



CUNARD'S 'QUEENS' AND THE 1960s

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By the 1960s, it was evident that air travel was in the ascendant. The days of crossing the ocean by ship were coming to a close as passengers increasingly chose the faster aeroplanes, the North Atlantic ferry giving way to cruising. Frequently, it is said that the Cunard 'Queens' (*Queen Mary* and *Queen Elizabeth*) were 'ghost ships' and often sailed with as few as two hundred passengers. The purpose of this short page is to provide a few figures which help to highlight that these liners were still popular:

Right: In the post-war years and sea travel faced stiffer competition from the air, Cunard advertised on the slogan that 'getting there is half the fun!' (J. Kent Layton Collection)



Mark Chirnside's Reception Room

	<i>Queen Mary</i>			<i>Queen Elizabeth</i>		
	Passengers carried	Number of Crossings	Average Passenger List	Passengers carried	Number of crossings	Average Passenger List
1956	61,954	44	1,408	73,875	44	1,679
1957	58,193	42	1,386	68,719	44	1,562
1958	54,928	40	1,373	69,806	44	1,587
1959	52,293	43	1,216	65,722	47	1,398
1960	49,440	42	1,177	61,323	44	1,394
1961	47,032	44	1,069	56,048	44	1,274
1962	48,449	47	1,031	53,104	43	1,235
1963	52,543	43	1,222	54,887	40	1,372
1964	44,718	40	1,118	44,391	33	1,345
1965	43,458	40	1,086	52,177	41	1,273
1966	28,904	34	850	28,501	27	1,056
1967	28,774	30	959	36,858	34	1,084

While these figures only show the total number of passengers and the average passenger lists for any given year, the averages do help to demonstrate that the two liners enjoyed great popularity even in their twilight years. Passenger lists of only a few hundred were seen in the winter months on occasion, yet they were by no means as frequent as popular belief would seem to signal.

At the same time, the view that the *Queen Mary* was more popular than her sister seems to be misplaced – in every single year during the 1956-67 period the *Queen Elizabeth* had higher average passenger lists. All too often, popular myth seems to belie the true historical facts. It is also possible to examine the total number of passengers each liner carried over their entire careers, by citing two interesting sources. How many passengers did *Queen Mary* carry? The answer is found by turning to Neil Potter and Jack Frost's *The Mary: The Story of No. 534*, which was updated by Lindsay Frost and issued as a third edition (Shipping Books Press; 1998), page 221:

She had steamed 3,794,017 miles and carried more than 2,114,000 people.

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Above: This photograph shows the proud Cunard liner RMS Queen Mary departing New York Harbour later in her career. Below right: The somewhat neglected sister, RMS Queen Elizabeth, entering New York Harbour. (Both J. Kent Layton Collection.)

In comparison, her sister *Queen Elizabeth* appears to have a slight edge in terms of the total number of passengers she carried. David Hutchings' fine *RMS Queen Elizabeth: From Victory to Valhalla* (Kingfisher Publications; 1990) documents this information, pages 95-96:

She had crossed the Atlantic 896 times; she had carried over the years 2,300,000 passengers (excluding her war service) and had steamed 3,472,672 miles.

These estimates seem to have been made on a comparable basis - civilian passengers carried outside of their war service - and so do the mileage figures, for *Queen Elizabeth's* career was shorter than her sister's. Not only does it seem that both ships carried more passengers than they were given credit for in the 1960s, but it also seems to be true that *Queen Elizabeth* was consistently more popular than her sister (contrary to popular belief), and indeed had the edge in carrying slightly more passengers than *Queen Mary* did over a shorter career. It is often the case that by examining issues in detail, popular belief has a lot to answer for - for myths can be repeated so frequently that they gain a false credibility that they do not deserve.

