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THE MERCHANT SHIPPING ACT, 1894

REPORT OF COURT

(No. S.413)

s.t. "William Mannell" O.N. 144425

In the matter of a Formal Investigation held at Fleetwood on the 24th and 25th days of August, 1949, before R. F. Hayward, Esq., M.C., K.C., assisted by Captain J. W. Grimston, Captain C. V. Groves and F. Bee, Esq., into the circumstances attending the stranding and ultimate loss of the s.t. "William Mannell" off Dunmore Head on the 22nd February, 1949.

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 certificate of the skipper, Reuben John Melhuish, be suspended for six months from the 22nd February, 1949.

Dated this 25th day of August, 1949.

R. F. HAYWARD, Judge

We concur in the above Report,

CHARLES V. GROVES
JOHN WM. GRIMSTON
FELIX BEE

Assessors

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The Court's answers to the questions submitted by the Ministry of Transport are as follows:—

- Q. 1. By whom was the s.t. "William Mannell" owned?
- A. A. J. Marr & Son, Limited, of Fleetwood.
- Q. 2. Did the s.t. "William Mannell" sail from Fleetwood on a fishing voyage on 9th February, 1949?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 3. Was the s.t. "William Mannell" seaworthy when she sailed from Fleetwood on her last voyage?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 4. With what compasses was the s.t. "William Mannell" supplied, and where were they placed on board?
- A. Three magnetic compasses: standard compass, overhead steering compass in wheelhouse, hanging compass in skipper's berth.
- Q. 5. Were charts, sailing directions, Pilots and publications adequate for the voyage, supplied?
- A. West Coast Scotland Book Chart.
West Coast Ireland Book Chart.
Three Channel Book Charts.
Fleetwood to Rockall Sheet Chart.
Olsen's Almanack.
West Coast Scotland Pilot Book.
These were adequate for the voyage.
- Q. 6. On the last voyage was the s.t. "William Mannell" properly equipped with life-saving appliances?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 7. Did the s.t. "William Mannell" carry a crew of 13 persons all told?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 8. On the 21st February, 1949, whilst fishing on the Dubh Artach fishing grounds did the skipper of the "William Mannell" receive a gale warning and proceed to a small bay on the North Coast of Ireland near Glengad Head, and anchor in 7 fathoms about 200 yards off shore at about 2.30 p.m. on the same day?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 9. Had trouble been experienced with the steering gear whilst fishing on the fishing voyage which commenced at Fleetwood on the 9th February, 1949?
- A. Yes. Whilst fishing on the St. Kilda grounds the steering gear had jammed on three or four occasions, but was readily freed by giving the wheel a small turn in the reverse direction.
- Q. 10. At about 4 a.m. on the 22nd February, 1949, did skipper Reuben John Melhuish decide to leave his anchorage and proceed to sea, as the weather had improved?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 11. Did the skipper put the wheel hard aport and order half speed ahead as soon as he got a report that the anchor was aweigh?
- A. After putting the engines slow ahead to steam up to his anchor, and after receiving the report that the anchor was aweigh, the skipper, as he thought, put the wheel hard aport and rang his engine half speed ahead; in fact the wheel had jammed when only partly over to port.
- Q. 12. What was the wind, weather, sea and visibility at this time?
- A. The wind was strong from W.S.W. to W.N.W. with a slight swell, and visibility suddenly decreased to almost nil in a squall.
- Q. 13. Did the s.t. "William Mannell" ground on rocks very shortly after she was moved from the anchorage?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 14. What lookout was kept from the time the s.t. "William Mannell" moved from the anchorage to the time she struck?

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- A. The skipper, who was at the wheel in the wheel-house.
- Q. 15. Did the skipper cause the ship to be sounded and pumping started?
- A. No.
- Q. 16. Was the "William Mannell" abandoned, and how soon after she stranded, and how was the abandonment carried out?
- A. The ship was abandoned as soon as the boat could be got away, probably about half-an-hour after stranding.
- Q. 17. (a) Did the skipper and chief engineer return to the "William Mannell", and did the engineer succeed in getting on board?
- A. Yes.
- Q. (b) How long after the stranding was this?
- A. About 6.30 a.m.
- Q. 18. Did the "William Mannell" float off the rocks without assistance about 8 hours after she stranded?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 19. Did the skipper of the "William Mannell" and two deck hands return and go on board the "William Mannell" and take in the warps of s.t. "Gava" (a nearby trawler), and did the s.t. "Gava" commence to tow "William Mannell" for beaching in Culdaff Bay?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 20. Was anything attempted on board the "William Mannell" for the purpose of saving the ship other than the towing operation?
- A. No.
- Q. 21. Did the skipper of the "Gava" advise abandonment of the "William Mannell" at about 2.15 p.m., and was the tow continued with no one on board the "William Mannell"?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 22. Did the s.t. "William Mannell" sink in 14 fathoms about 3 miles east of Dunmore Head at about 3 p.m. on the 22nd February, 1949?
- A. Yes.
- Q. 23. What was the cause of the stranding of the s.t. "William Mannell"?
- A. The fact that, unknown to the skipper, the wheel was not hard aport as he thought from the time of weighing anchor.
- Q. 24. What was the cause of the sinking of the s.t. "William Mannell"?
- A. The fact that the ship floated off the rocks after being badly holed on them.
- Q. 25. Were all proper and seamanlike steps taken to protect and save the "William Mannell" from the moment she stranded?
- A. No.
- Q. 26. Was the stranding and/or the ultimate loss of the s.t. "William Mannell" caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of her skipper, Reuben John Melhuish?
- A. The stranding of the "William Mannell" was caused or contributed to by the wrongful act or default of her skipper, Reuben John Melhuish, but although proper steps were not taken for her subsequent safety, she would nevertheless have foundered.

ANNEX TO THE REPORT.

The "William Mannell" was a single screw steel trawler built in 1917 by Smith's Dock Company, Limited, and owned by Messrs. J. Marr & Son, Limited, of Fleetwood. She was of 275 tons gross, 125 feet 6 inches long, 23 feet beam and 13 feet depth, fitted with three watertight bulkheads, triple expansion engines and one cylindrical boiler, coal fired. Her

steering gear was hand gypsy rod and chain type. She was fitted with two stockless anchors, a kedge anchor, and 105 fathoms of anchor cable.

The "William Mannell" was equipped with radio telephone, direction finder, two echometers, and the usual hand leads. She had a standard compass, an overhead steering compass in the wheelhouse and a hanging compass in the skipper's berth. The two former had practically no deviation. She was fitted with appropriate life-saving appliances and the usual pumping arrangements.

The "William Mannell" sailed from Fleetwood on a fishing voyage on the 9th February, 1949, with adequate charts and navigational equipment, carrying a crew of 13 hands all told. On the 21st February, after fishing in the St. Kilda grounds, she took shelter about 200 yards off shore in 7 fathoms of water in Culdaff Bay to the southward of Glengad Head. On three or four occasions whilst fishing off the St. Kilda grounds her steering gear had jammed, but was readily freed by giving the wheel a small turn in the reverse direction. At about 4 a.m. on the 22nd February, the weather showing signs of improvement, the anchor was weighed with a view to continuing fishing. The skipper was on the bridge and the mate and two hands were weighing the anchor. On receiving a report that the anchor was aweigh, the skipper increased his speed from "slow" to "half ahead", and, as he thought, put the wheel hard aport and secured it with a becket. At about this time a heavy squall reduced visibility to practically nil.

After securing the wheel, the skipper looked out ahead, and on returning looked at the compass and found that the ship had turned only about three points to port, a much less turn than that to be anticipated with hard aport wheel, and as he was about to ring the engines to "stop" the vessel stranded on the rocks, taking a list to port, and there remained. The engines were put full speed astern for a few minutes without result, and steps were taken to put the boat into the water. This was done with difficulty. A neighbouring steam trawler at anchor, the "Gava", hearing the S.O.S. whistles from the "William Mannell", launched her boat which proceeded to her, and the skipper and crew of the latter abandoned their vessel and proceeded to the "Gava" in these two boats. No steps were taken to sound the trawler's compartments or to start her pumps. It was said that this would have necessitated going to the forward end of the stokehold, which could not be done owing to the list to port, which had heavily increased.

Some two hours after the stranding, the skipper and chief engineer proceeded to the "William Mannell" in a small shore boat which had come out. The chief engineer, being more agile, was able to clamber aboard by means of the overhanging derrick. He went round the ship and found that the engineroom was pretty dry, there was no water in the bunkers, but the water in the fish hatch was at sea level and there was no water showing down the forepeak hatch or the fore hold hatch, and the dynamo was still running slowly.

Meanwhile the shore boat took the skipper back to the "Gava", and on returning to the "William Mannell" refused to wait around, and proceeded ashore with the chief engineer. At about 12.15 p.m. the "William Mannell" refloated on the rising tide. She had stranded at about half ebb and floated off at about half flood. After refloating the "William Mannell" retained some port list, but was much down by the head and was continuing to fill with water. The "Gava" went alongside her and temporarily breasted to her whilst her towing warps were made fast forward on the sinking ship. The "Gava" attempted to tow her to the nearest beach in Culdaff Bay. One tow warp carried away and was replaced, but very slow progress was made and at about 2.30 p.m. those remaining on the "William Mannell" were advised to return to the "Gava", which they did. The towage was continued, but at about 3 p.m., the "William

Mannell" listed to port and sank by the head in a position about two-and-a-half miles to the east of Dunmore Head in about 14 fathoms of water.

The Court is of opinion that, having regard to his proximity to the shore, and to the fact that his steering gear had on this voyage given trouble and that he had no lookout man with him on the bridge, the skipper was lacking in seamanlike care in proceeding at half-speed ahead under, as he thought, hard aport wheel when the visibility became nil. The Court is also of opinion that he should have re-anchored and waited for better visibility, particularly as he had no-one on the bridge to assist him in the navigation. Had he had a lookout man there he would have earlier appreciated that his ship was not turning to port as quickly as expected, and that she was in great danger.

The Court is of opinion that, after stranding, steps should have been taken to maintain steam and to operate the pumps. It is, however, satisfied that even had this been done the ship would still have sunk within three or four hours after refloating, and no fault can be found with the praiseworthy efforts made by the "Gava" to beach her.

The Court recommends that the skipper's certificate be suspended for six months from the date of the casualty, and it makes no order as to costs.

R. F. HAYWARD, Judge

CHARLES V. GROVES
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