

(No. 4396.)

## "CHICHESTER" (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1887.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at the Recorder's Court, Belfast, on the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th days of October 1891, before FELIX J. MAC CARTHY, Esquire, Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captains BAKER and BROOKS, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "CHICHESTER," of Belfast, on or near Astree Rock, Straits of Magellan, on or about the 9th day of August 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 cause of the stranding of the ship was due to the fact of the course set not having been made good, and sufficient measures not having been taken to verify her position after 1.30 p.m. on the 9th of August 1891, and finds the master, Robert Crosbie, and the chief officer, Patrick Robb, in default, and suspends the certificate of the master for the period of six calendar months, and the certificate of the chief officer for the period of three calendar months from this date. The Court, having regard to the chief officer's antecedents and the testimonials he has produced, recommends that a first mate's certificate be granted to him during the period for which his certificate is suspended. The Court makes no order as to costs.

Dated this sixteenth day of October 1891.

(Signed) F. J. MAC CARTHY, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) C. H. J. BAKER, } Assessors.  
EDWARD BROOKS, }*Annex to the Report.*

The "Chichester" was a British steel screw steamer, built at Belfast in 1890 by Messrs. Workman, Clark & Co., Limited, of Belfast, and registered at that port. Her official number was 96,263, her gross tonnage was 2,082.81 tons, and nett registered tonnage 1,358.92 tons. Mr. William Robert Rea, of Belfast, was her managing owner. She was schooner-rigged, and fitted with triple expansion engines of 200 h.p. combined. Her length was 285.3 ft., breadth 38.2 ft., and depth of hold 19.2 ft. She was provided with three boats, two of which were lifeboats; they were in good order and ready for use. Her compasses were two in number, viz., a standard compass placed on the upper bridge, by which the courses were set and steered, and one aft in a wheelhouse. There were also four boat's compasses on board. The vessel was steered by steam-steering gear amidships.

The "Chichester" left Iquique on the 28th of July last with a crew of 25 hands all told, including the master and one passenger, bound to St. Vincent, C.V. for orders. Her cargo consisted of 2,940 tons nitrate of soda, her draught of water being 20 ft. 8 in. forward and 21 ft. 2 in. aft. The vessel had on board large scale charts of the anchorages in the Straits of Magellan, but not a large scale chart of the Strait the ship was navigating when she stranded. The only chart of the Straits of Magellan on board was an Admiralty small scale general chart, dated 26th January 1889, No. 554. The Sugar Loaf Island at the eastern entrance to the Straits of Magellan was, about 11 a.m., bearing N.E. by N. by compass, distant about 3 miles. A course was then set for Cape Upright, E.  $\frac{1}{2}$  N. by compass, with an error of 40' easterly. Plus error was found by observations, and afterwards checked by the second officer during his afternoon watch. The patent taffrail log was set at this time. About 1.30 p.m. Cape Pillar was abeam, distance estimated at 4 miles. The master then went below, leaving the second officer in charge, with

the only instructions not to let the vessel go to the northward of her course, and to be careful not to go too close to the Island of Tamar. The weather was squally, wind variable, and weather clear at times. At 3.30 p.m. Cape Parker was abeam (as entered in the log-book), no distance given. At 4 p.m. Tamar Island came in sight, bearing E. by N.  $\frac{1}{2}$  N. by compass, estimated distance about 10 or 11 miles. Had cross bearings been taken at this time of Cape Parker and Tamar Island the position of the vessel would have been correctly found, showing that she had been set considerably to the northward of her course, and the ship steering directly for the Astree Rock. The chief officer on taking charge was informed by the second officer that there was a rock one mile and three-quarters south of Tamar Island. No other orders were received by him, excepting not to go to the northward of the course. No mention was made respecting calling the master. Shortly after 4.15 p.m. he ordered the helmsman to keep the ship E.  $\frac{1}{2}$  N. by compass. Having given this order he left the bridge to assist the boatswain to get the anchors over the bows, leaving nobody on the look-out. Previous to this he had laid down the course the ship had been steering from 1.30 p.m., also the distance of the rock off Tamar Island, which he stated was 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles. He returned to the bridge after the anchors had been got over. At 4.58 p.m. Tamar Island was just on the 4-point bearing, and the log showed 48  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles. At 5.15 p.m. Tamar Island came abeam, the log then registering 51  $\frac{1}{2}$  miles. At this time the master came on deck and asked him what land that was on the port beam, to which the chief officer replied "Tamar Island," distance 2 miles. The master raised a doubt about its being Tamar, and said he thought by his calculations it was Cape Upright. The chief officer replied that the ship could not have run that distance, and told the master there was a rock off Tamar, but that the course the ship was going would take her clear, and that he thought that by the bearings which he had taken of Tamar she would go half a mile outside of it. The master then went to the chart-room for one minute or two to consult the chart and returned to the bridge. He went over to the port side where the chief officer was standing, and looking over towards the bow, said "What is that; is it a tide ripple?" The chief officer then looked, and stated that he saw a dark ripple on the water, and replied to the captain that the Book of Sailing Directions said "You are not to take notice of tide ripples." Immediately after, at 5.20 p.m., the ship struck and remained fast. The engines were stopped, and the master ordered soundings to be taken by the carpenter, and the chief officer ordered the boats to be got ready for lowering, which was done. The carpenter reported 15 ft. of water in fore hold, and only 10 in. in the bilges of No. 2 hold. Soundings were taken round the ship by the chief officer, who stated that he found 20 ft. abreast of the bridge, 10 fathoms abaft the bridge, 15 fathoms abreast of the mainmast, and 20 fathoms over the stern. The vessel's bow was up to the 16 ft. mark. There was a good deal of conflicting evidence with reference to the lowering and provisioning of the boats. The chief officer stated that he had received orders from the master to lower all the boats. This the master denied, though he admitted that he did give orders for the starboard boat to be brought round to the port side, and also gave orders to provision the boats, and assisted in provisioning them. On or about 8 p.m. all the boats left the ship, and stood by about a ship's length off, leaving the master on board. The chief officer's boat came alongside at intervals. The lamp trimmer came on board in response to a call from the master. He and the master removed the tarpaulins of No. 2 hatch, and sounded the wells, there being no water in No. 2 hold, engine-room, nor in after hold. The master then ordered the chief officer, who remained alongside, to call the remaining boats alongside, with the intention of jettisoning cargo from No. 2 hatch. The crew, with the exception of the boatkeepers, responded to the call and came on board, but they grumbled at not having gear rigged and steam to jettison the cargo. After this the master gave no further orders, but told the men to get some supper before they abandoned the ship. The chief engineer stated when he came on board at this time, he went into the engine-room, found it intact, no water, and 80 pounds of steam

in the boiler. The engineer, on being asked, informed the Court that 60 pounds was the usual pressure for working all the winches. On or about 3 a.m. on the morning of 10th August, the crew, under the orders of the master, abandoned the ship, and made their way for Sandy Point, the master being the last man to leave the ship, but before doing so, sounded the ship and found the fore hold full (the nitrate having formed into a liquid), No. 2 hold dry, engine-room dry, with steam in the boilers and no water in after hold. After proceeding a distance of about 23 miles in the boats, they were picked up by the s.s. "Rhosina," of Cardiff, bound to Talcalmayo; on the same day they passed the "Chichester." The master of the "Rhosina" calculated that he was about 2 miles from Tamar Island. At this time they sent on board the wreck, and the crew saved some of their effects. They were ultimately landed and paid off at Talcalmayo, and afterwards were transferred to the Royal Mail steamer "Magellan" for passage home. On passing through the Straits there was about 18 ft. of the foremast visible of the "Chichester." It appears, from the whole of the evidence, that the Sailing Directions were not followed, particularly in not having a good look-out kept when approaching Tamar Island, where Astree Rock and all other rocks in the Straits are easily distinguished by the quantity of kelp on them. It also appears that in this vessel there was no look-out whatever kept, although the ship was entering a very narrow channel. It might further be stated that the master, when he went below at 1.30 p.m. off Cape Pillar, left no orders to be called at any time, and did not come on deck until about seven minutes before the ship struck. The Court is of opinion that the chief officer should have called the master when approaching Tamar Island, and that he ought not to have taken upon himself the sole responsibility of navigating the ship at so critical a period.

At the conclusion of the evidence Mr. J. S. McTear, for the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions for the opinion of the Court:—

1. Whether sufficient means were taken to verify the errors in the standard compass, and were the errors properly applied to the courses set on the 9th of August?
2. Whether the vessel was supplied with proper charts of a sufficiently large scale for the purpose of safely navigating the Straits of Magellan?
3. Did the master consult and properly attend to the Sailing Directions, and upon approaching Tamar Island, was the vessel navigated in accordance with them?
4. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel from time to time, and particularly when Tamar Island was in sight?
5. Whether a safe and proper course was set by the master at 11 a.m. on the 9th August, whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents, and whether this course was steered and made good?
6. Whether a proper and safe alteration was made in the course at about 4 p.m. by the chief officer, and whether, when the master came on deck at about 5.15 p.m., he took due measures to ascertain what courses had been steered, and the position of the vessel?
7. Whether a good, sufficient, and proper look-out was kept?
8. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?
9. Whether she was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

10. Whether the master, first officer, and second officer are, or either of them is, in default?

11. Whether, after the stranding, the officers and crew left the vessel contrary to the master's orders? And finally,

12. Whether, in the circumstances, any means could have been taken to save the vessel?

In the opinion of the Board of Trade, the certificates of the master, chief officer, and second officer, should be dealt with.

Mr. Martin Burke, counsel for the master and owner of the "Chichester," called and examined a witness, Mr. Pollock, as to the good character of the master, and several highly satisfactory testimonials were handed in in favour of the master and first and second officers. After which Mr. Burke and Mr. Albert J. Lewis, solicitor for the first officer, addressed the Court at considerable length on behalf of their respective clients, Mr. Jones, the second officer addressed a few observations to the Court on his own behalf, and Mr. McTear replied on the part of the Board of Trade, after which the Court gave judgment in the replies to the several questions as follows:—

1. Sufficient means were taken to verify the errors in the standard compass, and the errors were properly applied to the courses set on the 9th of August.
2. The vessel was not supplied with a sufficiently large scale chart for the purpose of safely navigating the Straits of Magellan.
3. The master consulted the Sailing Directions, but upon approaching Tamar Island the vessel was not navigated in accordance with them.
4. Proper measures were not taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel after 1.30 p.m., and particularly when Tamar Island was in sight.
5. A safe and proper course was set by the master at 11 a.m. on the 9th of August. No allowance was made for tide and currents. This course was steered but not made good after 1.30 p.m.
6. The slight alteration made in the course at 4 p.m. by the chief officer was in the right direction, but not sufficiently to the southward. The master when he came on deck at about 5.15 p.m. took measures to ascertain what courses had been steered, and the position of the vessel.
7. A good, sufficient, and proper look-out was not kept.
8. The cause of the stranding of the ship was the course set not having been made good, and insufficient measures taken to verify the position of the ship after 1.30 p.m.
9. The ship was navigated with proper and seamanlike care up to 1.30 p.m. on the 9th of August, but not afterwards.
10. The master and chief officer are in default. The second officer is not in default.
11. The officers and crew did not leave the vessel contrary to the master's orders.
12. Means might have been taken to save the vessel, but none were attempted.

(Signed) F. J. MAC CARTHY, Judge.

We concur.

(Signed) C. H. J. BAKER, }  
EDWARD BROOKS, } ASSESSORS.

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