

(No. 3000.)

"BOURNEMOUTH" (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of the formal Investigation held at the Sessions House, Westminster, on the 17th of September 1886, before H. C. ROTHERY, Esquire, Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captains RONALDSON and PATTISON, as Assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the steamship "BOURNEMOUTH," near the High Light-house, Portland, on the 27th of August 1886.

Report of Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances of the above mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons annexed, that the stranding and loss of the said ship was due to the wrongful acts and defaults of William Perren, the master, and it accordingly suspends his certificate for twelve months, but recommends that during the period of such suspension a first mate's certificate be granted to him.

The Court is not asked to make any order as to costs.

Dated this 17th day of September 1886.

(Signed) H. C. ROTHERY,
Wreck Commissioner.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) A. RONALDSON, } Assessors.
JOHN L. PATTISON, }

Annex to the Report.

This case was heard at Westminster on the 17th of September 1886, when Mr. Hunter appeared for the Board of Trade, and Mr. Trevanion for the master of the "Bournemouth." The managing owner of the vessel was present, but was not represented by either counsel or solicitor. Six witnesses having been produced by the Board of Trade and examined, Mr. Hunter handed in a statement of the questions upon which the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court. Mr. Trevanion, having then produced a witness, addressed the Court on behalf of the master, and Mr. Hunter having been heard in reply, the Court proceeded to give judgment on the questions on which its opinion had been asked. The circumstances of the case are as follows:—

The "Bournemouth" was a small iron paddle wheel steamship, belonging to the Port of Poole, of 232 tons gross and 684 tons net register, and was fitted with engines of 240 horse power; being designed apparently to obtain a maximum speed with a minimum payment of tonnage dues. She was built at Leith in the year 1884, and, at the time of her loss, was the property of the Bournemouth, Swanage and Poole Steam Packet Company, Limited, Mr. Edward Bicker being the manager, her usual employment being to carry excursionists between ports on the south coast of England. She left Torquay at about 3.50 p.m. on the 27th of August last, with a crew of 14 hands all told, and 180 passengers, bound to Bournemouth, and at 4 p.m. passed Hope's Nose, when she was put on an E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S. course to pass the Bill of Portland. The weather at this time was fine and clear, the wind light from about S.W., and the tide running to the eastward, and the vessel proceeded on her course with her engines going at full speed, making from 15 to 15½ knots through the water, and allowing for wind and tide, which were in her favour, from 16 to 16½ knots over the ground. At about 4.30 p.m. the captain left the bridge, leaving the deck in charge of the boatswain or acting mate, and, having had his tea, came up again at about 5.30, when he found that a thick fog had set in. The vessel, however, was still continued on her course, making from 16 to 16½ knots over the ground until about 6 p.m., when, the fog still continuing, the course was altered $\frac{1}{2}$ a point

to the southward, to E.S.E., and the master directed the chief engineer to ease the steam off, but the telegraph was still kept at full speed. Soon afterwards the master went on to the upper bridge, leaving the boatswain on the lower bridge alongside the wheel to watch the steering; and at about 6.50 one of the look-out men forward sang out "land ahead," upon which the master immediately telegraphed to the engine-room to stop and reverse "full speed," but before they had time to get the engines astern, the vessel struck heavily on the rocks and became fast. Having gone forward and examined the damage, the master came to the conclusion that, if she was backed off the rocks, she would very probably sink in deep water, and he therefore very wisely ordered the engines to be stopped, and having lowered the boats sent them off with some of the passengers to the shore. Rockets and blue lights were also burnt and the whistle blown, and some shore boats having come off, they succeeded with their assistance, as well as that of the coastguard, in landing the whole of the passengers in safety. At about 11.30 p.m. the vessel was found to be breaking up, and accordingly they all left, and she soon became a total wreck. The place where the vessel struck was close under the cliffs on the west side of the Bill of Portland, and about midway between the Beacon and the High Light.

These being the facts of the case, the first question upon which our opinion has been asked is, "What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?" The cause of the stranding was that the vessel was kept too far to the northward, instead of being steered on a more southerly course so as to give the Bill of Portland a wider berth.

The second question which we are asked is, "What number of compasses had the vessel on board; where were they placed, and when and by whom were they last adjusted?" She seems to have had two compasses on board, but only one of them was mounted, and that one was placed just before the wheel on the lower bridge, and was used to navigate the vessel as well as to steer by. It is said to have been adjusted in May last, but where and by whom we were not told.

The third question which we are asked is, "Did the master ascertain the deviation of his compasses from time to time; were the errors correctly ascertained, and the proper correction to the courses applied?" The master told us that he verified his compass from time to time, and that on the course which he was steering, E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S., it was generally quite correct; but that on that day, in coming from Bournemouth to Torquay, he had found in steering his usual course, W. by N. $\frac{1}{2}$ N., which should have taken him to Hope's Nose, that she was heading for Berry Head, which is some four miles to the southward of it, shewing that the vessel's head had a tendency on that course to go to port. And he said that on the return voyage he put her on the usual course, E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S., intending to test the accuracy of his compass.

The fourth question that we are asked is, "Whether a safe and proper course was set and steered after leaving Torquay, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents?" The course steered, as we have seen, after passing Hope's Nose, from 4 till after 6 p.m., was E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S., and then, until she struck at 6.50, E.S.E. Now the master produced a Captain Bowring, the master of a vessel called the "Empress," which had left Torquay about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an hour before, bound also to Bournemouth, and with which it was said that they were racing. Captain Bowring told us that his course from Torquay to pass clear of the Bill of Portland, during the present year, was E. by S. $\frac{3}{4}$ S., or a $\frac{1}{4}$ of a point more southerly than the "Bournemouth's" course. He also told us that at about 6.55 p.m., the weather at the time being intensely foggy, he saw at only a very short distance, and on his starboard bow, the rock which lies off the end of the Bill of Portland, whereas he ought to have made it on the port bow, so that the "Empress" herself was within an ace of getting ashore. Now if the course steered by the "Empress," namely E. by S. $\frac{3}{4}$ S., took her too far to the northward, it is obvious that the course steered by the "Bournemouth," E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S. for about two hours, and then E.S.E. for less than one hour, would take her still more to the northward, and would consequently not be either a safe or a proper course.

The fifth question that we are asked is, "Whether, when the weather became thick with fog, a safe and proper alteration was made in the course, and whether the speed of the vessel was promptly and sufficiently reduced?" The weather, we are told, became foggy at about a quarter after 5, but the master was not informed of it until he returned to the deck at about half-past 5. He still, however, continued to go at the same speed, 16 to 16½ knots over the ground, and on the same course, E. by S. ½ S., for half-an-hour afterwards, although, according to the evidence of the look-out men, the weather was so thick that it was not possible to see more than about 10 yards ahead. Such a course was, in our opinion, utterly unjustifiable.

The sixth question which we are asked is, "Whether the master took proper measures to ascertain the distance run?" The distance from Hope's Nose to the Bill of Portland is as nearly as possible 39 miles. She passed Hope's Nose at 4 p.m., and continued for two hours going at full speed, making from 16 to 16½ knots an hour over the ground, so that in that time she would have got over some 32 to 33 miles, leaving only 6 or 7 miles to go before reaching the Bill of Portland. And yet the master continued for another 50 minutes to go at what he called three-quarters speed, which he said would be about 8 or 10 miles an hour; and if his estimate was correct that would have taken him beyond the Bill of Portland. Indeed, the master admitted that, when the vessel struck, he was under the impression that she had passed the Bill of Portland, and had got to the S.E. of it. No doubt the master estimated pretty correctly the distance run, but he had no right, with the weather so thick as it then was, to continue his course so as to pass the Bill of Portland without satisfying himself that he was clear to the southward of it, and this he took no steps to ascertain.

The seventh question which we are asked is, "Whether the total neglect of the lead was justifiable, especially having regard to the thick state of the weather?" Seeing that the master had reason to think, from the course steered in going from Bournemouth to Torquay that day, that his compass was not to be relied on, he had no right, with the fog so thick as we are told it was, to attempt to pass the Bill of Portland without knowing his position, which he could easily have done by taking a cast of the lead. In our opinion the neglect of the lead was in this case utterly unjustifiable.

The eighth question which we are asked is, "Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?" It seems that the captain was on the upper bridge, and the boat-

swain on the lower bridge, close to the man at the wheel, and that there were two men stationed forward on the look-out; but no amount of look-out would have been sufficient to prevent the vessel going ashore with the vessel going at the speed she was, and the fog so dense that they could not see more than 10 yards ahead.

The ninth question which we are asked is, "Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?" To continue going at a speed of from 16 to 16½ knots an hour over the ground, or even at 8 or 10 knots an hour, through a fog so dense that you could not see more than 10 yards ahead, on a course which he ought to have known would take him very close to, if not on, the Bill of Portland, with his compass not to be relied on, and not knowing his true position, was in our opinion a most improper and unseamanlike act.

The tenth question which we are asked is, "Whether the master is in default?" And it is added that, "in the opinion of the Board of Trade, the certificate of the master should be dealt with." In that opinion the Court entirely concurs. It is not denied that the blame for this casualty rests entirely with the master, but it is said that he has been for 22 years, first as mate and then as master, in the service of the Isle of Wight Steam Packet Company, and for the last three years as master in the employ of the owners of the "Bournemouth," during all the time navigating on this coast, with which, therefore, he must have been perfectly familiar. This, however, would not justify him in navigating this vessel in the very reckless way in which he appears to have done. Owing to his misconduct, a vessel worth, we are told, from 10,000l. to 12,000l. has been entirely lost, and the lives of 180 passengers placed in great peril; and if there had been a little more wind and sea, in all probability not a soul would have escaped. The assessors are of opinion that this is one of the worst cases that has come before them recently, and they think that his certificate ought to be suspended for 12 months.

The Court, however, on the application of his solicitor, agreed to recommend to the Board of Trade that during the suspension of his master's certificate he be allowed a first mate's certificate.

(Signed) H. C. ROTHERY,
Wreck Commissioner.

We concur.

(Signed) A. RONALDSON, } Assessors.
JOHN L. PAITSON, }

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