

(No. 4412.)

"PANAMA" (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1887.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at the Municipal Buildings, West Hartlepool, on the 17th and 18th days of November 1891, before RICHARD CORKER WALKER and ROBERT IRVINE, Esquires, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the county of Durham, assisted by Captains PARISH and WARD, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "PANAMA," of West Hartlepool, on or near the Westra Finngrundet, Gulf of Bothnia, on or about the 11th October 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 stranding and subsequent loss of the vessel was owing to her being set thirty miles to the westward of the course steered, caused either by an unknown current, bad steerage, heeling, or other error of the compass—probably all combined—and to the master's want of knowledge of the beacons on the banks, which are not described in the sailing directions which he had on board.

The Court does not find the master in default.

Dated this nineteenth day of November 1891.

(Signed) R. C. WALKER, } Justices of
ROBT. IRVINE, } the Peace.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) ALFRED PARISH, } Assessors.
C. Y. WARD, }

Annex to the Report.

This was an inquiry into the circumstances attending the stranding and subsequent loss of the steamship "Panama," of West Hartlepool, on the Westra Finngrundet, Gulf of Bothnia, on the 11th day of October 1891. Mr. Dendy appeared for the Board of Trade, and Mr. Marshall for the mate. The master appeared in person, but was not represented by counsel.

The "Panama," official number 84,525, was an iron screw steamer, built at West Hartlepool, in 1881, by William Gray & Co., of the following dimensions:—Length 256.2 ft., breadth 34.6 ft., and depth 19.6 ft. Her tonnage was 1,705.95 tons gross, and 1,094.46 tons register. She was fitted with two compound surface-condensing direct-acting engines of 150 horse-power (combined). She had three compasses, viz.: one pole, 12 ft. above the upper bridge and 23 ft. above the main deck (this compass was—the master stated—compensated by a magnet for heeling error), one in a binnacle on the upper bridge, and one aft on the poop. She had four boats (two of which were lifeboats), and was well found. She was owned by Mr. Thomas Appleby, of West Hartlepool, and others, Mr. Appleby being the managing owner.

The "Panama" left Abbola, in the Umea district, Gulf of Bothnia, on the 10th October 1891, with a cargo consisting of 633 standards of deals, battens and boards, bound for Bordeaux, under the command of Mr. Albert Winter, who holds a certificate of competency as master No. 98,588, and with a crew of 22 all told, her draught of water being 17 ft. 10 in. forward, and 18 ft. 10 in. aft. About 121 standards of the cargo were carried as a deck load, and stowed 12 ft. high forward of the bridge, and 6 to 7 ft. high aft of the bridge.

According to the master she was not a tender ship, but with this deck load she sometimes listed to starboard and sometimes to port, generally having a list to starboard of about 5 degrees. The master had on board Imray's Chart and Sailing Directions, but not the Admiralty Chart or Sailing Directions.

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After leaving Abbola at 10 a.m. of the 10th October, the weather became foggy and the vessel anchored, but the weather clearing the anchor was weighed, the pilot was discharged, and she proceeded on her voyage. At 4.45 p.m. of the 10th October a departure was taken from the Sydostbrotten Light vessel, which then bore W. by N. $\frac{1}{2}$ N. magnetic, and distant about two miles. The wind was southerly, the weather clear enough to enable them to see three or four miles, and the ship continued at full speed, about 9 knots per hour. The patent log then registered 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles. From this point a course was set S. by W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W. per pole compass equal to S. by W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W. magnetic. The ship had then a list to starboard of about 5 degrees, which continued up to the stranding. The course set would, if made good, have taken the vessel 17 miles to the eastward of the Finngrundet. Neither sun nor stars were seen after leaving Abbola, and the master stated that he had no opportunity of ascertaining the deviations of the compass.

At 9 a.m. of the 11th October the log registered 127 miles from the Sydostbrotten Light-vessel, and the master, thinking that the ship had hung somewhat to the southward of her course, altered the course $\frac{1}{2}$ point to the westward, that is, to S.S.W. magnetic. No observations were obtainable at noon, the sun being obscured. The log then registered 151 miles from the Sydostbrotten Light-vessel. The same course, S.S.W. magnetic, was continued, the wind being still from the southward, and the weather so hazy as to allow of their seeing only about 3 miles.

At about 1.15 p.m. a broom beacon was sighted, bearing about 3 points on the starboard bow, which the master concluded was that on the northern end of the Finngrund East Bank, but which was in fact the beacon off the N.W. end of the Westra Finngrundet. The helm was then put to starboard and the ship's head brought round to N.N.E., on which course she was kept until about 1.45 p.m. when the engines were stopped and a cast of the lead taken in 14 fathoms. The helm was then put to port and her head brought round to S. by E. and the beacon was again sighted. The vessel was then stopped and a cast of the lead taken in 15 fathoms, gravel. The engines were put on at full speed ahead. The master went below for a few minutes, and at about 2.10 p.m. the vessel took the ground, the beacon bearing west.

The engines were reversed full speed, the tank abaft the engine-room was pumped out, and a portion of the deck cargo was jettisoned. At about 3.35 p.m. the vessel floated, and the engines were reversed till 3.40 p.m., when they were stopped and soundings taken in 15 and 16 fathoms, sand and shells. At 4 p.m., her head being S.S.W., the helm was put hard-a-starboard, with the intention of bringing her round to the eastward, but at about 4.10 p.m., when heading about S.S.E., she struck again heavily, remained fast, and filled rapidly. The boats were got out, and at 6 p.m. the first officer and nine men were sent away in the port lifeboat, and landed at Iggö Island, near Gefle. Soon after dusk, the red light of the Westra Finngrundet Light-vessel was seen. At 8 p.m. the master and remainder of the crew got into the other lifeboat, and remained near the ship until 2 a.m., when they made for the light-vessel, but being unable to fetch her, they pulled for the shore and landed at Gasholmen, at 4 p.m. of the 12th October. The master telephoned to Gefle for assistance, and on the 15th October the steamers of the Neptune Salvage Company went to the ship, but did not succeed in getting her off, and on the 22nd October she broke up.

At the conclusion of the evidence Mr. Dendy submitted the following questions to the Court:—

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?
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 measures were taken at or about 4.45 p.m. of the 10th October to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel?

5. Whether a safe and proper course was then set and thereafter steered, and whether due and proper allowance was made for currents and heeling error in the compasses?

6. Whether a safe and proper alteration was made in the course at or about 9 a.m. of the 11th October, and whether due and proper allowance was made for currents and heeling error?

7. What was the spar beacon seen at or about 1.15 p.m.; was the master justified in taking it to be the E. Finngrund Beacon, and were proper steps taken to avoid the danger that it marked?

8. Whether the master was on deck at a time when the safety of the vessel required his personal supervision?

9. Whether, having regard to the hazy state of the weather, the vessel was navigated at too great a rate of speed?

10. Whether the lead was used with sufficient frequency?

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

12. Where did the vessel strand at or about 2.15 p.m. of the 11th October, and what was the cause of the casualty?

13. Whether, when the vessel floated at or about 3.35 p.m., proper measures were taken to bring her out of danger?

14. Where did the vessel strike on the second occasion, and what was the cause of the stranding?

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

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

In the opinion of the Board of Trade, the certificate of Albert Winter, the master, should be dealt with.

Neither the master or Mr. Marshall, on behalf of the chief mate, desiring to address the Court, the Court replied to the questions as follows:—

1. The vessel had three compasses—one pole compass 12 ft. above the upper bridge, by which the courses were set and steered, a binnacle compass on the upper bridge, and a compass aft on the poop. They were in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the ship.

2. There was no evidence by whom the compasses were made. They were last adjusted by Ainslie, of South Shields, on 11th March 1891.

3. After leaving Abbots on the 10th October 1891, it does not appear that the master had any opportunity for ascertaining by observation the deviation of his compasses. The corrections as shewn by the deviation card were properly applied.

4. For all practical purposes proper measures were taken at or about 4.45 p.m. of the 10th of October 1891 to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel.

5. A safe and proper course was then set and thereafter steered. No allowance was made for currents, nor for heeling error, the effects of which (if any) would have been to take the ship to the westward of her course.

6. The slight alteration made in the course at or about 9 a.m. of the 11th October was a safe and proper one. No allowance was made for currents or for heeling error.

7. The spar beacon seen at or about 1.15 p.m. was that off the north-west edge of the Western Finngrundet. Imray's Sailing Directions, by which the master was navigating the vessel, gives no description of the beacons on the Finngrunds, and the Court cannot therefore say that the master was to blame in taking the beacon he saw for that on the East Finngrund. In the Admiralty Sailing Directions there is a full description of the beacons on the Finngrunds. Had the master been provided with those directions and paid due attention to them he would have known that the beacon he saw was that on the Westra Finngrundet, and the casualty might have been avoided. The steps taken to avoid the danger that it marked would have been proper had the master been right in his supposition.

8. The master was on deck when the safety of the ship required his personal supervision.

9. Having regard to the state of the weather the vessel was not navigated at too great a rate of speed.

10. The lead was not used with sufficient frequency. No cast was taken until after the beacon was sighted. The weather being hazy, and the master having had no opportunity of ascertaining the errors of the compasses, and knowing the uncertainty of the currents, the lead should have been freely used when approaching the latitude of the Finngrunds.

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

12. The vessel stranded at or about 2.15 p.m. of the 11th October on the Westra Finngrundet. The casualty was caused by the course set not having been made good, and by the master having mistaken the beacon seen for that on the north end of the East Bank.

13. The measures taken when the vessel floated, at or about 3.35 p.m., would have been proper had the beacon seen been that on the East Bank as assumed by the master.

14. The vessel on the second occasion stranded again on the Westra Finngrundet. The cause of this second stranding was the error of the master in mistaking the beacons.

15. Having regard to the answer to No. 10 question it cannot be said that the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

16. The Court does not find the master in default, but considers that he erred in judgment in placing too much confidence in his assumed position, and not using the lead when approaching the latitude of the Finngrunds, where the currents are known to be so uncertain.

(Signed) R. C. WALKER, } Justices of
ROBT. IRVINE, } the Peace.

We concur.

(Signed) ALFRED PARISH, } Assessors.
O. Y. WARD, }