

(No. 6404.)

"TURRET BELL" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a formal investigation held at the Board Room of the Sunderland School Board Offices, John Street, in the Borough of Sunderland, on the 12th and 13th days of August, 1902, before JAMES WATERSTON and RALPH BROWN ANNISON, Esquires, two of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, acting in and for the said Borough, assisted by KENNETT HORE and WILLIAM HENRY SINCLAIR-LOUITT, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "TURRET BELL" on or near Lampoul Bay, Ushant, France, on the 27th day of June, 1902.

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 of this vessel was caused by the default of the master in continuing his course towards the land in thick weather, when it was impossible to verify the position of the vessel by observations or correctly determine her position by the use of the lead.

Under these circumstances the Court suspends the master's certificate, No. 010786, for three months.

Dated this 13th day of August, 1902.

JAS. WATERSTON, }
RALPH B. ANNISON, } Judges.

We concur in the above Report.

KENNETT HORE, }
W. H. SINCLAIR-LOUITT, } Assessors.

The "Turret Bell," official number 104,263, is a British steamship, built at Sunderland, by William Doxford & Son, in 1894. Her length 297 ft.; breadth, 40 ft.; depth of hold, 24-91 ft.

She is fitted with triple expansion engines by George Clark, Limited, Sunderland, the diameter of cylinders being 22½, 36½, and 60 ins. respectively; length of stroke, 42 ins., and indicated horse power, 1300. Her gross tonnage is 2211-47 tons, and registered 1375-78 tons.

She is owned by the Turret Steam Shipping Company, Limited, of 18, Sandhill, in the city and county of Newcastle-on-Tyne, William Petersen being designated managing owner under advice of 10th September, 1894.

She carried three boats, two of which were lifeboats, properly fitted and placed on the turret deck, and there were also life belts for each man on board, according to the regulations. She had three compasses—one on the upper bridge, which was a Standard, by which the vessel was navigated, the other two being placed before the steering gear only. The compasses had been adjusted by Messrs. John J. Wilson & Son, of Sunderland, compass adjuster, at Tynemouth, on 2nd May, 1901. The master found, from his own observation, that the deviation had slightly increased since that date.

The vessel left Garrucha on 21st June, 1902, under the command of Arthur James Wilds, who held a certificate of competency as master, No. 010786, with a crew of 23 hands all told, laden with 3450 tons of iron ore for Rotterdam, having a mean draft of water of 19 ft. 6 ins.

The crew was composed of master, first and second officers, four able seamen, two ordinary seamen, three engineers, one donkeyman, five firemen, one purser, one steward, one cook, one carpenter, one mess room steward.

This complement gives only two able seamen and one ordinary seaman for each watch, one A.B. at the wheel and another on the look-out leaves only the ordinary seamen to look after the deck. Two seamen of the watch at the time of the casualty gave evidence; both were foreigners, Herakili Montacci, a Greek, who could not speak English at all, and Henry Arndt, whose nationality is unknown. Both these men had been at the wheel since noon on the day of the casualty, but were unable to tell the Court what course they had steered, and, from their appearance and demeanour before the Court, it was felt that no reliance could be placed on their evidence.

She proceeded on her voyage all well, and on 25th June, at 2.25 p.m., was abeam of Cape Finisterre, distant about 7 miles.

A course N.E. by N. was steered from this point to round Cape Velano, which was passed at 4.35 p.m., distant 4½ miles, by a four-point bearing, the weather being hazy and the ship going 8½ to 9 knots, with a light N.W. wind and moderate sea.

From this point a course was set N.E. ¼ E. by compass, which was N.E. magnetic, and continued until 8 a.m. on 26th June, when it was altered to N.E. ½ E. by compass, and at noon of 26th June the position of the vessel was found by observation to be latitude 45° 35' N., longitude 7° 38' W.

The N.E. ½ E. course was continued from noon of 26th June until midnight, when the weather set in foggy, and the engines were reduced at 1 a.m. of 27th June to half-speed, a dense fog having then set in. At 4.30 a.m. the fog cleared a little, but became dense again at 8 a.m., remaining so up to the time of the casualty.

No alteration was made in the course although the weather had become dangerously thick and observations were impossible.

At 11.50 a.m. of 27th June a cast of the deep sea lead was taken which gave 63 fathoms sand and shell, and at noon the position of the vessel was assumed by dead reckoning to be latitude 48° 25' N., longitude 5° 30' W. and the distance run since noon of the 26th June, 191 miles by log. At this time, the master stated he heard two whistles, which he took to be steamers passing inside of him.

The weather was still a dense fog, but no alteration was made in the course, the master assuming that the cast of 63 fathoms agreed with the position in which he supposed himself to be by dead reckoning. Another cast of the lead was taken by Thompson's patent sounding machine at 12.50 p.m., which gave 61 fathoms sand and gravel, and the course continued slow ahead.

At 2.25 the master and chief officer heard the Ushant fog signal and at the same time saw rocks ahead and on the starboard bow. The engines were at once stopped and put full speed astern and helm hard a starboard. The ship swung round and cleared these rocks and the engines were put slow ahead. Another rock was seen on the port bow or nearly ahead on which the master went full speed ahead to clear it, which he succeeded in doing, but struck another under water which grazed along the starboard bilges and damaged her badly. The engines were at once stopped and the master ordered the bells to be sounded fore and aft, and as she was making a great deal of water in Nos. 1 and 2 holds the boats were lowered and the crew's effects and stores placed in them. A cast of the lead was then taken and 30 fathoms found and the anchor let go as there were rocks all round.

Some French fishermen came alongside at 3.30 and were engaged by the master to obtain assistance. At 4 a lifeboat came, the coxswain of which was a pilot. The master asked the pilot if he would take the ship to Lampoul Bay, and the pilot answered "Yes, if the master will take the responsibility of navigating her in the fog." The vessel proceeded at half-speed to Lampoul Bay, where she arrived at 6.30 p.m. Whilst on the way with the ship boats and fishermen's boats in tow, the starboard lifeboat took a wide sheer and capsized, throwing occupants and effects into the water.

The engines were immediately stopped and the shore lifeboat went to their assistance and picked up the boat's crew and part of the ship's papers. The official log was lost. The vessel remained at anchor for one hour and a half, the water gained so rapidly that the anchor was hove up and the ship beached to save her from sinking.

and as the best means to save the ship and cargo. The vessel grounded gently in water 20 ft. forward and 32 ft. aft.

The pumps were kept at work night and day until 1st July, when a French salvage steamer arrived from Brest with the owners' representatives on board. All efforts to get the vessel off with this boat failed. The Liverpool salvage tug "Ranger" arrived alongside on 7th July. The divers inspected the bottom and found a large hole under No. 1 hold and a few rents along the ship's bottom at different places.

These holes were wedged up. 1200 tons of cargo were discharged into two small steamers from Nos. 1 and 2 holds and sent on to Rotterdam.

On 14th July the vessel was towed off by the salvage steamer, and on the 15th July left for Falmouth, where she arrived under her own steam the same day, took in bunker coal and left for Rotterdam, arriving there on 18th July.

The cargo was discharged, some more repairs were effected, and she left that port on 25th July in water ballast for Sunderland, where she arrived on the 26th July.

From these facts it is clear the "Turret Bell" stranded at Ushant through the master setting a course from Villano to pass 14 miles N.W. of Ushant and continuing on it in thick weather when it was impossible to verify the effect of any tide or current on the vessel's course during that period.

The evidence given and the log books prove that thick weather prevailed for 14 hours prior to the ship's striking a rock, and although the soundings, 63 and 61 fathoms respectively, apparently agreed with the course assumed by the master to have been made up till noon of the 27th June, the same depth of water may be found 15 or 16 miles to the east of the position the master thought he was in.

Ample directions are given in the Admiralty Sailing Directions and the Notices to Mariners issued by the Board of Trade of the tides and currents in the vicinity of Ushant.

Had the master regarded these the casualty would not have happened.

There is no necessity to navigate so closely to Ushant in thick weather when it is impossible to verify the position by observation.

At the conclusion of the evidence, the solicitor acting for the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court upon 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?—The vessel had three compasses; the first, a standard, placed on the upper bridge, by which the courses were set and steered and the vessel navigated; the second, a steering compass placed before the wheel on the lower bridge, and the third before the steering gear aft. They were all in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and they were last adjusted at Tynemouth on 2nd May, 1901, by Messrs. John J. Wilson & Son, of Sunderland.

(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?—The master stated that he did ascertain the deviation of the compasses from time to time by observation and that he properly applied the corrections to the courses steered.

(3) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 4.35 p.m. of

the 25th June last?—Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at 4.35 p.m. of 25th June last. A four-point bearing was taken off Cape Villano, which was found to be $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant when abeam.

(4) Were safe and proper courses set and steered after passing Cape Villano at or about 4.35 p.m. of the 25th June, and was due and proper allowance made for easterly current and inset?—A safe and proper course was set and steered after passing Cape Villano at 4.35 p.m. of 25th June, supposing the weather to have been fine and clear. The only allowance that was made for easterly inset or current was in setting the course to pass 14 miles north-west of Ushant. Had the weather been fine and clear the master would have been able to correct the inset by seeing the island at noon on 27th June.

(5) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel from time to time thereafter?—The only measures that were taken or could have been taken as the weather was thick was a cast of the lead; the first was taken at 11.50 a.m., giving 63 fathoms, and the second 12.50 p.m., giving 61 fathoms. These were not sufficient, and, considering the state of the weather and passing such a dangerous place, soundings should have been taken more frequently.

(6) Whether, having regard to the state of the weather after noon of the 27th June, the vessel was navigated at too great a rate of speed?—The vessel was not navigated at too great a rate of speed after noon of the 27th June. She was only going slow, but no alteration was made in the course set.

(7) Was the lead used with sufficient care and frequency?—The lead was not used with sufficient care and frequency after noon of 27th June.

(8) Was a good and proper look-out kept?—A good and proper look-out was apparently kept.

(9) What was the cause of the casualty?—The cause of the casualty was the continuing the N.E. $\frac{1}{4}$ E. course in thick weather after it was impossible to verify the position of the vessel.

(10) Was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care?—The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care after the morning of the 27th June. The weather had been thick all the previous night, and at noon of the 27th June it was still so thick that it was impossible to verify the position of the vessel by observation. Only two casts of the lead were taken, and it was impossible from these two casts to determine whether the vessel had been set in by the current or not. The usual and ordinary precaution of a seaman in such a case would have been to put the vessel's head to the north-west till he could have ascertained the position correctly, but this was neglected.

(11) Was serious damage to the s.s. "Turret Bell" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master, chief and second officers, or of any of them?—Serious damage was caused to the "Turret Bell" by the default of the master alone. The chief and second officers are in no way to blame for the casualty.

JAS. WATERSTON, } Judges.
RALPH B. ANNISON, }

KENNETT HORE, } Assessors.
W. H. SINCLAIR-LOUITT, }

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 29th day of August, 1902.)

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