

## Queen Mary 2 – Cruise to the Mediterranean

Having encouraged parishioners to write about their travels for *“Faith Matters”* I thought I had to do some writing myself after our cruise in the Queen Mary 2 (QM2) to the Mediterranean and give readers an insight to cruising in the Cunard flagship.

Last year, Beryl and I went on the penultimate cruise in the QE2 before she sailed to become a permanent hotel in Dubai – see the January 2009 edition of *“Faith Matters”*. However, these plans are on hold due to the world economic downturn and she may sail to Cape Town to provide additional hotel accommodation for the Football World Cup in South Africa starting in June 2010.

Having enjoyed the QE2 so much we embarked in the QM2 on 14 September 2009 for a cruise to the Mediterranean.



Our taxi soon had us at the Ocean Cruise Terminal in Southampton – there are no restrictions on how much luggage you can take so it was nice for Beryl to be able to take lots of clothes for all occasions! Whilst waiting to check in we met Sandra and Bob from Washington State, USA, who knew the town of Snohomish and the children’s choir that had sung so beautifully in St. Faith’s Church on 10 July. We saw them a few times on the cruise and on one occasion we asked Bob if he was enjoying himself and he said *“So much so that Sandra is e-mailing our daughter to sell the house as we are moving on to the Queen Mary 2”*! It is such a great ship so it was quite understandable how our American friends felt. In fact, it is a floating 5-star hotel with 1,310

staterooms – the food, personnel, décor, staterooms, restaurants, organisation, shows, dancing, arrangements, and everything else, are all superb. Onboard were 2,599 passengers (1,327 from the UK, 686 Americans, 292 Canadians, 54 Chinese and 36 other nationalities), with 1,241 crew (690 from the Philippines, 106 from the UK, 68 from India, 44 South Africans and 48 other nationalities). It is a large ship with a lot of people but one did not get the impression at any time that it was crowded. One of the nicest things we found was meeting and talking to people and having a laugh over trivial incidents.

We were soon on board in our stateroom (cabin) and met Adrian our steward from the Philippines. Historically, in cruise liners, it is called a stateroom after the paddle steamers on the Mississippi who called the cabins by the names of the US States. After emergency drills, we enjoyed the complimentary bottle of champagne on our balcony as the QM2 sailed on a warm, clear evening under the command of Commodore Bernard Warner through the Solent with a lovely view of Carisbrooke Castle. At dinner, we met two lovely couples who would be our companions for evening meals during the cruise; Frank and Laura from Norfolk, Virginia, USA and Norma and Brian from Northampton. We also met our waiters Albert and Clark from the Philippines and our wine waiter Krishna from India who would be looking after us.

The cruise took us to Lisbon, Gibraltar, and to four other ports, all within a contiguous day’s sailing - Civitavecchia (the port for Rome), Livorno (the main port in Tuscany for Florence and Pisa), Monte Carlo (the main port in Monaco) and Barcelona.

The 12-day cruise consisted of 6 days in port and 6 days at sea, with 5 formal nights, 3 semi-formal and 4 elegant casual. The formal evenings coincided with a Black & White Ball, a Masquerade Ball, a Buccaneer Ball and a Royal Ascot Ball when the ladies could show off their beautiful dresses and gowns – and wear hats for Ascot!

There is always a very full programme when the ship is at sea that caters for all tastes in which one can participate or just relax on a sun bed on deck – you name it, they have it onboard, including a Spa, a gym, the largest library afloat, a Fine Art Gallery, a Flower Shop, Mayfair Shops, a Casino, a Planetarium, an Internet Centre, and much more. There are 8 separate restaurants to meet all tastes and a typical English Pub for the likes of bangers & mash and fish & chips. It is quite easy for your routine to revolve around meals as food is available at all times, with a white glove afternoon tea service being a favourite where one was entertained by a harpist, pianist and a string quartet. There are also 12 separate areas for having a drink. Apart from the gym and swimming, you can jog around the boat deck to shred all the pounds put on by eating. Three times round is 1.1 mile (in the QE2 it was 5 times around) – there were joggers, walkers and strollers – Beryl & I were the latter! We had some interesting speakers on astronomy; on our destinations; a QC on criminology; on the arts; and a salvage expert that gave very interesting talks on the “*Loss of the Russian Submarine KURSK*”. There were performances by *The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA)* and one we particularly enjoyed was “*Under Milk Wood*” by Dylan Thomas. Every evening there was a spectacular show with the *Royal Cunard Singers & Dancers* who would grace any west-end stage and included a ‘*Tribute to Sting*’ (David McLaine), a magician (Philip Hitchcock), a virtuoso flautist (Bettine Clemen), a really funny Irish comedian (Adrian Walsh), a violinist (Chris Watkins) and an opera singer (Annette Wardell). There was Ballroom and Latin Dancing every night, separate entertainment by a string quartet, harp melodies, classical concerts, piano playing, jazz, a Caribbean band, a DJ in the nightclub and a film. When sailing from each port there was always a ‘*sail-away party*’ with the Caribbean band and the QM2 orchestra on the Terrace Bar which is on the upper deck. As one would expect from a ship that is just five years old, it caters for the disabled person and there are plenty of facilities onboard and arrangements made for coach tours and getting ashore on the tenders. There are gentlemen escorts for ladies on their own who enjoy dancing and also a Solo Club for unaccompanied persons to meet.

There was a daily Catholic Mass onboard but sadly no Anglican service. Apparently, Cunard has to provide a Catholic priest because of the large number of crew members from the Philippines on board.

Should you wish to participate in activities there were watercolour art classes, bridge classes, lessons in the casino games, dance classes, needlework & knitting, computer classes, scarf tying, make up and beauty classes, napkin folding, line dancing classes, book club, board games, jigsaw puzzles and cookery demonstrations, to name but a few. There was also a *Karaoke* on some nights in the Golden Lion Pub where we went to support our American friend Frank who loved singing – needless to say Beryl and I did not join in!

On the second day we crossed the Bay of Biscay on a calm sea and went to the Commodore’s cocktail party in the evening. The next morning we sailed up the River Tagus passing *Christ the Redeemer* to our berth. We went ashore and walked around a very large marina with plenty of eating places. Thursday, we anchored in Gibraltar Bay, went ashore by tender and then on to the Italian port of Civitavecchia arriving on Saturday. We took a coach tour to Rome to get an insight to the city as we had not been there before. The 1½ hour drive was on a fast motorway and one could not help but think of the Roman soldiers marching years ago across this pleasant countryside. The tour pointed out many of the usual tourist attractions and we were told the historical past of the old buildings. Our Italian guide found it strange that many countries had two embassy’s in Rome – one for Italy and one for the Vatican and the fact that the Pope was also the Bishop of Rome. We did not toss a coin into the Fontana del Trevi, so I guess we will not be returning to Rome!



At Livorno we took a very pleasant 30-minute coach ride through avenues of umbrella pine trees to Pisa where we transferred to a trolley train to the Miracle Square (*Piazzadei Miracoli*) to see the Baptistery (*Battistero*), Cathedral (*Duomo*)

and the Leaning Tower (*cathedral's bell tower*) with a knowledgeable Italian lady as our guide.

We arrived in Monte Carlo just as the sun was rising and it looked very picturesque with many yachts in the anchorage. The yachts had taken up all the available anchorage so the QM2 had to remain underway for the day. This was not a problem but probably expensive, as the ship has a very modern propulsion system which gives her plenty of manoeuvrability and control. Instead of conventional propellers connected through long shafts to the engines, QM2's propellers are driven by four pods, or electric motors attached to the underside of the hull. - the propellers are used for propulsion and steering the ship – there are no rudders. The propellers pull the ship through the water rather than the conventional pushing. The marina was full of expensive yachts but very little else in the way of restaurants or shops – in fact I thought the marina at Port Solent was much more pleasant!

On to Barcelona - this is a clean, modern and busy container port. Ashore we went into the centre and soaked up the atmosphere along the wide avenues and artists.

Although passengers are not permitted on the bridge, the QM2 has a viewing area behind the bridge so you can see the modern technology there is with plenty of monitors to look at. Even the navigation charts are computerised – a bit different to what I remember when taking a sun sight with a sextant at noon to find the ship's position accurately and plotting it on a paper navigational chart with ruler and pencil on an open, and sometimes a very wet, bridge – no Global Positioning System (GPS) -'satnav' - then! It was different in Nelson's day too!!

We have been asked which ship we liked the most, the QE2 or the QM2. Both were different – one an old lady of 40 years coming to the end of her service; the other a very young and modern 5 years old. Both cruises were unique to Beryl and I and both were enjoyed exactly the same but for different reasons. However, the QE2 did look more like a cruise ship and she had a more distinguished siren.



Beryl and I came on the QM2 for rest and relaxation, but we were up early to see the ship enter port and went to bed way past our usual time. Not one page of the book each of us took was read – there was so much to do and observe.

Cunard prides itself on a White Star Service in making sure that passengers are looked after and it certainly excelled itself on this voyage. **Colin Carter**

