

(No. 4948.)

"ROBERT THORMAN" (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1887.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at the Board Room of the Sunderland School Board Offices, John Street, in the Borough of Sunderland, on the 3rd and 4th days of July 1894, before JOHN SANDERSON, Mayor of Sunderland, and Alderman WILSON, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace acting in and for the said Borough, assisted by Captains WARD and CUNINGHAME, Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "ROBERT THORMAN," of Sunderland, on or near Market Rock, South Quarken, Gulf of Bothnia, on or about the 11th of May 1894.

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 was caused through careless navigation. The Court finds the master, Richard Taylor Humble, and the second officer, James Wighton Anderson, in default for such stranding, and suspends the certificate of the said Richard Taylor Humble for four months, and the certificate of the said James Wighton Anderson for three months from this date.

Dated this 4th day of July 1894.

(Signed) JOHN SANDERSON, } Judges.
WM. WILSON, }

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) C. Y. WARD, } Assessors.
ANDW. CUNINGHAME, }

Annex to the Report.

The "Robert Thorman" is a British steamship built of steel at Sunderland in the year 1891, and registered at the port of Sunderland, her official number being 97,549, and her dimensions, as per register: length, 210 ft.; breadth, 30 ft.; and depth in hold, 14.7 ft. She is rigged as a schooner, and fitted with a set of three tri-compound surface-condensing engines of 130 horsepower combined, the diameter of the cylinders being 19, 31, and 51 inches respectively, with a length of stroke of 33 in., and her registered tonnage, after deducting 359.15 tons for crew space and propelling power, being 578.58 tons. This vessel is owned by Mr. Robert Thorman, of Sunderland, and others, Mr. Thorman being the managing owner; and she was under the command of Richard Taylor Humble, who held a certificate of competency as master, numbered 023,665.

When the vessel was new she was supplied with three compasses by Mr. John J. Wilson, of Sunderland, namely, one on the upper bridge, a patent spirit compass, by which the vessel was navigated, one aft, and a spare one in the cabin. They were last adjusted by Mr. Wilson on the 18th January last off the Tyne, and a card of deviations supplied to the master, who stated that from time to time he verified them and found them correct. The Court, however, is not satisfied that the deviations were always correctly applied to the courses steered. She was also supplied with boats and life-saving appliances, which were all in good order and condition.

The "Robert Thorman" left Domsjo, under the charge of a government pilot, bound for Wisbech, on the morning of the 8th of May last, with a crew of seventeen hands all told, and a cargo of 370 standards of wood, 80 standards of which were on deck, her draught of water being then 15 ft. aft and 14 ft. forward. Shortly after leaving Domsjo a thick fog came on, and the vessel was anchored about 9 p.m. in the fiord for the night. About 5 a.m. next day she proceeded on her voyage, and at 6.20 a.m. the pilot was landed on Malmo Island, from which the master took his departure, the

island being about a quarter of a mile distant, and a S. $\frac{1}{4}$ W. magnetic course was set and steered till 8 a.m., when it was altered to S. $\frac{1}{4}$ W. magnetic for the South Quarken. At first the vessel's speed had to be eased several times on account of occasional fogs, but latterly the weather was very fine and clear with a perfectly smooth sea. The mate who had the first watch stated that at 11 p.m. he took cross bearings of the South Skalskar and Understen Lights, the former bearing S. $\frac{1}{4}$ W. and the latter W.S.W., and that the distance of Skalskar was 17 miles. On projecting these bearings on the chart, the Court finds that they place the ship only 3 miles instead of 17 miles north of Skalskar, and 8 or 9 miles beyond the range of the Understen Light; it is evident, therefore, that the mate's evidence on this point is quite unreliable. The captain was on deck at the time, and stated that the bearings were reported to him but he did not verify them, but that he altered the course to S.W. by W. magnetic, which course was continued until 12.50 a.m. of the 10th, when he again altered it to south west. At 1 a.m. he took cross bearings of Understen Light and Market Rock Light, which bore respectively S.W. by S. and south. He then altered the course to S.W. by S., on which he continued for about fifteen or twenty minutes, when he altered it to S.W. by W. $\frac{1}{4}$ W., and he then went below, leaving the deck in charge of the second mate with orders to him when Market Rock Light was abeam to steer south by east. The second mate stated that he endeavoured to carry out his instructions, but in about half an hour after the master went below, the ship going full speed, 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ knots, stranded on Markellan Rock and remained fast, having seven feet of water under her forefoot, twelve feet just before the bridge and ten fathoms under the stern. The master immediately came on deck, and having first eased the engines, finally stopped them, and ordered the cargo on the fore-deck to be jettisoned. He stated that at the time he came on deck the weather was still fine and clear, no wind, and the sea perfectly smooth, and that he saw the beacon on Markellan Shoal, a point on the starboard bow and about forty yards distant. The fore-peak filled immediately the vessel struck, and about 10 a.m., water appearing in the fore-hold, the master sent a boat to Market Rock Lighthouse to telegraph for assistance, and about midnight two salvage steamers, the "Belos" and the "Hero," arrived from Stockholm. With the assistance of the salvors, cargo was removed from the fore 'tween decks and rafted, a pump having been put on board, and a diver having plugged up the hole in the vessel's bottom, the "Robert Thorman" was got off at 7 a.m. on the 12th, and proceeded to Stockholm under her own steam, where she was placed in dry dock, and it was then found that she had sustained material damage, twenty plates being condemned and the stem broken. Repairs having been effected and the cargo re-shipped, she left Stockholm on the 10th June and on the 15th arrived at Wisbech.

The evidence in this inquiry as to the alleged bearings of lights and position of the ship at 11 p.m. on the 9th and at 1 a.m. on the 10th is so inconsistent and inexplicable, that the Court is of opinion that the lights were either not properly identified or that the bearings were incorrectly observed, otherwise it is almost inconceivable how, with ordinary care in such fine clear weather, the casualty could have occurred. In any case it seems to the Court that the master was not justified in going below just as he was approaching a place where his careful supervision was especially required. The Court is also of opinion that had the second mate been exercising due vigilance and intelligence he would have discovered the perilous position of the vessel, and that she was not making the course between the Understen and Market Rock Lights that the master intended.

At the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Burton, 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.—This vessel had three compasses on board, namely, one on the upper bridge, which was the standard compass, one aft, and a spare one in the cabin; they were in good order, and were sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel.

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

Ans.—They were supplied by Mr. I. Wilson of Sunderland in 1891, and were last adjusted by him off the Tyne on the 18th January 1894.

3. Did the master ascertain the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time, were the errors correctly ascertained and the proper corrections to the courses applied?

Ans.—The master appears to have ascertained the deviation of his compasses from time to time by comparing the courses steered with his land-falls, the errors appear to have been correctly ascertained, but the corrections were not properly applied.

4. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at midnight on the 9th May, at 1 a.m. on the 10th May, and from time to time thereafter, and was her position from time to time correctly determined?

Ans.—No measures were taken at midnight of the 9th May to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel, but at 1 a.m. of the 10th May measures were taken by cross-bearing, but, in the opinion of the Court, the position of the vessel was not then properly ascertained, and no measures were taken thereafter to ascertain her position.

5. Whether a safe and proper course was set at 1.15 a.m. on the 10th May, and thereafter steered, and

whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents?

Ans.—The course set at 1.15 a.m. on the 10th May was a safe and proper one if the vessel had been in the position the master supposed her to be. No allowance was made for currents.

6. Whether, when the master went below, he left proper instructions with the second officer as to the courses to be steered and the precautions to be taken?

Ans.—No.

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

Ans.—The master was not on deck at a time when the safety of the vessel required his personal supervision.

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

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

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

Ans.—No.

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

Ans.—Both the master and second officer are in default.

(Signed) JOHN SANDERSON, } Justices.
WM. WILSON, }

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) C. Y. WARD, } Assessors.
ANDW. CUNINGHAME, }

"M I

The Merchant

In the matter of the Magistrate and 9th days of Esquire, assisted by Wood, into the ing of the Bri pool, 2½ miles Carnarvon Bay.

The Court, having considered the circumstances attending the casualty, finds, for hereto, that the said vessel were damaged, make her course good, the sounding which obtained, came to further from the consequently in a

Dated this 9th day of

We concur in

(Signed)

The "Mersey," screw steamship, built of steel at Hull, was 173.01 ft., beam 11.87 ft. She was of 73 horse-power, 536.34 tons, and was owned by H. Bright and M. tered joint managers.

The "Mersey" 1.40 p.m., bound for of sugar. She was held a certificate 010,111. He had crew consisted of mate, 4 deck hands of the deck hands as steward, cook, of this was that t only himself and compasses, one in compass, on the the steam-steering the vessel. The swung more than master, who joined tion cards then cordingly took f of correcting the and appeared to with its error. randum book, 10.15 p.m. on was abeam, dist ordered the vessel to the eastward course he calculated on that compass was abeam, dist was altered to N magnetic. The miles to the west about 2.30 a.m. went below, but deck, where he