

(No. 4392.)

"AMBASSADOR" (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Moot Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on the 1st and 2nd days of October 1891, before JOHN JOSEPH HUNTER and EDWARD ECCLES, Esquires, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace acting in and for the city and county of Newcastle-on-Tyne, assisted by Captains CASTLE and BROOKS, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "AMBASSADOR," of Newcastle, through striking a rock or wreck off Salcombe, Devonshire, on the 19th September 1891.

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 loss of the vessel occurred through her striking upon some sunken wreckage or water-logged vessel.

Dated this 2nd day of October 1891.

(Signed) JOHN J. HUNTER, } Judges.
EDWARD ECCLES, }

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) JOHN S. CASTLE, } Assessors.
EDWARD BROOKS, }

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was held at the Moot Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on the 1st and 2nd days of October 1891.

Mr. Dendy, solicitor, represented the Board of Trade, Mr. Bell appeared for the owners, Mr. Temperley for the master, and Mr. Scott for the chief officer.

The "Ambassador," official number 95,253, was a steel screw steamship of 2,572.61 tons gross and 1,664.51 tons nett register. Her length was 300 ft., breadth 38.7 ft., depth of hold 23.6 ft.

She was built at Willington Quay by the Tyne Iron Shipbuilding Company in the year 1888, schooner-rigged, and fitted with three vertical inverted triple-expansion engines of 220 h.p. combined, and was owned by John Hall, Esquire, of the city and county of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and others, whose names appear on the transcript of register, Mr. Hall being managing owner.

The vessel appears to have been in good condition, and well found in every respect. She was fitted with five watertight bulkheads, and had steam steering gear. Her compasses were three in number, namely, a standard on the upper bridge, by which the courses were set and steered, one compass on the lower bridge, and one aft, also a palinurus. The compasses were supplied by Morton, of South Shields, and adjusted by him previous to the departure of the ship on her first voyage. They had not been adjusted since that date by a professional adjuster, but it appears that the master ascertained the errors of his compass whenever opportunity occurred, registering the same in a book kept for the purpose. This book, however, was lost in the ship. The last observation was taken on the 17th September on a N.E. $\frac{1}{2}$ N. course, the deviation then found being the same as on the previous voyage.

The "Ambassador" left Odessa, bound for Hamburg, on the 3rd September last, with a cargo of 3,050 tons of grain and 350 tons of bone dust, her mean draught being 21 ft. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., with a crew of 27 hands, including the master, Mr. James Aikman, who holds a certificate of competency as master No. 32,613. All proceeded well during the voyage, and at midnight 16th September Cape Villans Light bore S.E. $\frac{1}{2}$ S., distant about 8 miles. A course was then set N.E. $\frac{1}{2}$ E. (magnetic), which was continued until noon of the 17th, when her position by observations was found to be latitude by mer. alt. 48° 2' N., longitude by chronometer 5° 28' west. The course was then changed to N.E. by N. $\frac{1}{2}$ N. (mag-

netic), and at 2.45 p.m. the engines were stopped for about 20 minutes, and soundings taken in 60 fathoms—sand and shells—the weather at this time being hazy, and Ushant not visible. At 4 p.m. the master, considering that he was well clear of Ushant, altered the course for 5 miles east of the Start, namely, N.E. $\frac{3}{4}$ E. (magnetic), and this course was continued until the casualty occurred. At 8 p.m. the master consulted the chief officer, and showed him the position of the ship on the chart. At 11 p.m., the weather being fine and clear, the master went to the chart-room, leaving the second officer in charge, having previously told him that he expected to sight the Start Light between 2 and 3 o'clock. He came on deck again at 11.50 for a short time, the weather still being clear and bright. At midnight the second officer was relieved by the chief officer, who stated that the weather remained fine until about 2.30 a.m. 19th, when it became slightly hazy, and that at 2.45 a.m. a steamer passed them on the port side, showing masthead and red side light, about 3 miles distant; also that the Start Light had not been sighted. At 2 a.m. 19th the master again came on deck, and looked at the taffrail patent log, which then registered 127 miles from noon 18th. He stated that the weather was still fine, and that two steamers passed on the port side, about 4 miles distant.

The master then returned to the chart-room, and at 3 a.m., considering the vessel's position to be about 15 miles from the Start, he was coming on deck, when he felt the ship strike something twice, not heavily; it caused her to heel to port slightly, but the ship's way was not stopped. The third engineer, who was in the engine-room, described the striking as a grating sound along the starboard side.

The master immediately ordered the engines full speed astern, which order had also been given by the chief officer and carried out. All the witnesses state that the Start Light was not seen by them at any time, nor was any fog signal heard.

A cast of the lead was taken by the second officer, who stated that he used the deep sea lead, which he had bent on to the hand lead line, and with an up-and-down sounding he did not get bottom at 20 fathoms; he also took a second cast, with the same result.

After reversing for about 15 minutes it was found the ship was making water rapidly, and the master, having consulted with his officers, determined to steer for Plymouth. A N.W. by W. magnetic course was steered for that purpose, and the engines set full speed ahead, but as the fore compartment at this time was full of water, and the ship considerably down by the head, her speed was in consequence reduced to about five knots.

Immediately after the striking the chief engineer had closed all the sluice valves; the water, however, rapidly increased in the engine-room, putting the fires out; at 5 a.m. the engines stopped. The boats had been prepared for lowering, which was done when it was found that the ship was foundering. The crew then left the ship at 5.30 a.m., and remained in her vicinity until she foundered at 6.15 a.m. The chief officer had previously made a life-buoy fast to the deep sea lead-line, which was attached to one of the boat's davits for the purpose of buoying the position of the vessel after foundering.

They then steered N.N. westerly for the land, the boats being under sail with a fresh breeze from the W.S.W., and after running for about 20 minutes they saw the loom of the land, and shortly afterwards made out the Bolt Head, distant about 3 miles. They then ran down to the eastward, and proceeded into Salcombe, where they landed. No lives were lost. The captain stated that he judged the position of the "Ambassador" when she foundered to be about three miles south of the entrance to Salcombe Harbour.

At the conclusion of the evidence, the following questions were submitted on behalf of the Board of Trade. Mr. Bell, Mr. Temperley, and Mr. Scott addressed the Court on behalf of their respective clients, and Mr. Dendy replied:—

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 vessel?

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

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?

4. Whether proper and sufficient measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about noon on the 18th September, and from time to time thereafter? Whether a safe and proper course was then set and steered, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents?

5. Whether a safe and proper alteration was made in the course at or about 4 p.m. on the last mentioned date, whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents, and whether the master was justified in keeping the vessel so long on the course then steered?

6. Whether at or about 2 a.m. and thereafter the weather was thick, and if so, whether the master or the officer of the watch was justified in neglecting to reduce the speed of the vessel?

7. Whether the lead was used after 4 p.m. on the 18th September, and if not, whether its neglect was justifiable?

8. What was the obstacle upon which the vessel struck?

9. What was the cause of her loss?

10. Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?

11. Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

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

In the opinion of the Board of Trade, the certificates of James Aikman, the master, and James Mauger, the chief mate, should be dealt with.

To which the Court replied as follows:—

1. There were three compasses on board—one on the upper bridge, a standard compass by which the courses were set and steered, one on the lower bridge, and one aft. They were in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel.

2. The compasses were made by Morton, of South Shields, and were supplied to the ship three years ago. They have not been adjusted by a professional adjuster since her first voyage.

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

4. Proper and sufficient measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at noon on the 18th September, and from time to time thereafter, and a proper course was then set and steered, and due and proper allowance made for tide and currents.

5. A safe and proper alteration was made in the course about 4 p.m. on 18th September, and due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents, and the master was justified in keeping the vessel on the course then steered.

6. At or about 2 a.m. on 19th September, the evidence goes to show that the weather was not thick so as to necessitate the master or officer of the watch reducing the speed of the vessel.

7. The lead was not used after 4 p.m. on the 18th September, and the Court is of opinion that the omission to use it did not conduce to the loss of the ship.

8 and 9. From the evidence, the Court is of opinion that the vessel could not have struck any known rock marked on the chart, and can only conclude that she must have struck upon some sunken wreckage or water-logged vessel.

10. Yes.

11. Yes.

12. No.

(Signed) JOHN J. HUNTER, } Justices.
EDWARD ECCLES, }

We concur.

(Signed) JOHN S. CASTLE, } Assessors.
EDWARD BROOKS, }

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