(No. 6125.)

"TURRET AGE" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a formal investigation, held at the Moot Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on the 11th and 12th days of December, 1900, before Nicholas Henry Martin and John McKay, Esquires, two of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace, acting in and for the City and County of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, assisted by Captains Bigley and Erskine, Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "Turret Age," of Newcastle, on the Sor Gadden Reef, Gulf of Bothnia, on the 25th August, 1900.

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 loss of the vessel was caused by the master, after midnight of the 24th August, 1900, failing to take any measures to verify his position when making the Quarken Channel. The Court finds the master, John George Purvis, in default, and hereby suspends his Certificate, No. 020175, for the period of six months from the date hereof.

Dated this 12th day of December, 1900.

N. H. Martin, } Judges.
John McKay, }

We concur in the above Report.

Wm. Barnett Bigley, } Assessors.
William Erskine, }

Annex to Report.

This was an inquiry into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "Turret Age," and was held at the Moot Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on the 11th and 12th days of December, 1900, before Nicholas Henry Martin and John McKay, Esquires, assisted by Captains Bigley and Erskine, nautical assessors. Mr. Burton appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. Temperley represented the owners, and Mr. Miller, junior, the master and officers.

The "Turret Age," of Newcastle, official No. 101,841, was a steel screw steamship, built at Sunderland, in the year 1893, by Messrs. Wm. Doxford and Sons, Limited, and was of the following dimensions: length, 311 feet; breadth, 38·2 feet; and depth in hold, 21·65 feet. She was schooner rigged, fitted with triple-expansion engines of 303 horse power, also constructed by Messrs. Doxford, in the year 1893. She was of 2231·97 gross and 1383·19 net registered tonnage, and was owned by the Turret Steam Shipping Company, Limited, of 18, Sandhill, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Mr. William Petersen, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, being appointed managing owner on the 11th October, 1899.

She was, on the voyage in question, in good condition and well found, fitted with lifeboats and life-saving appliances in accordance with the Act.

The vessel had four compasses, two of which were in use, viz., a standard compass on the upper bridge and one in the wheel-house.

According to the evidence there was a considerable amount of deviation on the standard compass. On this account, and owing to the fact that the card furnished by the professional adjusters proved of no practical service, and the master had little opportunity of himself testing the compass on various courses, he, on the present voyage, both set the courses and steered by the wheel-house compass, which he had found the more reliable of the two.

This was a very inconvenient plan to adopt, as the navigation of the vessel must necessarily have been rendered more difficult, owing to reliance being chiefly placed on a compass shut in in the wheel-house.

Both compasses, however, were in good working order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel.

The "Turret Age" left Lulea at 5 a.m. of the 24th August, bound for Amsterdam, with a crew of 22 hands all told, under the command of Mr. John George Purvis, who held a Certificate of Competency as master, No. 020175. She had a cargo of 3,600 tons of iron ore, and her draught of water on leaving was 20 feet aft and 19 feet forward.

They proceeded in charge of a pilot, who left at 8 a.m., off Rod Hall, and at 10 a.m. they were abeam of Norstromgrund Lightship. The patent log was streamed and a course set for the Quarken Channel.

At 8.45 p.m. Helsingkallan Lightship was seen bearing about three points on the port bow, the vessel being then on a S.W. by S. ¾ S. course on which there was no deviation.

They bore away for the Light, and, when within an estimated distance from it of 2½ to 3 miles, the course was altered to W. ¼ S. which, allowing for two degrees westerly deviation, gave W. ½ S. (magnetic). This course was set to make the Holmögadd Light.

The weather at the time was overcast, but clear, with moderate S.S.W. wind and no sea.

The master, who had been on the bridge all the day, went below at 9.45, telling the mate that he ought to make the Light right ahead, and to call him when it was seen. The vessel proceeded at full speed, making about 8 knots an hour, and at 11 p.m. the mate sighted the Holmögadd Light, as expected, right ahead, and immediately informed the master, who told him to alter the course to W. ½ S., making W. ¾ S. (magnetic).

The master soon after came on deck, and saw the light bearing about half a point on the starboard bow, Quarken and Storskar Light being also in sight.

At midnight the course was altered to W. by S., which, allowing for four degrees westerly deviation, gave W. by S. ¼ S. (magnetic). Cross-bearings were then taken of the Holmögadd and Quarken Lights, the former bearing W. ¼ S. (magnetic), distant 7½ miles, and the latter S.W. (magnetic), distant 12 miles.

The course was again altered to W. by S. ½ S. by compass, making W.S.W. (magnetic).

The three lights remained in sight, but no further means were taken to verify the vessel's position as she approached the Channel. The master and the second officer were on the bridge, and there was a man on the look-out.

At 0.45 the vessel, to use the master's expression, "trembled" over something. He reversed the engines and put the helm hard-a-port. She came round, and, on the engines being put ahead again, she immediately struck on the rocks and remained fast. The actual point of stranding was about 1½ miles E.S.E. of the Holmögadd Light.

The mate was sent for assistance, and the same day a salvage steamer arrived.

Divers were employed stopping the holes, and on the 31st she was floated and anchored, but on the following day, from stress of weather, she filled and sank. Renewed efforts were made to float the vessel. This was successfully done on the 29th September, but she sank again on the following day, and was finally abandoned on the 5th October. No lives were lost.

The vessel was lost through careless navigation on the part of the master.

It was a fine, clear night; there were three lights visible, rendering it perfectly easy for the master to accurately determine his position from time to time as he was passing through the Channel. The fact, also, that the vessel stranded at a point about 2 miles inside her course shortly after the position by cross bearings was said to have been found, indicates the probability that those bearings were inaccurately taken.

At the conclusion of the evidence the following questions were submitted on behalf of the Board of Trade, Mr. Miller addressed the Court for his clients, and Mr. Burton replied.

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?

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3. Were proper measures taken at or about 9.30 p.m. of the 24th August last to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel? Was a safe and proper course then set and thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and current?

4. Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 11 p m. of the 24th August last, and from time to time thereafter?

5. Were safe and proper alterations made in the course at or about 11 p.m. of the 24th August, and from time to time thereafter, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

6. Was a good and proper look-out kept?

7. Was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

8. What was the cause of the casualty?

9. Was serious damage to the s.s. "Turret Age" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master, chief and second officers, or of any of them?

To which the Court replied as follows :—

1. There were four compasses on board, two of which were in use, viz., the standard compass on the upper bridge and one in the wheel-house. On the voyage in question the courses were set and steered by the wheel-house compass, which the master stated had less deviation, and was the more reliable.

The compasses appear to have been in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted by Messrs. B. Cooke and Son, in Grimsby Roads, on the 5th of August last.

2. The master was accustomed to ascertain the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time, and stated that the errors were correctly ascertained, and the proper corrections to the courses applied. On the passage home from Lulea, however, he appeared to have had no opportunity of testing his compasses by observation.

3. At 9.30 p.m of the 24th August no measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel, but the master estimated that he was at that time about 2½ or 3 miles from Helsingkallan Lightship, bearing S. ¾ E. A safe and proper course, W. ½ S. (magnetic), was then set and steered. No allowance was made for current.

4. No measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about 11 p.m. of the 24th August, when Holmögadd Light was seen ahead at an estimated distance of 9 miles. The only measures at any time taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel were at midnight of the 24th, when cross bearings of the Holmögadd and Quarken Lights were taken, bearing respectively W. ¼ S. (magnetic), and S.W. (magnetic), the former light being 7½ miles distant, and the latter 12 miles.

5. When Holmögadd Light was first seen, as mentioned in the last answer, the course was altered to W. ¾ S. (magnetic), and at midnight, before the cross bearings were taken, the course was again altered to W. by S. ¼ S. (magnetic). Both these alterations were at the time safe and proper. Immediately the cross bearings were taken the course was altered to W.S.W. (magnetic), and upon this course the vessel stranded at 0.45 on the Sor Gadden Reef. Even assuming the vessel had been in the position indicated by the cross bearings, this alteration was not safe and proper. But seeing that the vessel actually stranded at a point 2 miles inside, the Court is of opinion that the cross bearings were not accurately taken.

6. A good and proper look-out appears to have been kept.

7. The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care, as the master, after midnight of the 24th August, took no steps to verify his position when making the Quarken Channel, although he had continuously three lights in sight by which his position could have been accurately ascertained from time to time.

8. The casualty was caused by the master failing to ascertain and verify his position as stated in the last answer.

9. The loss of the vessel was caused by the wrongful act and default of the master, John George Purvis, and the Court hereby suspends his Certificate, No. 020,175, for the period of six months from the date hereof.

The master's solicitor applied to the Court to recommend the grant of a first mate's certificate during the period of suspension.

The Court declined to accede to this application, but consented to recommend the grant of a second mate's certificate.

N. H. Martin, }
John McKay, } Justices.

We concur.

Wm. Barnett Bigley, }
William Erskine, } Assessors.

(*Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 4th day of January*, 1901.)