

Report of Court.

(No. 7936).

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held in camera at the County Buildings, Glasgow, on 1st, 2nd and 4th of September, 1942, before James Wellwood Johnston, Esquire, Advocate, Sheriff-Substitute of Lanarkshire, assisted by Captain William James Elford and Captain J.S. Corfe as Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the steamship LOCHGARRY of Glasgow, on the 21st January, 1942, between Tor Point and Fair Head, on the North-East coast of Ireland while on a voyage in ballast from Glasgow for Oban.

The Court having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the loss of the vessel in question for the reasons stated in Annex hereto finds that the loss was probably due to an abnormal set towards the Irish coast owing to a moderate S.E. gale, occurring during darkness and in poor visibility owing to frequent snow and rain squalls, but was also contributed to by the default of the master.

The Court answers the questions submitted by the Ministry of Shipping as follows:-

1. By whom was the s.s. LOCHGARRY owned?
 - a. David MacBrayne, Limited, 44, Robertson Street, Glasgow, C.2.
2. When the ship set sail from Glasgow on the 20th January, 1942, was she in good and sea-worthy condition?
 - a. Yes.
3. Was the ship fitted with
 - (A) Wireless telegraphy?
 - (B) Direction finding apparatus?
 If so, were they in efficient working order throughout the voyage?
 - (A) Yes.
 - (B) Not fitted.
 - (A) Was in efficient working order.
4. Was the degaussing equipment in order when the ship set sail? Had the equipment been tested before the voyage? If the answer to the latter question is "Yes" were there any, and, if so, what adjustments made?
 - a. Yes.
 - A new coil was fitted in Glasgow before sailing and the equipment was tested and found in order.
5. Was the ship fitted with any, and, if so, what sounding appliances? If so fitted, were they in efficient working order throughout the voyage?
 - a. Yes. Kelvin hand sounding-machine together with deep-sea and hand lead-lines. They were all in efficient working order throughout the voyage.
6. Were the charts on board the ship adequate for the needs of the voyage?
 - a. Yes. Supplied by Sea Transport to whom the ship was under charter.
7.
 - (A) With how many compasses was the ship fitted?
 - (B) Where were they situated?
 - (C) When were they last professionally adjusted?
 - (D) Were they in efficient working order when the ship set sail, and thereafter throughout the voyage?
 - (E) Were the correct deviations to be applied to the compasses known to those on board?
 - (A) Three.
 - (B) On top of wheelhouse, in wheelhouse and aft.
 - (C) 12th September, 1941, at Leith.
 - (D) Yes, but some oscillation took place on alteration of courses which later settled down.
 - (E) Yes.

Q.8. Was any abnormal deviation in the steering compass found during the course of the voyage?

If so, was the master aware of it? If the answer to the latter question is "Yes"

- (A) When was the master aware of the error?
- (B) Did he take every reasonable step to allow for the error?

A. No, only slight.

- (A) When the ship was approaching Cloch boom the pilot notified the captain of a slight error in deviation on the course they were then steering.
- (B) Yes.

Q.9. At the time the ship set sail what was the state of

- (A) The weather? Hazy.
- (B) The wind? S.E.'ly.
- (C) The visibility? Moderate.
- (D) The tide? Ebb.

Were there any, and, if so, what alterations in (A), (B), (C), and (D) between the time the ship set sail and the time of the stranding?

A. (A) After leaving Glasgow and proceeding down river the weather was hazy but cleared up approaching Cloch Point and remained so until the pilot left at Ascog.

After the pilot left the wind increased and visibility became poorer.

Approaching Pladda the wind increased to a moderate gale, force 6, visibility one to two miles between the snow and rain squalls. This weather continued until time of stranding.

- (B) S.E. x S. Fresh wind to moderate gale.
- (C) Bad.
- (D) Slack water was about 8 p.m., after which flood tide set in.

Q.10. What courses were set after the pilot was dropped? Were there any, and, if so, what subsequent alterations made in the course of the ship? Were the courses or course set, proper and adequate to be set in the surrounding circumstances?

A. When pilot left, ship steered Admiralty courses until reaching Admiralty buoy marked A at 10.15 p.m., when a course of N.45°W. by compass was set to pass the Mull of Kintyre at about 3½ miles. Later, after 11 p.m., an alteration of course 5° to the west was made. The courses laid down were proper and adequate.

Q.11. Were soundings taken during the course of the voyage? If so, when and where were they taken, and what depths did they record? If no soundings were taken should they have been taken?

A. No. It might have been prudent to take a sounding shortly before the stranding, but it is unlikely that this would have been of any value.

Q.12. (A) When was the ship's last correct position ascertained after leaving Glasgow?

- (B) By what means was it ascertained?
- (C) By whom was it ascertained?
- (D) What was it?

A. (A) At 10.15 p.m.
(B) By bearing.
(C) By master.
(D) Buoy marked A.

Q.13. During the period between the ascertaining of the last correct position and the stranding were there any, and, if so, what lights seen and correctly identified?

A. Nothing sighted.

Q.14. Was a good and proper lookout kept on board the ship up to the time of the stranding?

A. Yes.

Q.15. Where and when did the ship strand?

A. Probably somewhere between Tor Point and Fair Head on the N.E. coast of Ireland about 12.25 a.m. on the 21st January, 1942.

Q.16. What steps did the master take after the ship stranded? Were they in the circumstances reasonable steps and best calculated to minimise the effects of the stranding?

A. The engines were put full speed astern and the ship came off at 12.35 a.m. The engines were then put slow astern and ship kept stern on to wind and sea on account of the damage forward, thus minimising the effects of the stranding. Rockets were fired at intervals and wireless messages asking assistance sent out. These were reasonable steps best calculated to minimise the effects of the stranding.

Q.17. Were any messages received after the stranding? If so, what were they? From whom and when were they received?

A. Yes.
Wireless messages were sent by the Portpatrick, Malin Head and Tiree radio stations. A message was also sent from Portpatrick that a tug was being sent to the vessel's assistance. The ship later received a wireless message from the tug stating she would arrive about 3.45 a.m.

Q.18. At what time was the order "Abandon ship" given by the master? Where was the ship at this time?

A. Between 3 a.m. and 4 a.m.
Position unascertained, but probably off Fair Head.

Q.19. Was the ship navigated in a proper and seamanlike manner.

(A) before, and
(B) after the stranding?

A. (A) No.
(B) Yes.

Q.20. How many of those on board the ship lost their lives as a result of the casualty?

A. 23 lost their lives.

Q.21. What was the cause of the casualty?

Was the stranding caused or contributed to by wrongful act or default of the master, Robert Robertson MacKechnie?

A. Bad weather and very poor visibility together with an abnormal set towards the Irish coast. The stranding was, however, contributed to by the default of the master. In the prevailing conditions, and not having sighted the Mull Light, he should have reduced speed and turned his ship into the wind until daylight or clearer weather.

The Court severely censures the master on this account.

Dated this 4th day of September, 1942.

J. WELLWOOD JOHNSTON.

Judge.

W.J. ELFORD.

J.S. CORFE.

Assessors.

ANNEX TO THE REPORT.

This was an Inquiry into the circumstances attending the loss by stranding of the s.s. LOCHGARRY in ballast off the N.E. coast of Ireland.

The Inquiry was held in the County Buildings, Glasgow, on the 1st, 2nd and 4th of September, 1942, before James Wellwood Johnston, Esquire, Advocate, Sheriff-Substitute of Lanarkshire and Capt. W.J. Elford and Capt. J.S. Corfe, Nautical Assessors.

Mr. Thomas Walter Donald, Solicitor, Glasgow, appeared for the Ministry of Shipping.

Mr. George T. Harvey, Solicitor, Glasgow, appeared for the Owners of the s.s. LOCHGARRY, David MacBrayne, Ltd., 44, Robertson Street, Glasgow, C.2.

Colonel Spens appeared for the master.

The s.s. LOCHGARRY registered at the Port of Glasgow, Official No. 108764, and rigged as a fore and aft schooner, was constructed of steel.

She was built at Pointhouse, Glasgow, 1898, and is 1669.81 gross and 727.40 registered tonnage, 265 feet in length and 33.6 feet in beam. Speed $10\frac{1}{2}$ knots.

s.s. LOCHGARRY left Glasgow at 1 p.m. on the 20th January, 1942, for a voyage to Oban in ballast with a crew of 49 hands all told and one passenger.

She proceeded down the River Clyde with a pilot on board who was discharged at Ascog in Rothesay Bay. The weather which had been hazy coming down the River Clyde was now clearing a little, wind being S.E. x S. fresh breeze.

The master then shaped his courses according to Admiralty instructions. Shortly after the pilot left however, the weather worsened the wind increased to a moderate gale and the visibility becoming poor with squalls of snow and rain. Admiralty buoy D was sighted on the port bow and it was then found out the ship had been set 1 mile to the westward of her course. The log was streamed off Holy Island. Only a glimpse of Ailsa Craig light, which was shut in by a squall before a bearing could be taken, was seen.

The master on taking a departure from D buoy set a course for A buoy allowing 10 degrees leeway which was found to be too much as A buoy was made on the starboard bow instead of port. Ship was hauled to the westward to pass close to the buoy. A course was then set N50W magnetic to pass Mull of Kintyre $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles distance the time being 10.15 p.m. and the log showing 29 miles. The wind was still S.E. x S. moderate gale with snow squalls.

The ship was kept at full speed and the master expected to sight the Mull of Kintyre light at about midnight. The log at midnight showed 48 miles. The light was not picked up and the ship struck the rocks at 12.45 a.m. which the master thought was the Mull of Kintyre, but which eventually turned out to be the Irish coast.

The master then ordered the engines to be put full speed astern and at 12.35 a.m. she refloated. The engines were then reduced to slow astern and her stern kept to wind and sea as it was discovered the collision bulkhead in the fore peak had gone. The master then gave orders for some members of the crew to go down No. 1 hatch and shore up the watertight bulkhead in that hold, whilst others were sent to get the two after lifeboats ready for abandoning ship.

The master then sent out a wireless S.O.S. for assistance, unfortunately, of course, giving his position as on the Mull of Kintyre; a reply was received from Portpatrick that a tug would be sent. Nothing however was seen of the tug.

At about 2.40 a.m. a lamp signal from the shore was seen flashing the letter U which reads you are running into danger. The master then turned his ship's bows on to the wind and sea to get off the land. The vessel began to make water rapidly and the master gave orders to abandon ship between 3 and 4 a.m.

The two after lifeboats were then got away, one in charge of the 1st and 2nd mates and one in charge of the 3rd mate.

The master and chief engineer stayed on board the ship until about 5.30 a.m. when they left in another lifeboat and landed on Rathlin Island at 6.30 a.m., where they found 25 others of the ship's company safe with 23 missing and who were subsequently found to have lost their lives.

Nothing was seen of the ship afterwards.

We have not reviewed the evidence as to the behaviour of the compass because while the possibility of material compass deviation cannot be positively excluded, we are satisfied that this was not the cause of the ship's failure to keep her intended course.

The Court's difficulty in arriving at a completely satisfactory explanation of this casualty has been greatly increased by the fact that all the ship's papers, charts, logs, etc. were lost. That there was some degree of fault on the part of the master is clear. His failure to sight the Mull Light or otherwise establish his position should have caused him sufficient anxiety as to make him take precautionary measures at least 15 minutes before the stranding. Owing, however, to the abnormal conditions of weather and set which we are satisfied existed, the Court thinks that his certificate need not be dealt with but that he should be severely reprimanded.

J. WELLWOOD JOHNSTON.

Judge.

We concur in this Report.

W.J. ELFORD.

J.S. CORFE.

Assessors.