

(No. 6963.)

“LUCENT” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a formal investigation held at the Sunderland Union Offices, John Street, in the County Borough of Sunderland, on the 31st day of July and the 1st day of August, 1906, before Aldermen THOMAS JOHNSTON and ARTHUR RITSON, Esquires, two of His Majesty's Justices of the said Borough, assisted by Commander W. F. CABORNE, C.B., R.N.R., and Captain DAVID ANDERSON, nautical assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British s.s. “LUCENT,” of Sunderland, at or near the Elie Ness, Fifeshire, on or about the 23rd day of June, 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 stranding was caused by an error in judgment on the part of the master, Mr. James Martin. The Court does not find him in default for such stranding.

Dated this 1st day of August, 1906.

THOS. JOHNSTON, } Judges.
ARTHUR RITSON, }

We concur in the above Report.

W. F. CABORNE, } Assessors.
DAVID ANDERSON, }

Annex to the Report.

The “Lucent” is a steamship built of iron, at Sunderland, in the county of Durham, in the year 1879, her official number being 81453 and her dimensions as per register length 250 1/8 ft., mainbreadth 34 ft., depth in hold 18 3/8 ft., and length of engine room 44 ft. This vessel is rigged as a schooner, and her registered tonnage, after deducting 533.71 tons on account of space required for propelling power and for the crew, is 875.53 tons. She is fitted with two compound surface condensing engines of 140 h.p. combined, the diameter of the cylinders being 32 and 59 ins. respectively.

This vessel is owned by Mr. James Westoll and others, Mr. James Westoll, of Sunderland, being the managing owner, and at the time of the casualty she was under the command of James Martin, who holds a certificate of competency as master, No. 037265, renewed on 3rd November, 1902, the original certificate being dated the 3rd March, 1881.

This vessel left Dagenham, in the River Thames, on the 21st day of June last about 2 p.m., bound for Methil, in Fifeshire. She was then in good order and condition and had three compasses on board, one on the bridge, the pole compass, by which the courses were set, and one aft. She had two lifeboats and one jolly boat and was supplied with lifebelts and buoys in accordance with the regulations for saving life. Her crew consisted of 18 hands all told, and at the time of sailing she was in water ballast, her draught of water being 6 ft. forward and 12 ft. 2 ins. aft.

The vessel proceeded on her voyage, and at 10 p.m. on Friday, the 22nd of June, the Longstone Light bore W. by S. 1/4 S. magnetic, at an estimated distance of three miles, but owing to the hazy state of the weather a four point bearing could not be taken. The patent log at that time showed 253 miles.

The sea was smooth with very little wind, variable.

A N.W. by N. 1/2 N. magnetic course was then set, the vessel at the time steaming about 9 1/2 knots, her full speed in ordinary weather being 11 to 11 1/2 knots. This course was kept until 0.15 a.m. of the 23rd June, when it was altered to N.W. by N. for 15 minutes, and the master states to the Court that he then estimated that the vessel had run 25 miles from the Longstone, and was then off St. Abb's Head. The master did not see St. Abb's Head Light, nor did he hear the fog signals.

At 0.30 a.m. the course was again altered to N.W., the weather continuing hazy. The N.W. course was kept till 2.30, when the master states he reckoned that he was about 19 miles north of St. Abb's Head. The engines were worked slow at times, and the vessel stopped about 2.30 in order to take a cast of the lead, which was done and a depth of 27 fathoms of water reported by the chief officer. The course was again altered to N.W. 1/2 W., and that course was kept until 3 a.m., when the log registered 300 miles, and another cast of the lead was taken in 17 fathoms of water. The engines were then put at slow and the course changed to N.W. 3/4 W., and as the weather had come in a very dense fog an order was given by the master to the chief officer to get the anchor ready, and this order was immediately carried out.

At about a quarter to three the master states that he heard the May Island fog horn, but the sound being very indistinct led him to believe that he was making the course which he had set. About 3.15 a.m. what appeared to be seaweed was reported a little forward of the starboard beam and in consequence the master ordered the helm to be put hard-a-starboard and the engines to be stopped and put full speed astern, but before the engines took effect the vessel struck on a ledge of rocks and remained fast. The engines continued going astern for ten minutes, but the vessel did not move. It was just at the top of high water, ordinary spring tides. The fog lifted and it was then seen that the vessel had stranded on the east side of Elie Ness, about a quarter of a mile from the coast guard station. At the time the vessel stranded her head was N.W. 3/4 W.

The vessel appeared to have sustained no damage at the time, but as the water left her she settled on the rocks and holed herself by bursting in twelve plates, and several others were dented. The forward ballast tank was pumped out immediately after the stranding. A kedge anchor was run out astern and wire ropes fastened to the rocks, and at high water in the afternoon attempts were made to get the vessel off but without success, and the master then wired for assistance, and on the next day, (Sunday the 24th), the East Coast Salvage Association from Leith began operations and worked for three or four days and ultimately the vessel was got off and taken to Elie Harbour, where she was temporarily repaired, and afterwards brought to Sunderland.

The master stated to the Court that he considered the reason he was out of his course was owing to an abnormal set of the tide to the northward. It was also stated that shortly after the stranding several steamers were seen to come in very close and one of them was hailed and kept off.

At the conclusion of the evidence the Solicitor acting for the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court upon the following questions:—

(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?—This vessel had three compasses, namely, a standard compass on the bridge deck, a pole compass, and a third one aft. They were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the

vessel. The compasses were last adjusted on the 2nd of April, 1906, by Mr. Jackson in Shields Roads.

(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?—The master did ascertain the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time, the errors were correctly ascertained and the proper corrections to the courses applied.

(3) Was the vessel supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions?—The vessel was 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 10 p.m. of the 22nd June last, was a safe and proper course then set and thereafter steered and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?—Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 10 p.m. of the 22nd June last, in so far as a bearing of the Longstone light was taken when it became visible, but the distance was only estimated, as a four point bearing could not be obtained. From the estimated position of the vessel from the Longstone the course then set was a safe and proper one. An allowance was made for tide and currents but the Court is not prepared to say that it was sufficient.

(5) Were safe and proper alterations made in the course at 0.15 a.m. of the 23rd June last, and from time to time thereafter and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?—The alteration made in the course at 0.15 a.m. of the 23rd of June last was a safe and proper one and from time to time thereafter until 3 a.m. when the vessel was in 17 fathoms of water the courses were proper. An allowance was made for tide and currents but the Court is not prepared to say that these were sufficient.

(6) Having regard to the state of the weather at and after 10 p.m. of the 22nd June last; (a) was the

vessel navigated at too great a rate of speed; (b) was the lead used with sufficient care and frequency?—Having regard to the state of the weather at and after 10 p.m. of the 22nd June last; (a) the vessel was not navigated at too great a rate of speed until 3 a.m. of the 23rd of June, after which time owing to the dense fog and the sounding obtained, namely 17 fathoms, extra precautions should have been taken; (b) after 3 a.m. of the 23rd June until the time of stranding the lead was not used. The Court considers it should have been.

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

(8) What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel and was she seriously damaged thereby?—The cause of the stranding of this vessel was that she was to the Northward of her estimated position. She was seriously damaged.

(9) Was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care?—The vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care as qualified by the answer to question 6.

(10) Was serious damage to the s.s. "Lucent" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master, chief and second officers or any of them?—The damage to the s.s. "Lucent" was caused through an error in judgment on the part of the master who had been on deck from 5 p.m. of the 22nd and had personally navigated the ship from that time.

THOS. JOHNSTON, } Judges.
ARTHUR RITSON, }

We concur in the above report and judgment,

W. F. CABORNE,
DAVID ANDERSON.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 28th day of August, 1906.)

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