

(No. 6682.)

“MELMORE” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Guildhall, Londonderry, on the 10th, 13th, and 14th days of June, 1904, before Lieut.-Colonel TYNTE, R.M., assisted by Captain A. CUNNINGHAME and Captain E. M. HUGHES, into the circumstances attending the damage sustained by the British steamship “MELMORE,” of Glasgow, through striking a submerged object off Malin Head, County Donegal, on or about the 5th of March, 1904.

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 damage was caused by an error of judgment on the part of Mr. Peter Mitchell, the master, in estimating his distances from the Blind Rock and the shore when passing through the narrow channel which separates them. In the circumstances, the Court feels justified in not dealing with his certificate. No blame attaches to either the chief or second officer. The Court desires to express its appreciation of the efforts of the master to minimize the consequences of the casualty by having the vessel successfully beached on Lag Strand.

Dated this 14th day of June, 1894.

MERVYN C. S. TYNTE, Lt.-Col. R.M.,
Judge.

We concur in the above report.

ANDW. CUNNINGHAME, } Assessors.
E. M. HUGHES, }

Annex to the Report.

The parties to this inquiry were the Board of Trade, represented by Mr. B. H. Lane, S.C.S.; Mr. Peter Mitchell, master of the “Melmore,” for whom Mr. Maxwell, solicitor, appeared; Mr. John Taylor Campbell, chief officer, and Mr. George Fletcher, second officer, who were represented by Mr. John Mallins, solicitor. Mr. Mallins also watched the case on behalf of the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Leitrim, the owner of the vessel.

The “Melmore” is a British steamship, built of steel, by Messrs. David J. Dunlop & Co., at Port Glasgow, in 1892. Her principal dimensions are:—Length, 156.2 ft.; breadth, 25.85 ft.; and depth in hold, 11.35 ft. She is owned by the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Leitrim, of Mulroy, Milford, in the County of Donegal, who is also designated managing owner by advice under his hand, dated the 11th day of May, 1903.

The “Melmore” is registered at the port of Glasgow, her official number being 99833, and her registered tonnage, after deducting 244.12 tons for crew’s space and propelling power, is 167.59 tons. She is rigged as a schooner, and is propelled by triple compound engines of 96 nominal horse-power, designed to give her a speed of 12½ knots.

The ship had on board two compasses—one on the bridge and one aft. They were last adjusted in April, 1903, and were stated to be in good order. The vessel was also equipped with three boats—a life-boat, a cutter, and a quarter boat aft—and had 320 life-belts and 6 life-buoys, being well found in every respect.

The “Melmore” was regularly engaged in the coasting trade between Glasgow, Portrush, Londonderry, and the coast of Donegal. On the 5th of March last, at 10.30 a.m., she left Londonderry with a general cargo of about 210 tons for some ports to the westward. She was drawing 11 ft. forward, and about 11 ft. 6 ins. aft. She carried a crew of 14 hands, but no passengers, and was commanded by Mr. Peter Mitchell, who held a certificate of competency, numbered 102281. Mr. Mitchell had been in command of the “Melmore” ever since she was built, and had over twenty-one years’ experience of the coast on which the vessel traded.

On the morning in question the weather was fine and clear, wind E.N.E., sea smooth, and the tide ebbing. Innishowen Head was passed at 12.20 p.m., about a mile off, all sail was set, and the course set N.W. by N. (magnetic). The speed of the vessel, with the wind and tide in her favour, was estimated to be 16 or 17 knots. When she was off Culdaff Bay the master went below for his dinner, leaving the second officer in charge. Shortly before the master returned to the bridge the second officer altered the course to N.W. by W. The ship was off Glengad Head about 1.30 p.m., and a quarter of an hour later she passed Stookarudden. From this point the vessel was navigated by landmarks to pass through the narrow channel which runs between Crab Island and Saddle Island, off Slievebane Bay.

The “Melmore” had some cargo to be delivered at Malin Pier, inside the westernmost point of the bay; but, owing to the state of the tide, the master knew that he could not get to the pier. Before leaving Londonderry, however, he had communicated with the pier-master, asking him to send a boat off for some sundries. On arriving off the pier and finding no boat out, the master of the “Melmore” steered out of the bay, and, when off Minad Point, set the course N.W. ½ N. The ship had not gone far when she was felt to graze along some object.

The master stated that the Blind Rock bore N.E., distant about half a mile, at the time. This bearing was corroborated by Albert J. Barrow, A.B., the man at the wheel, who stated that, after clearing the Sound, he got the course N.W. ½ N., and that the ship was almost abreast of the Blind Rock when she grazed something. The master immediately stopped the engines, and gave the mate directions to sound the bells. After examination the mate reported that there was no water in the holds. The engines were stopped for about five minutes, and were started again “full speed ahead.” A minute or two afterwards the second engineer reported that water was coming into the engine-room. The pumps were all put on; but, notwithstanding every effort, the water gained so fast that the chief engineer reported that he would have to draw the fires to prevent an explosion. The boats were swung out, and the vessel was headed for Lag Strand, in Trawbreaga Bay, where she was beached at three o’clock in the afternoon, and at high-water the decks were awash. She lay on the sand from 3 p.m. on Saturday, the 5th, to 9 a.m. on Wednesday, the 9th of March. Ultimately, the “Melmore,” as the result of salvage operations, was taken to Glasgow, where her somewhat extensive damages were repaired.

After a careful consideration of the evidence, it is clear to the Court that this unfortunate casualty occurred through the master over-estimating his distance from the Blind Rock when passing through the narrow passage between that

rock and Ardnacan Point. The passage is only four cables wide, and a slight error in estimating the distance may readily lead to disaster. The master stated that the accident occurred with the Blind Rock bearing N.E., and about half a mile distant. A reference to the Admiralty chart will show this is clearly an over-estimate, since it would place the vessel well on the landward side of Ardnacan Point. The Court, therefore, has no doubt the casualty was due to the master being nearer to Ardnacan Point than he had supposed.

At the close of the evidence for the Board of Trade, Mr. Lane, solicitor, 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?

(2) Was the vessel supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions?

(3) On passing Saddle Island, on the afternoon of the 5th March last, was a safe and proper course steered for Minad Point Pier, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(4) Upon approaching Minad Point Pier was the vessel navigated too close in-shore? If so, did she then sustain any damage?

(5) Were safe and proper courses steered out of Slievebane Bay, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(6) Where and on what did the vessel strike? Was she seriously damaged thereby? Is the object on which the vessel struck marked upon the Admiralty chart?

(7) Was a good and proper look-out kept?

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

(9) Was serious damage to the steamship "Melmore" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master and chief officer or of either of them, and (or) was it caused by the neglect of Mr. George Fletcher, second officer?

Mr. Maxwell, solicitor, then called some witnesses on behalf of his client, and addressed the Court on the evidence. Mr. Mallins followed on the same side, and Mr. Lane having replied,

The Court proceeded to consider the questions, and, in reply to them, found as follows:—

(1) The steamship "Melmore" had two compasses, both of which were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel.

(2) The ship was supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions.

(3) On passing Saddle Island, on the afternoon of the 5th of March last, a safe and proper course was steered for clearing Crab Island, which temporarily brought the vessel in the direction of

Minad Point Pier, but the master had no intention of calling there. There is no evidence as to what allowance was made for tide and currents.

(4) Upon approaching Minad Point Pier the vessel was not navigated too close in-shore, nor did she then sustain any damage.

(5) A safe and proper course was steered out of Slievebane Bay, but a safe and proper course was not set from off Minad Rock. There is no evidence as to what allowance was made for tide and currents.

(6) The Court is of opinion that the vessel struck on the outlying rocks off Ardnacan Point. The evidence of the master, corroborated by Albert James Barrow, A.B., and Charles Inkster, A.B., is, that, when the casualty happened, the Blind Rock bore about N.E., distant from a quarter to half a mile. This bearing and distance, laid down on the Admiralty Chart, leaves no reasonable doubt in the mind of the Court that the casualty occurred at the place stated. The ship was seriously damaged thereby. The object upon which the vessel struck is marked on the chart.

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

(8) The Court cannot say that the ship was navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

(9) No blame attaches to either the chief or the second officer. The serious damage to the steamship "Melmore" was caused by an error of judgment on the part of the master, Mr. Peter Mitchell, in estimating his distance from the Blind Rock and the shore when setting his course from Minad Rock to the North-Westward. In the circumstances the Court feels justified in not dealing with his certificate.

The Court desires to express its appreciation of the efforts of the master to minimize the consequences of the casualty by having the vessel successfully beached on Lag Strand.

No order is made as to costs.

Given under our hands at the Guildhall, in the City of Londonderry, this 14th day of June, 1904.

MERVYN C. S. TYNTE, Lt.-Col. R.M.,

Judge.

We concur,

ANDW. CUNNINGHAME, }
E. M. HUGHES, } Assessors.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 5th day of July, 1904.)

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