

# MAIDEN VOYAGE OF THE QUEEN MARY

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Heather Beagley, Bronze

Living until 98 I have been so fortunate. Not only did I live in Paris and Singapore, visiting many other countries, but I was on the MAIDEN VOYAGE OF THE QUEEN MARY in 1936 and that was the most inspiring trip of my life.

At a time of unemployment, and owing to a shortage of money, the first stages of building the ship were much delayed. At last in 1936, it was ready to sail.

My father had to book places on board months in advance as so many people yearned to be passengers. Permission had to be sought for me to be absent from school for a fortnight and to our relief my headmistress said 'lucky girl! It will be an education in itself!' So it was! My brother could not accompany us as he was taking his finals in Classics at Oxford.

Everyone in Bristol envied us and friends drove down to Southampton to wave us off. Before setting foot on this prestigious ship I was amazed at the sight of it, towering above us as we approached, all 81,000 tons.

My parents had a first-class cabin while I was in second class, sharing with three other young women. Of course, I sat with my parents in the magnificent dining-room, walls lined with beautiful wood and with its superb lighting. In the centre of our table was always a bowl of red roses and the meals, of many courses, were varied and delicious.

How did I pass my time? There were all sorts of deck games, though very few people my age to play them. Most days I went to the cinema. Films were all the rage in the 1930s and there were five stars on board including Jack Buchanan (nearly always drunk), Olivia de Havilland and Frances Day. I enjoyed reading from a selection of books in the library.

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In the evening there was dancing to the famous Henry Hall's Dance Band in the big ballroom. Via friends we were introduced to Jack, aged 42. Although so much older than me he danced with me every night. How lucky I was! One night when I was almost asleep I heard one of my companions say "How did that young girl find a gigolo when we can't." Next day I asked my mother what 'gigolo' meant. She replied 'A polite gentleman who loves dancing'!

After four days and a scare about an iceberg looming too close, we arrived in New York. All the big liners were competing for what was known as 'The Blue Riband' for the swiftest crossing of the Atlantic. Some people were disappointed that the Queen Mary did not beat the record but the answer was they did not try as the ship had to be run in like a new car.

The welcome in New York was astounding! Aeroplanes flew overhead, ships hooted and sprayed water, VIPS came out in little boats to greet us and crowds lined the quays to welcome us.