

“BOTHALWOOD.”

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of a formal Investigation held at the Town Hall, North Shields, on the 16th and 17th days of February 1881, before JOHN HEALEY and RICHARD SWAN, Esquires, assisted by Captains KENNEDY and COWIE, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the sailing ship “BOTHALWOOD,” in St. Ouen’s Bay, Jersey, on the 20th of January 1881.

Report of Court.

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 stranding of the barque “Bothalwood” on the 20th of January last, was caused by the vessel having run considerably to the southward whilst the rudder was out of order, and proper measures were not taken to verify the position of the ship. And the Court finds that William Marshall, the master, is in default; but taking into consideration the great number of difficulties he had to encounter, and the state of the sea and weather, the Court refrains from dealing with his certificate, but strongly censures him for not having used his lead more frequently, and in neglecting the navigation of his vessel during the repairs to his rudder.

Dated this 17th day of February 1881.

(Signed) JOHN HEALEY, } Justices.
RICHARD SWAN, }

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) H. C. KENNEDY, } Assessors.
W. COWIE, }

Annex to the Report.

The “Bothalwood,” official number 67,373, was a barque-rigged vessel built of wood at New York in 1856. Her gross tonnage was 912.03 tons. She belonged to the port of Newcastle, and was owned by Mr. Thomas Robson Miller, of Newcastle, who held 56/64th shares, and Mr. Robert Muir, also of Newcastle, who held 8/64th shares, Mr. Miller being managing owner. From the evidence adduced, the “Bothalwood” left Carthagena on the 4th of January 1881 for Leith, with a cargo of esparto grass, estimated about 480 tons, and a quantity of gravel for ballast; her draught of water was 17 feet forward and 17 feet 6 inches aft. Her crew consisted of 18 hands all told, including Mr. William Marshall, the master, who holds a certificate of competency as master, No. 28,931. They passed Gibraltar on the 8th January 1881, and then experienced southerly and easterly winds, until they sighted Bishop’s Rock Light, which at 10.30 p.m. on the 16th of January 1881, bore E.S.E., distant six or seven miles. The vessel was then put about, and stood to the southward, the wind being then about E.S.E., and the speed about 7 knots. During the morning watch of the 17th, they tacked and stood to the N.E., and at noon found by cross bearings that Bishop’s Rock Lighthouse bore N.E., distant two miles, and again they tacked to the southward, the wind about E.S.E., and made a south course until 8 p.m. The wind then began to haul gradually to N.E., and the vessel made a S. by E. course, from 8 to 10 p.m., and from 10 o’clock until midnight an E. course by compass, and according to the master’s evidence she continued to make an E. by N. course until she struck in St. Ouen’s Bay, in the island of Jersey, at 10 minutes past 12 a.m. on the 20th ultimo, and finally became a total wreck. At 8 a.m. of the morning of the 18th, the master discovered the rudder-head sprung, and it was not until 3 p.m. of that day they got it secured and were able to steer the ship by means of tackles hooked to an eyebolt in the after part of the rudder. Whilst the crew were employed securing the rudder, they appeared to have little command over the ship. She was then under lower topsails and foresail, and they could only keep her to the wind by setting the

mizen; and the Court is of opinion that the vessel must have frequently run off to the southward at considerable speed during the squalls, and as she was a clipper, she must have run very fast at those times unobserved by the master, as his attention was fully occupied in securing the rudder. At 3 p.m., the ship being again under command, the upper topsails were set; the wind was still from the north, blowing hard at times, and continuous heavy snow showers, with little intermission, had been encountered since they sighted Scilly Islands on the night of the 16th. They continued steering an E. by N. course, and at 6 p.m. of the 19th a bright light was seen for a short time on the starboard quarter, which was supposed to be that of a fishing vessel, but the Court conclude that it must have been a light on the north coast of France; and about 7 p.m. they hove the ship to, and a cast of the lead was taken, which shewed a depth of 40 fathoms, bottom light fine sand and shells; but such soundings could not have been correct, and if the master had consulted his chart then, it would have shown him by his own computation that he was greatly in error; and the captain concluded from the result of the soundings that he was in mid-channel, south of the Eddystone. An E. by N. course was maintained until 1 a.m. of the 19th, when it appears that the barrel of the wheel to which the tackles had been secured gave way; the vessel again became unmanageable until about seven in the morning, when a new barrel was made, and, as in the former case, she frequently fell off unnoticed to the southward. For the purpose of fixing a new barrel on the spindle of the wheel and over the screw, it was necessary to unship all the iron work in connection with it; and, according to the evidence, it remained from about one till seven a.m. lying on the starboard side of the binnacle; and the Court is strongly of opinion that so large a quantity of iron thus placed must have affected the compass, and the ship in consequence must have made a much more southerly course than the master had any idea of. There was another compass on deck, a few feet before the mizen mast, but it does not appear that the two compasses were compared at any time whilst the rudder or steering gear was under repair; neither was the log nor lead again used, as already mentioned; only one cast of the lead was taken, although the weather continued thick with snow and sleet. At noon on the 19th their position was in latitude 49°25 N., and longitude 4°56 W.; but the captain did not take any cast of the lead to verify his reckoning at that time; had he done so, the depth of water and nature of the bottom would have warned him that his assumed position was an erroneous one, and the vessel, instead of being where he concluded he was, must have been close to the French coast; and the Court has no hesitation in making this statement from the fact of the “Bothalwood” going on shore where she did about twelve hours afterwards. Nothing of any importance occurred until shortly after midnight, when the weather suddenly cleared a little, and some of the crew then descried what they thought was a steamer’s smoke on the port quarter, and immediately afterwards the second mate discovered it was land. He called the master, and the helm was at once put hard-a-port; almost at the same moment the vessel struck the rocks, paid off a little, then forged ahead a little, struck again, and became fast. The sails were shivered, then put aback, but of no avail; the rocks penetrated her bottom, and she soon filled with water. The two boats were put out, and the crew left the vessel about 9 a.m. on the 20th ultimo, and landed on the island of Jersey. No lives were lost. On the same day the sea began breaking over the ship, and she commenced to break up, and finally went to pieces.

The Court is of opinion that the loss of this vessel must be attributed to two causes: first, by running off unobserved so much to the southward whilst not under command, and for which no allowance was made by the master; and, secondly, by the compass being influenced by the iron steering gear having been allowed to remain so long on the starboard side of the binnacle, as already described.

At the conclusion of the evidence the following questions were submitted to the Court:—

1. What was the cause of the stranding of the “Bothalwood” in St. Ouen’s Bay, Jersey, on the 20th

of January last, and how did it happen that William Marshall, the master, and William Norquay, the mate, supposed her to be in close proximity to the Start?

2. Whether proper and seamanlike measures were taken between 12 and 4 a.m. of the 17th or 18th of January to tack the vessel, and, if so, how it happened that the main yard caught aback?

3. What was the cause of the rudder head being sprung, and whether prompt and proper measures were taken to secure the rudder, and whether the vessel was properly navigated until such rudder was secured?

4. Whether the placing of the ironwork of the rudder in proximity to the binnacle compass was justifiable, and whether it in any way altered or affected such compass?

5. Whether any measures were taken to verify the accuracy of such compass, and to ascertain the deviation or variation thereof after the said ironwork had been placed near it; and whether the said William Marshall was thereafter justified in trusting to such compass?

6. Whether every proper effort was thereafter made from time to time to ascertain and verify the position of the said vessel?

7. Whether the lead was used with sufficient frequency?

8. Whether the said William Marshall made proper allowance for tide and leeway after the breaking adrift of the rudder; and whether he was justified in keeping his vessel so long on the E. by N. course without taking any steps to verify his assumed position?

9. Whether the said William Marshall was on deck at a time when the safety of his vessel required his personal supervision? And

10. What was the light reported between 7 and 8 p.m. of the 19th of January; and whether the said William Norquay took proper measures to ascertain what light it was?

If the Court find the said William Marshall and the said William Norquay, or either of them, in default, their or his certificate or certificates should, in the opinion of the Board of Trade, be dealt with.

Dated this 16th day of January 1881.

(Signed) LANCEL DE HAMEL,
For the Board of Trade.

Judgment.

1. The Court considers that the cause of the stranding of the barque "Bothalwood" on the 20th day of January last was, firstly, by her having run considerably to the southward during the time the rudder was out of order, and whilst the same was being repaired, for which no allowance was made by the

master; and, secondly, through placing the ironwork apparatus so near the binnacle that the compass have been affected. The Court have no evidence to guide them to the conclusion that the vessel was in close proximity to the Start.

2. There is not sufficient evidence to satisfy the Court whether or no the main yard caught aback.

3. There is no evidence to show what was the cause of the rudder head being sprung, but prompt measures were taken to secure the same; and the Court is of opinion that the vessel was not sufficiently carelessly navigated whilst the rudder was being secured.

4. The Court finds that the ironwork of the rudder was allowed to remain much too long a time in the proximity of the binnacle compass, and that it has been affected the same.

5. No measures were taken to verify the accuracy of such compass, nor to ascertain the deviation or variation thereof after the ironwork had been placed near it; and the Court finds that the master was not justified in trusting to the same after the ironwork had been placed near it.

6. Proper efforts were not made from time to time to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel.

7. The lead was not used with sufficient frequency.

8. The master, William Marshall, did not make proper allowance for tide and leeway after the rudder broke adrift, and he ought to have taken steps to verify his position on the E. by N. course.

9. The master was on deck at a time when the safety of the vessel required his personal supervision.

10. The Court is of opinion, taking into consideration that the vessel stranded in St. Ouen's Bay about 12 hours after a light was reported, that such light was a light on the French coast; and the Court finds that sufficient measures were not taken to ascertain what light it was.

The Court finds that William Marshall, the master, is in default, but taking into consideration the number of difficulties he had to encounter, and the state of the sea and weather, the Court refrains from dealing with his certificate, but strongly censures him for not having used his lead frequently, and in consequence of neglecting the navigation of the ship during the repair of the rudder.

As regards the chief officer, the Court finds that the chief officer, William Norquay, is not in default.

(Signed) JOHN HEALY, }
RICHARD SWAN, } Jun

We concur in the above judgment.

(Signed) H. C. KENNEDY, }
W. COWIE, } Ass

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