

SYNOPSIS

Shortly after 1730 on 16 December 1999 the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) Yarmouth informed the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) that a dinghy with two people on board was overdue on a passage from Burnham Overy Staithe to Wells-next-the-Sea. Later that evening the MAIB was informed that one body had been located. An investigation was initiated the next day and was conducted by the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents, Rear Admiral John Lang.

At approximately 1130 on 16 December 1999, two men manning an open 4.26m (14ft) dinghy, *Samphire of Wells*, left Burnham Overy Staithe on the north Norfolk coast for the 6½ mile passage to Wells harbour. The weather was fine, it was sunny, there was a light to moderate westerly breeze, and high water neaps was predicted shortly before noon. The object of the passage was to take the dinghy to Wells to do some work on it and lay it up for the winter. It had spent the previous few weeks in Burnham Overy harbour.

The dinghy never arrived at Wells. During the early afternoon the partner of one of the occupants became concerned when it didn't appear, and raised the alarm. A search and rescue operation was initiated and at 1850 the Wells RNLI all-weather lifeboat (ALB) found the body of one of the two men floating upright in a pool among shoal water to the west of the Wells harbour channel. He was wearing a fully inflated lifejacket. When eventually landed, he was seen by a doctor and declared dead on arrival.

The second man was found dead 6 days later in the sea some 7 miles to the north of Cromer. He too was wearing a fully inflated lifejacket.

There were no witnesses to the accident. Although one or two pieces of wreckage were found and were thought to have come from the missing dinghy, this could not be proved beyond doubt. Neither the dinghy, nor its remains, have ever been found.

The precise cause of the loss cannot be determined with accuracy. The investigation concludes that the dinghy most probably foundered while making the short open sea passage between Burnham Overy harbour and the entrance to Wells harbour.

The report makes recommendations to improve the chances of survival for occupants of small boats who find themselves thrown into the water.