

(No. 6658.)

"YEOMAN" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a formal investigation held at the Magistrates' Room, Liverpool, on the 15th, 16th, and 17th days of March, 1904, before W. J. STEWART, Esq., assisted by Capt. ANDERSON, Capt. DYER, R.N., and Capt. BARNETT BIGLEY, into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British s.s. "YEOMAN," of Liverpool, at Camelle, N.W. coast of Spain, whereby loss of life ensued.

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 and loss of the said vessel were due to the default of the master, Mr. William Lang, whose certificate, numbered 31636, the Court suspends for a period of three months from the date hereof. The loss of the four lives was due to the capsizing of one of the life-boats.

Dated this 17th day of March, 1904.

W. J. STEWART,
Judge.

We concur in the above report.

ABSM. ANDERSON,
RICH'D. C. DYER,
WM. BARNETT BIGLEY, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was held at the Magistrates' Room, Dale Street, Liverpool, on the 15th, 16th, and 17th days of March, 1904, when Mr. Paxton appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. Miller for the master and chief officer, Mr. Pedder for the second officer, and Mr. Harley for the owners.

The "Yeoman," official number 113490, and port of registry Liverpool, was a British steam screw ship, built of steel by Messrs. C. Connell & Company, of Whiteinch, Glasgow, in the year 1901. Her dimensions as per register were:—Length 470·3 ft., breadth 56·25 ft., and depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling at midships 31·8 ft. She was fitted with triple expansion engines of 580 nominal horse power, and 3500 indicated horse power, which should drive the vessel about 12½ knots per hour. Her gross tonnage was 7379·45 tons, and, after deducting 2595·60 tons for propelling power and crew spaces, her registered tonnage was 4783·85 tons. She carried six steel life-boats, and two small wooden boats, with the usual life-belts and life-buoys, in accordance with the Act, and at the time of the casualty which forms the subject of this investigation, she was the property of the Charente Steamship Company, Limited, Mr. Frederick James Harrison, of Mersey Chambers, Liverpool, being the duly appointed manager. She had four compasses in position, which were last adjusted professionally before starting on her first voyage in 1901, since which date the master has ascertained the deviation from time to time. The "Yeoman" was supplied with the latest charts and sailing directions—in short, she was in good order and condition throughout, and well found in every respect.

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On the 6th February last, the "Yeoman" left Liverpool at 1.30 p.m., in charge of a pilot, with a general cargo of about 8000 tons, bound for Calcutta, her draught of water at the time being 26 ft. 1 in. forward, and 26 ft. 4 ins. aft. At the time of leaving she had a crew of 82 hands all told, and 4 passengers, and was under the command of Mr. William Lang, who held a certificate of competency as master numbered 31636. At 4 p.m. she arrived at the Bar Lightship, where the pilot was discharged, and at 4.15 p.m. again proceeded on her voyage at full speed. At 8.37 p.m. the South Stack light was abeam, distant 1½ miles, and at 9.55 p.m. the Carnarvon Bay Lightship was on the port beam. The weather at this time was clear, with a fresh breeze from the W.S.W., and a moderate sea. At 0.10 a.m. on the 7th February, Bardsey light was abeam, distant 1½ miles, and at 6.10 a.m. the Smalls light was found, by a four-point bearing when abeam, to be 5 miles distant. From this position a departure was taken, and a course S.W. ¾ S. magnetic was set, the wind at this time being light from the S.W., with a heavy Westerly swell.

At 5.30 p.m. the Bishop Rock light (Scilly Isles) was on the port beam, distant 14 miles. At midnight the wind and sea increased considerably, and the vessel commenced to ship heavy water. At 4 a.m. of the 8th February, the weather is described as a strong gale from the West, with a heavy sea. At noon of that day, the position of the vessel by observations was found to be 47° 47' North, and longitude 7° 53' West. The S.W. ¾ S. magnetic course was continued, the gale at this time having veered to the N.W., with a confused sea, causing the vessel to labour and roll heavily. At 10 p.m. the gale backed to the S.W., and at midnight the gale was accompanied with heavy rain squalls and lightning. At 7.40 a.m. of the 9th February, the weather became so bad that the vessel was brought up to S.W., bowing the sea, and the engines reduced to half speed. At noon of that day no observations could be obtained, but the position of the vessel by dead reckoning was assumed to be latitude 45° 28' North, and longitude 8° 59' West, the distance run by log during the past 24 hours being 147 miles. Shortly before 1 p.m., the gale having veered to the North-West, the vessel was put on her original course, viz., S.W. ¾ S., with orders to go nothing to the Southward. The engines were at this time put at full speed. At 4 p.m. the gale somewhat abated, but the sea continued very heavy, so much so that the vessel laboured and shipped large quantities of water fore and aft. At 8 p.m. the wind and sea still further moderated, and the weather was now clear, the speed of the vessel having increased to 8 knots. At 10 p.m., the master having written up his night order book, the following being a copy: "Course S.W. ¾ S., don't make it Southerly. In the early morning look out for Villano, let me know if you see it. Standing orders as usual," it was read by the chief officer and signed by him, and the master went into the chart room, so as to be handy for a call. At midnight the second officer relieved the chief, and before taking over charge of the watch, was made acquainted with the orders in the night order book. The speed of the vessel since 9 p.m. had been 9 knots an hour. The S.W. ¾ S. course was continued, and at 2 a.m. of the 10th February, the wind again backed to the W.S.W., accompanied with passing showers. At about 3.5 a.m. the second officer saw a white light about 2½ points on the starboard bow. This light disappeared for a short time, and while walking across the bridge he saw it again. After watching it from 5 to 7 minutes, and having a doubt in his mind as to what the light was, he went to call the master, and while going down the steps leading from the upper bridge to the chart room, the look-out man rang two bells, indicating thereby that there was either a light or vessel on the starboard bow. The second officer called the master, and, according to the latter, he said: "There is a light which I have been watching for 10 minutes; will you come up?" but, according to the second officer, he said: "There is a very

suspicious light on the starboard bow; sometimes it looks like a shore light, and at other times like a ship's light." It will be noticed that there is a slight discrepancy between the master and second officer, but there is no doubt whatever that a light was reported to the master, who at once came on to the bridge, the time being about 3.15 a.m. The master stated that he looked all round, and was unable to see any light, and that the weather was now dark, with a drizzling rain. After looking for some time, and not seeing any light, he inquired of the second officer whether he was certain that he had seen a light, to which the second officer replied in the affirmative. The master then asked whether he thought it was Villano, to which the second officer replied that he was not sure, and that it was a very irregular light. The master having looked with the glasses for about 10 minutes, and failing to see any light, he asked for the distance on the log, and having been told 109 miles at 2 a.m., he went to the chart house in order to see where this distance would place the vessel. He had scarcely got there when he heard the order given hard-a-port, and the engine telegraph ring, whereupon he at once returned to the bridge, and inquired what was the matter, to which the second officer replied, "The ship is ashore; look at the breakers," and almost immediately the vessel struck heavily, the time of striking being about 3.30 a.m., and the vessel's head W. by S. All hands were immediately called, and the boats ordered to be swung out. At 3.35 a.m. the engineer reported that there was 3 ft. of water over the engine room plates, and immediately after the fires were drowned out. Distress signals were made, and answered from the shore, and the vessel swung with her head to the shore. Orders were given to lower the starboard life-boats, and to pass them round to the port side, which was the lee side, and while the after starboard boat was being passed round the stern of the vessel with 8 Lascars in her, the boat got adrift, either by the painter breaking, or by its being cut. This boat afterwards capsized in a heavy sea, and four of the Lascars were drowned. The vessel continued to strike heavily, seas washing over the decks fore and aft, and all holds were found to be full of water up to the 'tween decks, the vessel settling down with a list to starboard. Finding there was no hope of saving the vessel, the crew and passengers were ordered into the boats, and the vessel abandoned at 7.30 a.m. The place of stranding was near Point Camelle, about 6 miles to the Eastward of Cape Villano, N.W. coast of Spain. The boats ultimately reached the shore, and all hands (with the exception of the four alluded to) were saved. The vessel has since become a total loss.

In the opinion of the Court, the master should have taken measures, immediately he came on deck, to ascertain his approximate position by a cast of the lead; and before going below to consult the chart, he should in the circumstances have placed the vessel's head to the Westward, and eased the engines, and more especially so considering that the distance run by the log would bring the vessel close to the land if out of her course, and that the vessel had experienced a heavy gale and sea on the starboard side while crossing the Bay.

At the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Paxton, on behalf of 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?
- (4) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel when abeam of the Smalls on the afternoon of the 7th February last? Was a safe and proper course then set and thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(5) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about noon of the 8th February, and from time to time thereafter?

(6) Were safe and proper alterations made in the course at or about 7.40 a.m. and 0.40 p.m. of the 9th February, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(7) What was the light seen at or about 3.7 a.m. of the 10th February? Were proper measures then taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel?

(8) Ought the second officer to have called the master sooner after he sighted a light on the starboard bow?

(9) Having regard to the state of the weather on the morning of the 10th February, was the vessel navigated at too great a rate of speed?

(10) Was the lead used before the ship struck? If not, should it have been used?

(11) What was the cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel, and what were the circumstances in which four lives were lost?

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

(13) Was the loss of the s.s. "Yeoman" and the loss of life caused by the wrongful act or default of the master and second officer, or of either of them?

Mr. Miller having addressed the Court on behalf of the master, and Mr. Pedder on behalf of the second officer, the Court gave judgment as above, and returned the following answers to the questions of the Board of Trade:—

(1) The "Yeoman" had four compasses in position, viz.: A standard on the upper bridge abaft the wheel, a steering on the upper bridge in front of the wheel, another in the wheel-house on the lower bridge, and one aft. They were in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted by Basnett, of Liverpool, in 1901.

(2) The master ascertained the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time; the errors appear to have been correctly ascertained, and the proper corrections to the courses applied.

(3) The vessel was supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions.

(4) Proper measures were taken by means of a four-point bearing to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel when the Smalls was abeam at 6.10 p.m. of the 7th February last, which at that time placed the vessel 5 miles off that light. A safe and proper course was then set and steered up to noon of the 8th, but not afterwards. No allowance was made for tide, currents, or indraught.

(5) Proper measures were taken by observation to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at noon of the 8th February last, which placed the vessel in latitude 47° 47' North, and longitude 7° 53' West. From this time no means were available to ascertain and verify or approximate the position of the vessel until some time before the stranding.

(6) The alteration made in the course at or about 7.40 a.m. of the 9th February was in the right direction, but considering the heavy gale and high sea setting on the vessel's starboard bow, the alteration made at 0.40 p.m. of the 9th was neither safe nor proper. No allowance was made for tide, currents, or indraught.

(7) The light seen on the starboard bow at or about 3.7 a.m. of the 10th February last was Cape Villano light. No measures whatever were taken, either when a light was seen by the second officer, or when the master was called and came on deck, to ascertain the position of the vessel.

(8) In the light of subsequent events it would have been better had the second officer called the master directly the light was seen. Considering, however, that the second officer was expecting to pass about 30 miles to the Westward of Cape

Villano, the Court is of opinion that so doing was not an unreasonable step, as he was endeavouring to ascertain the position of the light before calling the master.

(9) Having regard to the state of the weather on the morning of the 10th February last, the vessel was not navigated at too great a rate of speed.

(10) The lead was not used before the ship struck, and the omission to use it was not a grave one.

(11) The stranding was caused by the heavy gale and high sea setting on the vessel's starboard bow from noon of the 9th to the morning of the 10th February last. After the stranding one of the boats was lowered into the water, and was made, by means of her painter, under the stern of the vessel to this was being done, the boat got on board of the life-boat, and the painter breaking, or by its capsized in a heavy sea. Four of the Lascars were drowned; the others were saved.

Villano, the Court is of opinion that the delay in so doing was not an unreasonable one, inasmuch as he was endeavouring to ascertain the character of the light before calling the master.

(9) Having regard to the state of the weather on the morning of the 10th February last, the vessel was not navigated at too great a rate of speed.

(10) The lead was not used before the vessel struck, and the omission to use it was, in the opinion of the Court, a grave one.

(11) The stranding was caused by the neglect of the master to make any allowance whatever for the heavy gale and high sea setting on the vessel's starboard bow from noon of the 8th February last, and the non-use of the lead after he was called and came on deck on the morning of the 10th February last. After the stranding one of the starboard life-boats was lowered into the water, and an attempt was made, by means of her painter, to pass her under the stern of the vessel to the lee side. While this was being done, the boat got adrift, either by the painter breaking, or by its being cut by those on board of the life-boat, and the boat eventually capsized in a heavy sea. Four of the Lascars who were in her were drowned; the other four got safely to land.

(12) The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

(13) The loss of the s.s. "Yeoman" was caused by the default of the master. In consideration of the long and continuous service of the master in one employ, and the high character given to him by his employers, the Court, while reluctantly compelled to mark its judgment of his default by dealing with his certificate, contents itself with suspending it for only three months.

W. J. STEWART,

Judge.

We concur in the above report.

ABSM. ANDERSON,
RICH'D. C. DYER,
WM. BARNETT BIGLEY, } Assessors.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the
22nd day of April, 1904.)