

No. S. 401

STEAM TRAWLER "AQUAMARINE"
and
STEAM TRAWLER "ST. DELPHINE"

THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894

REPORT OF COURT

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at the Guildhall, Hull, on the 1st and 2nd days of August, 1939, before R. F. Hayward, Esq., K.C., assisted by Captain T. W. Hanney, Captain W. J. Elford, and F. Bee, Esq., into the circumstances attending the loss of the steam trawler "St. Delphine" in the River Humber on the 9th March, 1939, resulting from a collision with the steam trawler "Aquamarine."

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 cause of the casualty was an inefficient lookout on board the "St. Delphine" coupled with the improper porting of her wheel before the light of the "Aquamarine" was seen by the man in charge of the navigation of the "St. Delphine."

Dated this fourteenth day of August, 1939.

R. F. HAYWARD,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

T. W. HANNEY,
W. J. ELFORD, } *Assessors.*
F. BEE,

This Inquiry was held at the Guildhall, Hull, on the 1st and 2nd August, 1939. Mr. H. L. Holman (instructed by the Solicitor, Board of Trade) appeared for the Board of Trade. Dr. T. C. Jackson, LL.D., of Messrs. A. M. Jackson & Co., watched the proceedings on behalf of the Kingston Steam Trawling Co., Ltd., the owners of the s.t. "Aquamarine." Mr. J. Hearfield, of Messrs. Hearfields & Lambert, watched the proceedings on behalf of Thomas Hamling & Co., Ltd., the owners of the s.t. "St. Delphine."

The "St. Delphine" was a single screw steam trawler, official number 160096, owned by Thomas Hamling & Co., Ltd., of St. Andrew's Dock, Kingston-upon-Hull. Her registered tonnage was 155.96, gross tonnage 358.51, length 140.4 feet, and breadth 24 feet. She was built at Beverley in 1928 by Cook, Welton, & Gemmill, and was fitted with a reciprocating triple expansion engine of 96 horse power nominal, giving her a speed of 11 knots.

The "St. Delphine" had four water-tight bulkheads, and she carried one lifeboat and the usual life-saving appliances usual to a vessel of her class, and, in addition, one Carley Float capable of supporting about 20 men. Her crew numbered 15 hands all told including a Lieut.-Commander, R.N., and an acting Petty Officer, R.N., who were on board on Admiralty duty. The "Aquamarine" is a single screw steam trawler, official number 160098, owned by the Kingston Steam Trawling Co., Ltd., St. Andrew's Dock, Hull, built by Cook, Welton & Gemmill, Ltd., at Beverley in 1928. Her registered tonnage is 150.81 and gross tonnage 357.47, length 151.5, and breadth 24 feet. She is fitted with a reciprocating, triple-expansion engine of 96 horse-power nominal, five water-tight bulkheads, carries one lifeboat, and is supplied with the usual life-saving appliances for a vessel of her class.

Previous to sailing on her last trip which was for the purpose of Admiralty trials prior to her acquisition by the Royal Navy, the "St. Delphine," retaining her ordinary engine room staff, was provided by the Admiralty with a skipper,

R.N.R. (who was unfamiliar with the Humber) and with six deckhands, R.N.R., from a Naval Barracks. At the request of the Naval Officer in charge of the trials, a local trawler skipper, Thomas Thorpe, was signed on as second hand and put in charge of the navigation. He was informed that none of the deckhands had experience of steam steering gear and accordingly, when the "St. Delphine" left Hull at about 7.30 a.m. on the 9th March to carry out a trial trip, he steered the ship and remained at the wheel practically throughout the day. The trawler was trimmed about eight feet by the stern and vision forward from the wheelhouse was in consequence somewhat obstructed by her stem head, i.e., the surface of the water ahead of the ship would be invisible from the wheelhouse for a distance of a little over a cable. During the day the trials were carried out, and on her return at about 6.40 p.m., when about off Salt End and approaching the shipping in Hull Roads in fair visibility which was rapidly darkening, Thorpe, who was still at the wheel, notified the Lieut.-Commander, who was also in the wheelhouse, that he could not see very well. The latter suggested getting a deckhand to steer so that Thorpe could go on to the top of the wheelhouse, and from there direct the navigation. Thorpe had never so navigated a trawler; there was no voice pipe down to the wheelhouse, and on his information that no deckhand was familiar with steam steering, he was, in the opinion of the Court, justified in refusing as he did, to adopt the suggestion. The Lieut.-Commander then ordered skipper Tucker, who was on the fore-deck, to send two men on to the lookout, and this was done. What training at sea the deckhands had had did not transpire; unfortunately, one of them sent to the lookout, Matheson, was drowned, but the other lookout, McDonald, who was called as a witness, stated that he had never been to sea in anything but a 20-foot boat and had never before been at sea at night. The "St. Delphine," coming up on the strong flood tide at full speed, was slowed down to half speed by Thorpe a few minutes before the collision. There were several trading and fishing vessels at anchor in the Roads. Waiting trawlers were about to enter the dock, and one, the "Aquamarine," was engaged in heaving up anchor. Her forward anchor light was seen by McDonald at a distance which he estimated as four or five trawler lengths. He wondered what it was, and after speaking to the other lookout, reported "Light ahead!" It was, in fact, a little on the port bow. On hearing this report, Thorpe, thinking that there were no vessels to port of him, immediately, and before he had himself seen the light, put the wheel to port. Shortly afterwards, he saw the "Aquamarine" very close to, on the starboard bow, and although an effort was made to clear her by reversing the wheel, and although those on the "Aquamarine" stopped heaving on their anchor cable and put their engines full speed astern when they realised that there was danger of collision, the "St. Delphine," with her starboard side about amidships, struck the stem of the "Aquamarine" at about an angle of 45° leading aft on the "St. Delphine." The "St. Delphine," with her engines left working half speed ahead, turned parallel to the "Aquamarine" and as she slid by Thorpe and another hand jumped aboard her. The Lieut.-Commander promptly cleared away the "St. Delphine's" Carley Float, in which he and four hands embarked just before the trawler sank within

a few minutes of the collision. Of the remaining hands, the skipper and two deckhands were drowned, and five more were picked up by other vessels.

In these circumstances, the Court finds that the two main causes of the collision were:—(1) a bad lookout, and (2) the porting of the wheel by Thorpe before he had seen for himself the light which was reported to him. It is also of the opinion that there was an unfortunate failure to provide Thorpe with at least one helmsman who had previous experience of steering a steam steering vessel, and with at least one experienced lookout man. Further, the Court is of the view that the skipper of the trawler ought to have been on the bridge when the vessel was nearing the Roads, to assist in the navigation. Unfortunately, by reason of his death, no explanation of his absence was forthcoming, but it may well be that he was relying on his senior officer, the Lieut.-Commander, for orders as to what to do.

The Court censures Thomas Thorpe for his above-mentioned action, and for failing to stop the engine after the collision. It recommends that those responsible for manning a trawler in similar circumstances, whether they be trawler owners or Naval authorities, for the safety of life should ascertain that she is manned by a sufficient number of men trained in the duties of lookout and steering and that the officer navigating her has an unrestricted all-round view and is freed from the distraction of steering when approaching a busy port.

R. F. HAYWARD,
Judge.

I. W. HANNEY, }
W. J. ELFORD, } *Assessors.*
F. BEE, }

Questions and Answers.

The Court's answers to the Questions submitted by the Board of Trade are as follows:—

Q. 1. By whom was the s.t. "St. Delphine" owned in March, 1939?

A. Thomas Hamling & Co., Ltd., St. Andrew's Dock, Kingston-upon-Hull.

Q. 2. Of whom did her crew consist on the 9th March, 1939?

A. As per Crew List attached and Lieutenant-Commander Frank Clutton Husband-Clutton, R.N., and acting P.O. Botwood, R.N., who were on board on Admiralty duties.

Q. 3. At what time did the vessel pass Spurn Lightvessel on her return to Hull on the 9th March, 1939?

A. This time was not accurately ascertained; it was probably about 5 p.m.

Q. 4. When the vessel entered the River Humber (a) who was in charge of the navigation; (b) who was in the wheelhouse; (c) who was at the wheel? Were there any alterations in (a), (b) or (c) between this time and the time of the casualty? If so, what were they?

A. (a) Thomas Thorpe; (b) Thomas Thorpe, Lieut.-Commander Husband-Clutton, R.N., and acting P.O. Botwood, R.N.; (c) Thomas Thorpe. As to (a) and (c) No, as to (b) the acting P.O. left the wheelhouse on the passage up river.

Q. 5. What was the state of (a) the weather; (b) the tide; (c) the visibility at the time referred to in Question 4? What, if any, alterations were there in (a), (b) or (c) between this time and the time of the casualty?

A. (a) Fine and overcast light north-easterly wind; (b) Flood; (c) Moderately clear. At the time of the casualty the weather remained about the same, the flood tide was of about four knots force and there was some little haze due to smoke about the port.

Q. 6. What were the fore and aft draughts of the vessel? Did her trim have any, and if so what, effect on the navigation of the vessel?

A. 7 ft. 3 in. Forward (observed). 15 ft. 2 in. Aft (subsequently calculated). Her trim by the stern tended to restrict the view forward from her wheelhouse.

Q. 7. Between the time when the vessel entered the river and the time of the casualty, was there anyone posted as a lookout on the fore-castle head? If so, who was so posted and when was he posted?

A. Yes. Deckhands Matheson, R.N.R., and McDonald, R.N.R., were posted as lookouts on the fo'castle head about 10 minutes before the casualty.

Q. 8. At what speed did the vessel proceed up the river? Was this speed reduced at any time? If so, what was the reduction and when was it made? Was it adequate?

A. Full speed about 10 knots. Yes, the engines were eased to half speed shortly before the collision. The reduction would have been adequate had a proper lookout been kept.

Q. 9. Immediately prior to the casualty, what speed was the "St. Delphine" making over the ground?

A. About nine or ten knots.

Q. 10. By whom was the "Aquamarine" owned at the time of the casualty?

A. Kingston Steam Trawling Co., Ltd., St. Andrew's Dock, Hull.

Q. 11. What was her position in the river shortly before the casualty occurred?

A. In a position with the Clock Tower bearing N. by W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W. Mag. Upper West Middle Buoy East, Mag.

Q. 12. What was she doing shortly before the casualty occurred?

A. Heaving up her anchor prior to entering the Dock.

Q. 13. Was there anyone, and if so who, on watch shortly before and at the time of the casualty?

A. Yes, the skipper was on the bridge and her second hand, bo'sun, and spare hand were on the fo'castle head.

Q. 14. What lights was she exhibiting shortly before and at the time of the casualty?

A. An all-round electric white fishing light secured on the port side of her foremast and used as a forward anchor light; also an all-round (oil) lantern in her port after rigging.

Q. 15. How far apart were the vessels when those on board the "St. Delphine" first sighted the "Aquamarine"; and how far apart were the vessels when those on board the "Aquamarine" first sighted the "St. Delphine"? How were the vessels bearing in relationship to each other at these times?

A. About a cable or a little more. About the same distance. Each vessel was bearing fairly fine on the port bow of the other.

Q. 16. What efforts did those on board the "St. Delphine" take to avoid the casualty? Were such efforts right and proper in view of all the circumstances?

A. When the forward light of the "Aquamarine" was reported, the wheel of the "St. Delphine" was put to port. Very shortly before the collision it was put amidships. No.

Q. 17. What efforts did those on board the "Aquamarine" take to avoid the casualty? Were such efforts right and proper in view of all the circumstances?

A. When the "St. Delphine" was seen to be porting causing danger of collision, the "Aquamarine" stopped heaving on her windlass, and put her engines full speed astern. Yes.

Q. 18. How did the vessels bear in relationship to each other at the time of the collision and what part of each vessel came in contact with the other?

A. The starboard side of the "St. Delphine" about amidships struck the stern of the "Aquamarine" at an angle of about 45 degrees leading aft on the "St. Delphine."

Q. 19. For how long after the collision did the "St. Delphine" remain afloat?

A. Considerably less than five minutes.

Q. 20. After the collision were the "St. Delphine's" engines stopped? If not, should they have been stopped?

A. No. They should have been stopped.

Q. 21. Were all proper efforts made to prevent loss of life by those in charge of (a) the "St. Delphine," and (b) the "Aquamarine" after the collision?

A. (a) Yes; (b) Yes.

Q. 22. Was a good and proper lookout kept on board (a) the "St. Delphine," and (b) the "Aquamarine"?

A. (a) No; (b) Yes.

Q. 23. What was the cause of the casualty?

A. The cause of the casualty was an inefficient lookout on board of the "St. Delphine" coupled with the improper porting of her wheel before the light of the "Aquamarine" was seen by the man in charge of the navigation on the "St. Delphine."

Q. 24. How many members of the crew of the "St. Delphine" lost their lives as the result of the casualty?

A. Three, skipper Oliver George Tucker, R.N.R., and deckhands Alfred Hoskin, R.N.R., Angus Matheson, R.N.R.

R. F. HAYWARD,
Judge.

T. W. HANNEY, }
W. J. ELFORD, } Assessors.
F. BEE, }

Crew List.

Thomas Thorpe—Mate.
Thomas E. Joyce—Wireless Operator.
Wm. Henry Weston—First Engineer.
Leonard Hunter—Second Engineer.
Charles Kenneth Ryder—Fireman Trimmer.
Harry Sayle—Fireman Trimmer.

R.N.R. List.

Oliver Geo. Tucker—Skipper, R.N.R.
Alfred Hoskin—Deckhand, R.N.R.
George Thomson—Deckhand, R.N.R.
Angus Matheson—Deckhand, R.N.R.
George Cardus—Deckhand, R.N.R.
Andrew MacDonald—Deckhand, R.N.R.
James Lowden Stephen—Deckhand, R.N.R.

(Issued by the Board of Trade in London
on Wednesday, the 11th day of October, 1939)

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