

(No. 5715.)

"BRITTANY" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Moot Hall and Police Buildings, Newcastle-on-Tyne, on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th days of May, 1898, before HUGH MORTON and WILLIAM C. WELLS, Esquires, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace acting in and for the City and County of Newcastle-on-Tyne, assisted by Captains EDWARD BROOKS and WILLIAM ERSKINE, Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "BRITTANY," of South Shields, about one mile to the south east of Knud's Head, East Coast of Denmark, on the 18th day of March, 1898.

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 and subsequent material damage were caused through the master, Alexander Bowman, neglecting to take proper measures to verify his position. The Court finds the master alone in default, and, while not dealing with his certificate, reprimands him for his neglect.

Dated this Fifth day of May, 1898.

HUGH MORTON, } Judges.
W. C. WELLS, }

We concur in the above report.

EDWARD BROOKS, } Assessors.
WILLIAM ERSKINE, }

Annex to the Report.

This was an inquiry into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "Brittany," and was held at the Moot Hall and Central Police Buildings, Newcastle upon-Tyne, on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th days of May, 1898, before Hugh Morton and William Cowell, Esquires, assisted by Captains Edward Brooks and William Erskine, nautical assessors.

Mr. Dendy appeared for the Board of Trade and Mr. Temperley represented the owners and master.

The "Brittany," official No. 65,123, was an iron screw steamship built at Wallsend-on-Tyne in the year 1871 by Messrs. Schlesinger, Davis & Co. She was of the following dimensions: Length, 205 feet; breadth, 28.6 feet; and depth of hold, 17.25 feet.

She was schooner-rigged, fitted with two compound direct-acting surface-condensing engines of 112 horsepower, constructed by Messrs. R. and W. Hawthorn, of Newcastle, in the year 1871.

She was of 810.41 gross, and 498.65 net registered tonnage, and was owned by the S.S. Benalder Company, Limited, Messrs. Sherinton Foster Whittles and Thomas Pallister, both of 22, King Street, South Shields, being designated managing owners.

She was, on the voyage in question, in good condition, and well found and fitted with boats and life-saving appliances in accordance with the Act.

The vessel was supplied with two compasses, one on the bridge and the other aft.

The "Brittany" left Blyth on the 15th March last bound for Svendborg, in the Baltic, with a cargo of 1,034 tons of coal and a crew of 17 hands all told under the command of Mr. Alexander Bowman, who held a certificate of competency as master No. 03585. Her draught of water on leaving was 16 feet 8 inches on an even keel. The master, who had a free hand as to charts, &c., was supplied with Messrs. Norrie & Wilson's blue-back chart of the Cattegat published in

1894, but not corrected to date. As will be seen from the answers to the questions submitted to the Court, this chart was inaccurate in many particulars, and the Court desires to point out once more how desirable it is that masters should be provided with the latest charts and sailing directions.

On the day following, the master had one opportunity on the voyage of testing his compasses, and of this he availed himself.

All went well till 4 p.m. of the 17th, when it became thick, and speed was reduced, the vessel being stopped from time to time to take casts of the lead. At 11 p.m. the weather became very thick, and the fog-siren was heard on the Skaw lightship, bearing W.S.W.

After rounding the Skaw the course was altered to S.E. $\frac{3}{4}$ S. (magnetic) and continued till 6 a.m. of the 18th, during which time the vessel had been going "slow." The course was again altered to S.S.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ E. (magnetic) and continued till 8 a.m., when it was altered to S. by E. $\frac{1}{4}$ E. (magnetic) and continued till noon.

At this time the master, calculating that he was clear of the Kobber-grund, made a further alteration to S.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ W. (magnetic). At 2 p.m. the weather cleared up and the vessel was put at "full speed," the course at 3 p.m. being altered to S.W. by W. $\frac{1}{4}$ W. (magnetic), and at 4 o'clock the master, seeing land broad on the starboard beam, altered the course to S.W. $\frac{3}{4}$ S. (magnetic). At 6 p.m., the weather becoming hazy over the land, soundings were taken, giving 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms, and the course altered to E.S.E. (magnetic) for a few minutes, and then to S.E. (magnetic). At 6.15, the master and mate being on the bridge, the vessel touched the ground but did not stop. The second officer who was below, feeling the shock, immediately came on deck and went on the bridge. He stated, that when he stepped on deck he saw a beacon with two balls on his port beam, and that by the time he reached the bridge it was on the port quarter. In this he was corroborated by the man at the wheel and the first officer, and the master's attention was called to it, but he stated in evidence he did not see it. The vessel was stopped and a cast of the lead taken, giving 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms. Here the master made his initial mistake by not referring to his chart. Had he done so, he could not have failed to verify his position.

Soundings were continued, several courses were steered, and the vessel occasionally stopped. At 7 p.m., while steering E.S.E., the master saw a light, and at 8 p.m. he pointed it out to the second officer, who had just come on the bridge to relieve the first officer. The light was then on the starboard bow, and the master said it was the gas-buoy which he had told the second officer, when he was last on watch, he expected to make. This light, as subsequent events proved, was the Knud's Head Light, and was not shown on the chart by which the master was navigating; but a comparison of the soundings taken with those indicated on the chart outside the buoy would have at once proved to him his error.

At 8.5 p.m. the last cast of the lead was taken, giving 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms. Soon after Fornaes Light opened, bearing S.S.E. (magnetic), nearly ahead on the starboard bow, the vessel going at the time "full speed." At 8.20 the second officer remarked to the master that the supposed gas-buoy light appeared very large and very high, and the latter replied that it was a high buoy. The ship proceeded, and in a short time had to port her helm for a passing steamer, and whilst being brought back to her course struck on the rocks about one mile south-east of Knud's Head, and remained fast. During the afternoon and up to the time of stranding there had been a moderate breeze from the S.W., with haze over the land. The pumps were sounded and the forward tank found filling with water. The pumps were kept going all night, and at 8 a.m. of the 19th the master went on shore for assistance. By this time there was a strong breeze from the N.W., which increased to a gale on the 20th, when all hands left and the vessel was abandoned, their efforts to get her off being unavailing. She was subsequently, on the 9th April, floated by a Svitzer salvage steamer and taken to Copenhagen, where it was found she had

sustained very material damage, a number of plates being holed. No lives were lost.

At the conclusion of the evidence, the following questions were submitted on behalf of the Board of Trade; Mr. Temperley addressed the Court for his clients and Mr. Dendy replied:—

1. What number of compasses had the vessel; were they in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel; and when and by whom were they last adjusted?
2. 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?
3. Was the vessel supplied with proper charts and sailing directions; and did the chart by which the master was navigating contain the latest corrections?
4. Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at 8 p.m. on the 18th March, and from time to time thereafter?
5. Was a safe and proper course set at or about 8 p.m. on the last mentioned date; was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents; and was the course set steered?
6. Did the master mistake the light exhibited from Knud's Head for the light from the buoy off the Tangen Bank, and, if so, was the mistake justifiable?
7. Was a good and proper look-out kept?
8. Was the lead used with sufficient frequency?
9. Was the vessel navigated with proper and seaman-like care?
10. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?
11. Was serious damage caused to the "Brittany" by the wrongful act or default of the master and officers, or any or them?

To which the Court replied as follows:—

1. There were two compasses on board, one on the bridge and the other aft. They were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted by Aynsley, of South Shields, off the Tyne, in November, 1896.
2. The master stated he ascertained the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time, that the errors were correctly ascertained, and the proper corrections to the courses applied.
3. The vessel was supplied with Norrie & Wilson's blue-back chart of the Cattegat, published in 1894, and the accompanying sailing directions. The chart, however, was not corrected to date, and did not show the light on Knud's Head shown on the Admiralty chart No. 2,114 corrected to date. It improperly described the gas-buoy and beacon placed respectively on the north-eastern and western ends of Tangen Bank, and omitted altogether to refer to the floating beacon moored at the eastern extremity of the bank. These are all noted on the Admiralty chart and in the Baltic

Pilot; but, apparently, there is a discrepancy between the Admiralty chart and the Baltic Pilot in reference to the buoy at the western end of Tangen Bank, the former showing two balls and the latter one only. There was no evidence to show when the light was placed on Knud's Head, but it undoubtedly existed in October, 1895, when Part I., 3rd edition, of the Admiralty Baltic Pilot was published. For the foregoing reasons the Court finds that the vessel was not supplied with proper charts and sailing directions.

4. Proper measures were not taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at and after 8 p.m. of the 18th March, as the master omitted to refer to the chart when the Fornæs Light came in view at 8 p.m., bearing S.S.E. nearly ahead. Had he done so he would have at once found the vessel's position.

5. A safe and proper course was not set and steered at or about 8 p.m., and no allowance was made for currents.

6. The master mistook the light exhibited from Knud's Head for the light from the buoy off the Tangen Bank, but, although the former was not shown on his chart, the mistake was unjustifiable, inasmuch as the soundings found did not correspond with his assumed position, and land was visible on the star-board beam and bow, which would not have been the case had the light seen been that from the buoy.

7. A good and proper look-out appears to have been kept.

8. The lead was used with sufficient frequency up to 8 o'clock, but the master failed to take advantage of the information thus obtained by neglecting to compare the soundings with the chart.

9. The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care after 6 p.m. of the 18th March.

10. The stranding of the vessel was caused through the master failing to take proper measures to verify his position.

11. The Court finds the master, Alexander Bowman, alone in default; but having regard to his age and previous good character, and to the fact that he had been constantly on the bridge for some 24 hours navigating the vessel in thick weather through difficult waters, the Court does not deal with his certificate, but reprimands him for his neglect.

HUGH MORTON, }
WM. COWELL, } Justices.

We concur.

EDWARD BROOKS, }
WILLIAM ERSKINE, } Assessors.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 27th day of May, 1898.)

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