

(No. 4602.)

"CASKET."

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1887.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at the Guildhall, Plymouth, on the 26th and 27th days of October, before A. S. HARRIS and THOMAS PITTS, Esquires, Justices of the Peace, assisted by Captains WILLIAM PARFITT and EDWARD BROOKS, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British sailing ship "CASKET," of Guernsey, on or near the Frying Pan Shoals, North Carolina, U.S.A., on or about the 13th September 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 vessel was stranded owing to the courses set and steered not having been made good, in consequence, probably, of the existence of a north-easterly current, with which the master was not at the time acquainted; and to his error in judgment in heaving his vessel to on the wrong tack. The Court is of opinion that the certificates of the master and mate should not be dealt with.

Dated this 27th day of October 1892.

(Signed) A. S. HARRIS, } Justices.
THOS. PITTS, }

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) WM. PARFITT, } Assessors.
EDWARD BROOKS, }

Annex to the Report.

This investigation was held at the Guildhall, Plymouth, on the 26th and 27th days of October 1892.

Mr. Wolferstan appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade. The master and first mate of the vessel appeared, but were not represented by counsel.

The "Casket" was a British sailing-vessel, built of wood, in 1869, at Bridport, Dorset. She was rigged as a barque, her official number being 56,390.

She was registered at the Port of Guernsey, and was owned by Mr. Oliver S. S. Piper and Mr. William G. Crinks, both of Plymouth. The latter was appointed managing owner on the 19th November 1891.

Her under-deck tonnage was 322.37 tons, gross tonnage 349.85, and her registered tonnage 302.91.

She had a raised quarter-deck, and her dimensions were as follows:—Length, 130' 6"; breadth, 26' 1"; depth of hold, 15' 7".

This vessel loaded at Huelva, Spain, a cargo of 517 tons of iron pyrites, and left that port on the 4th August last bound for Wilmington, North Carolina, drawing 15 ft. forward, and 15 ft. 6 in. aft., with a crew of ten hands all told, of whom Mr. Richard C. Tozer was master, and who holds a certificate of competency as master, number 29,726.

The ship appeared to be well and properly equipped and in good order and condition, and after a favourable voyage across the Atlantic, during which her compass was tested frequently and always found to be correct, she arrived in Long Bay, Carolina, on the 13th September, her position at noon being, latitude, by meridian observation, 33° 17' N., longitude, by chronometer, 78° 26' W., and a cast of the lead was at that time taken giving 13 fathoms.

The weather was fine with a moderate southerly breeze. A course was set N. by E. (magnetic), and the vessel proceeded on this course under all plain sail, making an average of about 2½ knots an hour, the wind at times falling very light. The lead was hove hourly, and at 4 p.m. 12 fathoms was obtained. At 6 p.m. 9½ fathoms, and by this time the wind had freshened from S.S.E. The course was then altered to N.E. (magnetic).

Soundings were continued, and at 8.30 p.m. 7½ to 8 fathoms was obtained, when the wind had much increased and the night was very dark with drizzling rain. Nothing was in sight, although the first mate and one hand were aloft looking out for the Bald Head Light at the entrance to Wilmington River. The vessel was then rounded to, on the starboard tack, under the two lower topsails.

The weather continued to get worse, and at 10.25 a sounding was taken in 8 fathoms, and 10 minutes after 5 fathoms was found. All hands were then called, the foretop sail was clewed up and the starboard anchor let go, and cable veered to 45 fathoms.

As the vessel swung round, and when nearly head to wind, she bumped heavily. Rockets were then sent up, tackles hooked on to the boats, and the boats got out, and the second anchor let go.

The vessel began to make water rapidly and continued bumping, and at 12.30 all hands got into the boat and hung astern of the vessel. In about an hour and a half after this the "Casket" sank in about 23 feet of water. The crew continued to lie astern in the boat until 6.30 a.m. when they pulled away to the N.W., and in about half an hour the boat filled. The crew clung to her for some two hours, and then getting on a sand bank they succeeded in bailing her out, and shortly after a boat came to them from the shore and they landed at Cape Fear.

The place where the vessel struck was about four miles to the southward of the Bald Head Light, on the western side of the Frying Pan Shoals.

All the crew's effects were lost as well as all ship's papers, but no lives were lost. After landing they proceeded to Charlestown, where the master entered his protest, and from thence the master, first mate, and two other of the crew got passage to England, and were landed at Plymouth.

The master stated to the Court that when he shaped his course at noon on the 13th, he anticipated meeting with a southerly current, but that he discovered, when on the shoal, that the current was setting to the N.E., which agrees with the description of the current near Cape Fear, given in the Admiralty Sailing Directions for that locality, published in 1882, in which at page 189 it says: "The currents on this part of the coast of North Carolina are generally governed by the wind. During the summer, when the prevalent direction of the wind is S.W., the current sets N.E. parallel to the coast line. If setting in the opposite direction, it is a sure indication of an approaching N.E. wind."

As the current was undoubtedly at the time setting the vessel towards the Frying Pan Shoals, and as the wind was blowing hard from the S.S.E., whatever headway she might have been making when hove to must have been in the direction of danger. Had she been hove to on the other tack, she would probably not have stranded when she did, and might by daylight have been in pilot's water.

At the conclusion of the evidence Mr. Wolferstan submitted to the Court the following questions, namely:—

1. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about noon on the 13th September last?
2. Whether a safe and proper course was then set and thereafter steered, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide, currents, and leeway?
3. Whether a safe and proper alteration was made in the course at or about 6 p.m. of the 13th September, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide, currents, and leeway?
4. Whether, having regard to the state of the weather and the depth of water under the vessel at 8 p.m., the master was justified in heaving her to?
5. Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?
6. What was the cause of the casualty?
7. Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?
8. Whether the master and mate are, or either of them is, in default?
9. The Board of Trade is of opinion that the certificates of the master and mate should be dealt with.

To which the Court replied as follows:—

- 1. Proper measures were taken.
- 2. A safe and proper course was steered. No allowance was made for tide or currents. There was no leeway.
- 3. A safe and proper alteration in the course was made, but no allowance was made for tide or currents. There was no leeway.
- 4. The master was justified in heaving her to, but committed an error of judgment in not heaving her to on the port tack.
- 5. A good and proper look-out was kept.
- 6. The cause of the casualty was due to the courses set and steered not having been made good owing

probably to the existence of a north-east current which the master was not at the time acquainted, and to the mistake made by him of heaving his vessel to the starboard instead of the port tack.

7. The vessel was navigated with proper and seaman-like care, subject to the error of judgment mentioned above.

8. Neither the master nor the mate are in default.

(Signed) A. S. HARRIS, } Justices.
THOS. PITTS, }

We concur.

(Signed) WM. PARFITT, } Assessor
EDWARD BROOKS, }

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