

(No. 7055.)

"ATBARA" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a formal investigation held at Caxton Hall, Westminster, on the 26th and 27th days of March and the 8th and 9th days of April, 1907, before GILBERT GEORGE KENNEDY, Esq., assisted by Captains A. RONALDSON and HENRY HIGGINSON, into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British steamship "ATBARA," of London, on the Haisborough Sand, North Sea, on the 11th February, 1907.

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 vessel was stranded and lost because when nearing the Haisboro' lightship on the afternoon of the 11th February the course that was then being steered, E. 1/4 S., was maintained too long, whereby she ran on to the Haisboro' Sand. The master was then under the influence of drink. The Court suspends the master's certificate for 18 months.

Dated this 9th day of April, 1907.

GILBERT G. KENNEDY, Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

A. RONALDSON, } Assessors. HENRY HIGGINSON, }

Annex to the Report.

The Inquiry was held at the Caxton Hall, Westminster, on March 26th and 27th, and April 8th and 9th, 1907.

Dr. Ginsburg appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. A. E. Nelson for the master, and Mr. W. W. Higgs, solicitor, for the first officer. The second officer appeared, but was not professionally represented. Mr. A. P. Simon was present on behalf of the owners.

The "Atbara," official number 95270, was a British screw steamship, schooner-rigged, built of steel at Sunderland in 1888 by James Laing, and registered at the Port of London. The name of the ship was formerly "Ohio;" it was changed to "Atbara" under the 47th Section of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1894, under Board of Trade authority, dated 7th June, 1898. She was owned by the Gordon Steam Shipping Company, Limited, Charles Wood Gordon, of 36, Lime Street, City of London, being designated the person to whom the management of the vessel was entrusted by and on behalf of the owners, by advice received 5th August, 1905, under his hand as a public officer of the Company. Her dimensions were:—Length, 293 feet; breadth, 38.25 feet; depth in hold, 25.8 feet. Her gross tonnage was 2389.48; her registered tonnage 1568.09.

She was fitted by George Clark, of Sunderland, in 1888, with three triple-expansion engines of 260 nominal horse-power, the diameter of the cylinders being 22 inches, 36 inches, and 60 inches respectively. Her full speed, as estimated by the master, was 8 knots.

The vessel carried four boats, and a lifebelt for each person on board. She had three compasses, viz., a standard compass on the upper bridge, a steering compass in the wheelhouse on the lower bridge, and

a compass aft on the deck; they were last adjusted on the 9th November, 1906, by T. L. Ainsley, of South Shields. The deviation cards were lost with the ship; the corrections for the courses, as far as this voyage went, were taken from the cards, there having been no opportunities for observations. The vessel was supplied with proper sailing directions; the chart used, a "blue-back" chart, belonged to the master.

The "Atbara" left South Shields for the Piræus on the 10th of February, 1907, in charge of Mr. John Dew, who holds a certificate of competency, No. 06945, dated 21st September, 1883, with a crew of 25 hands, all told. She carried a cargo of about 3000 tons of coal, her draught being 23 feet forward, 23.2 feet aft.

At midnight, Flamborough Head was abeam, at a distance of 7 or 8 miles as estimated by the master; but the second mate, who took a four-point bearing of the Head, said the distance abeam was 4 miles, and he reported it to the master, and also to the mate, who relieved him at midnight. The course then being steered was S. by E. 1/4 E. magnetic. The engines had been put to half speed at 9.30 p.m., in consequence of fog, by the second mate, who reported the same to the master, who was then in his cabin. Half speed was maintained, although it was clear at midnight, the reason given by the master being that "he wished to get to the Haisboro' Sand by daylight."

The distance from Flamborough Head to the Haisboro' Sand could not have been covered, however, at full speed, until long after daylight. At 6.30 a.m. on the 11th of February, the engines were put to full speed by the second mate, during his watch, and were kept so until the stranding. The mate came on deck at 8 a.m. when the ship was going full speed on the same course, viz., S. by E. 1/4 E. magnetic. At 9 a.m. the Dudgeon bell buoy was abeam, to starboard.

The ship was hauled out a little to the eastward, to clear the buoy, and was then kept to her course again. The same thing had to be done to clear the South Sheringham buoy, at 11.40 a.m.; and it is to be presumed that the same course was steered again after passing that buoy.

About 12.30 p.m. the second mate, during his watch, was told by the master, who was then on deck, to get a cast of the lead. This was done, bottom (sand and shells) being found at 11 fathoms.

The second mate said that he could see the houses at Cromer at the time. After the lead had been hauled in, the engines going ahead again, the second mate, on returning to the bridge, found that the course, which had been S.E. by S. when he came on deck at noon, was now altered to S.E. by E., by the master's orders as the helmsman told him. He was relieved for his dinner by the mate, and when he came back, at 1 p.m., the same course was being steered, S.E. by E.

About 1.30 he saw the Haisboro' lightship bearing E. 1/4 S., four to five miles off; the mate, who was still on the bridge, though it was his watch below, also saw it and told the second mate to go and report the lightship to the master, who was in his cabin. The master shortly afterwards came on the bridge, and the lightship was pointed out to him; he told the second mate to steer straight for it, and the course given to the man at the wheel was E. 1/4 S. southerly, so as to keep it a little on the port bow. The master then left the bridge. At 2.20 p.m. the lightship was abeam, the "Atbara" still steering E. 1/4 S. The second mate, in his evidence, said that he then went to see the master, who was in his cabin, and told him the position, viz., that the lightship was abeam, that the course was still E. 1/4 S., and that the ship was being steered right for the sands, and he asked the master to give him a course. The master said it was the Woald lightship, that he had read her name. The second mate thereupon said, "Come and see for yourself; give me a course; the ship is going on shore as fast as she can." The master replied, "Let her rip." On his return to the bridge, the second mate altered the course to S. by E., but it was too late, as the ship immediately grounded. The evidence of J. Mullen, who had the watch from noon on board the Haisboro' lightship, may be referred to

Description during the s.s.

Table with columns B., tons, and various numbers (26, 24, 28, 18, 17, 10, 20, 18, 27, 26, 25, 28, 19, 16, 27, 21, 20, 27, 17, 18, 30, 15, 16, 25, 17, 26, 16, 25, 16, 20, 15, 26, 19, 15, 20, 25, 15, 19, 33, 9, 27, 14, 25, 8, 22, 22, 22, 22, 22, 22, 22, 15-13).

led from January, List of

ing.

in.

r. ineer. a.

Judge.

essors.

on the

at this stage. He said that about 3 p.m. he saw a steamer coming from the northward, which was not unusual, that she passed within half a mile of him, but he did not take particular notice of her, as his attention was drawn to the Trinity boat which was in sight, and when he next saw the steamer she was heading for the sands, having altered her course bearing S.E. from him, and before he could make signals to her she was ashore.

The Court is unable to explain the difference of one hour in the time of the casualty as given by the lightship and the "Atbara" respectively.

When the "Atbara" grounded, the second mate put the engines full speed astern. By this time the master was on the bridge, and rang full speed ahead, with the helm hard-a-starboard; but the ship remained fast, the lightship bearing N.W. $\frac{1}{4}$ N. Soundings were taken round the ship of 22 feet.

About 3.30 p.m. the tug "Winchester," of Hull, came alongside, and the master asked if any assistance were wanted. He was told, "No, not at present." About four p.m. the tug master boarded the ship. The master of the "Atbara" would not reply to him, and left the bridge, but returned about 6 o'clock and told the tug master to try and get him out of it. Thereupon the tug master returned to his tug; but no rope was given him, and though he kept hailing for it, the only answer he got was, "they were not ready." At 6.30 p.m., the Cromer lifeboat came alongside, it being then top of high water, and offered them help; but the master, who seemed very angry, said, "To hell with the tug, and the lifeboat too."

At 8 p.m., the Palling lifeboat arrived and stood by.

The "Atbara's" engines had been working ahead and astern for half an hour after the ship struck. From that time the engineers and their men were at their posts, with steam up, waiting for orders, until about 11.50, when, it being then almost low water, the steam pipes cracked, and the ship began to break amidships. Then the engineer ordered everyone to go on deck, and at 12.30 a.m. of the 12th of February the Cromer lifeboat took all on board and lay off for the night.

About 7 a.m. on the 12th of February, the master, chief engineer, third engineer, and carpenter went on board, but seeing nothing could be done, they returned to the lifeboat, and were eventually landed at Cromer.

The sobriety of the master was a chief point in the inquiry. The master's evidence was vague, and his behaviour was unsatisfactory. From the time of setting the course on leaving the Tyne, he seemed to have taken no precautions to see that it was maintained; he was seldom on the bridge; he never looked at the compass, nor took any bearings, nor left orders for them to be taken, and for the greater part of the time he remained aft in his cabin. He was not aware, or did not remember, that the course was changed before noon on the 11th of February and again after the cast of the lead; though, by the second mate's evidence, it appeared that this was done by his own orders. He denied, or did not remember, the conversation alleged by the second mate when that officer came to him from the bridge to report Haisboro' lightship in sight. The chief engineer said, in his evidence, that he was talking to the master at the time the second mate came aft to the master, thereby corroborating the second mate's statement so far.

The chief engineer further said that about 9 a.m. of the 11th the master seemed dazed, and also about 11 o'clock he appeared as if he had had drink. The first mate stated that in the forenoon the master seemed dazed and smelt of drink, and that immediately after the stranding he noticed again that the master was dazed and was "talking at random." The tug master, when he was on board the "Atbara," noticed that the captain was "queer and excited, and seemed unsteady." The second mate stated that the master was drunk at noon on the 11th, and again that, when he went to report the lightship abeam, he found the master holding on to the mantel piece, with a glass containing some liquid in his hand, and that after the master did eventually come on deck he had to hold on to the rail. The captain admitted that after

the stranding he retired to his cabin and became unconscious for a short time.

After a careful consideration of the evidence, the Court came to the conclusion that the master was under the influence of drink before, at the time of, and after the stranding.

So far as the conduct of the mates is concerned, it is remarkable that the first mate did not remember any of the courses steered, though he said he knew they were written on the black board in the wheelhouse; further the Court thinks that he should have made more efforts to save the logs. It is also the opinion of the Court that the second mate should have called the chief mate on deck when he found that the master would not give him a safe course.

At the conclusion of the evidence, Dr. Ginsburg, on behalf of the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions for the opinion of the Court:—

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?

(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 charts and sailing directions?

(4) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 9 a.m. of the 11th February last? Was a safe and proper course 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 when Sheringham South buoy was abeam at or about 11.40 a.m. of the 11th February? Were proper courses thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(6) At what time on the afternoon of the 11th February was North Haisboro' lightship seen? Was it reported to the master? Were proper measures then taken for the safety of the ship?

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

(8) What was the cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel? Was every possible effort made by the master to save her?

(9) Was the master under the influence of drink on the 11th February last, either before, at the time of, or after the stranding?

(10) How was it that the ship's log book and scrap log book were not saved?

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

(12) Was the stranding and loss of the s.s. "Atbara" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master, chief and second officers, or of any of them?

(13) What was the value of the vessel and what were the insurances effected upon and in connection with her?

Mr. Nelson and Mr. Higgs addressed the Court on behalf of their respective clients; the second mate did not make any remarks.

Dr. Ginsburg replied for the Board of Trade, and the Court gave judgment and returned the following answers to the questions:—

Answers.

(1) The vessel had three compasses, viz., a standard compass on the upper bridge, and a steering compass in the wheelhouse, and one aft. They were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel. They were last adjusted on the 9th day of November, 1906, by T. L. Ainsley, of South Shields.

(2) The master had no opportunity on this voyage of ascertaining the deviation of his compasses by observation, and he steered according to his deviation card as last corrected.

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

(4) Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 9 a.m. of

the 9th
course
allowance
(5)
verify
South
11th
after s
for tid
(6)
afterno
It was
then t
(7)
(8)
nearin
11th d
steere
ran on
Eve
to sav
(9)
on the
time
(10)

the 9th day of February last. A safe and proper course was thereafter steered, and due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents.

(5) Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel when Sheringham South Buoy was abeam, at or about 11.40 a.m. of the 11th day of February. Proper courses were thereafter steered and due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents.

(6) The North Haisboro' lightship was seen on the afternoon, of the 11th day of February at or about 1.30. It was reported to the master. Proper measures were then taken for the safety of the ship.

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

(8) The vessel was stranded and lost because, when nearing the Haisbro' lightship on the afternoon of the 11th day February, the course that was then being steered, E. $\frac{1}{4}$ S., was maintained too long, whereby she ran on to the Haisboro' Sand.

Every possible effort was not made by the master to save her.

(9) The master was under the influence of drink on the 11th day of February last before and at the time of and after the stranding.

(10) The ship's log book and scrap log book were

not saved because no efforts were made to save them.

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

(12) The stranding and loss of the s.s. "Atbara" was caused by the wrongful act and default of the master.

(13) The value of the vessel was about £17,000. She was insured for £15,000. The freight of 2900 tons of coal was not covered by insurance.

GILBERT G. KENNEDY,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

A. RONALDSON,
HENRY HIGGINSON,
Y. B. Trinity House, } Assessors.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the
10th day of May, 1907.)