

SYNOPSIS

(all times are UTC)

At 0208 on 18 March 1999, the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB), was informed by HM Coastguard that a ferry had grounded in Plymouth Sound the previous day. An investigation began later that day and was conducted by MAIB inspector Captain Nick Beer.

The ferry *Quiberon*, which is owned and operated by Brittany Ferries, left her Mill Bay berth at Plymouth at 2330 on Wednesday 17 March, for a scheduled sailing to Roscoff, France. The weather was fine with a gentle north-north-westerly breeze and good visibility. Low water was predicted to occur at 0004 and it was a period of spring tides. As the vessel rounded Drake's Island in Plymouth Sound, the master, who had the con, decided to pass to the west of Melampus buoy to give greater clearance to two anchored vessels.

The change in plan was neither communicated to the chief officer, who was also on the bridge, nor carefully considered. The passage to the west of the buoy, between it and dangerously shallow water, was, at best, only 80m wide. The master was navigating mainly by eye and the chief officer was not monitoring the vessel's progress against a passage plan.

The manoeuvre was misjudged and the vessel grounded on Pilot Shoal. She was successfully refloated about an hour later and was able to return to her berth under her own power. She had sustained only superficial damage and was able to resume her schedule later on 18 March.

The investigation has highlighted shortfalls in the bridge team management and passage planning on board *Quiberon* and an appropriate recommendation is made to Brittany Ferries.