

(No. 6638.)

"KATHLEEN ANDERSON" (S.S.).

REPORT and finding of the Court of Inquiry, held at Durban, into the circumstances attending the wreck of the steam trawler "KATHLEEN ANDERSON."

Report of Court.

The steam trawler "Kathleen Anderson," iron-built, of 58 tons net (200 gross) register, left Durban for a fishing trip on the 15th October, 1903.

She had on board a crew of eight Europeans and 18 coloured men.

The master and mate hold no Board of Trade certificate, though the mate produced a document which he described as a Norwegian master's certificate.

On October 17th, on arriving at Bird Island, about 34 miles from Port Elizabeth, the trawler proceeded to the fishing ground, where she fished with varying weather for 14 days, leaving on her return passage on the afternoon of October 31st, the weather being then fine, with light S.W. wind.

According to the master's evidence the course was then E.N.E. $\frac{1}{2}$ N., in order, as he says, to bring the vessel near the land about Port Alfred. The mate, however, who was on duty up to midnight, fixes the course from the time the vessel bore up for home, as having been between E. and E. by N., land being visible all the time up to midnight, and East London light then bearing N.E. by E. and distant four miles. When that light was passed at 12.30 the weather was still clear, but at about 1 a.m. a drizzling rain came on and the coast was hidden. Since passing East London, the master says that the course was E.N.E. At about 3 a.m. the mist cleared and the land became visible, as the master thinks, about two miles distant. He then changed his course E. by N., reckoning that this would clear the land. Half-an-hour later thinking he felt a ground swell he altered the course to E., and about 20 minutes later to E. by S. After going thus for about 10 minutes, the vessel struck about 4 a.m.

We have to remark on the discrepancy between the courses given by the master and those stated by the mate. The former course would apparently have taken the ship ashore before reaching Port Alfred, while the latter would appear to be approximately correct up to midnight.

It appears that about two months prior to the casualty, the former master having reported the compass to be defective, a careful readjustment was made in the usual manner by Captain Cambridge, a competent and certificated master.

We find, however, that owing to the position of the compass on board being in close proximity to large pieces of iron, unless constant observations for deviation were taken frequent changes might occur upon alterations in the ship's course. The master seems

to have noticed that something was wrong though he took no steps to correct it.

At the time of striking, the weather was hazy. It is probable that the rock on which the ship struck is one of those marked on the chart as lying just off Cape Morgan. The captain stated that the rock was half a mile from the shore, though the mate and the 1st fisherman estimate the distance as $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

The ship carried a lifeboat, 16 ft. long, which was at once ordered to be put out, while the pumps were kept going and the vessel was turned to the beach. The coloured part of the crew got into the boat which was kept alongside and most of them refused to come out. The boat however capsized and six of the crew were drowned on the vessel reaching the breakers and finally stranding, full of water about 400 yards from the beach. Another native who, contrary to orders, had jumped overboard from the ship was also lost.

Two of the survivors swam ashore at daylight, but the rest remained in the rigging until the morning of the 2nd November, when they also succeeded in swimming ashore.

Finding of the Court.

We find that the vessel was a new one, properly found and equipped save in respect of her compasses as already stated. It is doubtful, however, whether the life-saving appliances of the vessel were quite adequate to the number of the crew on board.

It does not appear that the master at any time gave instructions as to the actual courses to be steered, and we cannot help arriving at the conclusion that the course of the steamer was left in a great degree to the individual judgment of those on deck at the time, to keep the vessel in a safe position, without much regard to compass courses.

We are of opinion that the master, knowing that his compass was defective, and having regard to the state of the weather, would have acted with better judgment had he given the land a wider berth as soon as the weather became thick at 1 a.m.

We find that neither the master nor the mate had any idea of ascertaining or applying the errors of the compass, and were therefore compelled to navigate the ship by the land—a condition of things which, unless extreme caution were constantly exercised, would be calculated to end in disaster once the weather became unfavourable and the land obscured.

(Sgd.)

W. BROOME,
President

(Sgd.)
(Sgd.)

J. SAMPSON,
W. B. DICKIE, } Assessors

(Sgd.)

B. HODSON, } Secretary to the
Court of Inquiry.

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19th day of February, 1904.)