(No. 4308.)

"SKYRO" (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1887.

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 26th and 27th days of May 1891, before James Stokoe and Charles Lilburn, Esquires, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace acting in and for the said Borough, assisted by Captains Methven and Baker, Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "Skyro," of Sunderland, through striking some obstruction about ten miles S. by W. of Cape Finisterre on or about the 22nd ultimo.

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 "Skyro" was caused by striking on a rock. The Court finds John Brown Vickers, the master, in default for such loss, and suspends his certificate for the space of twelve calendar months from this date.

The Court recommends that he be granted a second mate's certificate in the meantime.

Dated this twenty-seventh day of May 1891.

(Signed) James Stokoe, Charles Lilburn, } Judges.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) R. Methven, C. H. J. Baker, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

The "Skyro" was a British screw steamer, built of iron, at Sunderland, in the County of Durham, in the year 1880, and registered at the Port of Sunderland, her official number being 81,469. She was rigged as a schooner, her dimensions as per register being—Length, 227·5 feet; breadth, 32 feet; and depth of hold, 16·15 feet; and her registered tonnage, after deducting 410·94 tons for crew space and propelling power, was 731·49 tons. She was fitted with 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 being of the power of 120 horses combined. This vessel was owned by the Pinkney & Sons Steamship Company, Limited, Mr. Thomas Pinkney, of John Street, Sunderland, having the management of the vessel.

The "Skyro" left Gandia on the 16th day of April 1891, under the command of Mr. John Brown Vickers, who holds a certificate of competency as master, No. 023,858, renewed, with a crew of eighteen hands all told, and one passenger. She had on board a cargo of about 1,200 tons weight, consisting of pig lead and bar silver, and a quantity of fruit, bound for London and the Tyne. This vessel had three compasses on board, namely, one pole compass, one on the bridge, and one aft. She had three boats, two of which were lifeboats, and they appear to have been in good order and kept ready for use.

The vessel proceeded on her voyage, calling at Gibraltar, which port she left about 11 a.m. on the 19th of April, and at 10.10 a.m. on the 21st of April passed Cape Carvoeiro at a distance of about five miles. A course was then shaped N. by E. ½ E. magnetic to pass inside the Burlings, and the patent log put overboard, the ship going full speed at the time (or about 7¾ knots), the wind was light, but favourable, from the south-south-west. This course was continued until 1 a.m. of the 22nd, when it was changed to N. ½ E. magnetic, and so continued until 8 a.m. of the 22nd, when the ship was found to be off Vigo Bay, and Cies Island was abeam at about four miles distant. This position was thirty-four miles eastward of where the captain supposed himself to be by the course he had shaped. The distance from Cies Island was an estimated one, no soundings were taken to fix it more accurately. From this point the ship was steered N. ¼ W. till 10 a.m., when two rocks were seen abeam, which are presumed to have been the Cantiro Rocks, at an estimated distance of 2½ miles. At noon the course was again altered to north magnetic, and half an hour afterwards again changed to N. by E. magnetic, and this course was continued until the ship struck at 1.45 p.m.

Correcting the distances given from Cape Carvoeiro by the patent log, and deducting five miles, the error of the log, would place the ship in the same latitude as the Meixido Reef, and 2½ miles from the Yusua Rock, lying just outside the reef.

There is a further correction to this position of the ship. After the ship foundered the crew embarked in the boats, and pulling in shore for about 2½ miles, entered within a line of rocks. This correction enables the Court to fix very closely the place where the ship struck, and which would be either on the outer edge of the Meixido Reef, or more probably on the Yusua Rock, just adjoining Meixido. The water on this rock is 22 feet, it was low water at the time the vessel struck, she having a draught of about seventeen feet. There is always a considerable swell on this coast, and the vessel may quite well have struck here.

On the boats passing inside the rocks they fell in with a Spanish fishing boat which took them in tow—the ship's boats also using their own sails and oars—and the crew was ultimately landed at Corcubion. No lives were lost, but the officers and men lost all their effects. The ship's log and papers were also lost.

When the vessel struck on the rock she swung round with her head to the south-eastward, but passed off the shoal, the engines were stopped, and after a few minutes again set ahead, with the object of closing in with the shore. Soundings were taken in the holds, when it was found that the forehold was clear, but that there was five feet of water in the mainhold, and the rivets in the watertight bulkhead were starting; and as the master deemed it unsafe to stay longer on the ship, the engines were stopped, and a lifeboat and a jolly-boat were immediately cleared away, the men were called up from the engine-room, and as it was evident that the ship was sinking fast, the crew left her, and she sank in about twenty minutes, going down head first.

The weather, which during the forenoon had at times obscured the land by passing rain showers, cleared up, and the master, who was the last to leave the ship, was enabled to see Cape Finisterre, which appeared to be about nine miles distant, and a short time afterwards he could see the lighthouse. No effort appears to have been made by either the master or the officers of the ship to fix the place of the disaster.

After the crew had landed at Corcubion, surveyors were sent off to endeavour to fix the position of the sunken vessel, but they found no sign of her.

The deflection of the course between 10 a.m. of the 21st and 8 a.m. of the 22nd of April was so abnormal, having regard to the fine weather prevailing at the time, that the Court considers this deflection is to be attributed to a want of knowledge of the error of the navigating compass. The error of the navigating compass could have been ascertained by good observations on the afternoon of the 21st, but this duty was neglected. Nor, in the courses shaped after 8 a.m. of the 22nd, did the master take into account, or make any allowance for a deviation, which he had then ascertained had taken him out of his course so very considerably.

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 vessel?

Ans.—The vessel had three compasses on board, namely, a pole compass, one binnacle compass on the upper bridge, and one binnacle compass aft. They appear to have been in good order, and were sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel.

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

Ans.—There is no evidence to show by whom they were made. They were last adjusted by Mr. Wilson, of Sunderland, off the Tyne on the 21st of February last.

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 states that he did ascertain the deviation of his compasses by observation during the earlier part of the voyage, but not when on the coast of Portugal. There is no evidence to show that the errors of the compasses were correctly ascertained, and the proper corrections to the courses applied.

4. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at 8 a.m. on the 22nd April, and from time to time thereafter?

Ans.—No measures were taken at 8 a.m. of the 22nd April to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel, and from time to time thereafter.

5. Whether safe and proper courses were set and steered after 8 a.m. on the 22nd of April, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents?

Ans.—Safe and proper courses were not set and steered after 8 a.m. on the 22nd of April. No allowance was made for tide and currents.

6. Whether a safe and proper alteration was made in the course at or about 12.45 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 upon this course until she struck at 1.30 p.m.?

Ans.—The alteration made at or about 12.45 p.m. was not a safe and proper alteration. Due and proper allowance was not made for tide and currents. The master was not justified in keeping the vessel upon this course until she struck.

7. What was the cause of the damage the vessel sustained?

Ans.—Striking upon a rock.

8. Whether the master and officers took proper measures to ascertain the position of the rock or other obstacle upon which the vessel struck, and whether the Court is satisfied, from the evidence given in this case, that the vessel struck some obstacle not marked upon the Admiralty Chart, No. 1,756, left herewith?

Ans.—Neither the master or officers took any measures to ascertain the position of the rock or other obstacle upon which the vessel struck. The Court is not satisfied, from the evidence given, that the vessel struck some obstacle not marked upon the Admiralty Chart, No. 1,756.

9. Whether the lead was used, and if not, whether its neglect was justifiable?

Ans.—The lead was not used at all. Its neglect was most unjustifiable.

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

Ans.—The vessel was not navigated at too great a rate of speed.

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

Ans.—A good and proper look-out was not kept.

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

Ans.—The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

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

Ans.—The master alone is in default.

(Signed) JAMES STOKOE, CHARLES LILBURN, } Justices.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) R. METHVEN, C. H. J. BAKER, } Assessors.