

(No. 2452.)

“ DORDOGNE ” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of a formal Investigation held at Cardiff on the sixth and seventh days of February 1885, before ROBERT ARTHUR VALPY, Esq., Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captain CASTLE and Captain VAUX, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British S.S. “ DORDOGNE,” of Cardiff, on the Isle of Oleron, on the fifth day of January 1885.

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 said ship was due to careless navigation on the part of the master, Andrew Hurry, for which the Court finds him in default, and suspends his certificate for six calendar months.

Dated this 7th day of February 1885.

(Signed) R. A. VALPY, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) JOHN S. CASTLE, } Assessors.  
C. VAUX, R.N.R., }

Annex.

The “ Dordogne ” was an iron steam screw ship, built at Wallsend on Tyne in the year 1882, of 728 gross and 463 registered tonnage. She was fitted with two inverted compound surface condensing engines of 99 horse power combined, and was registered at the port of Cardiff, her official number being 84,672. She was the property of the Cardiff Steamship Company, Limited, Mr. Horatio Hooper of that port being the managing owner. Mr. Hooper was called as a witness, and being interrogated as to the insurance of the vessel refused to give any information upon the point.

The “ Dordogne ” was employed in trading between Cardiff and Bordeaux, usually making two voyages in a month, and carrying coals from Cardiff and bringing back pitwood or a mixed cargo from Bordeaux. She left Cardiff for Bordeaux with a cargo of about 1,000 tons of chiefly consisting of coal, patent fuel, and cases of tin on the 2nd January last, having a draught of water on leaving dock of 15 feet 2 inches forward and 16 feet aft. Her crew consisted of 16 hands all told, and she was under the command of Mr. Andrew Hurry, who held a certificate of competency as master, No. 0547, and dated 13th January 1883. Mr. Hurry had been in command for nine months. There seems to be no doubt that the ship on starting upon this voyage was in good and seaworthy condition. She was well provided with steam and hand pumps, and carried a life-boat and two other boats. She was supplied with one pole compass, a steering compass in the wheel house on the bridge, and an azimuth compass, which the master informed the Court was never used aft. These compasses had not been tested since the ship was first swung as a new ship, when a deviation card was supplied showing a westerly deviation of a quarter of a point on south easterly courses, and it appears that no observations were ever afterwards taken to test their accuracy. The want of attention shown to prevail with regard to the compasses extended to other details in the navigation of the vessel. No attention seems to have been paid to charts or sailing directions, and the master's evidence itself left much to be desired in the way of accuracy and clearness, and indicated an habitual slowness and looseness of observation. After passing Ushant early in the morning of the 4th, a course of S. ½ W. was shaped, which about 5 a.m. on the Lights on the Saints being in one was altered to S.E. At the same time the patent log was set, but at 10 the line broke and the log was lost. There was no

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hand log on board. At 10 a.m. the course was again altered to S.E. ½ S., and continued until 8 p.m. The Ile d'Yeu Light was sighted between 8 and 9 p.m. bearing N.E. by E., and distant in the master's judgment about 8 miles. The course was then altered to S.E. by S. The master stated that during the night he was not in bed at all, but passed the time between the deck and the chart room. He saw Chassiron Light at 2.30 a.m. on the 5th. The bearing he was unable to give, but he estimated the distance at 8 miles. He went into the chart room at 2.45 a.m., leaving the chief officer in charge, with instructions to call him if anything was seen. The weather throughout the voyage had been fine, although more or less hazy. During the night of the 4th a heavy swell set in from the westward, but no allowance was made for it. At 3.30 a.m. the chief officer altered the course to S.S.E. He states very positively that he immediately reported this to the master, and also told him that he thought they were very close to the shore. According to the chief officer, the master at once came on deck, but on this point there is a direct contradiction between the two. The master declares that he was not called until 3.50, and that he went on deck at once, but he admits that the mate had reported the change of course made at 3.30. We have already alluded to the master's statement that he had passed the night between the deck and the chartroom, and upon the whole it does seem to the Court that if shortly before the ship struck he was not actually on the bridge, he was yet close by in the chartroom, and within the immediate call of the officer of the watch. The ship struck at seven minutes to 4 a.m., at which time the master was on deck. Up to that time the ship had been kept going full speed, and although all the witnesses agree in stating that the weather was hazy, while both the master and mate go further and say that it was thick, the speed was not reduced, and no attempt whatever was made to use the lead. The ship appears to have struck on the Chardonniere rocks on the Ile D'Oleron, 13 or 14 miles out of her proper course. On striking, the engines were stopped, then put full speed astern, and then full speed ahead, but without effect, and the ship eventually became a total wreck. All hands took to the boats, and very little of their effects were saved. They stayed by the ship until daybreak, and were subsequently taken in tow by a fisherman and landed in safety at La Rochelle.

At the close of the evidence the following questions were submitted to the Court and it was intimated that in the opinion of the Board of Trade the certificates of the master and chief officer should be dealt with.

1. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?
2. What number of compasses had she on board and where were they placed? Did the master ascertain their deviation by observation from time to time?
3. Whether the errors of the compasses were correctly ascertained and the proper corrections to the courses applied?
4. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel when Ile d'Yeu Light was sighted?
5. Whether a safe and proper alteration was then made in the course at 11.30 p.m. on the 4th January, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tides and currents?
6. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel when Balcines Light was sighted about 1 a.m. on the 5th January?
7. Whether the master was on deck at a time when the safety of the vessel required his personal supervision?
8. Whether when Chassiron Light was sighted at 3 a.m. the chief officer took prompt and proper measures to call the master.
9. Whether the chief officer then took proper measures to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel. Whether he was justified in altering the course, and whether the alteration was a safe and proper one?
10. Whether the weather was thick, and if so, whether the chief officer was justified in neglecting to reduce the speed of the vessel?
11. Whether the total neglect of the lead was justifiable.

- 12. Whether a good and proper look out was kept?
- 13. Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care. And finally, Whether the master and chief officer are or either of them is in default.

The following answers to the foregoing questions were given by the Court:—

- 1. The stranding of the vessel was due to careless navigation.
- 2. There were three compasses—a pole compass, a steering compass in the wheelhouse, and a compass aft, fitted as an azimuth.
- 3. The ship was swung when she was first built, and a deviation card was supplied, but since that time no attempt seems to have been made to ascertain the errors of the compasses. The master admitted that he had never taken an observation for the purpose.
- 4. No measures were taken to verify the position of the vessel when the Ile d'Yeu Light was sighted.
- 5. The alteration made at 11.30 p.m. on the 4th, was in the right direction, but was not sufficient for safety. No allowance was made for tides or currents.
- 6. No measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel when Balcines Light was sighted about 1 a.m. on the 5th.

7. The master was on deck when his personal supervision was required.

8. As the master had himself seen the light at 2.45 a.m., it was not necessary that the chief officer report it to the master.

9. The chief officer took no measures to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel. He was justified in altering the course, and altered it in a safe direction, but the change made proved not to be sufficient.

10. The weather seems to have been very hazy. Under the circumstances the speed of the vessel ought to have been reduced, but it appears to the Court that it was the master's duty to have seen that this was done.

11. The total neglect of the lead was not justifiable.

12. A proper look-out was kept.

13. The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

14. The Court is of opinion that the master, and the master only, is in default.

(Signed) R. A. VALPY.

We concur.

(Signed) JOHN S. CASTLE, } Assessors.  
C. VAUX, R.N.R. }

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