

(No. 7391.)

“DALSERF” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a Formal Investigation held at Middlesbrough, in the County of York, on the 15th, 16th and 19th days of September, 1910, before THEODORE WILFRID FRY, Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Commanders A. S. HOUSTOUN, R.N.R., and F. C. A. LYON, R.N.R., into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British steamship “DALSERF” on or near Grasholm Island, St. Bride’s Bay, off the coast of Pembrokeshire, on or about the 10th day of July last.

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 loss of the vessel were due to an error of judgment on the part of the master in placing too much reliance upon the distance off St. Goven’s Lightship and St. Ann’s Head, and making an allowance then for a flood tide which had not attained its full strength; his default and neglect in not taking more frequent casts of the lead, and his attempting to navigate a narrow channel under the existing weather conditions.

The Court finds the master in default and severely censures him for navigating the vessel in the manner set out above, and in the answers to the questions of the Board of Trade, but, having regard to his previous high character and his clean record as a master for 13 years, refrains from dealing with his certificate.

Dated this 19th day of September, 1910.

T. W. FRY,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

A. S. HOUSTOUN, } Assessors.
F. C. A. LYON, }

This Inquiry was held in the Committee Room, Municipal Buildings, Middlesbrough, on the 15th, 16th, and 19th days of September, 1910. Mr. Burton, of Newcastle, appeared on behalf of the Board of Trade, and Mr. Lewis Noad represented the owners, and Mr. Temperley represented the master (Mr. Evan Williams). The second mate was a party to the Inquiry but was not represented by counsel.

The “Dalserf” was a British single screw steamship, built of steel at Stockton-on-Tees, in 1909, by Messrs. Richardson, Duck & Company. Her Official Number was 129439, and she was registered at Glasgow. The dimensions of the ship according to the register were as follows:—Length 260·2 feet, breadth 40 feet, and depth in hold from tonnage deck to coiling at amidships 17·75 feet. Her gross tonnage was 1,848·98 tons and deductions allowed 831·66 tons, leaving a net registered tonnage of 1,017·32 tons. She was propelled by a set of vertical direct acting triple expansion surface condensing engines with three cylinders, the diameters of which were 20 inches, 33 inches, and 54 inches respectively, and had two steel boilers, the loaded pressure being 180 lbs., all of which engines and boilers were made by Messrs. Blair & Company, of Stockton-on-Tees. She had four bulkheads and was constructed with a double bottom divided into nine water ballast tanks with a total capacity of 961 tons. She was owned by Mr. James Campbell, of Post Office Chambers, Middlesbrough, who was designated managing owner, advice under his hand received 20th October, 1909.

The vessel carried no passengers. She appears to have been well found and equipped for the voyage in question.

She had two compasses—one on the bridge by which the courses were set and the vessel navigated, and another on the poop. The compasses were last adjusted by Mr. Thomas L. Ainsley, of Cardiff, in Barry Roads, on March 4th, 1910, and a proper deviation card supplied by him. She was also supplied with proper charts and sailing directions and tide tables for the voyage in question. She had a Walker’s “Cherub” patent log, but was not fitted with a patent sounding machine.

There were three boats—two lifeboats and one jolly-boat—all of which were in good order and properly equipped according to the Board of Trade requirements. She had 24 lifebelts and 6 lifebuoys.

The s.s. “Dalserf” left Penarth on the 9th July last, about 7.50 p.m., under the command of Mr. Evan Williams, who holds a certificate of competency as master, No. 019417. Her crew consisted of 19 hands all told, and she carried a cargo of 2,652 tons of coal, consigned to the Admiralty at Oban, her draft being 18 feet 4 inches forward and 18 feet 6 inches aft. After discharging the pilot she proceeded on her voyage towards Oban. Various courses were steered to Nash Point which was abeam at 9.55 p.m., distant 4 miles by a four-point bearing. The weather was then described as cloudy with light north-westerly winds and smooth sea. A course was then set N.W. by W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W. compass, N.W. by W. $\frac{3}{4}$ W. magnetic. The master allowing 3° westerly deviation which he had then obtained by a bearing of the North Star, using Messrs. Bain & Ainsley’s corrector, this course was set to pass 4 miles off St. Goven’s Lightship. At 11.10 p.m., Scarweather Light Vessel was abeam distant 3 miles by a four-point bearing, the patent log was then streamed and the same course continued; at midnight the weather was described as cloudy with light north-westerly winds and smooth sea.

At 0.55 a.m. on the 10th July last, Helwick Light Vessel was abeam, distant by four-point bearing 3 miles, and the patent log registered 17 miles; this position was reported by the mate to the master, who had gone into the chart room after passing Scarweather Lightship, having left instructions with the mate to call him if it came on thick, and when the ship had passed Helwick. The master remained in the chart room and the same course was steered until 3.40 a.m., when St. Goven’s Lightship was abeam distant by four-point bearing 3 miles, the patent log showing 41 miles; this position was also reported to the master, who then gave orders to alter the course to N.W. by N. $\frac{1}{2}$ N. compass. This was also magnetic, there being, as the master stated, no deviation on that course.

The weather when St. Goven’s Lightship was abeam was described as fine and clear, but at 3.55 a.m. a dense fog came on, and the mate called the master, who went on the bridge and reduced the engines to half speed. At 4.5 a.m., the fog continuing, engines were put to slow; at 4.30 a.m., the fog lifting, full speed was again resumed; at 5.15 a.m., the fog again coming on, and hearing torpedo boats’ whistles on the starboard side, the engines were stopped; at 5.20 a.m. the engines were put to slow ahead and the course altered to N.N.W. compass and magnetic. The patent log then showed 53 miles; at 5.40 a.m. the engines were stopped and a cast of the lead taken, bottom being found at 29 fathoms; the nature of the bottom was, however, not obtained on the arming. Engines were put slow ahead again, and the same course, N.N.W. magnetic, steered until 6 a.m., when the patent log showed 54 miles, and the master, then judging by a four-point bearing of the sound of the steam siren on St. Ann’s Head that he was abeam of that place, distant about 5 miles, altered the course to N.W. by N. $\frac{1}{2}$ N. compass and magnetic. This alteration, he stated, was to allow for the flood tide, which he estimated would make about that time; but this was not a correct estimation on the part of the master as the north-going stream, as shown on the chart on that part of the coast, does not begin to make until five hours after high water at Dover, and the time of high water at Dover that morning being 1 hour 15 minutes, this would make the time of the turn of the tide, at the position where the ship was, about 6.15 a.m., and it would not gain any material strength until about 7 a.m. The N.W. by N. $\frac{1}{2}$ N. course was then continued, and the ship proceeded slow, the weather being prescribed as very foggy, although the master stated that it lifted a little at intervals.

The whistle was kept going, and hearing other steamers’ whistles on the starboard side the master concluded he was steering in the right direction for the Channel;

at 7.50 a.m., the patent log registering 63 miles, the engines were stopped and another cast of the lead taken. Bottom was found at 33 fathoms, and the arming was indented showing that rocky ground had been struck. The master concluded from this depth of water and from having run 22 miles by the patent log from St. Goven's that the ship was through the Channel, and at 7.55 a.m. put the engines dead slow again, the weather still being very foggy. About 8.8 a.m. rocks were reported by the look-out (and simultaneously seen from the bridge by the master and second mate) right ahead; the master rang the engine-room telegraph full speed ahead at the same time ordering the helm "hard-a-starboard," but on seeing that the vessel would not clear the rocks, without taking his hand off the telegraph rang full speed astern. The ship's head swung about two points and she struck the rocks about a minute or two after they were first seen, striking the rock on the port side of her stem first and wedging herself between that rock and another on the starboard bow. The engines were kept going astern for some time but the ship remained fast; they were then stopped for a little, then put full astern again, then stopped. This was frequently done, but finding all efforts to get the ship off unsuccessful they were finally stopped at 9.20 a.m., and the master gave orders to get the boats out.

Tanks and wells were immediately sounded, when the fore peak was found to be filling and No. 1 tank making water at the rate of one foot an hour; all other tanks and wells were dry, and the sea was quite smooth when the vessel struck, and no tide rips were seen or heard. About 9 a.m. the ship's stern swung round to the northward. At 10 a.m. the crew commenced to jettison cargo out of No. 1 hold to lighten the ship forward; this was continued until about 3 p.m. and then stopped after throwing overboard about 25 tons. The ship then commenced working and striking heavily on the rocks, the tanks were again sounded and No. 4 and 5 tanks were found to be filling and water running into the engine-room. About 3.30 p.m. the s.s. "Masterful" was signalled and she offered to report the casualty, and at 4.30 p.m. H.M.S. "Royal Arthur" came up and sent assistance to put cables on shore aft.

On Monday, 11th July, as the ship practically filled with water, when the tide made and worked and struck very heavily on the rocks, the master transferred all the crew to Torpedo Boat 049 which proceeded with them to Milford, as he did not consider it prudent to keep them on board any longer. The master and chief engineer remained on board.

Salvage operations were commenced on the 11th July, and continued until the 21st, when the master and chief engineer left her. At that time the after part of the vessel from the engine-room skylight was completely submerged, and further operations of salving were abandoned, and she eventually broke up.

In reviewing the circumstances and navigation from the last point of departure, viz., St. Goven's Lightship, when the mate took a four-point bearing which he made to be 3 miles off, the Court must point out that this distance does not agree with the subsequent position of the vessel, or the previous position off the Helwick Light Vessel which was also passed 3 miles off. If the course then steered N.W. by W. magnetic had been made good, the ship would have passed about 1 mile off St. Goven's Lightship, but as there was a strong ebb tide of over a knot an hour running southerly for nearly three hours during the run between the Lightships, the ship must have been set further south than the master anticipated, and the four-point bearing off St. Goven's cannot have been correctly taken, and on working back the course from where the ship stranded it is clear that she must have passed about 5 miles off that lightship.

But, in particular, when the master altered the course to the westward off St. Ann's Head, relying on a four-point bearing of the sound of the steam siren, he should have exercised more care and judgment in the navigation of the vessel. He should have known how very unreliable and purely approximate a position must be when ascertained by that method. He should then have stopped his ship and taken an accurate cast of the lead to verify the distance off, and as it was practically low water at the time he would have obtained a sounding, as marked on the chart, and no correction or allowance for the rise of the tide need have been applied. The one cast taken at 5.40 a.m., getting 29 fathoms, was actually no guide to the ship's position and distance off the land, the 30-fathom line being very irregular about this part of the coast. Had he taken more frequent casts he would have struck this line of soundings, which would have shown him that the vessel was further off the land than he assumed her to be, nor was he prudent in approaching a narrow

channel in foggy weather without using the lead more frequently. His action in attempting to go through this channel at all under the prevailing weather conditions (notwithstanding that the fog lifted at times) was unwise. By going outside the Smalls he would have had more sea room and greater safety. Owing to the vessel having only an ordinary deep sea lead and line, the operation of taking a cast could not be done with such frequency and accuracy as with a patent sounding machine, and the Court is of opinion that all vessels of this class engaged in the coasting trade should be supplied with a patent deep sea sounding machine.

In every other respect the s.s. "Dalsarf" was well found including an up-to-date compass and a patent log, but she had no patent sounding machine which the Court considers essential. It is only fair to add that although the master, for the reasons given above, was to blame for the stranding and loss of the vessel, the neatness and detail with which his log book and compass error book were kept did him great credit.

At the conclusion of the evidence Mr. Burton submitted the following questions on behalf of the Board of Trade, which were answered as follows:—

(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 when off St. Goven's Lightship at or about 3.40 a.m. on the 10th July last, were safe and proper courses thereafter set and steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(5) Having regard to the state of the weather after 3.55 a.m. on the 10th July last—

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

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

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

(7) What was the cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel.

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

(9) Was the loss of the steamship "Dalsarf" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master and second officer or of either of them?

Mr Noad having addressed the Court on behalf of the owners, Mr. Temperley for the master and Mr. Burton having replied on behalf of the Board of Trade, the Court gave judgment and returned the following answers to the questions of the Board of Trade:—

(1) The vessel had two compasses, namely, one on the bridge (Messrs. White Thompson's "New Era" compass) by which the courses were set and steered, and one on the poop. They were in good order and condition and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted by Mr. Thomas L. Ainsley, of Cardiff, on the 4th March, 1910.

(2) The master ascertained the deviation of his compasses from time to time, and the errors appear to have been correctly ascertained and the proper corrections to the courses applied.

(3) The vessel was supplied with proper and sufficient charts. She was also supplied with Messrs. Imray, Laurie, Norie & Wilson's Sailing Directions for the Bristol Channel, which were sufficient for the voyage in question, but she was not supplied with the Admiralty Sailing Directions.

(4) Proper measures were taken by a four-point bearing to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel when off St. Goven's Lightship at or about 3.40 a.m. on the 10th July last, safe and proper courses were then set and steered up to about 6 a.m., after that time safe and proper courses were not set and steered. Due and proper allowance was not made for tide and current.

(5) Having regard to the state of the weather after 3.55 a.m. on the 10th July last—

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

- (b) The lead was not used with sufficient frequency and accuracy.
- (6) A good and proper look-out was kept.
- (7) The stranding and loss of the vessel was caused—
- (a) By the master placing too much reliance upon the distance off St. Goven's Lightship at or about 3.40 a.m. on the 10th July last, which the subsequent position of the ship shows could not have been correct.
- (b) Under estimating his distance off St. Ann's Head about 6 a.m., when the master, judging by a four-point bearing of the sound of the steam siren that the ship was abeam of that place and about 5 miles off, altered the course half a point to the westward.
- (c) His neglect to take more frequent casts of the lead, in order to verify his position off St. Ann's, and afterwards, when approaching a narrow channel, and his error of judgment in then making an allowance for the flood tide and current which had not attained its full strength.
- (d) The master's attempting to proceed through a narrow channel under the existing weather

conditions when he had the alternative of proceeding outside the Smalls, but in extenuation of this action the Court thinks it fair to state that the fog lifted a little at intervals and the master thought he would be able to navigate it in safety.

(8) The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care after 6 a.m. on the 10th July last.

(9) The loss of the steamship "Dalserf" was caused by an error of judgment and the default of the master for the reasons stated in answer to question 7. No blame is attached to the second officer.

T. WILFRID FRY,
Judge.

We concur.

A. S. HOUSTOUN, } Assessors.
F. C. A. LYON, }

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the
18th day of October, 1910.)