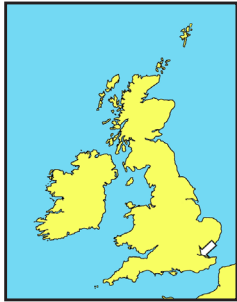


## SYNOPSIS



Late in the evening of 17 August 2008, a passenger fell into the River Thames and died as he was attempting to disembark from the passenger vessel *Hurlingham* onto Westminster Pier after an evening party.

*Hurlingham* was secured to Westminster pier using one mooring line at the bow, and the skipper had left the wheelhouse unattended with the engine in gear while he attended to the bar account and tidied up after the party. The stern of the boat drifted away from the pier, and the mate moved from his position on the pier, supervising the passengers disembarking, to manoeuvre the boat back alongside and attach two more mooring lines. No gangway was used and passengers were allowed to continue disembarking unsupervised while the boat was put back into position.

Shortly after the stern was brought back into the pier, a gap opened up between the front of the boat and pier at the point where passengers were disembarking. One passenger stepped forward and fell into the gap. Despite an extensive search, he could not be found and his body was recovered further downriver on 22 August 2008. A postmortem determined cause of death to be '*drowning in the presence of alcohol intoxication*'.

The investigation found that: the skipper was distracted from his primary responsibilities of ensuring the safety of the vessel and passengers, by other duties concerning the running of the licensed bar and by tidying up after the party; the vessel was not adequately secured; and the mate had left his position, supervising and assisting passengers, to reposition, and secure the boat. Also, the vessel's safety management system was poor, with ineffective emergency drills, flawed risk assessments and inadequate procedures for mooring and passenger disembarkation.

The owners have, during the course of the investigation, made a number of improvements to their safety management system. The Port of London Authority (PLA), in partnership with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), London River Services (LRS) and the Passenger Boat Association, has developed a Code of Practice for Passenger Vessel Operations on the River Thames which provides detailed guidance to operators to supplement regulations in the Domestic Passenger Ships Safety Management Code (DSMC).

In a safety bulletin, issued shortly after the accident, MAIB recommended that the MCA and LRS took urgent action to satisfy themselves that Class V passenger vessels operating on the River Thames had effective systems in place to ensure their safe operation. In addition, the MCA has been recommended to improve the guidance available to operators for complying with the DSMC; and to improve the targeting of inspections on the operation of these vessels. LRS has also been recommended to assess the risks associated with the movement and control of passengers on its piers at night. A number of detailed recommendations have been made to the owners of *Hurlingham* on aspects of their safety management system, conduct of crew and arrangements for passenger access.