

(No. 3865.)

“FOSCOLINO” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of a formal investigation held at the Board Room of the Sunderland Union Offices, John Street, in the Borough of Sunderland, on the 9th and 10th days of September 1889, before JAMES HORAN and JAMES STOKOE, Esquires, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace acting in and for the said Borough, assisted by Captains RICHARDSON and BROOKS, Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship “FOSCOLINO,” of Sunderland, off Barsebak, in the Sound, on or about the 14th of July 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 stranding was caused by an error in judgment on the part of the master in the mistake he made respecting the lights, and also that the courses set were not made good. The Court finds the master, Joseph Watson Thirkell, in default for such stranding; but taking into consideration his good character, the Court does not deal with his certificate, but cautions him to be more careful in future.

Dated this 10th day of September 1889.

(Signed) JAMES HORAN, } Judges.
 JAMES STOKOE, }

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) GEO. RICHARDSON, } Assessors.
 EDWARD BROOKS, }

Annex to the Report.

The “Foscolino” is a British steamship built of iron at Sunderland, in the county of Durham, in the year 1882. She is registered at the port of Sunderland, her official number being 84,997, and her dimensions as per register being 84.997 ft., main breadth 31.9 ft., and depth in hold 15.8 ft., and her registered tonnage, after deducting 407.52 tons for propelling power and crew space, being 716.25 tons.

This vessel is schooner rigged, and has two compound surface-condensing engines, the diameter of the cylinders being 27 and 50 inches respectively, with a length of stroke of 36 inches, and of the power of 100 horses combined. She is owned by the Wear Steamship Company, Limited, Sunderland, Mr. John L. Brown, of John Street, Sunderland, being manager. She was under the command of Joseph Watson Thirkell, who holds a certificate of competency as master, numbered 81,612, granted to him by the Board of Trade on the 9th of February 1880.

This vessel was loaded with a cargo of 1,370 tons of coal, and sailed from the Tyne on the 11th July last, bound for Malmo. She had on board a crew of sixteen hands all told, her draught of water at the time being 15 ft. 10 ins. forward, and 16 ft. 2 ins. aft. She had three compasses on board, namely, a pole compass, by which the courses were set, one on the bridge, and one aft; these compasses were made by Mr. Plumb of Sunderland, and were last adjusted by Messrs. Wilson & Gillie, of North Shields, off the Tyne on 18th February 1888. The vessel proceeded on her voyage, and at 7.45 p.m. of 14th July, Elsinore Light was passed at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, bearing W. $\frac{1}{2}$ N. magnetic. A S. $\frac{1}{2}$ W. course, magnetic, was then set and kept till about 8.30 p.m.; the helm was then starboarded till 8.45 p.m., when the Heven Light was abreast at an estimated distance of one mile, bearing E.N.E. magnetic; the course was then altered to S. by E. $\frac{1}{4}$ E. magnetic. Between 9 and 10 the master was on the bridge, and saw a bright fixed light bearing from

between S.S.E. to S.S.E. $\frac{1}{2}$ east, and about a point and a half on the port bow, and at an estimated distance of between two and three miles; this light was taken by the master to be that of the pilot boat stationed off Malmo. At 10 p.m. a cast of the lead was taken, giving the depth of water as six fathoms. James Scott, A.B., was at the helm from 8 to 10 o'clock, and, according to his evidence, he, when about to be relieved, was ordered to starboard the helm, which order he obeyed. And when he was relieved at 10 p.m. by Gordon Frazer, A.B., the helm was still a little to starboard. Before going to the helm, Frazer, at about 9.45, reported a bright light on the starboard beam, of which no notice appears to have been taken; but when relieving the wheel at 10 p.m. he saw no lights, the night being hazy and dark at times, with rain squalls. While at the helm he received orders from the master to steer S.E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S., which course was continued for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, then S.S.E. until his vessel stranded. After leaving the wheel he saw a fixed white light on the starboard bow. The chief engineer, W. E. Horncastle, states that he went on watch at 8 p.m. of the 14th, the engines were going full speed, and so continued up to 10.30 p.m. by the engine-room clock, when the engines were slowed according to orders. At 10.45 p.m. the vessel struck, and he received orders to reverse the engines and go full speed astern; this was done for about five minutes, then full speed ahead, again full speed astern, but without affecting the position of the ship—the main injection becoming choked. About 7.30 a.m. of the 15th a salvage boat came alongside. At 9.30 an agreement was made for 650l. to get the vessel afloat, supply diver's certificate, and take the ship into Malmo Harbour. After jettisoning 340 tons of cargo, at 9.30 p.m. the ship floated and was taken into Copenhagen Roads. Divers examined the ship's bottom and reported dents in several plates, the ship was then taken to Malmo, and after discharging the remainder of her cargo the vessel was put upon the slip and her bottom further examined, the surveyors recommending the removal of the injured plates on her return to England. The steamer then proceeded to Banksholm in the Baltic, and took on board a cargo of deals and battens for Dunkirk, the ship making no water. After discharging the cargo at Dunkirk, the vessel was taken to the Tyne in water ballast, where she arrived on the 11th of August, and was placed in dry dock. The master and crew being discharged, could not state the result of the survey, but it was reported that five plates which were cracked were taken out and renewed. Nineteen other plates indented were taken out, straightened, and replaced. The master accounts for his mistaking the light at Barsebak, where the vessel stranded, for the light of the pilot boat off Malmo to an alteration of the Barsebak Lights, not shewn on his chart, from two lights to a single fixed white light, which alteration he was informed by people at Malmo had taken place eighteen months previously, and this statement of the master was corroborated by the chief mate from similar evidence, while, according to an Admiralty Chart corrected up to July 1888, no such alteration was shewn. The Court is of opinion that if such alteration has taken place in the lights as stated, without due notice from the proper authorities, enabling publishers of charts to make the proper corrections for the guidance of navigators, it is calculated to lead to serious disaster, and steps should be taken to ascertain the truth or otherwise as early as possible in order to prevent further disaster. In this case the master, according to the evidence before the court, was on the bridge from passing Elsinore to the time of the stranding of the vessel, which stranding was evidently brought about by his mistaking Barsebak Light for that of the pilot boat stationed off Malmo.

At the conclusion of the evidence, the solicitor acting for the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court on the following questions:—

1. 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 ship?

Ans.—Three, namely, a pole compass, by which the vessel was navigated, one on the bridge, and one aft. The pole and bridge compasses were in good order and they were sufficient for the navigation of the vessel.

2. When and by whom were they made, and when and by whom were they last adjusted?

Ans.—They were made by Mr. Plumb, of Sunderland, and adjusted by Messrs. Wilson and Gillie on 18th February 1888, off the Tyne.

3. Did the master ascertain the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time, were the errors of the compasses correctly ascertained, and the proper corrections to the courses applied?

Ans.—The master ascertained the deviation of the compasses by observation from time to time, and according to the evidence the errors were correctly applied.

4. Whether safe and proper courses were set and steered after passing Elsinore, and whether due and proper allowance was made for currents?

Ans.—Safe and proper courses appear to have been set, but no allowance was made for currents. The courses were not made good.

5. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain the position of the vessel from time to time, and particularly when the white light was reported at about 9.40 p.m.?

Ans.—No measures were taken to verify the position of the vessel at 9.40 p.m., when the white light was reported.

6. Whether the master was justified in assuming that this light was that of the Malmo pilot vessel?

Ans.—The master was not justified in assuming that this light was that of the Malmo pilot vessel.

7. Whether the Barsebak Lights have been altered?

Ans.—The evidence before the Court goes to show that there was only one light at Barsebak visible on the night of the stranding.

8. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?

Ans.—The master's mistake in taking the Barsebak Light for that of the Malmo pilot vessel, and the courses not being made good, and no allowance being made for currents.

9. Whether the officers assisted the master, and took a proper part in the navigation of the vessel?

Ans.—Yes.

10. Whether she was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

Ans.—Yes; up to 9.40 p.m. of the 14th July, when the error was made with regard to the lights.

11. Whether the master and officers are, or either of them is, in default?

Ans.—The master alone is in default, he having committed an error in judgment as to the lights.

(Signed) JAMES HORAN, } Justices.
JAMES STOKOE, }

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) GEO. RICHARDSON, } Assessors.
EDWARD BROOKS, }

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