

(No. 7297.)

“LANGTON GRANGE” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a Formal Investigation held at Liverpool on the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 20th days of September, before T. SHEPHERD LITTLE, Esq., Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captain F. C. A. LYON, R.N.R., and Captain C. B. GRAVES, F.R.G.S., into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British steamship “LANGTON GRANGE” on or about the 5th August, 1909, on the Bell Rock, off the North Bishop.

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 subsequent loss of the s.s. “Langton Grange” was caused by the master not making sufficient allowance for tides and currents, and steering too fine a course to clear the North Bishop Rock after sighting Strumble Head Light in hazy weather. The Court finds the master in default and severely censures him for steering too fine a course under the conditions set out in the answers to the questions of the Board of Trade.

Dated this 20th day of September, 1909.

T. SHEPHERD LITTLE,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

F. C. A. LYON, } Assessors.
C. B. GRAVES, }

Annex to the Report.

This Inquiry was held in the Magistrates’ Room, Dale Street, Liverpool, on the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 20th days of September, 1909. Mr. J. Paxton appeared for the Board of Trade, and Mr. A. A. Miller, of Miller, Son & Taylor, appeared for the master.

The “Langton Grange” was a British single screw steamship, built of steel at Belfast, in 1896, by Messrs. Workman, Clark & Co. Her Official Number was 105831, and she was registered in London. The dimensions of the ship, according to the register, were:—Length 420 feet, breadth 54·2 feet, and depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling at amidships 29·5 feet. Her gross tonnage was 5,851·5 tons, and deductions allowed were 2,023·4 tons, leaving a net registered tonnage of 3,828 tons. She was propelled by a set of triple expansion surface-condensing engines, and had three steel boilers, all of which (engines and boilers), were also made by Messrs. Workman, Clark & Co., of Belfast. She had seven bulkheads, and was constructed with a double bottom divided into six water ballast tanks, with a total capacity of 1,442 tons. She was owned by the Houlder Line, Limited, of London, and Mr. Augustus Frederick Houlder, of 146, Leadenhall Street, London, E.C., a director of the Houlder Line, was designated manager. According to her passenger certificate she was fitted for and allowed to carry 84 passengers, and had a crew of 50 hands all told. There were six boats on board, three of which were lifeboats of the aggregate capacity of 1,057 cubic feet, capable of carrying 104 persons, the other three with a capacity of 565 cubic feet, capable of carrying 55 persons, making in all a carrying capacity for 159 persons. There was also an ample supply of lifebuoys and lifebelts on board. The vessel had three compasses—a standard by Sir William Thomson on the upper

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bridge, another by D. McGregor in the wheelhouse on the lower bridge, and a spirit compass on the fore part of the wheelhouse. The standard compass was last adjusted by Messrs. Sewill, of Liverpool, in February, 1908, and proper deviation cards were supplied. She also had on board all the necessary sailing directions and charts, those in use on this passage being Admiralty charts of recent date. The master of the steamer was Mr. F. A. Graves, whose certificate of competency was numbered 021964.

The “Langton Grange” left Glasgow at 1 a.m. on 4th August this year bound for Newport, Monmouth, in water ballast on a draught of 12 feet forward and 15 feet 6 inches aft. She was intended to dry dock, bunker, and load a general cargo in the Bristol Channel ports, and was fixed to sail for New Zealand on 18th September. At 4 a.m. the pilot was discharged off Greenock, and the vessel proceeded full speed, the weather being dull and overcast, with a light S.W. wind. Ailsa Craig was passed at 8.28 a.m. distant about half a mile, the patent log at the time registering 42 miles. At 10.25 a.m. Black Head, on the Scottish coast, was abeam, distant 2½ miles, the ship’s head being S.W. by S. ¼ S. by compass. This was the course steered at the time, and the error allowed was 23½° W., which gave a true course of S. 2° W. This error was obtained about 9 a.m. by an observation by the third officer. The vessel proceeded on this course during the day with the weather hazy and a light breeze. No land or lightships were sighted and at noon the haze prevented any observations being taken. At about 4 p.m., however, the ship was swung round by S. to E.N.E. to get the deviations of the compass by observation of the sun on the courses required for the navigation of the Bristol Channel, and the results appear to have been carefully noted in the deviation book. As the whole of this operation took only about 12 minutes, the Court is of opinion that it was much too hurried. The deviation on the course which was being steered, however, seems to have been well ascertained and properly applied. No allowance was made for the distance run to the eastward during the progress of the foregoing observations. At 8 p.m. the course was altered to S.W. by S. ¼ S. by compass, and an allowance of a quarter of a point was made by the master to counteract the effect of the flood tide on his star-board bow.

It may be noted here that the course as steered during the day was set by the master direct for the South Bishop Light, it being his intention to pick up this light and so make certain of definitely fixing his position, as according to his evidence he considered this a better method than steering for the Smalls.

The weather continued hazy, and at 1.20 a.m. on 5th August, Strumble Head Light was sighted about five points on the port bow and bearing S.E. by S. ¼ S. magnetic. The master was at once called, and he immediately came up on the bridge and joined the second mate, who was in charge of the watch at this time. The master recognized that the ship had been set in to Cardigan Bay more than he had anticipated, so he brought Strumble Head Light abeam, with the intention of getting a four-point bearing abaft the beam. When the light, however, bore one point abaft the beam, it became obscured by the prevailing haze, and nothing more was seen of it.

The time occupied in altering the bearing of the light one point, as taken by the master himself, was six minutes, and he estimated that the speed of the ship at the time, over the ground, was 13 knots. By this means he calculated the ship’s distance from the light when abeam at about 5½ miles, and there is no doubt a grave miscalculation was made here, as the ship could not have been so far from Strumble Head at the time. After making this calculation, the vessel was kept away W.N.W. to clear any outstanding danger, and that course was steered for eight minutes. Then thinking that his ship was in a safe position, the master altered the course to S.W. by W. ¼ W. magnetic. It would appear that about this time, the vessel being much nearer the land than those on board thought, the effect of a strong southerly inset toward Ramsey Sound, occasioned by the ebb tide, was experienced, and the ship was thus further brought within the danger zone. After steering this course about 40 minutes, which brought the time to 2.15 a.m., the South Bishop Light appeared in sight through the haze, bearing S.W. by compass. The master

at once left the bridge to put this bearing on the chart, but almost as soon as he had got into the chartroom, which was immediately under the bridge, he was called up by the second mate who reported rocks in sight close on the starboard bow. He rushed up on the bridge again and gave the order to hard-a-port the helm. Then before the helm was actually over he saw that the ship would not clear the rocks, so ordered the helmsman to hard-a-starboard. It was too late, however, and the next moment the vessel struck heavily on the rocks and remained fast. The engines were at once stopped, and before any other measures could be taken, the engine-room commenced to fill, also the after holds, and it became evident that the bottom was very badly fractured and that getting her off was out of the question at the moment, therefore rockets were fired and the boats got ready. At 8 a.m. the lifeboat from St. David's Head came off to the ship and remained standing by, and at 2 p.m. the s.s. "Sussex" came up and took 32 of the crew. Soon after this the s.s. "Vigilant" appeared on the scene, and the remainder of the crew went on board this ship, which remained in the neighbourhood. Visits were paid to the stranded vessel several times but her after decks were practically awash by this time, and it was decided that it was hopeless to attempt any salvage. On Saturday morning the 7th August, therefore, the crew finally abandoned her, and she became a total wreck.

On carefully going over the evidence, the Court formed the opinion that the loss of the ship was occasioned by the default of the master, who in the first place should not have made the South Bishop Light his objective when steering down the St. George's Channel. This light is near the centre of a very dangerous group of rocks, through which strong tides with varying eddies have their courses; therefore the course should have been set for the Smalls, which is the outlying point of this coast. But the master thought he would be able to pick up the South Bishop in ample time to avoid danger, and he appears to have been deceived by the hazy state of the weather.

Again, when the light on Strumble Head was sighted and a bearing obtained, so much reliance should not have been placed on the distance calculated, as it could only be approximate under the conditions; therefore a wider margin should have been allowed and the vessel kept on the W.N.W. course until safety was assured. Also a cast of the lead might have been taken before Strumble Head was sighted, and this would have shown when the ship was within the 30-fathom line. It appears to have been too late to do anything after the South Bishop Light was sighted, although the master might have known that S.W. was a dangerous bearing to get of this light on the course he was steering, and if he had recognized this and ported his helm at once, danger would have been averted. He stayed, however, to put the bearing on the chart, and then the disaster became inevitable.

The master appeared to be about the bridge all the time, and personally directed most of the movements, showing in this no negligence of his duties; therefore, considering this and all the other circumstances, the Court did not feel justified in dealing with his certificate, but severely censured him for his conduct of the navigation as detailed in the answers appended hereto.

At the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Paxton, on behalf of 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) 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 10.25 a.m. of the 4th August, were safe and proper courses thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tides and currents?
- (5) What was the bearing of Strumble Head Light at or about 1.20 a.m. of the 5th August last? Were proper measures then and thereafter taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel, were safe and proper courses then and thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tides and currents?

(6) Having regard to the state of the weather after 1.20 a.m. of the 5th August 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 stranding and loss of the vessel?

(9) Was the vessel navigated with proper and seaman-like care?

(10) Was the loss of the British steamship "Langton Grange" 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 three compasses; they were in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel. The standard compass was last adjusted by Messrs. Sewill, of South Castle Street, Liverpool, in 1908.

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

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

(4) Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel about 10.25 a.m. of the 4th August, off Black Head, on the Scotch coast. Safe and proper courses were thereafter steered, and due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents.

(5) Strumble Head light was sighted about 1.20 a.m. on 5th August, bearing S.E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S. magnetic. Proper measures were taken to verify the position here, as the light was brought abeam, and the time taken, but when one point abaft the beam the light became obscured by the prevailing haze. The calculation then made put the ship about five miles off the light when it was abeam. As this could only be approximate, too fine a course was then and thereafter steered, and, consequently, an insufficient allowance was made for tides and currents.

(6) (a) The vessel was not navigated at too great a speed.

(b) The lead was not used. After getting a bearing and approximate distance off Strumble Head Light, the lead would have been no guide as to proximity to the land, but as an act of prudence it might have been used with advantage before sighting the light, as soundings would have shown when the ship was within the 30-fathom line.

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

(8) The stranding and loss of the steamship "Langton Grange" were caused by the master placing too much reliance on an approximate distance from Strumble Head Light, which he had obtained in hazy weather, and thereafter steering too fine a course to clear the North Bishop Rocks, and in so doing, not making sufficient allowance for the strong tides which prevail in this vicinity, as the vessel evidently experienced a strong southerly inset towards Ramsey Sound. The South Bishop Light was sighted, but before a position could be properly ascertained the ship stranded on the Bell Rock off the North Bishop and there remained.

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

(10) The loss of the British steamship "Langton Grange" was caused by the default of the master, Mr. F. A. Graves. The Court finds the master in default, but in consideration of all the circumstances does not deal with his certificate, but severely censures him for steering too fine a course under the conditions prevailing.

T. SHEPHERD LITTLE,
Judge

We concur in the above Report.

F. C. A. LYON, } Assessors
C. B. GRAVES, }

Liverpool,
21st September, 1909.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the
5th day of October, 1909.)