dr. B. W. Ginsburg (instructed by the Imperial Merchant Service Guild) appeared for the master; and Mr. Sanford D. Cole (instructed by Messrs. G. F.

Hudson, Matthews and Company) appeared for the chief officer.

The s.s. "Molesey" (ex "Rokeby"), Official Number 112,405, registered at the Port of London, was a steel single-screw steam ship built at Stockton-on-Tees in the year 1899 by Messrs. Ropner and Son. There was no unusual feature in her construction; she was one of a large number of vessels of similar type built about that period. Her dimensions were as follows:—length between perpendiculars 347·8 feet, breadth 49·5 feet and moulded depth 23·4 feet. She was a single deck vessel, schooner rigged with two masts, of 3,809 gross tonnage and 2,393 register tonnage.

She had six steel water-tight bulkheads and was fitted with seven water-ballast tanks of which the capacities were as follows:—

No. 1 double-bottom tank	.....	130 tons
No. 2 do. do.	.....	112 "
No. 3 do. do.	.....	120 "
No. 4 do. do.	.....	132 "
No. 5 do. do.	.....	131 "
No. 6 do. do.	.....	121 "
After peak tank	.....	67 "

making a total of 813 tons water ballast.

She had in addition a dry tank below the boilers, which was not used for ballast purposes, but she was without a fore peak tank.

Her loaded dead-weight capacity was 6,260 tons on a salt water draught of 23 feet 0½ inches which gave her a freeboard amidships of 5 feet 4½ inches.

She had four cargo holds of a total grain capacity of 325,013 cubic feet, served by four hatches situate on the weather deck. The master's and officers' living accommodation was aft, in the poop. Her deck erections consisted of a fore-castle 39 feet long, a bridge deck 75 feet 3 inches long, and a poop 30 feet long.

The coal bunkers were amidships, giving space for 400 tons of permanent bunkers, in addition to which she could carry 362 tons in the bridge space and a further 414 tons in the reserve or cross bunker, making 1,176 tons in all. Two fresh-water tanks, each containing 2,000 gallons, were housed in the after end of the bridge deck space, and the boat equipment consisted of two life boats and two working boats.

The engines were triple expansion, of the direct acting surface condensing type, with cylinders of 25 inches, 41 inches and 67 inches diameter respectively and length of stroke 45 inches. They were built in the year 1899 by Messrs. Blair and Company, Limited of Stockton-on-Tees, and were designed to give a speed of 9½ knots. The ship had two steel single ended boilers, with a working pressure of 180 pounds. Her propeller had four blades and its diameter was 16 feet 10½ inches; at a draught of 13 feet aft the upper blade would protrude 4 feet 11¼ inches out of the water.

She was fitted with a wireless installation and carried one operator. Her crew consisted of 31 hands all told, including the master, but at the time of the stranding she had on board in addition three women and two stowaways, making a total of 36. She underwent her special survey in May, 1928.

In the year 1918, the vessel, then named "Rokeby" and registered at the Port of West Hartlepool, was purchased by the Britain Steam Ship Company Limited, of 7 Whittington Avenue in the City of London, from the Pyman Steamship Company Limited (in liquidation) at a cost of £75,750. The registry was transferred to the Port of London and the vessel was renamed "Molesey." On the 27th day of October, 1928, Mr. Edmund Hannay Watts, a director of Watts, Watts and Company Limited, of 7 Whittington Avenue in the City of London, was designated the person to whom

the management of the vessel was entrusted on behalf of the Britain Steam Ship Company Limited, the owners. At the date of the loss of the vessel the Britain Steam Ship Company, Limited, and Mr. Edmund Hannay Watts were still the registered owners and manager respectively, but in October, 1929, the vessel had been sold by the Britain Steam Ship Company Limited for £11,000, and at the date of her loss was on her way to the Bristol Channel to dry dock preliminary to being handed over to her new foreign owners.

The vessel was insured under time policies in force for 12 months commencing on the 20th day of February, 1929, for the following amounts:

	£
Hull and machinery .....	19,000
Freight .....	3,600
Disbursements .....	7,400
A total of .....	<u>£30,000</u>

There were no additional insurances on the voyage in question.

Captain George Edgar Huntley had been at sea since the year 1906, had held a master's certificate since 1914, and had been in the service of Watts, Watts and Company Limited since 1913. He had been master for 8 or 9 years of other vessels when in July, 1929, he took over command of the "Molesey" at Norfolk, Virginia. The vessel proceeded thence to Galveston in ballast; at Galveston she loaded wheat for Greece and in due course she discharged that cargo at Piraeus, Volo and Salonica. She then proceeded in ballast to the Danube, where she loaded grain at Braila and Sulina for Liverpool and Manchester.

The "Molesey" arrived in the Mersey at 4 p.m. on the 7th day of November, 1929, and proceeded to discharge her cargo at Liverpool and at Manchester. During this period a survey of the boilers was made and a new spring buffer was fitted to the steering chain. She remained at Manchester for about 10 days and either there or at Liverpool the master received orders that on completion of discharge and repairs the vessel was to proceed to the Bristol Channel to be handed over.

The vessel started from Manchester at 7 a.m. on the 23rd day of November, 1929, with about 20 to 30 tons of bunkers on board and proceeded to Partington, where she took in 81 tons more bunkers. She then proceeded down the Manchester Ship Canal, and at Eastham was taken over by the Mersey sea pilot, who took her to sea. At the time of leaving the Mersey the draught was approximately 8 feet forward and 13 feet aft, the vessel being in light ballast trim. The weights on board were:—

Double bottom tanks and after peak (full) ... ..	813 tons
Bunkers ... ..	about 105 tons
Fresh water ... ..	about 20 tons
Stores and shift boards ... ..	about 90 tons
A total of approximately	<u>1,028 tons</u>

Deadweight by displacement scale on 10 feet 6 inches mean draught is 1,050 tons. When proceeding down the Manchester Ship Canal the weather was normal; in the Mersey the wind was light, south-easterly, force about 3 or 4, on the starboard quarter, and nothing occurred to call for comment from the pilot in the conduct of the vessel between Eastham Locks and the Bar Light-vessel. The ship steered normally, made between 6 and 7 knots, and was in a trim normal with similar vessels in ballast trim. She left the Bar Light-vessel about 6 p.m. on the 23rd day of November, 1929, and set a course to

the Skerries, the weather being at the time normal, with the wind light from the southward. A speed of about 6 knots was made and she rounded the Skerries about 2 a.m., when a course was set S.W.½ S. for a position to the westward of The Smalls. By this time the weather had become squally, with rain obscuring the lights at times, the wind being from the southward and westward. About 3 a.m. the South Stack light was abeam, 3 miles off, but was not actually seen when abeam. The master then went below and the vessel proceeded down the St. George's Channel. That day, the 24th day of November, the weather became worse, with hard south-westerly squalls; at times the vessel would not steer her course, but fell off from the wind to about west during the squalls. A tarpaulin was set abaft the mainmast to try to keep her up to the wind, but this had little effect. During the evening of that day the master received by wireless the following gale warning:—"Gale warning—southerly gale extending to all coasts reaching force 9 locally—Intense depression off south-west Ireland moving north-east." At the time this warning was received the weather was heavy, with wind about force 9 from the south-west, and the master inferred that the warning referred to the weather he was then experiencing. At 9.30 p.m. the Tuskar Light was sighted, bearing W. by S., but the distance off was not obtained. The course was then altered to S.E. magnetic to sight either The Smalls or the South Bishop Light. The weather was bad at first; the wind was southerly, and S.E. was as near the wind as the vessel would lie. After midnight the weather began to improve, and at 4 a.m. on the 25th day of November the wind had gone down considerably. At 8 a.m. the weather was clear and bright, with good visibility, wind force 3 from S.S.E., but the vessel continued on the south-easterly course. About 9 a.m. the islands at South Bishop were sighted; the course was altered and the South Bishop Lighthouse was passed at a distance of 3½ miles when abeam. At 11 a.m. Grassholm was on the starboard beam, bearing W.¾ S. approximately, distance 2 miles, and the course was then altered to S. by E.½ E. to pass 3 miles off Skokham Island. At this time a wireless message was sent to the owners at Cardiff "Noon Smalls endeavouring make morning tide twenty-six." When Skokham Island was bearing four points on the port bow the wind suddenly shifted to S.S.W. and started to blow very strongly, increasing up to force 9. This caused the vessel to fall away from her course and she only just cleared Skokham Island. Every effort was made to bring her up to the wind and the order to flood No. 3 hold was given. This was started and all available canvas was rigged aft, but she refused to answer her helm and continued to drift in a north-easterly direction. The master thought of making Milford Haven, but it was soon apparent that on the course being made it would not be possible to clear St. Ann's Head. He then brought the vessel round before the wind with the intention of attempting to pass through Jack Sound, but as there was very little prospect of success in this, a S.O.S. message was sent to Fishguard, giving the position of the vessel and asking for assistance. A message timed 1.50 p.m. "Ashore on Wolf Stack Point require immediate assistance vessel breaking up" was sent to the owners at Cardiff, before the vessel actually went ashore, as soon as the master saw no hope of saving her. When approaching Jack Sound he had difficulty in clearing the Blackstones Rock and was not able to make the Sound. Both anchors were then let go and the vessel took the rocks off the south-east corner of Mid Island with her starboard side, head to the westward. She was immediately holed, filled and sank—resting on the bottom fore and aft. A further message was then dispatched to Fishguard requesting immediate help. An attempt was made to establish communication with the Island by means of a 40

foot ladder, but this was washed away. Of the four boats, three were washed away and the fourth, the starboard life-boat, could not be launched. Several of the crew attempted to jump from the ship to the rocks and were drowned; others were drowned when the starboard side of the bridge was washed away; seven in all were lost. The remainder sheltered in various places amidship, and from time to time distress rockets were sent up. At daylight on the 26th day of November the Angle life-boat came in sight; she came alongside and took off the survivors, with the exception of one fireman who had stowed away in the remaining boat and who later got ashore on the Island and was rescued from there.

The persons lost were:—

Fredk. W. Inch, 3rd engineer.  
E. Redvers King, Wireless operator.  
Charles Mattson, Carpenter.  
John Ellertsen, Sailor.  
Thomas McGinn, Ordinary seaman.  
Ahmed Said, Fireman,  
and  
Ethel Stocks, Stewardess.

W. Shannon, the second officer, received serious injuries in the wreck and subsequently died of those injuries.

At the conclusion of the evidence of witnesses called by the Board of Trade, Mr. G. St. Clair Pilcher submitted for the consideration of the Court the following questions:—

1. Who were the Registered Owners and the Registered Manager of the s.s. "Molesey" ?

2. When did the s.s. "Molesey" last arrive in the River Mersey ?

Did the master receive any, if so what, sailing orders emanating from the owners or their marine superintendent thereafter ?

Were such sailing orders adequate and proper ?

3. Did the s.s. "Molesey" proceed to Manchester and discharge the remainder of her cargo there ?

Were any, and if so what, repairs done to her steering gear at that port ?

4. When the s.s. "Molesey" last left Manchester, on the 23rd November, 1929:

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

(b) how many operators were employed in working such installations ?

(c) was the vessel in good and seaworthy condition and properly equipped as regards boats, life-saving appliances, charts, sailing directions, anchors and chains ?

5. What were the draughts of the s.s. "Molesey," forward and aft, when she left Manchester ?

What were the weather conditions and the state of the barometer at that time ?

Had the master received any, and if so what, gale warnings before the vessel left Manchester ?

Was the s.s. "Molesey" when she left Manchester, sufficiently ballasted and in safe trim for the voyage which she was to undertake ?

6. What were the conditions of the weather and sea when the pilot was dropped at the Bar Light-vessel ?

7. Was there any, and if so what, change in the weather conditions between the time when the pilot was dropped at the Bar Light-vessel and the time when the vessel rounded the Skerries ?

Was she under control during this part of the voyage ?

8. When did the vessel round the Skerries ?

What course was then set after she had rounded them ?

9. Was there any, and if so, what change in the conditions of the weather and sea between the time when the vessel rounded the Skerries and about 9.30 p.m. on the 24th November, 1929 ?

Was the vessel under control and able to keep her course during this part of the voyage ?

If not, were all proper means adopted to endeavour to get her on to her course ?

10. What was the position of the vessel at or about 9.30 p.m. on the 24th November, 1929 ?

What were the conditions of the weather and sea at that time ?

Did the master alter course at or about that time, and if so, what alterations did he make ?

11. Did the master receive a wireless gale warning during the 24th November 1929 ?

If so, what was the nature of that warning ?

Did he take any, and if so, what action in consequence of the warning ?

If so, was such action proper and adequate ?

12. Was there any, and if so what, change in the weather conditions between 9.30 p.m. on November 24th and 9 a.m. on November 25th, 1929 ?

What was the position of the vessel at or about 9 a.m. on November 25th, 1929 ?

Was she under control during this part of the voyage ?

13. What were the conditions of the wind and sea at or about 9 a.m. on November 25th, 1929 ?

Was there any, and if so what, change in those conditions between 9 a.m. and noon of the said November 25th ?

Did the master during this period send a wireless message to the owners' office at Cardiff ?

If so, what were its terms ?

14. What was the position of the vessel at or shortly after noon on the 25th November, 1929 ?

Did any, and if so what, change in the direction and force of the wind take place at or about that time ?

If so, was such change sudden and unexpected or should it have been foreseen by the master ?

15. If such change occurred, did it cause the vessel to become out of control ?

Did the master take all proper and seamanlike steps to endeavour to bring the vessel under control and to keep her off the shore ?

16. Did the master send out any and if so what wireless distress signals ?

If so, were they sent with due promptitude ?

17. When and where did the vessel go ashore ?

18. How many persons lost their lives as a result of the casualty ?

Could anything have been done to save them or any of them ?

19. What was the cause of the stranding and loss of the s.s. "Molesey" ?

20. Was the loss of the s.s. "Molesey" and/or the loss of life caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of Captain George Edgar Huntley, the master; and Mr. Edmund Hannay Watts, the Registered Manager; and Captain George Bernard Musson, the Marine Superintendent; or of any and if so, which of them ?

Counsel representing the parties to the Inquiry then addressed the Court.

To the questions submitted the Court gives the following answers:—

1. The Registered Owners of the s.s. "Molesey" were the Britain Steam Ship Company, Limited, of 7, Whittington Avenue in the City of London, and the Registered Manager of the ship was Mr. Edmund Hannay Watts, of Watts, Watts and Company, Limited, 7, Whittington Avenue in the City of London.

2. The s.s. "Molesey" last arrived in the River Mersey at 4 p.m. on the 7th day of November, 1929. The master did thereafter receive sailing orders emanating from the owners; he received orders to proceed to the Bristol Channel on completion of discharge and repairs and to keep a look-out for wireless instructions. Such sailing orders were adequate and proper.

3. The s.s. "Molesey" did proceed to Manchester and discharge the remainder of her cargo there.

Repairs were done to her steering gear at that port, a new spring buffer being fitted to the steering chain.

4. When the s.s. "Molesey" last left Manchester, on the 23rd day of November, 1929:

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

(b) one operator was employed on working such installation;

(c) the vessel was in good and seaworthy condition and properly equipped as regards boats, life saving appliances, charts, sailing directions, anchors and chains.

5. The draughts of the s.s. "Molesey," forward and aft, when she left Manchester were 8 feet and 13 feet respectively.

The weather conditions at that time were normal. The state of the barometer cannot be given as the records were lost with the ship.

The master had not received any gale warnings before the vessel left Manchester.

The s.s. "Molesey" when she left Manchester was ballasted and in safe trim according to general practice for the voyage which she was to undertake, but as events proved later she was not sufficiently ballasted for efficient steering.

6. The conditions of the weather and sea when the pilot was dropped at the Bar Light-vessel were moderate, the wind was southerly, force 3 to 4.

7. There was no change in the weather conditions between the time when the pilot was dropped at the Bar Light-vessel and the time when the vessel rounded the Skerries.

She was perfectly under control during this part of the voyage.

8. The vessel rounded the Skerries at about 2 a.m. on the 24th day of November, 1929. The course then set, after she had rounded them was S.W.  $\frac{1}{2}$  S. (magnetic).

9. There was a change in the conditions of the weather and sea between the time when the vessel rounded the Skerries and about 9.30 p.m. on the 24th November, 1929; the weather became very boisterous, wind—force about 8—from the southward, with very heavy sea, causing the ship to fall off her course although canvas was rigged aft.

For considerable periods during this part of the voyage the vessel was not under control and able to keep her course.

All proper means were adopted to endeavour to get her on to her course.

10. The position of the vessel at or about 9.30 p.m. on the 24th November, 1929, was such that the Tuskar Light bore W. by S., but the distance off was not verified.

At that time a strong gale was blowing from the S.W., with heavy sea.

The master did alter course at or about that time; he altered the course to S.E. with the object of picking up either the Smalls or the South Bishop Light.

11. The master did receive a wireless gale warning during the 24th November, 1929. He received a warning timed 7.06 p.m. from Seaforth "Gale warning—Southerly gale extending to all coasts reaching force 9 locally—intense depression off south west Ireland moving north east."

He did not take any action in consequence of the warning; he considered the bad weather he was then experiencing was the weather referred to in the warning.

12. There was a change in the weather conditions between 9.30 p.m. on November 24th and 9 a.m. on November 25th, 1929. The weather improved considerably, the gale moderated, and the vessel was again brought under control.

The position of the vessel at or about 9 a.m. on November 25th, 1929, was such that the South Bishop Lighthouse was approximately  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles S.  $\frac{1}{2}$  E. (magnetic).

She was under control during this part of the voyage.

13. At or about 9 a.m. on November 25th, 1929, the wind was about S.S.E., force 3 and the sea was confused.

There was a change in those conditions between 9 a.m. and noon of the said November 25th. At 11.30 a.m. the direction of the wind suddenly changed to S.S.W., shifting to the starboard bow, and increased to a gale.

The master did during this period send a wireless message to the owners' office at Cardiff; at 11 a.m. he sent to that office the message "Noon Smalls endeavouring make morning tide twenty-six."

14. The position of the vessel at or shortly after noon on the 25th November, 1929, was immediately south of, and close in to, Skokham Island.

No change in the direction of the wind took place at that time—it had taken place at 11.30 a.m.—but the force increased to 9. The change from S.S.E. to S.S.W. was both sudden and unexpected, and could not reasonably have been foreseen by the master unless he possessed local knowledge.

15. The increased force of the gale did cause the vessel to become out of control.

The master did take all proper and seamanlike steps to endeavour to bring the vessel under control and keep her off the shore.

16. The master did send out wireless distress signals; at 1.50 p.m. he sent to the owners' office at Cardiff the message "Ashore on Wolf Stack Point require immediate assistance vessel breaking up." That message was received by the owners from both Fishguard and Seaforth.

The signals were sent with due promptitude.

17. The vessel went ashore at 2.30 p.m. on the 25th day of November, 1929, on the south-east corner of Mid Island, in Jack Sound, Pembrokeshire.

18. Seven persons lost their lives at the time as the result of the casualty. Nothing could have been done to save them, or any of them. One man who was injured as a result of the casualty subsequently died from the injuries he received.

19. The cause of the stranding and loss of the s.s. "Molesey" was:—

(1) unexpected bad weather causing the vessel to be blown off her course and to become unmanageable on a lee shore;

(2) unhandiness of the vessel in ballast trim; and

(3) insufficient allowance of sea room to enable the vessel to be turned round if necessary.

20. Neither the loss of the s.s. "Molesey" nor the loss of life was caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of either Mr. Edmund Hannay Watts, the Registered Manager; or Captain George Bernard Musson, the Marine Superintendent, but the loss of the vessel and resulting loss of life were contributed to by the action of Captain George Edgar Huntley, the master, in attempting to pass between The Smalls and the main land through a channel where the tides run with great strength, in a vessel of low speed and light draught, with doubtful weather conditions prevailing. This action may have been due to excess of zeal and a desire to make Cardiff on the following morning's tide, which hope the master had expressed by radio to the owners; otherwise it is difficult to understand his reason for taking what was obviously a great risk. The Court considers that he was not in the circumstances justified in taking this risk and that he made an error of judgment in taking it and thereby jeopardising the safety of his ship. The Court however highly commends the conduct of the master and officers after the ship struck and while awaiting rescue by the life-boat.

With respect to the unhandiness of this vessel during the voyage in question it has been borne in mind that she had made many passages in similar ballast conditions during her career of 30 years and that there are no records of her having been abnormally unhandy during any of them. The

difficulty of handling vessels of this type in light trim in heavy weather is well known to all experienced seamen, and the Court therefore considers it proper to make the recommendation that vessels of similar type now under construction, or about to be constructed, should be fitted with a deep water-ballast tank of suitable capacity consistent with the tonnage, in addition to the usual double-bottom tanks, thereby making it possible to keep such vessels under proper control if heavy

weather be encountered when in light trim. The Court also recommends that a light load line be introduced.

M. P. GRIFFITH-JONES, *Judge.*

We concur.

CECIL D. S. RAIKES, }  
 PERCY F. W. BLAKE, } *Assessors.*  
 H. P. LEARMONT, }

(Issued by the Board of Trade in London  
 on Tuesday, the 19th day of August, 1930.)

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