

(No. 4481.)

“ ABERLEMNO.”

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of a formal Investigation held at St. George's Hall, Liverpool, on the 10th and 11th days of March 1892, before W. J. STEWART, Esquire, assisted by Captain METHVEN and Captain BAKER, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British sailing ship “ ABERLEMNO,” of Swansea, about three miles west of Dover, on Feb. 18, 1892.

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 of and consequent material damage of the said vessel was due to the master not having a knowledge of the error of his compasses, and keeping the ship running in a continuous thick snow storm, and taking no soundings. The Court severely reprimands Mr. Thomas Myles, the chief officer, and suspends the certificate of the master, Mr. Lewis Davies, numbered 93,573, for three months from the date hereof.

Dated this 11th day of March 1892.

(Signed) W. J. STEWART, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

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

Annex to the Report.

The “ Aberlemno,” official number 73,832, was a British barque, of the port of Swansea. She was built of iron by Messrs. Birrell, Stenhouse, & Co., of Dumbarton, in 1876. Her length was 183.4 ft., her breadth 21 ft., and her depth 18.5 ft. Her registered tonnage was 735.22. She was owned by Mr. Morgan Tatton, of Swansea, who was registered as her managing owner. She was commanded by Mr. Lewis Davies, who held a certificate of competency as master, numbered 93,573.

She left Talcahuano for Queenstown for orders on October 15th, 1891, with a cargo of 1,160 tons of wheat, and a crew of 15 hands all told, but without the first mate, who had been left behind at Santos ill of yellow fever. She arrived at Queenstown on February 5th, 1892, and received orders to proceed to Hamburg. It being necessary to obtain a mate, and the master being anxious to secure the services of a Channel pilot, application was made to the owner's agents at Queenstown, and, acting on their recommendation, the master shipped as first mate Mr. Thomas Myles, who held a certificate of competency as only mate, and had acted for about 17 years as a Channel pilot, though without a license.

The “ Aberlemno ” left Queenstown on February 10th, drawing 16 ft. 11 in. forward and 17 ft. 2 in. aft. She was supplied with two compasses—the standard compass, by which the courses were set, being fixed on a pole 10 ft. above the poop deck. The vessel had not been swung during the 3½ years that she had been commanded by Mr. Davies, but he stated that he used to check the compass whenever he had an opportunity, and kept a private record of the deviations, which, however, was lost when she stranded. The master also stated that there was no deviation on the standard compass on the courses up the English Channel, but as he had to beat up the Channel, his opportunities for ascertaining this were limited. The chief officer informed the Court that on the voyage from Queenstown, when in the neighbourhood of the Scilly Isles, he took an observation of the pole star by the steering compass, which gave that compass 1¼ points of westerly deviation, but he does not appear to have communicated this to the master, nor to have ascertained whether there was any deviation of the standard compass.

Indeed, the result of this observation seems to have been practically ignored, and it was taken for granted that the standard compass was true, and that the ½ point of westerly deviation, which was all the difference that existed between the steering compass and the standard compass, was all the deviation for which allowance ought to be made. The result of this oversight was that the vessel must have been making a course up Channel of a point or more to the northward of her assumed course.

About 6 p.m. on February 17th the master took a bearing of the Royal Sovereign Light. It bore N. by W. by the steering compass, distant about four miles. The weather was clear, the wind from the N.W., a good whole sail breeze, all sail was set, and the vessel was making about seven knots an hour. As soon as this bearing was ascertained, the chief officer, with the master's consent, altered the course to E. by N. ½ N. by the steering compass, which he considered was E. by N. by the standard compass, and therefore E. by N. magnetic, on the assumption that the latter compass was true. On this course it was expected that the vessel would pass Dungeness at a distance of about four miles. At 8 p.m. the wind shifted to the W., and it began to snow, the snow continuing to fall heavily until the vessel got on shore. As the wind increased the vessel did not steer well, and from time to time had occasion to go off her course to avoid other vessels, and the Court had some doubt as to whether the course set by the steering compass was made good. By 10.30 p.m. the chief officer calculated that the vessel was abreast of Dungeness, and distant from it rather more than 4 miles. He accordingly altered the course to N.E. by E. ½ E. by the steering compass, being equivalent, as he considered, to E.N.E. magnetic by the standard compass. If the observation taken off Scilly was correct, it is obvious that the deviation allowed in this course was not sufficient; and it is worthy of note that the place where the vessel stranded bears about N.E. ¼ E. magnetic from the assumed position of the vessel 4 miles off Dungeness, which is about where her course would take if the steering compass had the deviation which the observation disclosed. But further, it is not even clear that the course set was made good, for the master, on looking at the steering compass at midnight, found that it was at N.E. by E., and was informed that the chief officer had altered the course without consulting him. He at once spoke to the chief officer, who stated that he had thought it necessary to go a little more to the northward, as he believed that the vessel had passed Dungeness at a greater distance than 4 miles, but added that he intended to alter the course shortly, which seems to have been done.

At 10.30 p.m. the wind had shifted to the S.W. and was blowing hard, and the fore and main topsails and the foresail were furled, and the speed of the vessel was reduced to about 4 knots through the water; but as the flood spring tide was making, she would be running about 6 knots over the ground. The heavy snow obscured all objects, and no soundings were taken, so that there were no means of ascertaining the position of the vessel. A good look-out was, however, kept by a man on the fore-castle, and by the master and chief officer on the poop, and the lights of more than one vessel were seen in time to avoid collision, but neither the master nor the chief officer seem to have taken sufficient care to see whether the course given was accurately kept.

At 1.30 p.m. on February 18th, the loom of the land was suddenly seen on the port bow. The master at once ordered the helm hard-a-port, and the yards to be braced up, but before this could be done the vessel stranded opposite Lydden, about three miles to the west of Dover. The seas at once began to break over her, filling the cabin, so that it was not until 5 a.m., when the tide had receded, that they were able to get at the rockets. These were eventually procured and fired, but no relief came. However, at morning the vessel was high and dry, and the crew were able to walk ashore, the master remaining on board. At 11 a.m. the coastguard came on board, and the pumps were set to work, but kept choking. Between 1 and 2 p.m. a tug came from Dover to their assistance, and an attempt was made to tow the vessel off, but without avail. Lighters were subsequently employed to lighten the vessel, a steam pump was put on board, and on

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February 26th the vessel was towed off and taken into Dover, where she discharged the rest of her cargo, and where she still remained at the date of this inquiry.

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

1. Were there any errors in the standard compass, and if so, were the proper corrections applied to the courses?
2. Was every reasonable effort made to ascertain the position of the vessel before changing the course to E.N.E. by the standard compass?
3. Was that a safe and proper course, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and leeway?
4. Was the course E.N.E. steered after it was set, and if not, who was responsible for the alteration?
5. Was a good and proper look-out kept on board?
6. Was the vessel navigated at too great a rate of speed, having regard to the weather?
7. Ought the lead to have been used?
8. What was the cause of the stranding?
9. Were the master and mate, or either of them, in default in regard to any of the above matters?

The Board of Trade state that in their opinion the certificates of the master and mate should be dealt with.

Mr. Miller, for the master, having addressed the Court, and the chief officer having spoken on his own behalf, the Court gave judgment as above and returned the following answers to the questions of the Board of Trade:—

1. The master stated that there were no errors in the standard compass, which was a pole compass, on the courses steered up Channel, and consequently no corrections were applied to the courses.
2. Owing to the fact that all objects were obscured by a snowstorm, no means were available for ascertaining the position of the vessel when the course was changed to E.N.E. by the standard compass. Her assumed position was arrived at by calculating the distance she had run from the point of departure at 6 p.m. on an E. by N. course by the same compass.

3. If her assumed position at 10.30 p.m. had been correct, the course then set would have been safe and proper, except that it would have taken her somewhat too much over to the Varne Shoal. No allowance was made for tide.

4. The course E.N.E. was steered until about midnight, when the chief officer, acting also as pilot, altered the course half a point to the northward for half an hour, and then resumed the E.N.E. course.

5. A good and proper look-out was kept on board.

6. When the snowstorms commenced, the vessel ought to have been hove to until the weather cleared.

7. The lead ought to have been used.

8. Having regard to the fact that the chief officer obtained an observation of the pole star on entering the Channel, which showed $1\frac{1}{2}$ points westerly deviation on the steering compass, by which the observation was taken, it should have been apparent that the pole compass did not give the true magnetic, and that consequently a course of E.N.E. by the latter compass was taking the ship more to the northward and inshore than was supposed. The stranding was due to the fact that the vessel was kept running during a thick snowstorm, which continued for some hours, upon a course considerably to the northward of her proper course.

9. Both the master and mate were in default—the master for entrusting too implicitly the navigation of the vessel to an unlicensed pilot, and for proceeding rashly in a continuous thick snowstorm without heaving to and using the lead, and the mate for neglecting to apply to the courses the correction he obtained by the observation of the pole star, and for omitting to call the attention of the master to the results of his observation.

The Court suspends the certificate of the master, Mr. Lewis Davies, for three months, and severely reprimands the chief officer, Mr. Thomas Myles.

(Signed) W. J. STEWART, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

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

Liverpool, 12th March 1892.

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