

(No. 3706.)

“KNIGHT TEMPLAR” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at the Town Hall, Hull, on the 8th, 9th, and 10th days of January 1889, before E. C. Twiss, Esquire, Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captain DRAGE and Captain BRAGG, into the circumstances attending the abandonment of the British steamship “KNIGHT TEMPLAR,” of North Shields, after striking a rock in the vicinity of Ushant on the 18th of December last.

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 cause of the vessel striking the rock was attributable (1) to improper courses having been set and steered at and after 3 p.m. on the 18th of December last, and (2) to the total neglect of the lead when approaching the land in thick weather. The Court finds the master, Mr. James Warskitt, alone in default, and suspends his certificate of competency as master, number 011,048, for four calendar months from the date hereof.

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

Dated this 10th day of January 1889.

(Signed) E. C. Twiss, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) Z. B. DRAGE, J. THRELFALL BRAGG, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was held at the Town Hall, Hull, on the 8th, 9th, and 10th days of January instant, when Mr. Saxelbye represented the Board of Trade, whilst Mr. Rollit appeared on behalf of the master, and Mr. Holdich for the chief officer. The second officer and chief engineer were also parties to the investigation, and appeared personally, but were not professionally represented.

The “Knight Templar,” official number 70,393, was a schooner-rigged steamship, built of iron, at Sunderland, by Messrs. Austin & Hunter, in 1874, and was owned by Mr. Henry Samman, of Hull, and others, the former being the managing owner. Her dimensions were: length, 262 ft.; breadth, 32 2/5 ft.; and depth of hold, 23 9/10 ft.; and her registered tonnage, 1,023 tons. She was fitted with two compound surface condensing engines of 160 horse-power combined. North Shields was her port of registry.

The “Knight Templar” left Odessa on the 28th of November last, bound for London with a cargo of 2,100 tons of wheat and barley in bulk, under the command of Mr. James Warskitt, who held a certificate of competency, number 011,048, and dated February 4th 1885, with a crew of twenty-two hands all told, her draught of water being 20 ft. 3 ins., fore and aft, and with a freeboard in salt water of about 5 ft. 5 ins. There were five compasses on board, all of which appear to have been in good condition, the one on the bridge being used as the standard by which courses were set and steered. They were last adjusted in March 1888, in Grimsby Roads, by Mr. Bee, Compass Adjuster, Hull. The vessel carried four boats, two of which were lifeboats, and the remaining two, a gig and jolly boat. They were kept hanging in davits, on chocks, and were fully equipped. The vessel was built with four watertight compartments, and was well found in all respects on leaving Odessa.

She proceeded on her voyage, and in due course Malta was reached, where she put in to coal, and the stowage of her cargo, we are told, was there examined and found in perfect order.

After leaving Malta she continued her voyage, and on the 16th arrived off Cape Villano, which at 1.30 a.m. when abeam bore S.E. half E. by compass, distant about

7 miles. There was a fresh gale at the time along the coast from the north-eastward, with a heavy cross sea, and a course was then set N.E. half N. by compass.

That course was steered with slight alterations from time to time to meet the sea, throughout the day and night, and on the following morning, the 17th, about 1 a.m., the vessel was struck by an unusually heavy sea which threw her over on her port side with a jerk, submerging the end of the bridge. The decks, cabins, and berths were filled with water fore and aft, and when the decks were freed from water it was found that the vessel had a list to port of from 12 to 15 degrees. After this the decks were so continually full of water that nothing could be done immediately to try to right her, except to burn the coals from the port bunkers, which was done. At daylight the crew were employed in shifting coals from port to starboard, the weather continuing boisterous until the morning of the 18th, when it moderated, and an observation for longitude was obtained at about 9 a.m., and at noon an observation was also obtained for latitude, and at 3 p.m. another observation was taken for longitude, and at this time the master found his position to be latitude 47° 33' N., longitude 5° 12' W. An Azimuth ought to have been taken for the compass error at this time, more especially as the position found by observation was considerably to the eastward of the dead reckoning, which showed that the heel had considerably augmented the easterly deviation of the compass; but the master stated that on the two courses set and steered from the position named he allowed 9° easterly deviation for the heeling error. At the hour mentioned, 3 p.m., a course N. by E. by compass was set and steered, and as the evening approached the weather became misty and the wind veered to the south-eastward. At 8 p.m. the watch was relieved by the 2nd mate, and the course was altered by the master to N.N.E. by compass, and we have been told by some of the witnesses that at this hour the weather was thick. At 8 p.m. the engines were put at half-speed, and at about 8.30 the master went below to the chart room, for the purpose, as he stated, of laying off his dead reckoning. We have been informed by the lookout man, who was stationed on the fore-castle-head, that when he went on duty at 8 it was very foggy indeed; lifting at times and then settling down quite thick, to such an extent that a vessel's light could have been seen only at a very short distance, and in this statement he was materially corroborated by the man at the wheel. The vessel proceeded on the same course and at the same speed until about 9.20 p.m., no lights at all having been seen nor fog-signals heard, when she struck heavily forward, but she did not hang but passed by. The second officer at once ordered the helm hard-a-starboard and called the master, but the latter, having felt the shock, at once rushed up on to the bridge and stopped the engines. He then ordered the second officer to take a cast of the lead, and the chief officer and carpenter to go forward and ascertain if possible what damage had been sustained. All orders were promptly carried out, and the second officer reported seven fathoms and afterwards 25 fathoms. It was then reported that the vessel was filling forward, whereupon the master ordered the anchors to be got ready and the boats to be swung out and provisioned, and the engineer to stand by the pumps. About 10 p.m. the port bower anchor was let go in 30 fathoms with 75 fathoms of cable which was afterwards veered to 120.

The vessel's head was N.N.W. when tide-rode, it then being first-quarter flood. Signals of distress were shown by firing rockets and burning blue lights and other means, but they were not answered. About an hour after striking, the water in the fore-hold and fore-peak was level with the sea and the water was now rising rapidly in the main-hold. Between 4 and 5 a.m. on the 19th the vessel was settling down forward, and the sea was breaking heavily over the bows and fore-deck, when the master determined to take to the boats, three of which had been previously lowered into the water and kept alongside. The chief officer with seven hands went in the smaller lifeboat, the second officer and eight hands in the larger lifeboat, and the master and four men in the gig. The boats were fastened together on leaving the ship, the gig leading, and orders were given by the master that in case of their breaking adrift they should keep off the shore as it was rocky and dangerous to land upon. About an hour afterwards the two lifeboats broke adrift from the gig and the master lay to until daylight, when he found himself about three miles from the land, and he subse-

quently landed safely with his boat's crew on Ushant Island, and at noon of the same day the crews of the other boats were picked up by the steamship "Cyril," of Cardiff, and conveyed to Rotterdam.

After landing on Ushant the master was taken over in a boat to the main-land, and he then proceeded to Brest, where he arrived on the morning of the 20th. He was there taken by the Vice-Consul to the Admiral of the Port, who had already sent out a tug to render assistance, if possible, but she had returned the same day, telegraphing that nothing could be done, as the "Knight Templar" was full of water, and the master stated that it was afterwards reported to him she had foundered.

We have been asked whether the cargo was stowed in accordance with the regulations approved by the Board of Trade, and it will be necessary to explain the manner in which it was stowed. The main hold had an iron bulkhead in the fore-part and a wooden bulkhead in the after-part, from the floor to the 'tween decks. It was then divided longitudinally by three-inch shifting boards amidships from the centre of the keelson close up to the under part of the 'tween decks, which was iron, and through the hatchways these shifting boards were carried up to the top of the combings on the upper deck. The 'tween decks had two tiers of 2½-inch shifting boards fastened to the quarter stanchions on either side. The boards were vertical, and tightly fitted from deck to deck. They were secured in their position by longitudinal planks on either side, which were clamped to the stanchions, top and bottom, with bolts and nuts. All the other grain spaces were similarly fitted. The lower hatches were kept off in the 'tween decks, and proper grain-tight feeders were supplied throughout. The master told us that he personally superintended the stowage, that he saw it properly trimmed, that all the holds were full, and that he had about 6 per cent. of grain for feeding purposes.

It may be observed that some hour or two after the vessel struck the rocks, and when the weather had cleared, an electric flashing light was seen to the westward, distant about 6 miles, as stated, which afterwards proved to be the light on Creach Point, Ushant, and which, no doubt, had not been seen prior to the casualty, owing to the density of the atmosphere.

At the close of the examination of the several witnesses Mr. Saxelbye submitted the following questions for the opinion of the Court:—

1. What was the cause of the vessel striking a rock at or about 9.15 p.m. of the 18th December, and whether proper measures were hereafter taken to save the vessel?
2. What number of compasses had the vessel on board, where were they placed, and were they in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel?
3. When were, and by whom were, they last adjusted?
4. Did the master ascertain the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time, and were the errors of the compasses correctly ascertained and proper corrections to the courses applied?
5. What boats had the vessel, and were they all in good order and condition, and ready for immediate use?
6. Whether the vessel's cargo was properly stowed, and whether the regulations approved by the Board of Trade under section 5 of the Merchant Shipping carriage of grain Act 1880 were complied with in all respects?
7. Whether shifting boards were fitted in accordance with the Act extending through all the hatchways, and with proper beam fillings?
8. What was the cause of the vessel taking a list to port on or about the 16th December last, and whether proper measures were thereafter taken to remedy it, and had she as laden sufficient stability?
9. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at noon of the 18th December, and from time to time thereafter?
10. Whether safe and proper courses were set and steered, and whether due and proper allowances were made for tide and currents?
11. Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?
12. Whether the lead was used before the vessel struck, if not, whether its neglect was justifiable?
13. Whether the vessel was prematurely abandoned?
14. Whether she was navigated with proper and seamanlike care? and
15. Whether the master and officers are, or either of them is, in default?

The Board of Trade is of opinion that the certificate of the master should be dealt with.

Mr. Holdich then addressed the Court on behalf of the chief officer, and Mr. Rollit, having called one witness, followed on the part of the master, and Mr. Saxelbye having replied for the Board of Trade, the Court gave judgment as follows:—

1. The cause of the vessel striking the rocks at about 9.15 p.m. on the 18th of December last, was attributable (1) to improper courses having been set and steered at and after 3 o'clock on the afternoon of that day, and (2) to the total neglect of the lead when approaching land in thick weather. All available measures were thereafter taken to save the vessel.

2. There were five compasses on board, namely, the pole, elevated above the fore-part of the bridge, the standard, by which courses were set and steered, on the bridge deck, one on the poop, aft, and two spare ones in the chart house. They were in good order and condition and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel.

3. They were last adjusted off Grimsby, on the 25th of March 1888, by Mr. Joseph Hearfield Bee, of Hull.

4. The master did, according to his evidence, ascertain correctly from time to time, by observation, the deviation of his compasses and applied proper corrections to the courses, but on the afternoon of the 18th of December, when approaching the land, and when it was most important that the errors should be clearly ascertained, he failed when taking an observation to obtain an azimuth.

5. The vessel carried four boats, that is to say, two life-boats, a gig, and a jolly-boat. They were ready for immediate use, and were, with the exception of the port life-boat, in good order and condition. We have been told that the boat referred to leaked very badly, which was owing, in all probability, to her having become dried up when on the chocks.

6. According to the evidence, the Court is disposed to believe that the cargo was properly stowed, and that the regulations approved by the Board of Trade under Section 4 of the Merchants' Shipping (carriage of grain) Act, 1880, were respectively complied with.

7. According to the statements of the master and officers, longitudinal shifting boards were properly fitted in accordance with the Act, extending in the lower holds from keelson to deck through the hatchways, and in the 'tween decks again from deck to deck and through the upper hatchways.

8. It would appear from the evidence that at about 1 a.m. on the 17th of December, the vessel was struck by an abnormally heavy sea, in consequence of which she rolled over to port, bridge under, and this in all probability started the cargo, and so caused the list to port. Under the then existing circumstances, the Court is of opinion that all measures that could have been taken were taken to remedy the list. The vessel appears to have had, as laden, sufficient stability.

9. Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at noon on the 18th of December, and also at 3 p.m., when the master fixed his position by observation, but not afterwards.

10. Safe and proper courses were not set and steered at and after 3 o'clock on the afternoon of the 18th. No allowance appears to have been made for tide or currents.

11. A good and proper look-out was kept.

12. The lead was not used before the vessel struck, but, having regard to the proximity of the land, and the state of the weather, the Court considers that it most certainly ought to have been, and that the non-use of it was unjustifiable. In the Admiralty sailing directions for the west coast of France, we find the following caution:—"In approaching Ushant during thick weather "it is absolutely necessary to keep the lead going."

13. The vessel was not prematurely abandoned.

14. It cannot be said that she was navigated with proper and seamanlike care, for reasons already stated, and the Court is further of opinion that the master should not have been below when he was expecting to make Ushant.

15. The court finds the master alone in default, and having regard to the facts, it considers it of such a serious nature as to demand of necessity the suspension of his certificate, and orders it therefore to be suspended for four calendar months from this date.

(Signed) E. C. TWISS, Judge.

We concur.

(Signed) Z. B. DRAGE, Nautical Assessor.
J. THRELFALL BRAGG, Assessor.

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