

(No. 6895.)

"ROWTOR" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Town Hall, Cardiff, on the 13th and 14th days of February, 1906, before THOMAS WILLIAM LEWIS, Esquire, Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captains WILLIAM COSENS and B. DU SAUTOY ANSTIS, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "Rowtor," of London, near the Fratelli rocks, coast of Tunis, on the 3rd day of January, 1906.

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 proximate cause of the casualty was the careless navigation of the vessel by the master in continuing at too great a rate of speed in thick weather, when within range of a light that could not be seen, without taking measures that were available to verify her position, viz.:—by the use of the lead. The Court finds the master in default, and suspends his certificate for three months.

Dated this 14th day of February, 1906.

T. W. LEWIS,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

WILLIAM COSENS,
B. DU SAUTOY ANSTIS, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was held at the Town Hall, Cardiff, on the 13th and 14th days of February, 1906. Mr. Vachell appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. Miller for the master and first officer, and Mr. Lean for the second officer. He also appeared to watch on behalf of the owners.

The "Rowtor" was a steel screw steamship of 1510.92 tons register, and 2351.45 tons gross. Her official No. was 98983, and she was built in 1891 at West Hartlepool, by E. Withy and Company. She was 288 ft. in length, 40 ft. in breadth, and 18.35 ft. in depth. She had triple expansion surface condensing engines of 200 nominal horse-power and 720 indicated horse-power, and had two steel boilers of 160 lbs. working pressure. The engines and boilers were constructed by Messrs. Blair and Company, of Stockton. The vessel was owned by the Rowtor Steamship Company, Limited, of London, and was managed by Mr. James Jenkins, of Merchants Exchange, Cardiff, who was designated the person to whom the management of the vessel was to be entrusted by and on behalf of the owners, per advice received the 18th January, 1905, under the seal of the company.

The vessel had 4 boats, 6 lifebuoys, 30 lifebelts, and was classed 100 A.1 at Lloyd's. She had three compasses, all of them spirit compasses. One

placed on the bridge, another in the wheel-house, and the third aft. They were in good order in all respects, and were adjusted in August last in Barry roads by Ainsley, of Cardiff. They were corrected from time to time by observations taken by the master and were so corrected on the day preceding the casualty.

On the 23rd December last, the "Rowtor" left Barry Dock with a cargo of 2750 tons of coal bound for Port Said.

She was commanded by Mr. John Davies, had a crew of 22 hands all told, and drew 19 ft. 2 ins. aft and 18 ft. 6 ins. forward. She was supplied with a chart by Imrie, corrected to 1904, for the western portion of the Mediterranean, and had also the accompanying sailing directions. Rough weather was experienced crossing the Bay of Biscay but nothing of consequence occurred until after the vessel had passed the Straits of Gibraltar, and was proceeding along the north coast of Africa. On the 3rd January Cape Bougaroni was abeam at 3.30 a.m. and was said to have been ascertained to be 10 miles distant by a four-point bearing. The sky was overcast, light winds were prevailing, and the atmosphere was clear. The vessel was proceeding at full speed, making about eight knots, and was being steered upon an E. $\frac{3}{4}$ S. magnetic course. At 8.0 a.m. the sky was still overcast and there were slight showers. At noon there were heavy showers and the wind was from the N.W. and was freshening. Observations were rendered impossible by the condition of the weather, and navigation had to be conducted by means of dead reckoning. The log had been streamed on leaving England and was kept streamed throughout the voyage. No readings, however, were available for the use of the Court in consequence of the loss of all records with the ship's papers.

At 7.0 p.m. the wind had increased to a fresh breeze with a rough sea and heavy showers. It was still from the N.W. and remained in that quarter up to the time of the casualty. The weather itself was thick and vision was limited to a range of about three-quarters of a mile.

The master estimated that he was drawing near to Cape Serrat and ought to be well within the range of the light. No light, however, was seen and no land had been seen since Cape Bougaroni was passed.

The course was altered at 7 p.m. to E. $\frac{1}{4}$ N. magnetic, to give the Fratelli rocks a wider berth, and the engines were eased down. The speed of the vessel from this time on was between 6 and 7 knots.

In setting the above course no allowance was made for the strong N.W. wind and sea which had prevailed throughout the afternoon and which had steadily increased.

At 8.40 p.m. the vessel struck the reef lying to the northward of the Fratelli rocks, heeled over to port but did not remain fast. The engines were stopped but the vessel did not lose her way and grated over the reef into deep water.

The holds and tanks were sounded and No. 1 and 2 tanks found to be full, No. 3 with 5 ft. of water in it and rapidly filling, No. 1 bilge with 8 ft. of water in it, and No. 2 bilge with 5 ft. of water in it. Water poured into the stoke hold and engine-room, and notwithstanding that all watertight doors were closed and that the main pumps were put on to the holds and bilges, continued to rise rapidly and soon drowned out the fires. The inrush of water was so great that all attempts to deal with it were of no avail, and the vessel soon settled down by the head.

The lifeboats were lowered into the water and at 9.5 p.m. the crew were ordered into them. At 9.15 p.m. it was considered unsafe to remain longer near the vessel and the boats pulled away from her.

At 9.30 p.m. she sank head first. The Fratelli rocks were seen about three-quarters of a mile to

a mile to the westward when the boats were standing by the vessel before she sank.

After the "Rowtor" had foundered the boats were directed to Bizerta where the crew landed at 4.30 a.m. on the 4th January. The logs and all other ship's papers were lost and also the whole of the effects of the crew.

The soundings along the course the vessel actually made as she approached Cape Serrat, were totally different from those on her assumed course. Similar depths might have been obtained on the Galita bank to the northward of the assumed course but the nature of the bottom on the Galita bank differs materially and would have indicated the vessel's position if the lead had been used, and would have warned the master of his error.

At the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Vachell submitted the following questions, upon which he desired 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 at or about 3.30 a.m., on the 3rd January last; was a safe and proper course thereafter steered; and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(5) Was a safe and proper alteration made in the course at or about 7 p.m. of the 3rd January last; and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(6) Having regard to the state of the weather after noon on the 3rd January last—

(a) Was the vessel navigated at too great a rate of speed?

(b) Was the lead used, if not, should it have been used?

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

(8) What was the cause of the loss of the vessel?

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

(10) Was the loss of the steamship "Rowtor" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master?

The Court then considered the questions and answered as follows:—

(1) The vessel had three compasses. They were in good order, sufficient for her safe navigation, and were last adjusted in August, 1905, in Barry roads, by Ainsley, of Cardiff.

(2) The master ascertained the deviation of his compasses from time to time. The errors were correctly ascertained and the proper corrections applied to the courses.

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

(4) At or about 3.30 a.m. on the 3rd January last, according to the evidence of the master and officers, proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel by a four point bearing of Cape Bougaroni. The course then set is stated in evidence to have been E. $\frac{3}{4}$ S. magnetic, from a position 10 miles north of Cape

Bougaroni. Having regard to the state of the weather this course, when set, if in fact set from the position stated, and if made good, would have taken the vessel clear of danger, and would have been a safe and proper course. No allowance was made for tide or currents.

(5) From the position of the vessel, stated to have been assumed, at or about 7.0 p.m. of the 3rd January, the alteration made in the course was a safe and proper one, but from her actual position it was not a safe and proper alteration inasmuch as at that time she had been deflected, as subsequent events proved, about eight miles to the southward of her assumed position. The alteration was in the right direction but was not sufficient. No allowance was made for tide or currents.

(6) Having regard to the state of the weather—

(a) The vessel was navigated at too great a rate of speed after sunset.

(b) The lead was not used. It should have been used.

(7) A good and proper look-out appears to have been kept.

(8) The proximate cause of the loss of the vessel was the careless navigation by the master, in continuing at too great a rate of speed after 7 p.m. in thick weather, without taking measures that were available to verify the position of the vessel, viz.:—the use of the lead.

If the position of the vessel was accurately ascertained off Cape Bougaroni and the course said to have been then set was in fact set, the primary cause of the loss of the vessel was her deflection from that course either by bad steering or the force of the N. westerly wind experienced and a possible current produced thereby. But whatever the cause of such deflection may have been, the ultimate consequence, viz.:—the loss of the vessel could have been averted if, as above stated, the master had about 7 p.m. ascertained his position by the lead and then altered his course more to the northward. The use of the lead at 7 p.m. was the more incumbent on the master because he had not had an observation at noon, he was approaching the dangerous navigation of the Galita Channel, and he had failed to make the Cape Serrat light which he was looking for and which was well within range. The omission to use the lead was not a mere error of judgment, for the master omitted to bring his judgment to bear on the question whether the lead would or would not afford him guidance. The omission of the lead was in the opinion of the Court gross negligence. She was therefore not navigated with proper and seamanlike care, and for the reasons above-mentioned the Court finds her loss was due to the wrongful act and default of the master, whose certificate is suspended for three months.

T. W. LEWIS,
Judge.

We concur,

WILLIAM COSENS,
B. DU SAUTOY ANSTIS, } Assessors.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the
6th day of March, 1906.)

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