

(No. 6959.)

“FORTUNA.”

REPORT of a Court of Inquiry, held at Stanley, Falkland Islands, on the 26th May, 1906, to investigate the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British schooner “FORTUNA” on the 19th May, 1906, on a reef at the northern end of West Island.

*Report of the Court.*

The “Fortuna” (164 tons) was a vessel of schooner rig, belonging to the Falkland Islands Company. She was built of wood. Her official number was 72365, and she was registered at Stanley. It appears from the evidence before the Court that on the 19th May, 1906, she left San Carlos, East Falkland, at about 11.30 a.m., bound for Fox Bay, West Falkland. Her crew consisted of eight men, including the master, Francis Rowlands (uncertificated) who, for forty-three years, had been in charge of vessels sailing among the Falkland Islands. There were 10 passengers on board, including four children. Her cargo was wool. When the “Fortuna” left San Carlos the weather was fine, and a light easterly wind was blowing. When she got into the Falkland Sound the wind increased to a moderate gale. At 5 p.m. Swan Island was passed on the starboard, and Big Swan on the port side of the vessel. The “Fortuna” was then steered for West Island, with such deviations in her course as were necessary to clear Tyssen Patch, with the object of taking the passage between West Island and the mainland. On the lee side of the vessel, in the direction of West Island, lay a dangerous reef, and the vessel’s course was kept towards West Island, in order to avoid this reef, which, at the opening of the passage, is distant from the Island reef three-quarters of a mile, more or less. It was an unusually dark night and the sky was overcast. The master and the look-out men were on deck watching for land ahead. As to what was exactly done when the Island first came into view, the evidence is not quite in accord, but it appears that almost immediately, if not at the precise moment, it was seen, the master gave the order to keep the vessel off. Two men were at the wheel, and promptly

carried out the order, but, as the schooner was paying off, she struck, at 7.15 p.m. No time was lost in endeavouring to float her. A kedge anchor was run out and the cable worked with the winch, but without avail. The tide fell and she tightened on the rocks. Cargo was thrown overboard, but she still resisted all efforts to be dislodged. After the lapse of 12 hours she began to leak. The passengers were landed and attention was directed to saving what was possible. Both crew and passengers were subsequently rescued by the schooner “Lafonia” and brought to Stanley, where they arrived on Thursday, the 24th instant. The “Fortuna” was visited on the 25th instant, and found to be breaking up. The Court, having regard to the circumstances above stated, finds as follows:—

- (1) That the schooner “Fortuna” was stranded on a reef at the northern end of West Island, on the 19th May, 1906, and is a total wreck;
- (2) That, owing to darkness, the master was unable to ascertain the distance from West Island at which it was necessary for him to alter the course of the vessel in order to avert a casualty;
- (3) That he was on the alert with the object of judging the correct distance;
- (4) That in view of his long experience in navigating the waters of the Falkland Islands, and of his familiarity with the main course he was steering when the “Fortuna” struck, the master might reasonably have thought that he was incurring no undue risk in attempting the passage between West Island and the mainland on a dark night, the wind being favourable; and
- (5) That every effort was made to float the schooner after she stranded.

Dated at Stanley, Falkland Islands, this twenty-ninth day of May, 1906.

(Signed) H. E. W. GRANT,  
Magistrate.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) LEWIS WILLIAMS, } Assessors.  
(Signed) RICH. EDWARDS, }

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 31st day of July, 1906.)