

(No. 7204.)

“SOUTHWARK” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at the Magistrates' Room, Dale Street, Liverpool, on the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th days of October, 1908, before JOHN KINGHORN, Esq., assisted by Captain KENNETT HORE and Commander A. S. HOUSTOUN, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship “SOUTHWARK,” of Liverpool (Official Number 102121), at or near Fortean Point, Labrador, latitude 51°25½' N., and longitude 56°56' W., at 12.20 a.m. of the 11th August, 1908, whereby material damage was sustained.

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 and consequent damage were caused by the master not having ascertained that the vessel had over-run her distances, and in attempting to turn her round with a broad sweep of about three miles towards the shore, when she was much nearer the land than he supposed her to be.

Dated this 16th day of October, 1908.

JOHN KINGHORN,  
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

KENNETT HORE, }  
A. S. HOUSTOUN, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

This inquiry was held in the Magistrates' Room, Dale Street, Liverpool, on the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th days of October, 1908, when Mr. Paxton appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade, Mr. Miller represented the master of the s.s. “Southwark,” while Mr. Norman Hill watched the interests of the owners of the vessel.

The “Southwark,” Official Number 102121, is a British twin-screw steamship, built of steel by Messrs. Wm. Denny & Brothers, at Dumbarton, in 1893, and registered at the Port of Liverpool. She has three decks, four masts, and is schooner-rigged; and she has a double bottom, nine bulkheads, and eight water ballast tanks of a capacity of 1,308 tons. Her length from stem to stern is 480 feet, her main breadth 57 feet 2 inches, and her depth of hold from upper deck to ceiling at midships 37 feet 1 inch. She is fitted with two complete sets of quadruple expansion direct-acting inverted engines made by Denny & Company, at Dumbarton, in 1893, of 730 nominal horse power. Her gross tonnage is 8,606.56 tons, and her registered tonnage 5,641.54 tons, and she is owned by the International Navigation Company, Limited; Mr. John Eddowes Willett, of 27, James Street, Liverpool, being designated as the person to whom the manage-

ment of the vessel was entrusted by and on behalf of the owners by advice received the 6th November, 1906, under the hands of the secretary of the International Navigation Company, Limited.

The “Southwark” left Montreal and Quebec for Liverpool on the 8th August, 1908, under the command of Mr. Jenkin Owen Williams, with a crew of 159 hands, 119 passengers, and 5,862 tons of general cargo, and drawing 28 feet 5 inches forward, and 28 feet 7 inches aft. On leaving Quebec, at 8.30 p.m., she proceeded down the river, and at 8.35 a.m. of the 9th was abreast of Father Point when the log was set and streamed, and the pilot left the ship. The weather was fine and clear, the sea smooth, and there was a light breeze from the westward. At 8.39 p.m. Fame Point was abeam, distant 3½ miles, the log showing 27 miles. At midnight the weather was fine and clear with a light southerly wind, and at 4.13 a.m. of the 10th, South Point light house was abeam, distant 5½ miles, the patent log showing 13 miles. At 6.12 a.m. Heath Point light house on Anticosti Island was abeam, and found by a four-point bearing to be 4½ miles distant. The patent log was reset and the course set by standard compass N. 84° E. to make N. 52° E. true. The weather was fine and clear, the sea smooth, and the speed of the vessel 13.7 knots up to noon. Good sights were obtained by three different chronometers, the mean of which gave the position at noon as follows:—Latitude 49° 49' N., longitude 60° 5' W., the same course N. 52° E. true being continued. Several observations of the sun were taken during the morning and the afternoon of the 10th to determine the deviation of the compass, which was found to be 2° westerly in the morning, decreasing to 1° westerly in the afternoon. As the variation altered rapidly between Heath Point Light-house and Amour Point, the master allowed the mean variation between them to lay the course, viz., 30° and 2° of deviation making N. 52° E., which course would carry him about 2 miles south of Amour Point; but, by previous voyages, some twenty times through the Strait of Belle Isle, he had always found that the course made good was slightly to the southward of the course set, and consequently he expected to pass Amour Point on a N. 52° E. course about 4 miles distant, which allowed for the slight southerly set of the current in passing through the Straits to the eastward. The weather continued fine all the afternoon, and the engines were running at full speed, but, by the distances recorded in the log book, the vessel does not appear to have made the speed she did during the morning. At 7.45 p.m. the weather changed and began to be hazy and misty, the horizon being obscured by banks of misty clouds. At 8.15 p.m. the first cast of the lead was taken which gave 38 fathoms, the patent log showing 106 miles from noon. At 8.30 p.m. a sounding gave 50 fathoms the log showing 109 miles, at 9 p.m. 75 fathoms, and log 115 miles, at 9.30 p.m. 47 fathoms, log 121 miles, at 10 p.m. 51 fathoms, log 128 miles, and at 10.30 p.m. 50 fathoms, and log 134 miles, showing grey sand. The weather had now changed from thick mist to thick fog, the engines were reduced to half speed and slow, it being impossible to see more than a ship's length, and, finally, half a length ahead. The steam whistle was now sounded at regular intervals. Shortly afterwards the fog seems to have lifted a little, and just before 11 p.m. a light was seen and a horn heard before the beam on the port side sounding at irregular intervals. At 11 p.m. another cast of the lead was taken giving 48 fathoms sand and coral, the log showing 138 miles. The second officer, the boatswain, and the men, who were engaged heaving the lead, now saw the light once or twice abaft the beam and on the quarter at the same place where the sound of the horn came from. There was a difference of opinion between them, as far as the evidence goes, one of the A.B.'s taking it for a shore light, the others for a passing vessel. The master and officers on the bridge, however, at once decided when the light and horn were first seen and heard, that it was the light and horn of a passing vessel. Considering the state of the weather and the master's anxiety to make Greenly Island Light or hear the sound of the fog horn, it would have been more prudent, under

the circumstances, to have stopped the vessel until the fact of its being a ship's light or a shore light had been clearly ascertained and verified. Subsequent events show that at this time the vessel was nearly abeam of Greenly Island Light, and therefore it might possibly have been the light which was seen by the above witnesses. At 11.30 p.m. another cast of the lead was taken which gave 46 fathoms, the log showing 142 miles, and at midnight the soundings gave 38 fathoms, the log showing 146 miles.

The master, having run the distance to Greenly Island light from his position at noon, and not hearing the fog horn which he expected to do, now decided to turn the vessel round, and supposing that he was slightly to the southward of his course from the coral found in the soundings after 11 p.m., proceeded to turn her round with a long sweep under the starboard helm in the hope of being able to hear the sound of the fog horn before she was round. It was still a dense fog, the helm was put over and the starboard engine stopped so that she should not go round too quickly, and at 12.15 a.m. of the 11th August another cast of the lead was taken, which gave 49 fathoms, the log showing 149 miles. While the tube from this cast was being measured in the chart room, the vessel, at 12.21 a.m., struck heavily forward and remained fast, with her head N.W. by N., the log showing that since midnight the vessel in turning had made a distance of 3 miles towards the land at a right angle to her N. 52° E. course. The engines were immediately stopped and reversed full speed astern, but without effect, the wells were sounded, and the fore peak was found to have 4 feet of water in it, the soundings round the vessel showing 19 feet 6 inches at the stem, 21 feet at the break of the fore-castle, 27 feet at the fore chains, and 30 feet at the bridge. All hands were then set to work to trim the cargo aft. The after tanks were filled, and the pumps put on to the fore tank which was filled with water. At 1 a.m. Amour Point fog signal was heard for the first time on the starboard quarter, and continued to sound regularly afterwards while the fog lasted. The sealing steamer "Diana," of St. John's, came alongside and tried to pull the vessel off, but failed, and they then found they were stranded on Fortean Point, 4 miles S.W. of Amour Point. At 10.30 p.m. the s.s. "Ottawa" endeavoured to pull her off at high water, but failed. On the 12th August, having shifted about 115 tons and jettisoned some 200 tons of cargo from No. 2 hatch, the ship came off at high water by the aid of her own engines, and finding the pumps could keep the pressure of water from bursting the No. 1 tank under which she was holed, it was decided to restow the shifted cargo, get the vessel into trim and proceed on the voyage to Liverpool, where she safely arrived on the 19th August. On being put into dry dock and examined by Mr. Miller, the surveyor for the Board of Trade, the vessel was found to be seriously damaged, there being several holes through the shell plating from 8 feet abaft the stem, extending to about 60 feet aft under No. 1 tank, the principal hole being large enough for a man to crawl through.

The Court desires to direct attention to the extraordinary contrast disclosed by the evidence as to the weather conditions prevailing on the 10th August last at Greenly Island and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence between Anticosti and the Straits of Belle Isle. On that date, according to the deposition of Timothy E. Ryan, the attendant in charge of the Greenly Island lighthouse, the fog signal had to be sounded from 12.30 p.m. to 5 p.m., while from Heath Point lighthouse (Anticosti Island), which was abeam of the "Southwark" at 6.12 a.m., the weather was described as fine and clear all day until about 7 p.m., by which time the vessel had reached a line drawn between Rich Point and Outer Island.

After 5 p.m. the weather is described as clear at Greenly Island, while it became misty and thick after 7 p.m. with the "Southwark," and by 8.30 p.m. foggy, and at 10.30 p.m. and 11 p.m., when the vessel was only 7 and 5 miles from the island, a dense fog, which continued until after the vessel stranded at 12.21 a.m. of the 11th. At Greenly Island, on the other hand, the weather is stated to have remained clear until

3.30 a.m. of the 11th, at which time it became necessary to sound the fog signal, and the conditions also seem to have been much the same at Point Amour, as the fog signal there was not heard by those on board the "Southwark" until after she had stranded. It is to the co-existence of these opposite weather conditions that this casualty was mainly due, and points to the desirability of greater care and vigilance being exercised by those in charge of the fog signals as to the actual condition of the weather in the Straits itself, which may be enveloped in fog while the lighthouse on shore may be comparatively clear.

From a communication received from the Acting Deputy Minister at Ottawa, it appears that the lighthouse keeper, Rainnie, the immediate predecessor of Timothy Ryan at Greenly Island, and who was in sole charge of the lighthouse, was found to have committed suicide on the 23rd July last, which fact was only discovered on account of the light not being exhibited for several nights, and the Court gathers from Timothy Ryan's deposition that he also was the only person in charge of the lighthouse on the night of the 10th-11th August last, and as it appears to be a matter of supreme importance to shipowners that absolute reliance should be placed on the efficient working of the lights and fog signals in this Strait, the Court ventures to suggest an increase of the staff provided for Greenly Island. No deposition from the keeper of Point Amour Lighthouse had reached the Court at the time of this inquiry, although one was expected. But from the letter of the Acting Deputy Minister at Ottawa, the same arrangements seem to prevail there as at Greenly Island, and the Court's suggestion therefore applies to it also.

At the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Paxton, for the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions for 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) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about noon of the 10th August last, was a safe and proper course thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tides and currents?

(4) Having regard to the state of the weather after 7.35 p.m. of the 10th August last—

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

(b) Was the lead used with sufficient frequency and accuracy?

(4a) Having regard to the fact that fog set in thick at 10.30 p.m., was the master justified in continuing the course so long as he did without having heard any fog signal or seen any light?

(5) What was the light sighted by the boatswain at or about 10.40 p.m. of the 10th August last? Did he report it to the officer in charge of the bridge?

(6) What was the horn heard by those on board the "Southwark" at or about 11 p.m. of the 10th August last?

(7) Were safe and proper alterations made in the course after midnight of the 10th-11th August last, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(8) Was the weather thick with fog after 11 p.m. of the 10th August last? If so, were the fog signals at Greenly Island and Point Amour regularly sounded thereafter until after the vessel struck?

(9) Were the fog signals at Greenly Island and Point Amour heard by those on board the "Southwark" before the stranding? If not, why were they not heard?

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

(11) What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel, and was she seriously damaged thereby?

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

(13) Was serious damage to the s.s. "Southwark" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master?

Mr. Miller having addressed the Court on behalf of the master, the Court gave judgment as above, and returned the following answers to the questions of the Board of Trade—

(1) The vessel had five compasses. The standard by which the courses were set, and the vessel navigated, was placed on the bridge house, and was by Kelvin & White, Glasgow. The steering compass was also on the bridge house before the wheel, and there was a spirit compass under the bridge by F. Leyland & Co., of Liverpool. On the top of No. 5 steerage house was a compass by Alexander Dobbie, of Glasgow, and in the after-wheel house a compass by Bassett, of Liverpool. They were all in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted by T. W. Bruce, of Liverpool, on the 9th April, 1908.

(2) 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) Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at noon on the 10th August last. The weather was fine and clear, the sea smooth, and good sights by chronometer were obtained, which placed the vessel in latitude 49° 49' N., and longitude 60° 5' W. From this position a safe and proper course of N. 52° E. true was set, to pass 3 miles to the southward of Amour Point, and from the master's previous experience in running through the strait, he allowed for a slight set of current from 1 to 1½ miles to the southward of the course steered, and therefore expected to pass the Point at about 4½ miles distant.

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

(a) The vessel was not navigated at too great a rate of speed after 7.35 p.m. of the 10th August last. The weather was then only misty, but, at 10.30 p.m., when it became thick with fog, the speed was properly reduced to slow and the whistle sounded.

(b) The lead was used frequently and accurately, as was shown from the evidence, and when a faulty cast was found another cast was taken.

(4a) Having regard to the condition of the weather at 10.30 p.m., it being stated that the fog sometimes lifted, and from the fact that he had hardly run the distance to enable him to hear the sound of the fog horn on Greenly Island, the master was justified in proceeding at the moderate speed at which he was going, as he was depending on hearing it, and which, in the opinion of the Court, he would have done had the horn been sounded that night.

(5) The light seen by the boatswain at or about 10.40 p.m. of the 10th August last, and which was also seen by the second officer and other witnesses and reported to the officers on the bridge, may possibly have been Greenly Island light, as it was afterwards

found by the distance the ship had run to midnight that at 11 p.m. they were nearly abeam of it, but from the evidence of the master and officers on the bridge, they concluded from having heard a horn at the same time and from the same direction, that the light seen was that of a passing vessel.

(6) As from the deposition of the keeper of Greenly Island Lighthouse there was no fog horn being sounded between 5 p.m. of the 10th and 3.30 a.m. of the 11th August last, the horn heard by those on board the "Southwark" at about 11 p.m. of the 10th must have been that of a passing vessel.

(7) Safe and proper alterations were not made in the course after midnight of the 10th-11th August last, because the vessel was not where the master supposed her to be at that time. No allowance was made for tide or current, it not being necessary. At midnight of the 10th, the vessel was about 12 or 13 miles further ahead of where the position by patent log placed her, consequently the master had not the room to turn her round with a long sweep on the starboard helm which he would otherwise have had.

(8) The weather was thick with fog after 11 p.m. of the 10th August last. It appears from the deposition of the lighthouse keeper at Greenly Island that the fog signal there was not sounded between 5 p.m. of the 10th and 3.30 a.m. of the 11th August, and that at Point Amour does not appear to have been sounded, not having been heard by those on board the "Southwark" until an hour after the stranding, at which time it could be heard distinctly and regularly.

(9) The fog signals at Greenly Island and Point Amour were not heard by those on board the "Southwark" before the stranding, because it appears from the evidence they were not sounded.

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

(11) The cause of the stranding was the master not having ascertained that the vessel had overrun her distance, and in attempting to turn her round with a broad sweep of about 3 miles towards the shore when she was much nearer the land than he supposed her to be. Having regard to the nature and to the position of the damage sustained by the "Southwark," the Court is of opinion that the vessel was seriously damaged thereby.

(12) The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care after 12 p.m. of the 10th August last for the reasons stated in the previous answer.

(13) Serious damage was caused to the s.s. "Southwark" by an error of judgment on the part of the master in underestimating the distance run, but the Court does not deal with his certificate.

JOHN KINGHORN,  
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

KENNETT HORE, } Assessors  
A. S. HOUSTON, }

Liverpool, October 19th, 1908.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 6th day of November, 1908.)