

OFFICIAL COPY.

(No. 3600.)

“CARAIBE” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of a formal investigation held at Cardiff, on the 22nd, 23rd, 24th, and 25th days of August 1888, before THOMAS WILLIAM LEWIS, Esquire, Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captain WARD and Captain DAVIES, Assessors, into the circumstances attending the loss of the steamship “CARAIBE,” of London, in the Bay of Etal, Morbihan, France, on the 28th July 1888.

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 said vessel was due to careless navigation on the part of the master, Francis Midlen. The Court finds him in default, and suspends his certificate for twelve calendar months.

Dated this 27th day of August 1888.

(Signed) T. W. LEWIS, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) C. Y. WARD, } Assessors.
T. DAVIES, }

Annex.

The “Caraiibe,” of London, official number 87,186, was an iron screw steamer built at Dumbarton in 1856, and was owned and managed by Mr. Morgan, of Newport, Mon., who purchased her in April last for the sum of 1760l.

She was of 699 tons gross, and 431 tons register, and was fitted with two compound engines of 99 horse power (nominal) combined.

After purchase she was placed in dry dock at Cardiff, where she was overhauled and thoroughly repaired under survey, at a cost of 2,966l., and at the time of leaving Cardiff was certified to be in a good seaworthy condition.

She had two compasses fitted, one in the wheelhouse by which she was navigated, and one on the top of the wheel-house in a binnacle, which were adjusted and errors ascertained in Cardiff Roads on the day she left. She was supplied with a general chart, on a small scale, of the Western Coast of Europe, but not with a book of sailing directions.

She left Cardiff Roads at 9 a.m. on the 26th July last, under the command of Mr. F. Midlen, who held a certificate of competency as master, bound to St. Nazaire with a cargo of 697 tons of coal, on a draught of about 15 feet forward, and 15 feet 6 inches aft. Her crew consisted of 14 hands all told.

The Longships was passed at 7.30 a.m. on the 27th, and at 7.30 a.m. on the 28th Ushant was passed at an estimated distance of 10 miles.

At 11 a.m. the lighthouse on the Saints bore E. by S., at an estimated distance of 8 miles. From this assumed position, a S.E. by S. correct magnetic course was set

only a general chart on a small scale to navigate by, and had no book of sailing directions.

He had not accurately ascertained his position at any time during the day; indeed he said he had not seen any land, and yet when it was reported the vessel had run a distance which, had he considered for a moment, he must have known was impossible, he steered towards a coast bristling with dangers, of which he had no knowledge, the loss of the vessel being the result. The Court cannot find any excuse.

The following questions were submitted to the Court:—

- 1. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?
2. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at and after 10 p.m. on the 26th July, and whether the master was then justified in assuming that the vessel was at the mouth of the River Loire, especially having regard to the fact that there are three lights of different character at the entrance to that river, neither of them being a fixed red light?
3. Whether the master was justified in assuming that the light seen was that exhibited from the “Le Ture.”
4. Whether safe and proper courses were set and steered after 10 p.m. on the last-mentioned date, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents?
5. Whether, at 11.50 p.m., the two white lights spoken of by Ellis were visible, and if so how did it happen that they were not seen by the master until after the vessel stranded?
6. Whether the lead was used with sufficient frequency, and whether proper measures were taken to obtain accurate soundings?
7. Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?
8. Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?
9. Was the vessel wilfully wrecked? and finally, Whether the master and mate are, or either of them is, in default?

and steered until about 9 p.m., the master estimating that allowing for the set of current to the eastward the vessel would make a S.E. 1/2 S. magnetic course over the ground.

The engines were at full speed, the vessel making 7 1/2 knots per hour. The wind during the day was strong from the westward, with a high sea and a hazy atmosphere. This strong wind and high sea continued until evening, when it fell and the sea became smooth. The master stated that neither land nor lights were seen until between 10 and 10.30 p.m.; and afterwards, when a fixed red light was visible on the starboard bow, which he took to be the “Ture Light” off the entrance of the Loire. On the other hand, the mate stated that he saw the loom of land at 8 p.m., and that at midnight a red light was visible on the port bow, and two bright lights on the port quarter. The boatswain also stated he saw two bright lights on the port side between 8 and 9 p.m., and at 9 saw what he took to be an island, and two bright lights on it; and about 10.30 a red light on starboard bow. Benjamin Jones also saw land on port side at 8 p.m.

C. Ellis, fireman, stated that at 11.50 p.m. he saw a red light on port bow, two bright lights on port quarter, and two rocks on starboard bow. He also stated that the weather was clear, and that in his opinion the vessel was purposely stranded.

The patent log was set when off the Saints, and at 4 p.m. registered 37 1/2 miles; at 8 p.m. 68 miles; and at 9 p.m. it is said to have registered 89 miles, which latter must have been an error, for the vessel could not have run that distance. At about 9 p.m., the master, assuming the vessel to the southward of Belle-Isle, the course was altered to S.E. by E. 1/2 E. magnetic, and at about 9.30 the engines were slowed to half speed—vessel making about four and a half miles per hour, and a cast of the lead was taken in about 18 fathoms. At 10 p.m. the engines were eased to slow for half an hour (when, as before stated, a red light was seen), and then the engines were eased to “dead slow,” the master determining to wait till daylight for a pilot, and a flare was burnt as signal for a pilot. After this time a cast of the lead was taken every quarter of an hour, the engines being stopped for the purpose, and soundings are said to have been obtained in from 15 to 18 fathoms, and no bottom at 15 fathoms just before she stranded. The soundings must have been incorrect, for no such depths are shown by the chart to exist on the ground over which the vessel passed.

Shortly before midnight the course was altered, bringing the red light on the port bow, and shortly after midnight the vessel struck on the Rohan Rocks off the entrance to the Etal River. The engines were reversed full speed for six or seven minutes, but without effect, the vessel remained fast, and almost immediately filled with water, and she eventually became a total wreck. The boats were got out and the crew left the vessel in them, saving most of their effects, and pulled in the direction of the two bright lights.

Shortly afterwards they fell in with some fishing boats by which they were towed to Etal and landed there.

A grave charge was made by the fireman, C. Ellis, but was not substantiated.

It appears to the Court that the casualty is attributable to gross carelessness, or even recklessness, on the part of the master.

This was his first voyage in command, and he was unacquainted with the dangers on the coast. He had

The following answers were given to the foregoing questions:—

- 1. The stranding of the vessel was due to careless navigation on the part of the master.
2. Proper measures were not taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at 10 p.m., or at any other time on the 26th July, beyond heaving the lead, and the master was not justified in assuming that the vessel was at the mouth of the Loire, for in addition to the different character of the lights it was impossible that the vessel could have run the distance.
3. The master was not justified in assuming that the light seen was that exhibited from “Le Ture.”
4. Safe and proper courses were not set and steered after 10 p.m. on the 26th July, neither was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents.
5. The evidence is on this point conflicting, and the Court will not undertake to say whether the lights were or were not visible at the time mentioned.
6. The lead was used with sufficient frequency, and it appears the engines were stopped for the purpose, but the soundings said to have been obtained were inaccurate, and the Court therefore assumes that the operation of sounding was inefficiently performed.
7. A good and proper look-out was not kept.
8. The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care.
9. There is no evidence to show that the vessel was wilfully wrecked.
10. The Court finds the master in default.

We concur. (Signed) T. W. LEWIS.

(Signed) C. Y. WARD.
T. DAVIES.

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BY EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE,
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

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