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(No 7894)

"MOORWOOD" S.S.

THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894.

REPORT OF COURT.

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at Sunderland on the 23rd and 24th days of January, 1934, before Robert John Wilson, Esquire, and Alderman Ernest Frederick Dix, two of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, acting in and for the County Borough of Sunderland, assisted by Com-modore H. Stockwell and Captain F. J. Thompson, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship "Moorwood" of the Port of London on the 1st day of October, 1933.

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 steamship "Moorwood" were caused by the negligent navigation of the master in not taking any soundings and not using his wireless to take bearings before he did, and his failure to exercise proper supervision over the navigation of the vessel in seeing that the courses laid down were maintained.

In view of the master's good record and of the fact that he was on duty on the bridge from the time of passing Vierge to the time of stranding, and having given his evidence in a straightforward manner, the Court does not propose to deal with his certificate, but hereby severely censures him.

Dated this 25th day of January, 1934.

R. J. WILSON, }
ERNEST F. DIX. } *Judges.*

We concur in the above Report.

FRED J. THOMPSON, }
HENRY STOCKWELL, } *Assessors.*

Annex to the Report.

This Inquiry was held at the Sessions Court, Gill Bridge Avenue, Sunderland, on the 23rd, 24th and 25th days of January, 1934.

Mr. E. N. Robinson, of the firm of Messrs. Watson, Burton, Booth and Robinson, of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, appeared for the Board of Trade, and Mr. Stephen Brown, of Messrs. Middleton and Company, Sunderland, represented Mr. William Pritchard Brown Storey, the master, who was the only party to the Inquiry.

The s.s. "Moorwood" was a British steamship built of steel at Sunderland in the year 1924. Her length was 268 feet, her breadth 37.8 feet and her depth 20.43 feet. She was rigged as a schooner and fitted with one engine of 199 nominal horse power. She was registered at the Port of London. Her official number was 147,577, and her tonnage, after deducting 801.77 tons for propelling power and crew space, was 1,090.10 tons.

She was owned by Messrs. William France, Fenwick and Company, Limited, Sir George Higgins, C.B.E., of 5, Fenchurch Street, London, E.C.3, being the registered manager.

The vessel carried two compasses, namely:—the steering compass in the wheelhouse and a standard compass on top of the wheelhouse. They were last adjusted by Mr. H. Moss of Sunderland on the 29th January, 1933.

Deviation cards were supplied to the master and a deviation book was kept in the vessel, but it had been lost. She had three boats, twenty-three lifebelts and six lifebuoys, and a deep-sea lead and a Thompson Pattern sounding machine on board.

The vessel was manned by a crew of 19 hands all told. She was carrying a cargo of 2,420 tons of coal and left Methil for Bordeaux on the 27th September, 1933, at 6.45 p.m. under the command of her master, William Pritchard Brown Storey. Her draught of water at the time of sailing was 18 feet on an even keel. She was well found in all respects and all life-saving appliances were in accordance with the Board of Trade regulations.

No untoward incident occurred prior to the casualty hereafter mentioned.

On Saturday, the 30th September, 1933, at 10.20 p.m., G.M.T., the weather being fine, the wind blowing at force 2 from the east, and the tide running easterly about 2 knots, the ship was abeam of the Ile de Vierge Light, at a distance, estimated by the master and second mate as 5 miles (this distance being judged by eye only, no other effort having been taken to verify the same). The ship's course at that time was W.N.W. This course was run for about one hour at full speed of about 9 knots against a 2 knots tide.

At 11.20 p.m. the course was again altered to W. $\frac{1}{2}$ S. In the meantime and at 0.30 a.m. two steamers were passed steering to eastward. The visibility at the time was about 2 to 3 miles.

At 1 a.m. on the 1st October, 1933, fog came on. At about 1.50 a.m. a series of 2 and 3 short blasts were heard on the starboard bow. These signals were taken as steamer navigation signals. The engines were stopped and then worked at various speeds of "half" and "slow," as necessitated by the state of the fog. At 2 a.m. the master judged that the vessel was clear to pass round Ushant, and altered course to S.W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W. The engines were then put slow ahead. Further fog signals of 2 and 3 blasts were heard on the port side and were taken by the master as being the fog signals from Ushant and Le Jument.

At 2.30 a.m. a rock about 20 to 30 feet high was seen close on the starboard side, and it was then obvious that the calculations previously made were wrong. The engines were stopped, and the vessel was turned round to port through S. and E. to N.N.E., the engines being used as necessary in doing this.

The wireless operator was instructed to obtain a bearing from Ushant and a bearing of 110 degrees was received at 2.35 a.m. The second officer was also instructed to take bearings of sound signals of 2 and 3 blasts then heard on the port side. These were given as Ushant N.W. and Le Jument W. magnetic. It was then obvious that these signals were from Ushant and Le Jument, and the master formed the opinion that the vessel was in the Passage du Fromveur. The vessel was then put on a S.W. by W. course.

If the bearings of the fog signals taken by the second officer had been correct the course would have taken the vessel through the Passage du Fromveur. The engines were still going slow and at half speed, and the course was continued, the fog being very dense. At 3.05 a.m. the vessel struck the rocks which proved to be Les Remeurs.

Up to this point no soundings had been taken as the master considered that the vessel was clear of Ushant, and that his chart showed that at the position where he thought the vessel was, soundings were not of much guidance.

A wireless S.O.S. was immediately sent out and was answered by the salvage tug "Seefalke" stationed at Douarnenez, which arrived at 7.30 a.m. and was employed under the Lloyd's form of agreement "No cure no pay". In the meantime the lifeboat from Moleue Island had arrived about 6.45 a.m.

Before the arrival of the salvage tug and the lifeboat the crew were got away in the ship's lifeboats as the vessel was then making water fast with a list to port.

The master and the wireless operator stood by on board the vessel.

On the arrival of the salvage tug an examination was made by a diver and the conclusion arrived at by the salvors was that it was impossible to get the vessel off the rocks without discharging part of the cargo.

The crew then returned to the vessel and preparations were made to discharge the cargo, but by 1 a.m. on the 2nd October, 1933, after further examination, and as the vessel was practically full of water, and had a heavy list to port, it was decided that the vessel could not be saved, and at 2 a.m. on the same day the vessel was abandoned, the master and the crew being taken to Brest by the

tug "Seefalke". All the ship's papers were saved excepting the chief officer's log. The chief officer's explanation for not bringing this away was that he had not time enough to save everything, and lost a quantity of his own gear.

The master gave his own opinion that the cause of the casualty was due to misleading sound signals and underestimating the strength of the tide, coupled with an abnormal current, which led him to underestimate the distance travelled after passing Ile de Vierge.

The Court cannot accept the master's opinion that the ship experienced an abnormal current setting her in towards the land. The ship was lost in a position 18 miles in error of the estimated position, and it seems absurd to think that such an abnormal current could have been experienced between 10.20 p.m. when off Ile de Vierge Light and the time of stranding at 3.5 a.m.

The Court is of opinion that there are good grounds for considering that the course laid down by the master, viz., W.½ S. was not maintained, and this is supported by the evidence of Seaman Edwin Booth, who was at the wheel from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. (1 a.m. to 3 a.m. G.M.T.) and who stated that at 2.30 a.m. the course he was steering was S. by W.

Mr. Robinson, on behalf of the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions upon which he desired the opinion of the Court:—

Questions and Answers.

1. When the "Moorwood" left Methil on the 27th September, 1933, on a voyage to Bordeaux, was the ship in good and seaworthy condition? Was she provided with adequate charts and "Admiralty Pilots" for the voyage?

The vessel was in good and seaworthy condition, and she was provided with adequate charts and "Admiralty Pilots" for the voyage.

2. What compasses had the vessel? When and by whom had they last been professionally adjusted? Were they sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel?

Were deviation cards supplied to the master?

Had the master ascertained the deviation of the compasses by observations from time to time since the vessel last left Methil?

Had the errors been correctly ascertained and recorded, and did the master know the proper corrections to be applied to the various courses steered?

The vessel carried two compasses, namely, the steering compass in the wheelhouse and a standard compass on the top of the wheelhouse. They were last adjusted by Mr. H. Moss, of Sunderland, on the 29th January, 1933, and were sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel.

Deviation cards were supplied to the master.

The master had not ascertained the deviation of the compasses since the vessel last left Methil, on account of the weather conditions prevailing.

3. What sounding apparatus was there on board the vessel? Was it proper and sufficient?

She had a Thompson Pattern sounding machine on board and a deep-sea lead, which were proper and sufficient.

4. When the vessel had the Ile de Vierge (France) abeam how far was she from it? Was the distance ascertained by bearings, or was it merely estimated?

No accurate fix was obtained. The distance given by the master as five miles was an estimate.

5. What was the state of—

- (a) the weather;
- (b) the wind;
- (c) the tide; and
- (d) the visibility

when the Ile de Vierge was abeam of the vessel?

- (a) Hazy.
- (b) Light easterly.
- (c) Flood.
- (d) About six miles.

6. What course was set when the Ile de Vierge was abeam of the vessel? Was the course set a safe and proper one? Was proper and adequate allowance made for the easterly set of the current?

There is a conflict of evidence on this point between the master and the second mate, the master stating that the course set was W.N.W. for one hour, and the second mate stating that it was W.½ S., and the second mate's statement is borne out by the scrap log.

The course set was a safe and proper one.

Proper and adequate allowance was made for the easterly set of the current.

7. For how long did the vessel continue on the course set when the Ile de Vierge was abeam, and what speed did she make good?

Was any alteration made in that course? If so, what was the alteration and when was it made? Was the course as altered a safe and proper one?

The vessel continued on the course of W.N.W. at full speed for one hour making 7½ miles, but there is no entry to this effect in the scrap logbook, and the Court doubts that this course was maintained for one hour. The evidence of the second mate was that W.N.W. was steered until the Vierge Light was abeam and then the course set W.½ S. magnetic. This is confirmed by the scrap log.

According to the master's evidence an alteration was made to the course at 11.20 p.m. G.M.T. to W.½ S., and this course as altered, was a safe and proper one.

8. Was there any, and if so what, change in the weather on the early morning of the 1st October. What steps were taken to deal with the altered weather conditions? Were such steps proper and adequate?

Yes. Fog set in at 1 a.m. G.M.T. The engines were put at "stand by" and the whistle sounded. The speed was reduced at 1.50 a.m.

The steps taken to deal with the altered weather conditions were not proper and adequate.

9. Were any soundings taken when the weather conditions altered? If not, should any soundings have been taken?

Soundings should have been taken, but were not taken.

10. Were any wireless bearings taken when the weather altered? If not, should such bearings have been taken?

Wireless bearings were not taken at the time that the weather altered, but as the vessel was approaching a dangerous coast, wireless bearings should have been taken shortly after the weather changed.

11. Was any object seen from the vessel before she struck? If so, what was the object, and when was it seen? What helm and engine action was taken after the object was seen? Was the action taken proper and sufficient in the circumstances?

Yes. A rock at 2.30 a.m. G.M.T. which was sighted to starboard. The vessel was stopped and turned to port through S.E. to N.N.E., the engines being used at various speeds as required. The action taken of turning the course to port was proper.

12. Was the wireless operator instructed to obtain a bearing from Ushant, and what bearing did he get?

Yes, he was instructed at 2.35 a.m. to get a bearing from Ushant. He got 110 degrees.

13. Were any other, and if so what, steps taken to obtain bearings? Were such steps adequate and proper, and were the bearings taken accurate?

Attempts were made to take bearings by sound from fog signals. The Court considers that such bearings are unreliable and inaccurate.

14. Was any alteration of the course and/or speed of the vessel made after the bearings were taken? If so, was the altered course and/or speed safe and proper in the circumstances?

The course was altered to S.W. by W., the master estimating that he was in the Passage du Fromveur, and the speed to slow and half speed, until 3.5 a.m. when the vessel struck. The altered course and speed were not proper.

15. What were the conditions of—

(a) the weather; and

(b) visibility

at the time when this alteration of course and/or speed was made?

(a) Light easterly;

(b) Foggy. Visibility about two ships' lengths.

16. When and where did the vessel strand?

At 3.5 a.m. on 1st October, 1933, at Les Remeurs, the latitude being 48° 25' 30" north and the longitude 4° 58' 30" west.

17. What was the cause of the stranding of the s.s. "Moorwood"?

The cause of the stranding of the vessel was the negligent navigation of the master in not taking soundings and not using his wireless to take bearings before he did, and his failure to exercise proper

supervision over the navigation of the vessel in not seeing that the courses laid down were maintained.

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

No.

19. Were all proper steps taken to attempt to save the vessel after she struck? What steps were taken to save her?

Yes. A wireless message was sent out for assistance and the salvage tug "Seefalke" arrived at 7.30 a.m., and, after carefully surveying the vessel and sending a diver down, it was found impossible to save the vessel.

20. Were the stranding and subsequent total loss of the s.s. "Moorwood" caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of William Pritchard Brown Storey, the master of the vessel?

Yes.

R. J. WILSON,	}	<i>Judges.</i>
ERNEST F. DIN,		
FRED. J. THOMPSON,	}	<i>Assessors.</i>
HENRY STOCKWELL,		

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on Tuesday, the 20th day of February 1934)

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