

(No. 6020.)

“SAPPHO” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Guildhall, Westminster, on the 27th and 28th days of March, 1900, before R. H. B. Marsham, Esq., assisted by Captains Ronaldson and Cosens, into the circumstances attending the stranding of and consequent serious damage to the British Steamship “SAPPHO” on the 5th March, 1900, on the Craig Waugh Rocks, about five miles east of Leith.

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 of the vessel was that the master, Mr. John Young, did not ascertain his position by bearings when he altered his course at five minutes past 8 p.m. of the 5th March last, and that a good look-out was not kept.

The Court finds the master in default and suspends his certificate as master for twelve months.

Dated this 2nd day of April, 1900.

R. H. B. MARSHAM, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

A. RONALDSON, }
WILLIAM COSENS, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was held at the Guildhall, Westminster, on the 27th and 28th days of March, 1900, when the Hon. Arthur Russell appeared for the Solicitor to the Board of Trade, and Mr. L. Batten for the master of the vessel.

The chief and second officers were parties to the inquiry and gave evidence before the Court, but were unrepresented by counsel or solicitor.

The “Sappho,” official number 111,305, was a screw steamer built of steel, the builders being Messrs. Rammage & Ferguson, Ltd., of Leith.

Her dimensions were as follows: length 230.1 ft.; breadth, 33.15 ft., and depth of hold from tonnage deck to ceiling at midships, 15.1 ft.

She was registered at the port of Bristol, her gross tonnage being 1275.47 tons and net tonnage 806.14 tons.

She was fitted with three triple-expansion engines and one steel boiler with a pressure of 160 lbs.

She had three cylinders, 18-inch, 27-inch, and 45-inch; the length of stroke was 33 inches, and her indicated horse-power was 750, which would give a speed of nine knots.

She was owned by the Bristol General Steamship Company Limited, of 50 Prince Street, Bristol, and Sir John Alexander Arnott, Bart., of 50 Prince Street, Bristol, the Chairman of the said Company, was appointed the person to whom the management of the vessel was entrusted by and on behalf of the Company, the advice under their common seal being dated 15th February, 1900.

She had two lifeboats and a working boat. She had five compasses, namely a pole, a standard (by which the vessel was steered), one on the bridge, one in the wheel-house, and one on the after deck which, however, had not been adjusted. These compasses had been supplied by Messrs. Whyte, Thompson & Co., of 166 Broomielaw, Glasgow, and four of them were adjusted on the morning of March 5th, 1900, the day on which occurred the casualty which is the subject of this inquiry.

The “Sappho” was furnished with life-saving appliances in accordance with the Act of Parliament; there were twenty-four life-belts and six buoys.

Having loaded a cargo of coals, about 1,625 tons, she left Burntisland on 5th March last at about 11 a.m.

She was bound for Rotterdam and was under the command of Mr. John Young, who held a certificate of competency as master, No. 022,330, her crew being fifteen all told. There were no passengers, and this was her first voyage.

On leaving she drew about 16 ft. 7 ins. on an even keel; but in order that she should steer better, the after-peak tank was filled up, which (the master stated) would put her down about 9 inches aft.

The day was spent in cruising about in the Firth on the vessel's trial trip, and at the same time the compasses were adjusted.

At about 4.30 p.m. the “Sappho” was brought to an anchor in Leith Roads, a good half-mile (the master stated) from the entrance to Leith Harbour.

At 7.45 p.m. the anchor was picked up, and the engines were put slow ahead.

It was about two hours ebb when they got under way; there was no wind, the night was stated to be dark yet good for seeing lights, and the weather, to use the master's own words, was “fairly clear.”

Both the Inchkeith light and the Herwit gas buoy light, the master said he could see plainly.

The chief officer was on the fore-castle, attending with some of the crew to the anchor; the master was on the lower bridge.

The vessel was steered by steam on the upper bridge, where was stationed, the master stated, a look-out man; but it appears from the evidence that this man was putting up the bridge screens, work which was completed only about five minutes before the vessel struck.

No course was set at the time of starting, but the vessel was steered towards the Herwit gas buoy.

At about 8 p.m. the engines were put at full speed, which would be (the master said) about 8½ knots, and about this time the master called the chief officer on the bridge and asked him what he thought of the evening. He replied that it was dark and inclined to be hazy, and ten minutes afterwards went below.

At about 8 p.m. the boatswain, who was acting second officer, joined the master on the lower bridge. He stated that he saw the Inchkeith light and only one other light, and did not know what the second light was. At about 8.5 p.m. the Herwit gas buoy bore east by the bridge compass, at an estimated distance of a quarter of a mile.

A course was then set—east by south by the standard compass (E. by S. ¾ S. magnetic)—the master intending to take the vessel a little south of the North Craig rock, off which there is a gas buoy.

At about 8.18 p.m., when the master was going below to the chart room to see the bearing on the chart of the North Craig light which he stated he had not seen, the vessel struck on the Craig Waugh and remained fast. The spot was, the master stated, about half-a-mile south of where he had intended to be.

The engines were stopped and soundings taken, two feet of water being found in No. 2 hold.

The Inchkeith and the Herwit lights were quite visible. The boats were swung out, and on sounding No. 2 hold again seven feet of water were found and the water was rapidly rising.

Then the vessel took a heavy list to port, and a loud report was heard beneath as if she was breaking up.

The lifeboat and working boat were lowered into the water, the crew's effects having been put into the former, and distress signals were fired for assistance. Then all hands were ordered into the boats, the master alone remaining on board, continuing to fire rockets.

No assistance coming, the chief officer was sent in a boat to Leith; and on soundings being taken by the master two fathoms were found forward and five aft.

The list increasing and other reports being heard below, the master got into the lifeboat; but after some time, he did not know how long, he returned on board.

There was no greater list, but on sounding the wells the master found the water still increasing, and on going into the engine-room he saw water rushing through No. 2 bulkhead. The fires were drawn, but there was still a little fire. The master then went on deck and asked some of the firemen to come on board. They did so, and the steam donkey-pump was got to work.

The pumping was continued until the water was about half way up the donkey cylinders, when the pumping was stopped, the water increasing so rapidly in the engine-room.

This was the only time of pumping. A tug arriving in the morning, all the crew were taken to Leith, the vessel having become a wreck.

The master in his evidence stated that he never saw the North Craig light, but two A.B.'s who had successively taken the wheel stated that in addition to the Inchkeith light they had seen two lights, and the Court has no doubt, from their evidence, that these two lights were the Herwit light and the North Craig light.

The master's excuse for not seeing the North Craig light was that it must have been obscured with haze; but the principal lighthouse keeper at Inchkeith, who was on duty up to 9 p.m. of the 5th, stated that he had seen that light as well as the Herwit light; and according to the lighthouse log, which was produced in Court, both these lights were visible all night till 6 a.m. next day.

The Court finds it impossible to reconcile the master's evidence as to the course and the bearings of the lights with the position where the vessel stranded.

These were the facts of the case, and on the conclusion of the evidence Mr. Russell, 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? And were the proper corrections to the courses applied?
2. Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 7.45 p.m. of the 5th instant before setting the course?
3. Was a safe and proper course set after leaving Leith Roads and was due and proper allowance made for tide and current?
4. Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel from time to time?
5. Was the weather thick and if so was the speed of the vessel reduced?
6. Was the lead used and if not should it have been used?
7. Were the Herwit and North Craig lights seen?
8. Was the course altered upon approaching the North Craig, and if so was a safe and proper alteration made?
9. Was a good and proper look-out kept, and was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care?
10. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?
11. Was serious damage to the "Sappho" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master and officers or of any of them?

Mr. Batten, having addressed the Court on behalf of the master, judgment was given as follows:—

1. The vessel had five compasses, namely, a pole, a standard (by which the vessel was steered), one on the bridge (by which the courses were set), one in the wheelhouse, and one on the after deck which had not been adjusted. The four compasses were supplied and adjusted on the morning of the 5th March instant by

Messrs. Whyte, Thompson & Co., of 166 Broomielaw, Glasgow, and were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel. The master stated that the proper corrections to the courses were applied.

2. Proper measures were not taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 7.45 p.m. of the 5th instant; the only measure taken was a bearing of a buoy which the master stated was the Herwit buoy.

3. After leaving Leith Roads at 7.45 p.m. of the 5th March instant, the vessel was steered by the lights and no course was set till five minutes past 8 p.m., when the master estimated that he was a quarter of a mile from the Herwit buoy light; and he then set a course of E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S. magnetic. This would have been a safe and proper course had the vessel been in the position in which the master assumed her to be. No allowance was made for tide.

4. Proper measures were not taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel from time to time.

5. The weather was not thick and the speed was not reduced after 8 p.m. when the engines were put full speed.

6. The lead was not used, and it would have been of little, if any, assistance had it been used.

7. Both the Herwit and North Craig lights were seen by two A.B.'s who were at the wheel in succession, but the other witnesses state they only saw one of these lights. The Court fails to understand how it was that the master and the second officer did not see both lights, as the principal light keeper at Inchkeith lighthouse was himself on duty and saw the lights up to 9 p.m. of the 5th March. He produced the log kept at the lighthouse, by which it appears that there was no fog, and that both lights were visible until 6 a.m. of the 6th.

8. No alteration was made in the course after five minutes past eight, when approaching the North Craig.

9. A good and proper look-out was not kept, and the vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

10. The cause of the stranding of the vessel was that the master did not ascertain his position by bearings when he altered his course at five minutes past eight, and that a good look out was not kept.

11. The serious damage to the "Sappho" was caused by the default of the master, Mr. John Young, and the Court suspends his certificate for 12 months. Neither the chief nor the second officer is in default.

R. H. B. MARSHAM, Judge.

We concur.

A. RONALDSON, }
WILLIAM COSENS, } Assessors.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 20th day of April, 1900.)

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