

**INSIDE VIEW:**

# ON THE GREAT QUEENS

**A conversation with Queen Mary 2  
Hotel Manager John Duffy**

by

**Richard H. Wagner**

**J**ohn Duffy has had a remarkable career during which he has been associated with some of the most famous ships ever to sail. Indeed, Mr. Duffy became the Hotel Manager of the Queen Elizabeth 2 in 1981 and for some 28 years was not only a witness to that ship's legendary career but as one of the ship's most senior officers, a key figure in helping to shape it. Today, he is the Hotel Manager of the Queen Mary 2, in charge of the accommodations, entertainment, dining and other hotel services on what he describes as "the greatest ship in the world."

Despite having received recognition such as the Merchant Navy Medal for distinguished service and been voted "Seagoing Employee of the Year" by the Seatrade Conference in 2008, Duffy remains friendly and personable. Although some 900 crew members are in his chain of command, he downplays the importance of his role saying: "You have to have good heads of department - - the entertainment director, the food and

beverage manager, the executive housekeeper, the chief purser - - without them the job would be a lot harder. . I am very fortunate to have good people in all those positions."

### *The Ocean Liner Era*

**I**n 1965, Mr. Duffy decided on a life at sea and joined Cunard Line. His first ship was the original Queen Elizabeth (83,673 gross tons), then the largest ocean liner in the world and along with her fleetmate the Queen Mary, the most famous ship of her day.

Unfortunately, not long afterwards, Mr. Duffy's father passed away and he had to return home to Liverpool. Since the Queen Elizabeth's homeport was Southampton, Duffy would not have had much opportunity to go home if he returned to that ship once his leave was over. Accordingly, Cunard assigned him to one of

its ships that sailed from Liverpool on a regular basis. "I have always thought that Cunard was a wonderful company to work for and that was the first thing that made me stand up and say 'this is a good company!'"

The ship Duffy was assigned to was one of Cunard's smaller liners, the Carinthia (21,947 gross tons), which sailed transatlantic from Liverpool to Montreal. Later, he served on the Carmania (21,637 gross tons) and then on the Franconia (21,717 gross tons) before returning to the Queen Elizabeth for her final few voyages.

Life at sea in that era was much different than life on the passenger ships of today. "The Cunard liners of that period were class ships. The old Queens had three classes - - first class, cabin class and tourist class. The smaller ships such as the Carinthia had two classes - - first and tourist. They were very much class ships with the first class dining room, the tourist class dining room and so on and so forth. But I think they were very happy ships."

"People were traveling in those days to go from A to B for a reason. It was not necessarily a holiday although there were lots of people going to the United States on holiday or to Canada. But a lot of people were re-locating or on business trips. Of course, there were a lot of embassy people, political figures - - they were from all walks of life. They all had a story to tell."

"You didn't have all the activities that [you have today]. In fact, there was no such thing as cruise staff. [On transatlantic crossings] there was no entertainment director, the purser did the entertainment. The only time you had an entertainment director was when the ship went cruising. In the winter sometimes, they would do a few cruises - - maybe three weeks when they would be off the North Atlantic. Then you would have an entertainment director and cruise staff."

#### *A Legendary Era*

**I**n the late 1960s, Cunard placed an order for a new superliner to replace the aging Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary. This ship became the Queen Elizabeth 2 or QE2 as she is still affectionately known (originally 65,863 gross tons). Mr. Duffy joined QE2 in late 1968 when the ship was still in the builder's shipyard. "I did the very first voyage of the QE2 and of course, the very last one of the QE2 many years later."

"Times had changed and the ship was built differently from the old Queens although she was built as a transatlantic liner. She was a very well-built ship, built in the same shipyard up in the Clyde as the old Queens."

"She was originally built as a three class ship but she came out as a two class ship. There was only



*John Duffy.*

first and tourist class on the QE2 when she came out."

The class system meant that there was two of everything on the original QE2. "The Queens Room was originally the first class lounge. The Grand Lounge, which originally was called the Double Up and the Double Down Rooms, [was] the tourist class lounge. In fact, Quarter Deck was really the first class deck and Upper Deck was the tourist class deck. You used to have two libraries amazingly enough [- - one for first class and one for tourist class]."

"Over the years [the class system] gradually died out. Probably in the early 90's instead of two classes, it became a question of you dine in the restaurant which was assigned to [your] cabin. What they did then was they made the newly-named Grand Lounge the show lounge for everybody and the Queens Room became the dancing and afternoon tea lounge for everybody. Although having said that, the Grill passengers did have their own afternoon tea up in the Grill lounge."

QE2 evolved and changed continuously over her career. "It very quickly became evident that things they thought they would introduce in those days such as a coffee shop where you buy food weren't working.





*Queen Mary 2*

Funnily enough, these days ships do have them. Fifty years on, it is working on ships. But in those days, it didn't and so the coffee shop was quickly closed down."

"There was a nightclub [on Boat Deck], the 736 Club, and that was quickly changed into a casino but it was really too high up on the ship. When we put the penthouses on the QE2, they converted that into the Queens Grill. Where the coffee shop had been they converted into the Queens Grill kitchen."

Not long after QE2 entered service, she found herself the only ocean liner making transatlantic crossings on a regular basis. Jet air travel had arrived and the other ocean liners had been either taken out of service or converted into cruise ships. Looking for a way to grow, Cunard looked to mass market cruising.

"In [the early 1970s], the company brought out two small cruise ships just for the Caribbean. The first was the Cunard Adventurer and Cunard Ambassador was the second. I was asked to go to the Cunard Adventurer and made the maiden voyage there. After about six months, I was taken off and sent to Rotterdam to bring out Cunard Ambassador. They were very happy little ships in the Caribbean but they didn't last too long."

"After they had gone, the company brought out the Cunard Countess (17,495 gross tons) and the Cunard Princess (17,496 gross tons). I went to Ls Sperzia, Italy for about six months while the Cunard Princess was finishing off." In fact, Duffy was first promoted to Hotel Manager on Cunard Princess.

"They were very much built as small cruise ships - - just one class vessels with one restaurant with two seatings. Basically, they were built as island-hopping ships as indeed many of the Caribbean cruise ships are."

"They were not built in the Cunard tradition. Both of those sets of ships - - the Cunard Ambassador/Cunard Adventurer and the Cunard Princess/Cunard Countess - - were both planned and started by somebody else. Cunard bought into them [after] the planning stage. So, they were not Cunard designed ships. But they did a job and were very popular, especially the Cunard Princess/Cunard Countess, which were extremely popular in the Caribbean. But then I think that was not so much the ships as the people who were manning them, the Cunard staff."

In fact, Mr. Duffy sees the relationship between the Cunard staff and the passengers as an important asset, which helped Cunard to survive during the transition from the ocean liner era to today's passenger ship industry. "We have so many repeat passengers on Cunard Line - - they feel like they are coming home when they come back. They know the staff generally, not just the officers. They know the waiters, the head waiters, the restaurant managers and the bedroom staff. The passengers also expect to see this particular person on a particular ship and they look forward to it. The passengers like to come back to the same family. There is this great rapport between the crew of the ship and the passengers that I think is unique to Cunard and



that is why I think we have such a tremendous repeat clientele."

### *A Legend for Today*

Following Carnival Corporation's acquisition of Cunard in 1997, work began on a new ocean liner, one that was larger than any before. The Queen Mary 2 (150,000 gross tons) debuted in 2004. Mr. Duffy is now her hotel manager and although his name will always be associated with QE2, he has nothing but admiration for QM2.

"This ship differs from QE2. 40 years have elapsed [since QE2 was built]. There are a lot of new things out there and also a lot of new regulations. [However, QM2] is built as a liner and she is very elegant. She keeps that [Cunard] tradition - - the Grill rooms, the Queens Room and such like that. I think while she is different than the QE2, she does carry the same traditions QE2 carried and also the old Queens. But she is very much up-to-date and is absolutely incredible."

"I think the Queen Mary 2 has the finest facilities of any ship that has ever been built. She really is wonderful. I am not talking just about the front of the house but the back of the house from a management point of view. She has so many wonderful facilities back of the house, it makes it so much easier to actually run the ship and obviously these facilities pay dividends in the front of the house in what the passengers receive."

Consequently, he has no problem explaining why people should select QM2 for their holiday. "I think they should pick Queen Mary 2 because she is indeed the greatest ship in the world. She has the greatest tradition in the world and I do believe we have very wonderful service onboard, superb staff. She is, of course, the most prestigious ship in the world. There is not another ship in the world that has a million people turn out to see her as she goes into Hamburg. When we go into ports in Australia and around the world, thousands upon thousands of people turn out to see her. That only happens with the Queen Mary 2 as indeed it did with the QE2. So, I think quite honestly that the heritage of the Queen liners makes her extremely special. I think everyone has to travel on the Queen Mary 2."

People who are new to ocean travel and even experienced cruisers sometimes express hesitation about doing a transatlantic crossing because there are no port days during the voyage and they are concerned that they might become bored. "A lot of people have said that to me before they have done a transatlantic crossing. A lot of those people did try one because I asked them to and at the end, every one of them, without fail, has said:

"Thank you for making me do that. It was wonderful! And it is. It is something special. It is something different. It is something traditional. It is part of history and it is something everybody should do. I always say that everybody should do a transatlantic crossing on this ship. It is something that has been going on for 150 years and Queen Mary 2 is the only ship still doing it."

Another concern sometimes expressed about QM2 is based on the belief that Queen Mary 2 is a two class ship and thus passengers will be segregated like those in the movie "Titanic" Mr. Duffy who spent much of his career on ships that really had class systems points out that this concern is based on an erroneous premise. "Queen Mary 2 is not a two class ship, definitely not. We do have the Princess Grill and the Queens Grill and the passengers who dine in them are the ones in the higher category cabins but it is certainly not two classes. All the public rooms are open to everybody. The Grill rooms do have a little lounge for pre-dinner cocktails but outside of that the ship is open to everybody."

While Cunard honors tradition, even in her short career thus far Queen Mary 2 has continually evolved. For example, the entertainment and enrichment programs continue to grow with additions such as recitals and workshops with jazz musicians from the Julliard School and lectures in the ship's Planetarium by members of the Royal Astronomical Society. "Life itself evolves and Queen Mary 2 is part of life and so it naturally evolves. I think as time goes on things do change. People's tastes change, new things come in, old things go out and unless you evolved you would be static and you would get nowhere. I think it has to evolve."