

QE2 – End of an Era

In 1969, I was serving in *HMS Andromeda* as the Signal Communications Officer, the last frigate to be built in Portsmouth Dockyard. Whilst doing our sea trials off Portland we came across the QE2 who was doing her engine trials and we exchanged signals on how elegant each ship looked. Little did I realise that almost 40 years later I would be joining her on her penultimate cruise before becoming a hotel in Dubai.



16 months after booking the trip the day finally arrived and off Beryl and I set on Monday 27 October at 2.30pm to join the ship in Southampton. It took us all of 20 minutes to arrive at the QE2 Terminal and the efficiency of the Cunard organisation soon had us in our cabin, or stateroom, as they are called in cruise ships. Having served for 39 years in the “grey funnel line” (Royal Navy ships), the spacious ‘*ensuite*’ cabin was really something with a steward from the Philippines to look after us.

At 4.15pm all passengers repaired to their muster stations for lifeboat and security briefings before the ship sailed at 5pm to the sounds of “*Anchors Away*”, “*Rule Britannia*”, “*Land of Hope and Glory*” and to Beryl’s delight, Frank Sinatra singing “*My Way*”. These were played when departing from most ports and Beryl found it very moving.

At 7pm it was off to dinner in an elegant restaurant with a waiter from Mauritius and a waiter from India to serve our table during the cruise, with a couple from Holmer Green in Buckinghamshire and a couple from Ryton, just outside of Newcastle, and ourselves. The two other couples were on their third cruise in the QE2 – this was our first and last!

We chose to go on the QE2 to make our 50th wedding anniversary a special year to remember.

All 856 cabins were occupied among the 1,720 passengers from 19 different nationalities with 1,005 crew members from 50 different nationalities.

A fast moving musical show that ‘*visited*’ many European countries ended a great first day in the QE2 as we headed for the Bay of Biscay – there was at least one show and film screening every night. There were three girls from the Ukraine – playing the violin, cello and piano – that gave classical concerts and played at a Viennese afternoon tea - they were brilliant. There was a long swell as we crossed the Bay and with the ship steaming at 28 knots into a force 7 we soon got our ‘*sea legs*’.

Whilst at sea, the routine revolves around meal times; breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and midnight buffet. The food was absolutely superb - you can eat and drink all day if you want and can shred the pounds put on in the gym, swimming, walking/jogging around the boat deck (5 times around equals one mile) and going on the dance floor in the evening. When not in port, there are the most interesting lectures (places visiting and the history) and talks (on pearls, opals, tanzanite’s), activities (yoga, Pilates, dance classes), demonstrations (cooking, reflexology), games (upper and below decks), and much more, that caters for all tastes. You can never be bored – you can participate in one of the organised functions or just relax in one of the lounges or on deck when the weather is fine. We soon settled in and from my perspective it was great being at sea again, particularly as there were no watches to keep or work involved – just being waited upon!

There was antiseptic hand wash throughout the ship – just like in a hospital – to stop anyone getting or spreading Novo virus. This keeps your hands clean and soft. Should there be any sign of the virus a passenger is normally confined to their cabin for 24 - 48 hours.

Passenger comfort is of the utmost importance and the waiters in the restaurants and the

stewards in your cabin are meticulous in their duties. The food was exquisite with an extensive menu and the cabin was kept spotless with all towels being changed twice a day and sheets changed every day.

There were many disabled people with wheel chairs who were being looked after by their carers and whose requirements were catered for.

On the Tuesday, Beryl and I were presented with a commemorative QE2 lapel pin (which promises to be a highly collectable item!) by Commodore Ron Warwick who became the permanent senior master onboard QE2 in 1996 and is now an Honorary President of the Reader Offers Cruise Club.



The cruise took us to Lisbon (the ship sailed 11 miles up the Tagus River and berthed opposite 'Christ the Redeemer' that faces the city with outstretched arms reminding us that there is more than casual kinship between Lisbon and Brazilian sister Rio de Janeiro), Cagliari, Naples, Messina, Dubrovnik, Zakynthos, Piraeus (for Athens), Gibraltar and Vigo. We went on excursions in Naples and Athens and ashore for a walk around at the other places – the ship was at anchor at Dubrovnik and Zakynthos and we went ashore by the QE2's tenders (they even provided orange juice and iced water on the jetty for passengers).

We had five formal evenings that coincided with a Black & White Ball, the Captain's Cocktail Party, a Nautical Ball and a Masquerade Ball. The ladies looked glamorous in their fine dresses. Single ladies were looked after by male dancing escorts at the balls and dance evenings.

The 31st was Beryl's birthday and she opened up her cards (which I had saved for her), including a card from the Captain, Ian McNaught. Beryl loves pink roses so I made sure she had them throughout the cruise – no doubt she loved all the fuss! At dinner she received a nice surprise when the waiters surrounded the table and sang "Happy Birthday" and gave her a birthday cake with Beryl written on. That evening we had a Halloween Ball – did you know Beryl was a witch? - but a very lovely one.

On 9 November there was a moving Remembrance Sunday service in the Theatre. There must have been almost 500 people attending as the theatre holds 400 and there were many people standing in the theatre and outside. At 11am, everyone went to the quarterdeck when the Red Ensign was lowered to half mast and there was a two minute silence. That evening at dinner the stewards and chefs did a 'Baked Alaska Parade' and there was a 'Gala Midnight Feast' – the food was unbelievable.

Sadly on 10 November, we packed our clothes, left them outside our cabin to be collected during the night for landing when we arrived at Southampton, which should have been at 6am. However, the ship was blown off course by strong winds and ran aground at 5.30am on the Brambles sand bank and had to be pulled clear by five tugs, eventually arriving alongside at 7.40am.

After breakfast on the 11th we disembarked at 10.20am, collected our luggage and car and arrived home an hour later.

We now have some really wonderful memories of the QE2 - it ended a golden wedding anniversary year to remember - we are now looking forward to our next cruise in one of the Queen's!



It was amazing the love and affection the passengers and the crew had of this wonderful ship – it truly is an end of an era.

Colin Carter

