(No. 6111.)

"BRENTTOR" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a formal investigation held at the Moot Hall, Newcastle-on-Tyne, on the 6th and 7th days of November, 1900, before William Angus and James Horace Beckingham, 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 K. Hore and Wm. Erskine (Nautical Assessors), into the circumstances attending the loss of the British Steamship "Brenttor," of London, near the Sodra Sankan Beacon, Gulf of Bothnia, on the 1st October, 1900.

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 loss of the vessel was caused through an error of judgment on the part of the master in making an insufficient allowance for current and his allowing more deviation than probably existed. The Court finds the master and officers not in default.

Dated this 7th day of November, 1900.

Wm. Angus,
J. H. Beckingham, } Judges.

We concur in the above Report.

Kennett Hore,
William Erskine, } Assessors.

Annex to Report.

This was an inquiry into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "Brenttor," and was held at the Moot Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on the 6th and 7th days of November, 1900, before William Angus and James Horace Beckingham, Esquires, assisted by Captain K. Hore and W. Erskine (Nautical Assessors).

Mr. Burton appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. Miller represented the master and chief officer, while the second officer appeared in person.

The "Brenttor," of London, official number 98,132, was a steel screw steamship built at Sunderland in the year 1890 by Messrs. John Blumer & Co., and was of the following dimensions: length, 270 ft.; breadth, 37·1 ft.; and depth in hold, 17·15 ft. She was schooner-rigged, fitted with triple-expansion engines of 170 horse-power constructed by the North-Eastern Marine Engineering Company, Ltd., in the year 1890. She was of 1,951·27 gross and 1,232·76 net registered tonnage, and owned by the Thompson Steam Shipping Company, Ltd., of Baltic Chambers, Sunderland, Mr. V. T. Thompson being appointed managing owner on the 26th April, 1898.

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

On the 25th of September last the "Brenttor" left Blyth bound for Lulea, Gulf of Bothnia, with a cargo of 2,475 tons of coal and a crew of 20 hands all told under the command of Mr. Thomas Taylor, who held a certificate of competency as master, No. 94,503. The draught of water on leaving was 17 ft. 6 ins. forward, and 18 ft. 8 ins. aft.

The vessel had four compasses—particulars of which are hereinafter given—the courses being set and steered by the Standard compass on the upper bridge. On this compass the master stated there were, on N.W. courses, from four to six degrees westerly deviation. On the voyage in question he had no opportunity of testing the errors by an azimuth of the sun, but, on the night prior to the casualty, he stated he had taken an observation of the Pole Star, from which he concluded the deviation on a N.N.W. course was about six degrees westerly. The Court is of opinion, from the difficulty experienced by the master in making good his course, that the deviation found was not correct.

The master was supplied with two charts, viz., the Gulf of Bothnia Admiralty chart, No. 2,252, corrected up to August and September, 1898, and Imray's Blue Back chart of the Gulf of Bothnia for 1890. The master had been engaged in the Baltic trade for many years, and had made two previous voyages through the Gulf in the "Brenttor."

All went well, and at 8.15 p.m. of the 30th September, Svenska Biorn Light was abeam by four-point bearing, and distant 3 miles. The master now altered the course to N.N.W. ½ W. (magnetic) with the intention of making the South Quarken Channel, and at 9.30 p.m. he passed between Lägskär and Söderarm Lights at a distance of about 8½ miles from the former. It was a fine night and clear, though dark, with a fresh W.S.W. breeze and a moderately smooth sea. The course was continued, and, at about 11.40, a quick flashing white light was seen about two points on the port bow. At 12.30 the master, being unable to identify the light which was now about three points on the bow, distant some 3 miles, and land being seen ahead, turned the vessel round and steered back on a S. by E. ½ E. course, the engines being reduced to "half speed." They proceeded till 3.45 a.m. of the 1st October, when the Lägskär and Söderarm Lights again came in view bearing respectively S.E. by E. ¾ E. and S.W. ½ S.

From this assured position the vessel was turned round and again put on the N.N.W. ½ W. (magnetic) course, the master having in the meantime, by reference to the notices issued by the Board of Trade, discovered the flashing light seen at 11.40 to be the recently altered Gisslan Light.

Although, as already stated, he steered the same course as before, he now got the light, when seen, to bear two points on the starboard bow. This was explained by the master to be due to his having, on the second occasion, kept the ship well to the westward of the course set. At 6.15 a four-point bearing of the light was completed, which placed the ship 2 miles off. The course, which from 5.30 had been N.W. by N. (magnetic), was now altered to N.W. ½ N. (magnetic) and continued till the casualty occurred at 7 o'clock. From 4 o'clock the weather had been overcast, with drizzling rain and light drifting fog.

After passing Gisslan the fog increased so rapidly that the engines were reduced to "half speed," at 6.30 to "slow," and at 6.45 to "dead slow," the vessel then making about 2½ knots an hour. At 7 o'clock the vessel suddenly struck on what afterwards proved to be a three-fathom patch of rock about three-quarters of a mile S.W. of the Sodra Sankan Beacon. Soundings were immediately taken round, giving 20 ft. right aft, 18 ft. at the main rigging, 35 ft. at the bridge, 45 ft. on both sides forward, and 180 ft. over the bows.

The tanks were sounded and it was found that the 'midship tank was filling fast. The life-boat was sent to the Market Light for assistance, and, about 5 p.m., two pilot boats came alongside but refused to stop owing to the state of the wind and weather. They took the crew off to the pilot station at Hellman Island, and on the 3rd the salvage steamer "Helios" arrived; part of the cargo was jettisoned and the steamer's pump was put aboard. On the 7th, however, the vessel broke in two, the fore part sinking in deep water. No lives were lost and the officers and crew proceeded home.

From the above facts it is clear that the vessel did not make good the course set by the master. In the first place, from an assured position, he made the Gisslan Light two points on the port bow; and, although when he approached the second time he brought it on the starboard bow, it was only done by carefully keeping the vessel to the westward. Further, when the fog set in and there was nothing to be seen as a guide, the vessel again made to the eastward of her course.

This, in the opinion of the Court, shows that even had there been the deviation which the master allowed, the current was stronger than he supposed and especially influenced the vessel when proceeding "dead slow."

In all probability the deviation was not so great as the master estimated, and that, coupled with the effect of the current, explains the cause of the casualty.

It is to be regretted that the master, having had no means of correcting the compass by the sun, did not

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utilise his opportunity of getting the exact deviation on the course he intended steering when he passed between Lägskär and Söderarm Lights.

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

1. Was the vessel supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions?

2. 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?

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?

4. Were proper measures taken at or about 3.45 a.m. of the 1st October to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel?

5. Was a safe and proper course set at or about 4 a.m. of the 1st October and thereafter steered; and was due and proper allowance made for currents?

6. What was the light sighted at or about 5.30 a.m. of the 1st October; was a safe and proper alteration then made in the course; and was due and proper allowance made for currents?

7. Were proper measures taken at or about 6.15 a.m. of the 1st October to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel; was a safe and proper alteration then made in the course; and was due and proper allowance made for currents?

8. Having regard to the state of the weather after 6.15 a.m. of the 1st October, was the vessel navigated at too great a rate of speed?

9. Was a good and proper look-out kept?

10. Was the lead used before the stranding, and, if not, should it have been used?

11. Where did the vessel strike, and was the reef upon which she struck marked upon the charts used by the master?

12. What was the cause of the casualty?

13. Was the vessel navigated with proper and seaman-like care?

14. Was the loss of the s.s. "Brenttor" caused by the wrongful act or neglect of the master, chief and second officers, or of any of them?

To which the Court replied as follows :—

1. The vessel was supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions.

2. There were four compasses on board, viz., a Standard compass on the upper bridge by which the courses were set and steered, two in the wheel-house, and one aft. They were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted by Messrs. Wilson & Gillies, of Sunderland, in November, 1899.

3. The master stated he ascertained the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time as occasion offered; that the errors were correctly ascertained and the proper corrections to the courses applied. On the voyage in question he appears to have had no opportunity of testing the errors by an azimuth of the sun. On the N.W. courses on which he was steering prior to the casualty, he assumed the deviation to be five degrees westerly, for which he allowed. The events leading up to the casualty throw doubt upon the accuracy of this assumption, and it would have been more prudent on the part of the master, having regard to the intricate waters he was navigating, had he verified the actual deviation on the course steered when he passed between the Söderarm and Lägskär Lights.

4. Proper measures were taken by cross-bearings of the last-mentioned lights at 3.45 a.m. of the 1st October to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel, Söderarm Light bearing S.W. ½ S. 10 miles, and Lägskär Light S.E. by E. ¾ E., also 10 miles.

5. A safe and proper course was steered from 4 a.m. of the 1st October till 6.15 a.m., when the vessel was abeam of Gisslan Light. Due and proper allowance appears to have been made for current.

6. The light sighted at 5.30 a.m. of the 1st October was the Gisslan Light which the master identified, having first referred to the Board of Trade notice which had lately been issued directing attention to the change in the character of the light. A safe and proper alteration was made to N.W. by N. (magnetic), and due and proper allowance appears to have been made for currents.

7. Proper measures by four-point bearing were taken at 6.15 a.m. to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel, which was then found to be 2 miles off Gisslan Light. A safe and proper alteration was then made in the course to N.W. ½ N. (magnetic). Fog coming on, the engines were then put to "half speed," and subsequently to "slow" and "dead slow" as the fog increased. The current, which had been setting the vessel to the eastward during the night, would, under the changed conditions of speed, have greater effect, and for this the master made no additional allowance.

8. The vessel was not navigated at too great a rate of speed.

9. A good and proper look-out was kept.

10. The lead was not used prior to the stranding, and, having regard to the depth of water, would have been of no service.

11. The vessel struck upon a three-fathom patch of rock about three-quarters of a mile S.W. of the Sodra Sankan Beacon. It was marked on the Admiralty chart used by the master, but not on the Blue Back chart by which he was also navigating.

12. The cause of the casualty was insufficient allowance being made by the master for current while the vessel was going "dead slow" in a dense fog, and his allowing more deviation than probably existed.

13. The vessel was navigated with proper and seaman-like care, except so far as the master, by an error of judgment, under-estimated the effect of the current.

14. The loss of the vessel was not caused by the wrongful act or neglect of the master, chief and second officers, or of any of them.

WM. ANGUS,
J. H. BECKINGHAM, } Justices.

We concur.

KENNETT HORE,
WILLIAM ERSKINE, } Assessors.

(*Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 30th day of November*, 1900.)