

(No. 4985.)

“GERTRUDE” (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 13th and 14th days of September 1894, before JOHN SUGGITT and ROBINSON MURRAY, Esquires, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the Borough of West Hartlepool, assisted by Captains KENNETT HORE and WILLIAM ERSKINE, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship “GERTRUDE,” of West Hartlepool, at or near Blacknor Point, Portland, on or about the 26th day of August 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 casualty was caused in consequence of the incorrect allowance made by the master for deviation in the courses at and after 11 p.m. on the 25th August, and by the neglect of the use of the lead while approaching the land in hazy and thick weather, until too late to be of service, for had the lead been used earlier and with sufficient frequency, the master would have been warned of his proximity to the land in time to enable him to avoid the casualty. The Court finds the master, Frederick William Weeks, alone in default, but having regard to his excellent character, suspends his certificate for the period of three months only, to take effect from the date of the stranding of the vessel. The Court also considers the chief officer, John Goulding, to blame for not using the lead earlier and more frequently in thick weather, knowing the vessel was within range of and approaching the Portland Lights.

Dated this fifteenth day of September 1894.

(Signed) J. SUGGITT, } Justices.
R. MURRAY, }

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) KENNETT HORE, } Assessors.
WILLIAM ERSKINE, }

Annex to the Report.

This was an inquiry into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British steamship “Gertrude,” of West Hartlepool, near Blacknor Point, Portland, Dorsetshire, on the 26th August 1894, and was held at the Municipal Buildings, West Hartlepool, before Alderman J. Suggitt (Mayor), and Robinson Murray, Esquire, Justices of the Peace.

Mr. Burton (of Messrs. Watson and Dendy, Newcastle) appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. Temperley represented the owner, Mr. A. F. Trechmann, and Mr. T. H. Tilly appeared for the master, Mr. Frederick W. Weeks.

The “Gertrude,” official number 70,130, was an iron screw steam vessel, built at West Hartlepool in 1879 by Messrs. William Gray & Co. She was 244.0 ft. long, 32.2 ft. breadth of beam, and 18.4 ft. depth of hold, and was fitted with two inverted compound direct-acting engines of 120 horse-power combined, the diameter of the cylinders being 29 and 55 in., and length of stroke 33 in. She had two masts, and was brigantine-rigged; her gross tonnage being 1347.06 tons, and her registered tonnage 869.11 tons, and she was owned by Mr. Albert Frederick Trechmann, of West Hartlepool, and others as set forth in the register, Mr. Trechmann being the managing owner and designated as such on the 15th April 1893.

The “Gertrude” had three compasses, the pole placed before the bridge, and a steering compass on the bridge (before the steering gear), which was a spirit compass and used as a standard, and by this compass the courses were set and steered and the vessel navigated, and there was a third compass placed in front of

the steering gear aft. They were all said to have been in good order and condition, but they only appear to have been adjusted about the 12th of August 1892, by Mr. L. Emerson of West Hartlepool, who at that time cleaned and repaired them, fitting one with a new agate. There was no evidence before the Court to show when or by whom they were made, nor do they appear to have been in any compass maker's hands since that date.

The “Gertrude” carried four boats, two of which were lifeboats and the other two a gig and a small boat for running out lines. There were 22 lifebelts and six lifebuoys on board in accordance with the Board of Trade regulations for life-saving appliances, and the vessel was stated to have been well found and properly fitted and equipped for the trade in which she was engaged. Her crew consisted of 18 hands all told, apportioned as follows: master, two officers, and five A.B.'s, three engineers, three firemen, one donkeyman, cook, steward and boy. There was an officer and two A.B.s in each watch. The fifth A.B. was only a lamp trimmer, who kept no night watch. Consequently (as explained by the chief officer) when there was one man on the look-out and another at the wheel, there was no one left to take a cast of the lead or haul the line in, and unless the officer of the watch called the master on deck to take his place, and took the cast of the lead himself, in which event he would either have to haul the lead and line in himself or call the man off the look-out to assist him to do so, it was either necessary to call all hands or wait till the end of the watch when all hands were on deck, before this could be done.

The “Gertrude” left Huelva on the 20th of August last, and discharged the pilot about 4.30 p.m. Her draught of water was 18 ft. 6½ ins. on an even keel. She was bound for Rotterdam with a cargo of 1,750 tons of iron pyrites, and intended to call at Portland for coals. She was under the command of Mr. Frederick W. Weeks, and carried two passengers. She proceeded all well, the weather being fine and the winds light and variable. At 4.50 a.m. of the 21st August, Cape Sagres was abeam, and at 5.15 Cape St. Vincent was rounded and the courses set N. ½ E., N. by E., and N.N.E. till Cape Roca was abeam at 7.30 p.m., distant two miles. From this position a N.N.E. course for four hours and a N. by E. ½ E. course for 27 hours were steered, till Cape Finisterre was abeam at 3.30 a.m. of the 23rd August, distant about 13 miles. The courses were then altered to N.E. ½ N., N.E. ½ N., N.E. ½ E., and N.E. by E. till Ushant Light was abeam at 5 a.m. of the 25th August, distant seven miles, and bearing S.E. by S.

From this position off Ushant the master stated that he steered a N.E. by E. course by compass, which was N.E. by E. ¾ E. magnetic, till noon; and from noon N.E. by E. ½ E., which was E. by N. ½ N. magnetic, till the Start Light was made at 11 p.m. bearing about 3 points abaft the port beam, distant about 20 miles. The weather had been dull, cloudy, and heavy rain with thunder and lightning, but cleared up at this time, and the light was seen twice. The course was then altered to E.N.E., which the master stated was E. ¾ N. magnetic. From this position it will be seen there were about 38 miles to run to Portland Bill on an E.N.E. course, and the master stated he was steering E.N.E. by his compass, which was E. ¾ N. magnetic. The weather had in the meantime cleared up, and the master went below, leaving orders to be called at 2 a.m., or if it became thick or foggy, or if any shore lights were seen. At 2 a.m. the chief officer called the master, there was nothing in sight, and the master went below again after being on deck for five or ten minutes. The weather was fine but hazy, with occasional fog banks, the vessel going full speed, about 7½ to 8 knots. At 3.30 a.m. the weather had become a dense fog, and the chief officer called the master, who came on deck and slowed the engines, but no cast of the lead was taken till 3.55, when 21 fathoms were found with coarse sand and gravel, the watch below having come on deck and assisted to haul in the lead. After waiting some five or six minutes the engines were put easy ahead, and the course altered to East, which the master stated was E. by S. ¾ S. magnetic. In about ten minutes from starting easy ahead, the loom of the land was seen right over them, and the water breaking on the beach close under the bow. The helm was put hard-a-port, and the telegraph rang full speed astern, but before she could be stopped the vessel ran stem on to the rocks and re-

mained fast, her head still east by compass. The boats were swung out, and a kedge run out astern with a 5-inch hawser, and the holds were examined. Water was found to be rising in No. 1 hold, and the donkey pumps were set going. Three tugs came to their assistance, and every endeavour was made, with the help of the tugs and the ship-engines, to get her off, but without success. In the afternoon the water filled the holds and engine-room, breaking the bulk-heads, and the vessel was then abandoned, a complete wreck. No lives were lost. Everything moveable about the decks that could be taken away was saved.

From these facts it is clear that the primary cause of the casualty was steering towards the land in hazy and thick weather, without using the lead, in the endeavour to pick up Portland Bill Lights. From 11 p.m., when the Start was seen, there were only 38 miles to run on an E.N.E. course, and the master stated that he steered E.N.E., which was E. $\frac{1}{4}$ N. magnetic, and which course, if it had been correct, would have taken him quite clear; but it is evident, from where he stranded, that he did not even make the E.N.E. course, but was, in fact, northward of that line. What deviation there might have been on the N.E. courses it is impossible for the Court to say in the absence of any reliable observations or deviation cards, but it is apparent that the courses steered, from the position off Ushant, without regard to deviation, place the ship about where she stranded; and it is quite clear that had the lead been used with sufficient frequency after 11 p.m. the shoaling of the water would have warned the master of his position in time for him to have avoided the casualty, without regard to the question of deviation. From 11 p.m. till 3.30 a.m. the ship was kept going full speed, and it must have been evident had run her distance; but there was no cast of the lead taken till 3.55 a.m., although it was a dense fog, and by that time it was too late to be of any service. The reason given to the Court why this was not done was because, as it was stated, it was usual to take a cast when all hands were on deck to haul the line in. It seems almost incredible that with a cargo of iron pyrites on board the master took no particular observations to find whether it affected his compasses or not; but, judging from the compass courses steered from Ushant to where she stranded, the vessel's head must have been nearly correct magnetic on those courses. Again, looking at these courses laid down on the chart, and what the master said these courses represented as magnetic courses, shows that the corrections were much too large; and the fact of his having seen the Start must have warned him that the courses steered were not being made, and that he was to the north-westward of his position.

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

1. What number of compasses had the vessel, where were they placed, and were they in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel?
2. When and by whom were they last adjusted?
3. Did the master ascertain the deviation of his compasses from time to time, were the errors correctly ascertained, and the proper correction to the courses applied?
4. Whether a safe and proper course was set at or about 5 a.m. on the 25th August, and thereafter steered, and whether due and proper allowance was made for leeway and for tide and currents?
5. Whether safe and proper alterations were made in the course at noon and about 11 p.m. on the last mentioned date, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents?
6. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 11 p.m. on the 25th August and from time to time thereafter?
7. Whether the lead was used with sufficient frequency, especially having regard to the thick state of the weather?

8. Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?
 9. Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?
 10. What was the cause of the casualty?
 11. Whether the master and officers are, or either of them is, in default?
- In the opinion of the Board of Trade the certificate of Frederick William Weeks, the master, should be dealt with.

The Court was then addressed by Mr. Temperley for the owners and by Mr. Tilly for the master.

Mr. Burton having replied for the Board of Trade, the Court replied to the questions as follows:—

1. The vessel had three compasses—a pole compass placed before the bridge amidships; a spirit compass, also placed amidships, by which the courses were set and steered and the vessel navigated; and a compass placed before the steering gear aft. They were in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel.
 2. The compasses were last adjusted in August 1892 by L. Emerson, of West Hartlepool.
 3. The master stated that he did ascertain the deviation of his compasses from time to time, and that he properly and correctly applied the deviations; but no cards, compass book, or memoranda were produced by the master to show what the deviations really were.
 4. A safe course was set at and steered from 5 a.m. until noon of the 25th August, and due allowance was made for tide, currents, and leeway.
 5. The alterations made in the courses at noon and about 11 p.m., when a light (which was taken to be, and undoubtedly was, the Start) was seen, were in the right direction, but they were not sufficient, because the master allowed for easterly deviation, and the courses made prove to the Court that there was no easterly deviation whatever. A sufficient allowance was made for tide and currents.
 6. No measures were taken to ascertain the position of the vessel at 11 p.m. on the 25th August, beyond a bearing of the light, nor afterwards until within ten minutes of the stranding, when a cast of the lead was taken, which gave twenty-one fathoms.
 7. The lead was not used with sufficient frequency after 11 p.m., especially as the vessel had not made the course set and intended up to that time, and was approaching Portland in hazy and eventually thick weather. The lead should have been used constantly.
 8. A good and proper look-out was kept.
 9. The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care after 11 p.m. on the 25th August.
 10. The casualty was caused in consequence of the incorrect allowance made by the master for deviation in the courses at and after 11 p.m. on the 25th August, and by the neglect of the use of the lead while approaching the land in hazy and thick weather until too late to be of service; for had the lead been used earlier and with sufficient frequency the master would have been warned of his proximity to the land in time to enable him to avoid the casualty.
- The Court finds the master, Frederick William Weeks, alone in default, but having regard to his excellent character, suspends his certificate for the period of three months only, to take effect from the date of the stranding of the vessel.
- The Court also considers the chief officer, John Goulding, to blame for not using the lead earlier and more frequently in thick weather, knowing the vessel was within range of and approaching the Portland Lights.

(Signed) J. SUGGITT, } Justices.
R. MURRAY, }

We concur.

(Signed) KENNETT HORE, } Assessors.
WILLIAM ERSKINE, }

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