

(No. 6469.)

“MANCHESTER ENGINEER” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the City Sessions Court, Manchester, on the 22nd and 23rd days of December, 1902, before FRANCIS JOHN HEADLAM, assisted by Captain ALEXANDER WOOD and Captain HENRY PARSELL, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the s.s. “MANCHESTER ENGINEER” on or near the Serpent Reef, south shore of the River St. Lawrence, on the 15th day of October, 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 casualty was caused by the master taking the object sighted at 10.15 a.m. for the Serpent Reef buoy, and not altering his course promptly to the north, when the Serpent Reef buoy subsequently came in sight.

Dated this 23rd day of December, 1902.

FRANCIS J. HEADLAM,  
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

A. WOOD, } Assessors.  
H. PARSELL, }

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was held at the City Sessions Court, Minshull Street, Manchester, on the 22nd and 23rd days of December, 1902, when Mr. Galloway appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. Miller for the master, and Messrs. Hill Dickenson for the owners.

The “Manchester Engineer,” official number 113116, is a British steamship, registered at the Port of Manchester, and built of steel by the Northumberland Shipbuilding Company, Limited, Howden-on-Tyne, in the year 1902. Her dimensions as per register are:—Length, 360 ft.; breadth, 48 ft.; and depth in hold, from tonnage deck to ceiling at midships, 28.1 ft. She was fitted with one set of triple compound inverted direct-acting engines of 372 n.h.p. and 1850 i.h.p., made by Messrs. Richardson, Westgarth, & Company, Limited, Sunderland, and at the time of the casualty which forms the subject of this investigation was the property of the Manchester Liners, Limited, Edward Burdon Stoker, of 13, St. Ann Street, Manchester, being designated the person to whom the management of the vessel is entrusted, by and on behalf of the owners—advice received the 24th April, 1902, under the hand of the Secretary of the Manchester Liners, Limited. She has three compasses, the standard compass by which she was navigated being on the upper bridge, one in the wheelhouse, and one aft. Her gross tonnage is 4302.34 tons, and, after deducting 1489.31 tons for engine-room and crew spaces, her registered tonnage is 2813.03 tons. She was supplied with all the necessary boat and life-saving appliances in accordance with the Act, and was in good order, well found in every respect. The “Manchester Engineer” left Swansea on the 2nd October last, bound for Montreal, with a cargo of about 5800 tons coal, draft forward being 23 ft. 9 ins., aft 24 ft. 3 ins. She had a crew of 34 hands all told, and was under the command of Mr. Samuel Lawlan, whose certificate of competency as extra master is numbered 01367. Severe weather was experienced on the voyage

across the Atlantic, but all went well, and on the 13th of October she passed through the Straits of Bellisle, arriving at South Point Light on the Island of Anticosti at 11.20 p.m. on the 14th October last. A four-point bearing of this light was taken, which placed the vessel five miles from it when abeam. From this position a course N.W. by W. by compass was set, on this course there was 2° easterly deviation. The wind at this time was from the N.W., with clear weather and moderate sea. At about 6 a.m., on the 15th, land was sighted half a point on the port bow, at an estimated distance of 16 to 20 miles. About 8 a.m., in order to get closer to the land and so lessen the effect of the easterly current, the course was altered to W.N.W. This course was continued for about half an hour, when the N.W. by W. course was resumed. At 10.15 a.m. an object, which was taken for the black buoy on Serpent Reef, was sighted before the port beam by the master and third officer from the bridge, the third officer stated that he looked at the object through the glass, and concluded it was a black buoy. A five and seven-point bearing was taken of this object, by which means they ascertained the vessel to be 2 or 2½ miles distant from it. The course was continued N.W. by W., the vessel going at full speed about 7 or 8 knots, the land clearly visible. At about 10.35 a.m. another black buoy was sighted on the starboard bow, which unfortunately was taken by the master to be a buoy adrift. On approaching it the master became doubtful, put the helm hard to port, altering the course of the vessel to north, in order to pass outside of it.

In a few minutes after this she struck heavily and remained fast on Serpents Reef with her head north. Soundings were taken. 7 fathoms forward, 3½ fathoms amidship, and 4½ fathoms aft was found. Efforts were made with the engines to get the vessel off the reef without effect. The master then stopped the engines and as the tide was rising instructed the engineers to get up the highest pressure of steam possible. At high water the engines were put full speed ahead, the vessel came off the reef and proceeded to Quebec under her own steam, arriving there on the 17th October at about 5 a.m. with her ballast tanks full of water. In consequence of the increased immersion owing to so much water being in the vessel it was recommended by Lloyds' surveyor and the port warden that she should be lightened before proceeding to Montreal. The vessel was lightened to 25 feet, and then proceeded to Montreal where she discharged the remainder of her cargo afterwards and returned to Quebec for the purpose of being dry-docked and temporarily repaired to enable her to return to Britain.

At the conclusion of the evidence Mr. Galloway, for the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions for the opinion of the court:—

- (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) 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?
- (3) Was the vessel supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions for the navigation of the Gulf and River St. Lawrence?
- (4) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 11.20 p.m. of the 14th October last when off the South Point light, Anticosti? Was a safe and proper course then set, and thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?
- (5) Were safe and proper alterations made in the course at or about 8 a.m. on the 15th October, and from time to time thereafter, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?
- (6) What was the black buoy sighted just before the port beam at or about 10.15 a.m. on the 15th October? Was it marked on the Admiralty chart by which the master was navigating, and was it described in the sailing directions with which the master was supplied?

(7) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 10.15 a.m. of the 15th October, when the black buoy was sighted just before the port beam and from time to time thereafter?

(8) What was the black buoy sighted at or about 10.35 a.m. of the 15th October about half a point on the starboard bow? Did the master then take proper measures to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel and to keep her out of danger?

(9) Was a good and proper lookout kept?

(10) Where did the vessel strand? Was she seriously damaged through such stranding? What was the cause of the casualty?

(11) Did the master mistake the black buoy moored off the Great Fox River for the can buoy, painted black, moored off the Serpent Reef? If so was he justified in mistaking the one buoy for the other?

(12) Was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

(13) Was serious damage to the s.s. "Manchester Engineer" caused by wrongful act or default of the master, chief, second, and third officers, or of any of them?

Mr. Miller having addressed the Court on behalf of the master and produced Mr. R. B. Stoker, the managing director of the "Manchester Engineer," who gave evidence of the master's previous good character and ability, the Court gave judgment as above, and returned the following answers to the questions of the Board of Trade:—

(1) The vessel had three compasses. They were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel. They were last adjusted by Messrs. Dobbie & Co. of South Shields, 26th April, 1902.

(2) The master did ascertain the deviations of his compasses by observations from time to time. Errors were correctly ascertained and proper correction to the course applied.

(3) The vessel was supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions for the Gulf and River of St. Lawrence.

(4) Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 11.20 p.m., 14th October, when off the South Point light, Anticosti. A safe and proper course was then set, and thereafter steered. No allowance was made for tide and currents.

(5) Safe and proper alterations were made in the course at or about 8 a.m. of the 15th October until the second buoy was seen, and from time to time thereafter. No allowance was made for tide and currents.

(6) The black buoy seen at 10.15 a.m. on 15th October is not marked on the Admiralty charts, by which the master was navigating. There is a black buoy described in the sailing directions with which the master was

supplied as being placed inside the anchorage of Great Fox Bay; but this buoy, the Court is of opinion, could not have been seen from the vessel. The Court is unable to say what the object was which the master and third mate sighted and took for a buoy.

(7) Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 10.15 a.m., 15th October, when the object taken for a black buoy was sighted just before the port beam. If the object thus sighted had been the Serpent Reef buoy, no other means for ascertaining and verifying the position of the vessel thereafter until immediately before the vessel stranded were available.

(8) The black buoy sighted at about 10.35 a.m. of the 15th October, about half a point on the starboard bow, was the Serpent Reef buoy. The master did take proper measures, but not with sufficient promptitude to keep the vessel out of danger.

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

(10) The vessel stranded on the Serpent Reef, and was seriously damaged by the stranding. The casualty was caused by the master taking the object sighted at 10.15 a.m. for the Serpent Reef buoy.

(11) The master could not have seen the buoy inside the anchorage of Great Fox Bay from the position of his vessel approaching the Serpent Reef.

(12) The vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care up to the time the Serpent Reef buoy was sighted when the course of the vessel should have been at once altered to pass to the north of the buoy, which would have been the safe course, even if the master had been right in his impression that he had already passed the Serpent Reef buoy.

(13) The serious damage to the "Manchester Engineer" was caused by the master committing a grave error of judgment, when the buoy off Serpent Reef was sighted, in assuming that the object previously sighted was the Serpent Reef buoy, and that this was a buoy adrift. The Court severely censure the master for not taking immediate steps to put his vessel in a position of safety. No blame can be attached to the chief, second, or third officers, or any of them.

FRANCIS J. HEADLAM,  
Judge.

We concur in the above report.

A. WOOD, } Assessors.  
H. PARSELL, }

Manchester,  
23rd December, 1902.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the  
13th day of January, 1903.)

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This Inquiry was  
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master and chief c  
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The "Crocodile"  
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per advice received

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