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(No. 5894.)

"STELLA" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a formal investigation held at the Guildhall, Westminster, on the 27th and 28th April, and 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 11th May, and at the Town Hall, Westminster, on the 6th and 10th days of May, 1899, before R. H. B. MARSHAM, Esq., assisted by Captains KNOX, R.N., and RONALDSON, and Commander CABORNE, C.B., R.N.R., into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "STELLA," on the 30th March, 1899, near the Casquets, whereby loss of life ensued.

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 cause of the stranding and consequent loss of the vessel was that she had not made good the course set, and that the master continued at full speed in thick weather when he must have known his vessel was in the immediate neighbourhood of the Casquets, without taking any steps to verify his position.

Dated this fifteenth day of May, 1899.

R. H. B. MARSHAM, Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

HENRY KNOX, Captain, R.N., } Assessors. A. RONALDSON, } W. F. CABORNE, }

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was held at the Guildhall, Westminster, on the 27th and 28th April, the 2nd, 4th, and 5th May; at the Town Hall, Westminster, on the 6th and 10th May; and was concluded at the Guildhall, Westminster, on the 11th May, 1899. Mr. H. Mansel Jones and the Hon. A. Lyttleton, M.P., appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade, Sir Robert Reid, Q.C., M.P., Mr. Butler Aspinall, Q.C., and Mr. R. Acland represented the London and South Western Railway Company, the owners of the "Stella," Mr. W. Baden Powell, Q.C., and Mr. Balloch represented the relatives of the late Captain Reeks, the master of the "Stella," whilst Mr. H. C. Richards, Q.C., M.P., appeared on behalf of the Rev. John Penfold, of Guernsey, and the infant child of L. Andruna Ducasn, Mr. C. Tyrrell Giles, M.P., for the representatives of Mr. John Walter Townsend and Mr. Alfred William Green, Mr. Courthope Munroe and Mr. Percival Clarke for the family and executors of the late Alderman J. C. Collier and his son, Mr. E. K. Collier, Mr. Lauriston Batten for the relatives of Mr. De Montmorency, Mr. and Mrs. Black, and Mr. Maurice Roche, and also for Mr. Anderson, Mr. Arnold, and Mr. De Vesian, Mr. Cosmo Rose Innes and Mr. E. M. Vaughan Roderick for Mr. and Mrs. William Chamberlain, Mr. R. W. Turner and Mr. E. Hilliard for the relatives of Mr. Reginald Moon and Mr. Herbert Ross, Mr. R. Storry Deans for the relatives of Major D'Arcy Baker, and for Miss Baker, Mr. Earle for Mrs. Aylett and the executors of Dr. Davis, Mr. Arthur P. Poley for the widow and children of the Rev. G. W. Clutterbuck, Mr. Arthur Turner for the representatives of Mr. W. L. Parker, Mr. W. Agate for the relatives of Mr. R. A. Stuart, Mr. George Willson for the widow and four children of Mr. Le Mare, Mr. May for the widow and children of Mr. Herbert E. Stenning, Mr. W. Gurney Winter for Mrs. Welch and others, Mr. Edmund Fitzgerald for the relatives of Mr. William Smith, and Mr.

Percy W. Langdale was present on behalf of the Berthon Boat Company, Limited.

The "Stella," official number 97,219, was a twin screw steamship, built of steel in 1890, at Clydebank, Dumbartonshire, by Messrs. J. and G. Thomson, Limited. She was registered at the port of Southampton, and was the property of the London and South Western Railway Company, having its principal place of business at London. She was under the management of Mr. John Dixon, the Company's dock and marine superintendent at Southampton, designated the person to whom the management of the vessel was entrusted by and on behalf of the owners, advice received 17th August 1893, under the seal of the London and South Western Railway Company, the registered owners. Her dimensions were: length, 259 feet; breadth, 35.1 feet; depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling at midships, 14.8 feet; and her tonnage was 1058.95 tons gross and 192.55 tons net register. She was propelled by two sets of triple expansion engines of 5,700 indicated horse power, with compound direct acting inverted cylinders of the following dimensions: 24 inches, 37 inches, and 56 inches.

She had two steel boilers, with 160 lbs. pressure, made by her builders, which would give her a speed of 19 1/2 knots.

She cost some £62,000, and was insured for £30,000, the owners taking the remainder of the risk.

She was fitted with seven water-tight steel bulkheads, and the doors were closed by screws from the deck.

On this voyage she was commanded by Mr. William Reeks, who held a certificate of competency as master in the Home Trade Passenger Service, and also held pilot's certificates for the Southampton Waters and for the Channel Islands, and she had a crew of 42 all told. She was fitted with two lifeboats, two cutters, and a dinghey, and she had two Berthon collapsible boats. She had 754 life-belts, 36 life-buoys, and some deck raft seats. She last passed her Board of Trade survey as a passenger steamship on the 19th May, 1898, and was altogether in first-class order. She was fitted with three compasses, which were last adjusted by Mr. J. Blount Thomas, of Southampton, in April, 1897.

The crew were told off to the different boats, and were practised at boat-drill once a fortnight. The master's and chief officer's boats were the two Berthon collapsible boats.

She left Southampton on the 30th March last, at 11.25 a.m., this being the first daylight trip of the season for the Easter holidays, with about 147 passengers, but the Company was unable to furnish the Court with the exact number of passengers. When abreast of Hurst Castle the patent log was stated to have been put over, and when abreast of the Needles at 12.44 p.m.—it being at this time about high water—the log was set, and at 1.44 p.m. looked at, when it was found she had run 18 1/2 knots in the hour. The log does not seem to have been looked at after this.

The weather was fine, with a light, westerly wind, and the course was set from the Needles, S.W. 1/4 S. southerly by the standard compass, on which course there was stated to be no deviation. At about 2 p.m. the weather became hazy, and soon afterwards the vessel passed through a bank of fog, when, it was stated, the engines were eased. They again proceeded full speed, until about 3 p.m., when the engines were again eased during the time the vessel was passing through another bank of fog. Then full speed was resumed and continued up to the time of the casualty.

It was the master's practice before leaving Southampton to give orders to the chief engineer to ring up to the bridge on two occasions before reaching the Casquets when a certain number of revolutions had been made, so that the master might estimate the distance he was from the Casquets.

At 3.30 p.m. the second mate went on the bridge, having been sent for by the chief mate, who was on the bridge with the master, and they all remained there until the casualty took place.

From this time the haze seems to have increased ahead, but the second mate stated he thought he could see half a mile.

At 3.42 p.m. the first bell rang from the engine-room denoting that a certain number of revolutions had been made.

At about this time the fog seems to have increased considerably and become thick. At 3.55 p.m. the engine-room bell was said to have been again rung up to the bridge to inform the master of the additional number of revolutions; and this the second mate entered in the rough log, the chief mate having entered the previous warning.

Almost immediately afterwards the look-out man heard a blast—one only—right ahead, which he reported. This was answered from the bridge, and he immediately afterwards reported "Land right ahead," and again he received an answer. The blast must evidently have been heard by the master, for immediately afterwards the lookout man stated the vessel swung off rapidly to starboard. The second officer also stated he heard only one blast, and that the master immediately gave orders, "Port!" "Hard-a-port," while he (the second officer) immediately put the telegraph for the starboard engine to "stop," and "full speed astern."

At this time the foot of the Casquet rock on which the lighthouse is situated was quite visible, but, owing to the fog, the upper part could not be seen.

The ship paid off rapidly to starboard about six points and then appears to have struck on the foot of L'anquière rock almost immediately afterwards. The engines were immediately stopped and the water-tight doors closed, but the water rose rapidly, the bottom of the vessel having been most seriously injured.

Immediately upon striking, the master gave the order to call the men to "Stations," and to "Hurry up and get the boats out," and for the carpenter to sound the well, while the chief officer said to the passengers, "Keep cool, there is plenty of time; all will be saved"; and the crew, stewards, and stewardesses, assisted the passengers to put on life-belts.

The starboard lifeboat was then lowered and brought to the gangway. The chief officer called out, "Ladies and children first," upon which some of the passengers gave a cheer. About 37 persons, including four members of the crew got into her, and she shoved off from the vessel. About half in the boat were ladies, and there were two children also. The starboard cutter was also got away with about 26 persons in her all told, including one lady. The dinghey also got away safely with two of the crew and eleven passengers in her, including nine ladies and a boy. It was stated that at this time no more ladies were seen on the starboard side of the vessel. When the starboard cutter was about twenty yards away from the vessel three ladies appeared on the main deck and appealed for help. Simultaneously the chief officer approached them and said, "Ladies, your boat is on the other side," and they went with him.

At this time the ship was rapidly sinking by the stern.

In the meantime the port cutter had been lowered, and about four of the crew and eighteen passengers, including five ladies, left the ship in her. The port lifeboat had been lowered to the rail when the ship suddenly slipped off the rocks into deep water.

Some of the ladies appear to have been reluctant to enter the boats; several were pushed in by their friends, and others stood together in a group on the port side right up to the time of the vessel sinking.

The second mate, who went down with the vessel, upon coming to the surface saw the starboard lifeboat, and swimming to it, he was received on board and took charge. Soon after a passenger swam to the same boat and was picked up, bringing the total number to about thirty-nine.

Soon after the starboard cutter fell in with the dinghey and took her in tow, the dinghey having previously picked up a passenger. The starboard cutter and dinghey, after drifting about all night, were picked up by the Great Western Railway Company's steamship "Lynx," at about 7 a.m. of the next day, and taken to Guernsey.

The starboard lifeboat and port cutter were picked up by the South Western Railway Company's steamship "Vera," at about the same time, and their occupants were conveyed to Guernsey.

Upon the "Stella" foundering, the port lifeboat, which was being lowered, appears to have capsized, and some fourteen persons managed to reach her bottom.

Some few hours later she was struck by a sea and

righted, and all but two managed to get into her. Not being able to find a plug, though there were two properly attached, one of which only was necessary, they were unable to free the boat from water. During the night two of the crew and two of the passengers died from exhaustion and exposure. In the morning she was observed by a French coastguardsman to be floating about, and he having wired to the French Admiral at Cherbourg, the latter sent the Government tug "Marsouin" to her assistance, which eventually picked them up at about 2 p.m. on Good Friday when about seven miles north of Cherbourg. They were then taken to that port, and very hospitably treated.

On the deck of the "Stella" there had been a furniture van stowed, which floated off, and was clung to for a time by some of the unfortunate passengers and crew, but she was speedily lost to view.

One of the small deck rafts supported for some time four persons, who subsequently got on to the bottom of the port lifeboat.

Two passengers clung to a grating, one of whom was subsequently picked up by the starboard lifeboat, while the other was drowned.

The steamer disappearing so rapidly—only about eight minutes after striking—there was not sufficient time to open out and lower the Berthon collapsible boats, which were capable of containing seventy-four persons.

The Court attaches a list of the crew, showing the total lost and saved; also a list of the passengers saved, and a list, supplied by the Company, of persons for whom enquiries have been received as supposed passengers by the "Stella," but the Company has been unable to trace some of them as having been on board.

Mr. Reynolds, the second mate, who went down with the vessel, and afterwards took charge of the starboard lifeboat, deserves great credit for his courage and conduct.

These were the facts of the case, and on the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Mansel Jones, on behalf of the Board of Trade, put to the Court the following questions:—

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. Whether the vessel carried the boats and life-saving appliances required by the Statute, and were the boats so carried as to be at all times fit and ready for use?

3. Was the vessel supplied with a patent log and the necessary apparatus for taking soundings?

4. What experience had the late Captain Reeks of the navigation between Southampton and the Channel Islands?

5. What instructions were issued by the Company to their masters as to the navigation of their vessels, and were such instructions communicated to the late Captain Reeks?

6. What arrangements were made by the Company with regard to Easter traffic or excursions between Southampton and the Channel Islands, and what were the boats? When were they to start respectively, and who were their commanders?

7. At what time was the "Stella" due to arrive at Guernsey and Jersey respectively, on the 30th March? Up to what time could she have been berthed in the inner harbour at St. Heliers, and how long was it intended that she should remain there?

8. At what time was the "Stella" advertised to leave Southampton on the 30th March, and at what time did she leave that port? When was the patent log set?

9. Was a safe and proper course set when the vessel passed the Needles, was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents, and was the course set made good?

10. At what time did the weather become thick? Was the speed of the engines then reduced? Did it clear? Was thick weather again encountered, and if so, at what time? Was the speed again reduced, and if not, should it have been reduced?

11. Whether when the weather became thick and thereafter the late master was on the bridge?

12. Was the fog-signal of the "Stella" blown regularly from 3.30 p.m. of the 30th March to the time the vessel struck?

13. What was the state of the weather at or about 3.45 p.m.; when the vessel was approaching the Casquets? Should her speed have then been reduced, and should soundings have then been taken?

14. For how long of the sound of the bell, and how many persons were on board the "Stella"?

15. Was the vessel from 12.45 p.m. onwards in which it was on board the "Stella"?

16. Was the vessel used?

17. Was a good vessel navigated?

18. What was the vessel?

19. Were the vessel's efforts made in such circumstances in which it was on board the "Stella"?

20. If, in the vessel was caused by an excessive speed with the boat, reach those persons on board the "Stella"?

Mr. H. C. Giles, M.P., Batten, Mr. R. Arthur Turner, Winter, Sir R. Baden Powell, half of their respective replies on behalf of the Company was given as follows:

1. The vessel was in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and they were on board the "Stella"?

2. The vessel carried the boats and life-saving appliances required by the Statute, and were the boats so carried as to be at all times fit and ready for use? There were also on board the "Stella" 750 life-belts, the number required for the voyage, and of the 750 life-belts, everyone appeared to have examined, but with the exception of the regular overhauls.

3. The vessel was supplied with a patent log and the necessary apparatus for taking soundings?

4. What experience had the late Captain Reeks of the navigation between Southampton and the Channel Islands? Everyone appeared to have examined, but with the exception of the regular overhauls.

5. What instructions were issued by the Company to their masters as to the navigation of their vessels, and were such instructions communicated to the late Captain Reeks?

6. What arrangements were made by the Company with regard to Easter traffic or excursions between Southampton and the Channel Islands, and what were the boats? When were they to start respectively, and who were their commanders?

7. At what time was the "Stella" due to arrive at Guernsey and Jersey respectively, on the 30th March? Up to what time could she have been berthed in the inner harbour at St. Heliers, and how long was it intended that she should remain there?

8. At what time was the "Stella" advertised to leave Southampton on the 30th March, and at what time did she leave that port? When was the patent log set?

9. Was a safe and proper course set when the vessel passed the Needles, was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents, and was the course set made good?

10. At what time did the weather become thick? Was the speed of the engines then reduced? Did it clear? Was thick weather again encountered, and if so, at what time? Was the speed again reduced, and if not, should it have been reduced?

11. Whether when the weather became thick and thereafter the late master was on the bridge?

12. Was the fog-signal of the "Stella" blown regularly from 3.30 p.m. of the 30th March to the time the vessel struck?

13. What was the state of the weather at or about 3.45 p.m.; when the vessel was approaching the Casquets? Should her speed have then been reduced, and should soundings have then been taken?

14. For how long of the sound of the bell, and how many persons were on board the "Stella"?

15. Was the vessel from 12.45 p.m. onwards in which it was on board the "Stella"?

16. Was the vessel used?

17. Was a good vessel navigated?

18. What was the vessel?

19. Were the vessel's efforts made in such circumstances in which it was on board the "Stella"?

20. If, in the vessel was caused by an excessive speed with the boat, reach those persons on board the "Stella"?

14. For how long was the "Stella" within the range of the sound of the Casquet's siren before she struck, and how many times was that signal heard by those on board the "Stella"?

15. Was the Casquet's fog-signal regularly sounded from 12.45 p.m., and if so, what were the circumstances in which it was not heard more frequently by those on board the "Stella"?

16. Was the lead used, and if not, should it have been used?

17. Was a good and proper look-out kept, and was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

18. What was the cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel?

19. Were the boats promptly lowered, was every possible effort made to save life, and what were the circumstances in which so many lives were lost?

20. If, in the opinion of the Court, the loss of this vessel was caused or contributed to by her being navigated at an excessive speed in thick weather, was such excessive speed maintained for the purpose of competing with the boat despatched from Weymouth and timed to reach those ports at about the same time as the "Stella"?

Mr. H. C. Richards, Q.C., M.P., Mr. C. Tyrrell Giles, M.P., Mr. Courthope Munroe, Mr. Lauriston Batten, Mr. R. V. Turner, Mr. R. Storry Deans, Mr. Arthur Turner, Mr. George Willson, Mr. W. Gurney Winter, Sir Robert Reid, Q.C., M.P., and Mr. W. Baden Powell, Q.C., having addressed the Court on behalf of their respective clients, Mr. H. Mansel Jones then replied on behalf of the Board of Trade, and judgment was given as follows:—

1. The vessel had three compasses; they were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and they were last adjusted by Mr. J. Blount Thomas, of Southampton, on the 27th April, 1897.

2. The vessel carried the boats and life-saving appliances required by the Statute, and the boats were so carried as to be at all times fit and ready for use. There were two lifeboats, two cutters, and dinghies, all carried inwards on chocks, and two Berthon collapsible boats, which were carried abreast of the lifeboats inboard. There were also two or more rafts stowed under the seats. There was not sufficient time to get out the Berthon boats. The Court recommends that the lifeboats and cutters should be carried swung out in foggy weather, when the sea is sufficiently calm. There were about 750 life-belts on board, which were four times the number required for the passengers and crew on this voyage, and of those tried by the passengers it was stated that about six only were deficient in tapes. Everyone appears to have had a life-belt on. The Court has no doubt that the life-belts were periodically examined, but wishes to emphasize that they ought to be regularly overhauled at short intervals.

3. The vessel was supplied with a patent log and with the ordinary hand and deep sea leads.

4. The late Captain Reeks, who held a Home Trade Master's Certificate, and Pilotage Certificates for Jersey, Guernsey, and Southampton, entered the service of the London and South-Western Railway Company in 1874, and was promoted to be acting master in 1886, and master in 1891, all of which time he had been chiefly employed in the Channel Islands service, and was therefore thoroughly experienced in the navigation between Southampton and the Channel Islands.

5. Two circulars as to the navigation of the Company's vessels, dated 2nd September, 1889, and 20th October, 1892, respectively, were issued by the Company to their masters. The latter was sent to Captain Reeks, but not the first, as he was not then a captain.

The first circular stated that proper care and sound prudence must be exercised during a fog, and a sharp look-out kept, and the lead used in good time and freely. The second circular urged on the captains of the Company's steamers the absolute necessity to be careful, and navigate their ships by careful and proper courses, and by the various marks when visible, and also not to run any risks or attempt any short cuts.

6. A special daylight service between Southampton and the Channel Islands was fixed by the Company for Thursday the 30th March. The "Stella," commanded by Captain Reeks, was engaged on this trip, and left Southampton at 11.25 a.m., ten minutes after the advertised time. Another boat, the "Vera," commanded by Captain Winter, left with the mails for the Channel

Islands about midnight. The "Stella" was to remain at Jersey until Saturday the 1st of April. The "Frederica," commanded by Captain Allix, was to leave Jersey on Good Friday morning, the 31st March. On Thursday, the 30th March, an overflow boat, the "Dora," commanded by Captain Vanderplank, was ready to sail from Southampton for the Channel Islands, but was not required.

7. The "Stella" was due to arrive at Guernsey at 5.30 p.m. on the 30th March, and at Jersey at 7.30 p.m. She could have been berthed in the inner harbour at St. Heliers up to 2.40 a.m. the next day, and after 3.7 a.m. the same morning. She was to leave on Saturday the 1st April.

8. The "Stella" was advertised to leave Southampton on the 30th March at 11.15 a.m., and she left that port at 11.25 a.m. The patent log was put out at Hurst Castle, and was set at the Needles at 12.44 p.m.

9. The course set when the "Stella" passed the Needles was S.W.½S. southerly, which, if no allowance had been made for the tide, would have taken her about 5½ miles east of the Casquets. There was no evidence as to what allowance was made, but the second officer stated that they expected to pass 1½ miles West of the Casquets. If so, the allowance was about seven miles, which would appear to be about the usual allowance made at this state of tide. The course was not made good.

10. The weather became thick soon after two o'clock, and again about three. The speed of the engines was stated to have been reduced on each of these occasions. The weather afterwards cleared, but continued hazy, and thick weather was again encountered at about 3.30, and it gradually became thicker. The speed was not again reduced, and it ought to have been reduced.

11. The master was on the bridge when the weather became thick, and the Court is satisfied that after 3.30 p.m. he remained there until the vessel struck.

12. The fog-signal of the "Stella" was blown regularly from 3.30 p.m. of the 30th March to the time the vessel struck.

13. At 3.45 p.m. the weather was thick, and there was a dense fog over the Casquets when the vessel was approaching them. There was a regular arrangement between the Captain and the chief engineer before leaving Southampton on every voyage that the latter should report to the Captain when a certain number of revolutions had been run, and again when a further number had been run; and in accordance with the arrangement on this voyage the first warning call had been sounded from the engine-room about three minutes. The Casquets were not sighted nor the siren heard, and the patent log does not seem to have been looked at. The speed of the vessel should have been reduced and soundings taken.

14. Under normal atmospheric conditions the "Stella," at the pace she was going, should have been about 15 minutes within the range of the Casquets' siren before she struck. The three blasts constituting a signal were, in the opinion of the Court, only heard once by those on board the "Stella," before she struck.

15. The Casquets' fog-signal was regularly sounded from 12.45 p.m. of the 30th March. The chief light-house keeper stated that the mouth of the siren was turned to the West, facing the wind, in accordance with the usual practice. It is a well-established fact that thick fog deadens sound, as well as producing uncertainty in its direction. These two matters probably conduced to the sound of the siren not being heard more frequently by those on board the "Stella." It is also possible that the "Stella's" steam-whistle may have been blown on one or two occasions almost simultaneously with the siren.

16. The lead was not used, and it should have been used.

17. A good and proper look-out was kept. The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

18. The cause of the stranding and consequent loss of the vessel was, that she had not made good the course set, and that the master continued at full speed in thick weather when he must have known his vessel was in the immediate neighbourhood of the Casquets, without taking any steps to verify his position.

19. The boats were lowered with the greatest promptitude, and every possible effort was made to save life. The sole cause of so many lives being lost was that the vessel sank within about eight minutes after she struck, during which time four boats were lowered and filled and