

(No. 7393.)

“WM. CORY” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at Caxton Hall, Westminster, on the 7th and 18th days of October, 1910, before R. H. B. MARSHAM, Esquire, assisted by Captain G. L. LANGBORNE, F.R.G.S., and Lieutenant J. L. LEFTWICH, R.N.R., into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship “WM. CORY,” which, on the 5th of September, 1910, struck a submerged object off the coast of Cornwall, and was subsequently beached about a mile to the southward and westward of Pendeen Lighthouse.

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 vessel were due to the careless navigation of the master, Mr. William Henry St. Clair, when, having passed close to the Vyneck Rock, and being in a dangerous locality, he failed to set a proper course, to take bearings or to consult the chart, trusting only to his memory for landmarks on the coast. The Court finds the master in default, and, taking into consideration his previous good record, suspends his certificate for three months (No. 025930).

Dated this 19th day of October, 1910.

R. H. B. MARSHAM,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

J. L. LEFTWICH, }
GEO. L. LANGBORNE, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

This was an Inquiry into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British screw steamship “Wm. Cory,” of Sunderland, held at the Caxton Hall, Westminster, on the 7th and 18th days of October, 1910.

Mr. B. A. Cohen appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. L. Stanistreet Holmes represented the master of the “Wm. Cory,” and Mr. C. Harvey watched the proceedings on behalf of the owners.

The s.s. “Wm. Cory,” Official Number 129029, was a steel screw steamship built at Sunderland in 1909 by S. P. Austin & Son, Limited. She was schooner rigged, and was of the following dimensions:—Length, 314 feet; breadth, 45 feet; and depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling at amidships, 20·7 feet. Her tonnage was 2659·85 tons gross and 1591·59 tons net register. She was fitted with triple expansion surface condensing engines of 263 nominal horse-power, designed to give her a speed of about 9½ knots.

She had two steel boilers of 180 lbs. working pressure, constructed by George Clark, Limited, of Sunderland; and she was owned by Messrs. Wm. Cory & Son, Limited, of 52, Mark Lane, City of London, Mr. Gilbert Alder the younger, of the same address, being designated the person to whom the management of the vessel was entrusted by and on behalf of the owners, by advice received on the 23rd day of July, 1909, under the hand of Reginald James Speller, public officer of the company.

On this her last voyage the “Wm. Cory” was well found, and she had a proper and sufficient number of charts and sailing directions. She had two compasses—

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one in the wheelhouse, by which she was steered, and a standard compass on the upper bridge by which the courses were set.

She was under the command of Mr. William Henry St. Clair, who holds a certificate of competency as master (No. 025930), and carried a crew of 23 hands and no passengers.

The vessel left Uleaborg, Finland, on the 27th August last, bound for Newport. She was loaded with pit props, carried in the holds, and on deck.

The draft on sailing was approximately 18 feet 4 inches forward and 20 feet 4 inches aft.

She proceeded on her voyage and passed the Lizard at 8.45 a.m. on the 5th September. At 10.30 a.m. she passed inside the Longships Lighthouse, at a distance of three-quarters of a mile. It was fine clear weather, with a light north-west wind.

The master stated that he consulted his chart when off the Lizard before going on the bridge, but that on account of his knowledge of the coast in this vicinity, he did not consider it necessary to look at the chart afterwards. The courses laid off by the master on the chart, when he was before the Court, were from memory; and, after passing the Longships, there is no record in the scrap log book of the courses steered.

According to the evidence of the second mate, who was on the bridge with the master, the vessel passed one-half to three-quarters of a mile off the Vyneck Rock; and a short time after, the master pointed out to him that the Longships, the Brisons, and the Vyneck were in line, and that therefore the vessel was clear of all danger.

The second mate went into the chart room to look at these bearings on the chart, when, at about 11.40 a.m., he felt the vessel bump. The master was then on the bridge, and put the engines “full speed astern.”

The vessel floated and the engines were stopped.

The boats were then swung out, and at 11.50 a.m., finding the vessel was holed badly under Nos. 1 and 2 holds and rapidly filling with water and going down by the head, the engines were put full speed ahead, and the master decided to beach her in the best place he could select, which he did.

About noon, the vessel grounded near the Levant Mine, when the engines were put to “slow ahead,” with the object of keeping her from falling broadside on to the shore. This, however, proved unavailing, and after a time, the engines were stopped.

The crew left the ship at 3 p.m., saving all their effects; the master himself leaving an hour or so later.

The vessel eventually became a total wreck.

The Court cannot accept the evidence of the master and second mate, regarding the position of the vessel just before 11.40 a.m.

If what they state is correct, then a submerged rock exists about a mile from Pendeen Lighthouse, in a bearing of west (half south), as laid down on the chart by the master. This position would be half a mile from the coast line.

The Court cannot reconcile itself to the plea put forward on behalf of the master that the vessel struck on a rock that is not shown on the Admiralty Chart, nor that she struck on any submerged wreckage.

The coast in question is traversed from time to time by numerous vessels, many of which, deeply laden, pass along the beaten track, and over the spot where the master states his vessel struck.

If such a rock did exist in the Fairway, it would certainly be known to the fishermen who constantly fish and trawl in that vicinity.

Two independent witnesses, Edwin Trembath and James Eddy, who both appeared to have a good knowledge of the locality, and were fishing inside the Brisons on 5th September about 11 a.m., observed a steamer carrying a deck load of pit props pass outside the Brisons and close to the Vyneck Rock; and shortly after, saw the vessel which was then close to the land, standing out to sea, blowing her whistle. Eddy though she had struck the shore. Trembath was of opinion that her engines were broken down.

At 11.45 a.m. William Morris, keeper of the Pendeen Lighthouse, saw the vessel in the direction of Carn-du-Point, with her boats swung out. This line of direction from Pendeen places the position where the Court concludes the “Wm. Cory” did strike, namely, on the outlying rocks of Botallock Head, about the time of low water.

Only 20 minutes elapsed from the time the vessel struck until she finally grounded near the Levant Mine, and as the engines were stopped for nine minutes of that interval, and were going astern for a minute or so, it would only leave a period of ten minutes during which the engines were going ahead.

The vessel was much down by the head, and could not have covered any great distance during that interval of ten minutes.

The Court is, therefore, of opinion that the vessel stranded less than a mile from where she now lies.

These were the facts of the case, and on the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Cohen, on behalf of the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions to 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 when abeam of the Longships Lighthouse about 10.30 a.m. on the 5th September last, were safe and proper courses thereafter set and steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tides and currents?

(5) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel from time to time after 10.30 a.m. on the 5th September last?

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

(7) Where and upon what did the vessel strike at or about 11.40 a.m. on the 5th September last? Is the object upon which she struck marked on the Admiralty Chart?

(8) Did the vessel sustain serious damage as a result of her striking at or about 11.40 a.m. on the 5th September last?

(9) When and where was the vessel beached? What was her condition at that time?

(10) What was the cause of the loss of the vessel?

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

(12) Was the loss of the British steamship "Wm. Cory" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master?

Mr. Cohen and Mr. Holmes having addressed the Court, judgment was given as follows:—

(1) The vessel had two compasses—one in the wheel-house, by which she was steered, and the standard compass on the bridge, by which the courses were set. They were in good order and were sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel. They were adjusted in January last by Mr. James Morton, of Shields.

(2) The master did ascertain the deviation of the compasses by observation from time to time; and these

observations were recorded in a book that was produced before the Court. The errors were correctly ascertained and proper corrections appear to have been applied to the courses.

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

(4) Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel when abeam of the Longships Lighthouse about 10.30 a.m. on the 5th September last. Safe and proper courses were set and steered until the vessel was off the Vyneck Rock. No allowances were made for tide and currents, as none were necessary.

(5) After passing the Vyneck Rock, proper measures were not taken to verify the position of the vessel from time to time. The master navigated the ship by the land without reference to the chart, no regular courses being set or recorded.

(6) A good and proper look-out was not kept.

(7) The Court is of opinion that the vessel at 11.40 a.m. on the 5th September last, struck the out-lying rocks in the vicinity of Botallock Head, the positions of which are marked on the Admiralty Chart.

(8) The vessel did sustain serious damage as a result of her striking at or about 11.40 a.m. on the 5th September last, and she became a total loss.

(9) The vessel was beached about noon of the 5th September, close to the Levant Mine. She was then in a sinking condition; the fore holds were rapidly filling with water, and the water was up to the anchors on the bow.

(10) The cause of the loss of the vessel was due to the careless navigation of the master. Having passed close to the Vyneck Rock, and when in a dangerous locality, he failed to set a proper course, to take bearings or to consult the chart, trusting only to his memory for landmarks on the coast. The evidence tends to obscure rather than disclose the precise cause of the casualty, for if the testimony of the master and second mate is to be accepted, as to the position of the vessel after passing the Vyneck Rock, and as to the course steered, it is impossible that the casualty could have happened.

The Court is unable to accept this evidence.

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

(12) The loss of the British s.s. "William Cory" was caused by the default of the master.

In consideration of his good record, the Court suspends his certificate for three months only.

R. H. B. MARSHAM, Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

J. L. LEFTWICH, } Assessors.
GEO. L. LANGBORNE, }

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 1st day of November, 1910.)

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