

(No. 6119.)

“SUFFOLK” (S.S.).

FINDING of the Court held at Port Elizabeth, in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 8th days of October, 1900, to investigate the circumstances attending the loss of the British screw steamer “SUFFOLK,” at or near Tzitzikama Point, on the morning of the 24th day of September, 1900.

The “Suffolk” was a screw steamer owned by The Federal Steam Navigation Company of London, official No. 112,617, of London, registered tonnage 5,363 gross, 3,441 net, built in 1899. The following were her officers :--

- John Cuthbert Captain.
- William Duncan Henry... 1st Mate.
- Charles Stokes 2nd Mate.
- Arthur Calley Jarvis ... 3rd Mate.
- W. D. Martin 4th Mate.
- George Dunn Chief Engineer.
- James Reid Shirlaw ... 3rd Engineer.

It appears from the evidence given before this Court that she sailed from London on the 10th of August, 1900, for Fiume, and from thence bound for Table Bay (Cape Town), on the 24th of August, 1900, and reached that port on the 22nd September, 1900, and she sailed from Cape Town on the same day, bound for Algoa Bay, with a cargo of horses, with a crew of 63 together with 66 stockmen or horse-keepers, and a veterinary surgeon.

That upon the evidence given the vessel appears to have been well found, sufficiently manned, and seaworthy at the time of her departure from Table Bay.

That she proceeded on her voyage without any unusual occurrence being reported, and made and passed Agulhas in fair weather on the 23rd September at 4.40 a.m., distant 11 miles. That the captain then altered the vessel's course to E. ¼ S., and at 10.40 a.m. same day the captain altered course to E. ¼ S., and continued that course until 3.20 a.m. on the 24th. when breakers were heard, and the helm put hard-a-port, but the steamer struck on the No. 3 hold, and was injured apparently in the Nos. 4 and 5 holds as well as the stoke-hole ; that the engine-room and stoke-hole were flooded and the fires put out. After consultation, she was abandoned by the captain and crew at 0.30 p.m. on the 24th of September, 1900, and foundered at 3.50 p.m. that day in latitude 34° 12' S., and longitude 24° 30½' E., the captain, officers, crew, and stockmen transferring to the steamer “Lake Erie” and proceeding in that vessel to Algoa Bay, reaching there during that night.

After striking it would seem that beyond what was already attempted in respect of towing of the “Suffolk,” any effort to do so would have been futile, the “Lake Erie” was not a suitable vessel to achieve this object, and when the “Inchanga” drew up, even if she had taken the disabled ship in tow, the Court doubts if they would have reached Slang Bay, or other locality nearer, where the horses might have been saved.

No other course appeared open to those on the “Suffolk” than to free the animals and afford them a chance of reaching land.

The Court records its appreciation of the conduct of the captain and officers of the “Lake Erie” for their assistance, and is pleased to acknowledge that every consideration was given by them for the safety and accommodation of the officers, crew, and cattlemen of the “Suffolk,” and the salvage of the horses ; and it, more-

over, thanks the captain and officers who have given evidence at this enquiry for their ready attendance at its session, and the intelligence displayed by them throughout the period connected with the regrettable occurrence.

That the “Suffolk” does not appear to have been found with the large scale chart of the coast Mossel Bay to Cape St. Francis, or to have been furnished with African Pilot, Part III., and that it was necessary for the proper navigation of the ship that the captain should have had them, in addition to the small scale chart, which he alleges was used by him on the voyage.

That the position of the vessel as sworn to, at noon on the 23rd September, 1900, viz., latitude 35° 1' south, longitude 21° 16' east, if correct, would on the course set have taken her well clear of Cape St. Francis, allowing for an appreciable in-set current at about 5 a.m. on the 24th September, 1900, yet it is elicited from the evidence that she struck at a point on the coast in latitude 34° 10½' south, and longitude 24° 29' 10" east at 3.20 a.m. on that morning.

That it is evident in these circumstances that the position given was inaccurate, or that the course set was not properly steered.

No steps were taken to verify the position of the ship after dark, nor were any soundings attempted with that object.

That, notwithstanding the caution and warning to mariners, given in the African Pilot and Findlay's, which latter the captain was possessed of, he allowed his vessel to proceed at night within the limit of soundings referred to, where she became greatly affected by the current so well known to exist in that neighbourhood, having a dangerous tendency to set vessels on to the shore and in an easterly direction along the coast.

That no importance seems to have been ascribed to the admittedly wide course taken by a steamer, the “Lake Erie,” then upon a voyage from the westward to the same port as the “Suffolk,” as compared with the course the latter was upon.

That, when upon the portion of the coast of which he had no large scale chart, and at a time when the officer of the watch, who, it would seem, was ignorant of the warning given in Part III., African Pilot, and whose knowledge or ignorance of the important details there furnished had not been a question with the master, the latter left the deck and was, unfortunately, absent from the bridge at a critical time.

That no sufficient cause has been shown for his absence on the occasion, he had had a fair run in fine weather throughout the day, and if his personal attention to the navigation of his ship at night and at that juncture had been afforded, there would have been less likelihood of the vessel striking, for the reasons which will be more fully referred to hereafter.

That the vessel struck in fine, fair, and calm weather during the morning watch, when the second officer, Charles Stokes, who holds a master's certificate, was in charge of the vessel. That he alleges he saw no land or indication of land, and that he was not warned by the “look-out” until he had himself heard breakers, when he put the vessel's helm hard-a-port, and called the captain ; that the vessel, in answering her helm, struck and grazed along the rock and foundered. It would appear from the evidence that the officer had but little knowledge of the specially dangerous locality of the coast this ship was in the proximity of, and that he should, if he had been on the alert during his watch, have discerned land or the haze which it is sworn to was seen by the officers and members of the crew of the “Lake Erie” between the hours of 2.15 and 3.30 that morning, when that steamer was at a distance of four to five miles further from the shore than the “Suffolk” during the time just stated.

That, having given the fullest consideration to the evidence of the witnesses examined by the Court, and taken the evidence of the captain, officers, and others

concerned and tendered for examination, as also the arguments of the attorneys engaged in the case and the authorities quoted, the Court finds as follows:—

The loss of the "Suffolk" is attributed to the wrongful act or default of the master, John Cuthbert—

1. In navigating his vessel with insufficient and unseamanlike caution, and by neglecting to verify the ship's position on the course steered after dark.

2. Neglecting to use the lead.

3. In being absent from the deck and bridge when the safety of the vessel required his personal supervision.

And that for these wrongful acts or defaults his certificate be suspended for six months.

That the second officer of the s.s. "Suffolk," Charles Stokes, is guilty of a wrongful act or default, leading to the loss of the vessel, by neglecting to keep a proper look-out during his watch on the 24th September, 1900, between the hours of 2 a.m. and 3.20 a.m., and that for this wrongful act or default it is adjudged his certificate as master to be forthwith cancelled.

That Nelson Porter, A.B., who was look-out man in the watch between the hours of 2 a.m. and 3.20 a.m. on the morning of the 24th September, 1900, is guilty of gross neglect of duty, and is severely censured.

J. WYLDE,
Resident Magistrate, Port Elizabeth,
President.

JOHN MARTIN,
Commander, R.N. (retired), } Assessors.
H. BERESFORD PENRUDDOCKE, }
R.N.R., }

Resident Magistrate's Office,
Port Elizabeth,
6th October, 1900.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade, on the
28th day of December, 1900.)

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