

## Alex Reid's QM2 Cruise Diary: 10-Jan to 12-Feb-18

This was originally written in the form of a Blog, ie latest entries at the front (on the Web at <http://www.alex-reid.com/Blog/QM2-Cruise-Blog.html>). This version is written in chronological order, together with a number of photos, on the Web at <http://www.alex-reid.com/Blog/QM2-Cruise-Diary.pdf>.

### *Overview:*

Here are my overall reflections on the voyage from Southampton to Fremantle, taking 33 days. The overwhelming impression of the voyage is in relation to my initial fears, with so many “sea days” (7 in a row at times), that I thought I would find it hard to avoid boredom. As a result, I took quite a few things to do on the voyage (such as books, jigsaws, computer records to update, etc); however, I hardly did any of the things I brought to keep me occupied. The main reason for that was the number and variety of lectures given by guest speakers on board, including world-renowned figures as well as experts in a range of fields. Now, I am a “doing” person, that is, if there’s something to be done, I’ll do it. However, I am discriminating, and didn’t do \*everything\* there was to be done on board, not even attend all the lectures (though I \*did\* sample all the speakers). So, as you will see from the Blog, there was plenty to do and I did plenty!

The quality of the fare (meals, décor, entertainment, etc) was a little above most of what we have encountered on other cruises (which includes Princess, P&O, Holland-America, MSC, Hurtigruten, Avalon river cruises) - this was actually our 15<sup>th</sup> cruise. Quality is what Cunard are renowned for, so that was not surprising. As I told a few people on board, the quality of accommodation and meals and entertainment was rather better than the last time I travelled from Southampton to Fremantle, in 1957, as a migrant. We did find the requirement to dress up for dinner a little tiresome at times; there were only 2 categories of dress code - formal (ie dinner suit) and informal (ie jacket), so not very different for ladies; they did seem to be quite a bit more strict about it than other cruises...

On that earlier voyage, we were 8 to a cabin (males & females separated), with toilet & bathroom down the corridor. Perhaps for that reason, maybe that voyage doesn’t qualified as another cruise! On that occasion, it took 4 weeks (around the Cape), stopping only twice - a day each in Dakar (Senegal) and Durban (South Africa); the ship was the Shaw-Saville Line “SS New Australia” (which was originally built to carry 830 passengers, but carried 1,600 as a migrant ship); in 1958 she was sold to the Greek Line and refitted and rebadged as the QSS Arkadia. The only entertainment (as I recall) was the occasional movie; I can’t recall many activities arranged for passengers, other than the Crossing the Line ceremony. I don’t really remember how I spent my time (other than acquiring girlfriend!).



I do have a few photos of that journey, which reveal that we did play some deck games (eg sack races). Photos of my parents shows them on the deck, reading. I also have a few photos of the two

ports of call, Dakar and Durban. I do know that I took on board my Latin vocab book, as I did quite poorly at Latin, and wanted to use the voyage to improve my vocab. As in 2018, I don't think I touched it once! As it happens, upon reaching Australia we discovered that Latin was not taught at the school I went to (John Curtin Senior High School), and furthermore that it was not a prerequisite for medicine, the career I had intended to pursue. BTW, on the QM2 we were supposed to sail right past Dakar (the extreme Westernmost point of Africa), but instead diverted and anchored in the bay there for a few hours (to see why we did this, look at Day 8); I doubt the QM2, at 150,000 tons, could have docked there, as opposed to the New Australia at 20,000 tons.

I do recall my first view of Australia, approaching Fremantle harbour. I was quite disappointed at the low unexciting shore line - nothing like the cliffs of Dover, or even the Solent via which we had left Southampton.

But back to the Queen Mary 2. Having spent 33 days aboard her, I have a real affection for and interest in her (as I write, she's tied up in Tauranga, New Zealand - she has a "bridge cam" which is broadcast on the Web, and which I'm following). Of course, apart from the lectures and other entertainment with which I occupied much of my time, there were many, many more activities available (eg our table companions went to French lessons, to keep up their French). I did play some table tennis, but didn't get round to trying quoits, darts, dancing, trivia, chess, backgammon, fencing, bridge, shuffleboard, etc, not to mention the wide variety of musical performances and classes.

We had 8 of the 33 days in ports, and we found them very interesting, taking a ship-arranged tour in each port. The tours that stood out for me were the two visits to wild animal reserves in South Africa (one from Cape Town, the other from Port Elizabeth). These were not cheap, but whenever else might we get the chance to see such animals in the wild? Talking about cost, the cruise itself cost less than \$200/day, and that was all-inclusive (apart from the port tours, and alcohol); the alcohol prices did rather astound me, with the cheapest bottles of wine being significantly dearer than on any other cruise we had been on - but of course, they were discretionary.

Overall, the cruise went like this:

- 1 day boarding in Southampton;
- 3 days at sea;
- 1 day in Madeira;
- 1 day in Tenerife;
- 8 days at sea;
- 1 day in Walvis Bay, Namibia;
- 1 day at sea;
- 2 days in Cape Town;
- 1 day at sea;
- 1 day in Port Elizabeth;
- 4 days at sea;
- 1 day in Réunion;
- 1 day in Mauritius;
- 7 days at sea;
- 1 day disembarking in Fremantle.



I'm really pleased that we decided to return to Australia from the UK this way; it did cost rather more than business class flights, but given the board and lodging, entertainment, educational input, visits to exotic ports, it was well worth doing. I can't say that I would jump at the chance of doing it again, as I'm not sure our purse is deep enough. But I'm very glad we did it this time!

The Blog is written with the latest entries at the start, so to read it in chronological order, you must scroll to near the end and work backwards...

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***Day 1, Wednesday, 10-Jan-18 (embark on Queen Mary 2):***

Today we boarded the Queen Mary 2 cruise ship in Southampton for our epic 33-day journey to Fremantle. We had been accommodated overnight in the Doubletree Hotel near Southampton Airport (as part of our cruise package, which also included our flights from Perth to England). This location made it convenient to drop off our hire car at Southampton Airport. This I did by about 10am, and then walked back - it was about 4.5km, but a beautiful crisp morning, and the walk helped compensate for now gym and minimal exercise over the last 2 weeks.

We had arranged for our (included) taxi to the ship to arrive by 2pm, in time for our scheduled 3pm boarding. The drive to the ship took us past some of my teenage stamping grounds - first my old high school, Taunton's Grammar, which is now the Humanities department of Southampton University; then Southampton Common, walking distance from my school and where I sailed boats on the lake (pond?); then past the Civic Centre where I would change buses when I used them to get to school (now housing the wonderful Titanic Exhibition which we visited a few years ago); then past my old dentist - those were not pleasant memories, as they had the old style drills then which vibrated madly and did they hurt!

Check-in on the ship was pretty painless, and ahead of schedule. We had checked in on an earlier cruise in the same location, also trouble-free; I even remembered where to find the free magazines to take and read whilst waiting. I did notice that the cabin we had been allocated was different from the one we had booked, though no mention was made of this at check-in, and I didn't notice till later. We decided to wait and see what the new cabin had to offer. It turns out that though we had booked a cabin without balcony (considerably cheaper), we had been upgraded to one with a balcony, otherwise identical. It was at the rear of the ship (aft) rather than the front (forward), and a deck lower, but it *\*was\** still on the Port side (something I had particularly chosen - as land, Africa, would always be on the Port side as we travelled. So, very pleased and blessed by that, though we really didn't think having a balcony was a big deal.

Of course, our bags would have to be redirected (I had labelled them all for the original cabin). During one of my exploratory walks, I decided to go past the original cabin and there beheld a confused-looking porter with (most of) our bags. He was delighted when (a) I told him to which cabin they were now to be delivered, and (b) I helped him with them (too many for one person).

Another nice touch was a small bottle of bubbly, in an ice bucket, in the cabin to welcome us on board. We had been due to sail at 5pm, but the ship was late arriving into Southampton due to storms in the North Atlantic (it has crossed from New York, with 125 of those passengers remaining on board for this "world cruise"). So, the decision was made to remain in port overnight, and leave instead at 8am the next day. This didn't really affect us at all; indeed it helped, as I was able to connect my laptop to eduroam (presumably from some nearby branch of either Southampton University or, more likely, Southampton Solent University, which is located nearby). My computer had decided it needed an urgent Windows system update, which I was thus able to accommodate without eating into the expensive and slow satellite Internet service on board.

Something else that we chanced upon was a recital by the British Imperial Military Band in one of the spaces on board (the ballroom, I think); a very nice touch! (I'm partial to brass bands...). The quality of everything on board seems up a notch from most of the other cruises we've been on (something like 14 now, would you believe!!! - including Murray River and a 2-day conference I went on out of Southampton in 2000). By the way, some of you may be interested in the

specifications of the QM2 - here are some:  
launched 12-Jan-2004;  
refitted May 2016;  
length 1,132ft (345m);  
max. guests 2,691 (I reckon the ship is about 80-90% full); max. speed 28 knots (about 52kmh); gross tonnage 151,400 GRT.



We had elected to go to the early sitting for dinner (6pm), as

opposed to the late sitting at 8:30pm. We had also accepted the default "table of 6" arrangement. It turned out that one of the couples assigned to our table didn't come to dinner in the formal Britannia Restaurant this evening. One other couple did come, Laurie and Cathy, English folk but now living as retirees in a village near Orange in Provence. We enjoyed their company at dinner, exchanging Provençal anecdotes (over the past 2 years we have had occasion to be both delighted and aghast at incidents we have experienced in Provence). They have embarked on a truly epic holiday - starting a couple of weeks ago, they travelled by train to London and stayed with one of their children, then this cruise, all the way to Fremantle, a few days there then flying to Alice Springs with a trip to Uluru organised, then flying to Adelaide, then by car to Melbourne via the Great Coast Road (they have friends in Melbourne, formed when their children had school exchanges). They will then travel to Sydney (mode of transport not yet determined), where they will join a cruise around New Zealand and back. Then after a few days in Sydney they join another cruise to Singapore, then flying back to France. They'll be away 4 months altogether!

After dinner I had a phone call from Reception, telling me that my suitcase had been held up because their scanning revealed a "forbidden item" in it. I couldn't imagine what that would be! Anyway, I followed their instructions, going ashore to the Security point, where I saw my case, sitting innocently by itself. The officer said that what looked like a Swiss Army knife had been sighted; I confirmed that I had one, and that it had been on numerous flights as well as many other cruises before; his only response was that on planes it would be safely stowed in the hold. Anyway, I was able to locate and extract the knife without delay. He checked its main blade against a measure and checked how it operated. I asked what the issue was, to which he replied that he need to check that it did not have a "locking blade", whatever that is. Apparently satisfied, he returned the knife to me and said I was free to take my case on board; rather than wait for Cunard to assign someone to bring it to my cabin, I decided to wheel it myself - not a difficult task.

Once it was back in my cabin and unpacked, I made off for the nightly concert in the Royal Court Theatre, tonight comprising the song and dance troupe, followed by a stand-up comedian, Mick Miller. It was pleasant enough, but Helen was not disappointed she missed it, preferring to turn in earlier.

All in all, quite a full day, and we were both ready for bed at the end.

***Day 2, Thursday, 11-Jan-18 (in the English Channel):***

After breakfast (we usually have a full breakfast on cruises “because we can”, and then go without lunch, or having merely a light snack at afternoon tea time) we listened to a “port talk” given by Graham Howell (a Cunard employee) on Madeira, our first port of call (to happen on Sunday). We had pre-booked a tour which takes us to some of the sights, including some mountainous roads and great viewpoints (including the second-highest sea cliffs in the world).

We stayed on in the theatre to listen to Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, speaking on “Climate Justice: Why Climate Change is a Threat to Human Rights”. I was very impressed with her understanding of the issues and clarity of speech. Her basic premise is that it is the developed nations that are primarily responsible for climate change, but the poorer countries that suffer or will suffer the most (eg the low-lying islands of the Pacific) - the injustice of this is what strikes her most forcefully. She had few kind words to say for Donald Trump, other than that his opposition to climate change, including withdrawing from the Paris Accord, has actually helped the cause, as it has driven lower levels of government (states, cities, local authorities), as well as individuals, to take up the cause vigorously, instead of just “leaving it to government”.



Shortly thereafter I moved to another theatre to hear Chris Butler, FRAS (Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society), speak on “From Nine Planets to Nine Billion Worlds”. Helen decided to take a break. He was an American amateur astronomer and artist, but absolutely fascinated by everything astronomical, to the point of getting himself elected an FRAS!

On the way back to my cabin (“State Room” I’m supposed to call it!) I discovered 2 table tennis tables, and a young chap, Andy, hanging around in a manner I took to imply a longing to play. So I asked if he was interested and proceeded to have a good game with him. I lost, but given that 90% of the passengers have quite serious mobility issues, I’ll have to look out for him again! I haven’t played table tennis since we had a table at home when we lived in Willetton (~25 years ago), except for a few occasions when we’ve been on cruises in the last 5-10 years, and the last time would have been about 2 years ago. So, to lose 13:21 wasn’t too bad, I reckon! Nevertheless, Andy was proficient at spin, and I’ve never really mastered how to counter spin...

After lunch (which we didn’t have) I attended a lecture given by Captain John Nixon, MSc, Master Mariner, entitled “The Sinking and Recovery of Russian Nuclear Submarine ‘Kursk’”. He gave a very interesting illustrated account both of the various theories about why she sank, as well as of the very complicated recovery operation (with animations).

That night, we decided not to dress up for formal “black and white” dinner, but instead went to the Kings Court buffet. As it turned out, our table-mate, Laurie, was on our table all alone that night - the third couple didn’t turn up again, and his wife Cathy was not feeling well. But I do have to say that I was impressed with the quality and variety of fare in the buffet. Indeed, I reckon that the food has been the best on any cruise ship we’ve experienced. I suppose you might think that’s to be expected on the Queen Mary 2, flagship of the Cunard line; but the quality of food on all our cruises has been very good, so this has been exceptional.

After dinner, we went to the Concert in the Royal Court Theatre (the main theatre) to hear The Overtures, a 60’s tribute band, who played at Elton John’s wedding. They brilliantly and versatily performed covers of songs by the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Everley Brothers, the Hollies, Bob Dylan, the Moody Blues, Procol Harum, Simon & Garfunkel, etc, etc. So good, we called them back for an encore.

Phew! That’s the end of our first day at sea, and I have to say that my carefully devised plans about how to amuse myself (and relax!) are also all at sea! How on Earth am I going to fit in all the activities I had planned (reading, writing, relaxing, etc!) when there is so much interesting stuff happening? Well, maybe today has been unusually full and interesting... we’ll see.

### ***Day 3, Friday, 12-Jan-18 (crossing the Bay of Biscay):***

Dawn over the Bay of Biscay - very pretty, but “red in the morning” spells a shepherd’s warning. And so it was. No rain, I think, but grey skies and strong winds.

OK, draw breath, and we’re off on another whirlwind. First stop Andy Wyatt, a former pilot with the RAF Red Arrows formation flying team, talking about “The Red Arrows”. He was with the RAF for 20 years and has now been a BA pilot for the last 20 years. He explained when, why and how the Red Arrows and their predecessors were formed, dating back to Hendon in the 1920’s. There are 9 aircraft and pilots, a third of whom are exchanged every year (so max. tenure of 3 years); there are altogether about 120 personnel involved, including engineers, maintenance, admin staff, etc. A lot of video clips!



Then we listened to Graham Howell again, this time talking about our next port of call (Monday), Tenerife in the Canary Islands.

This was followed by an illustrated talk by John Sherlock on Architecture, the first of 5 or 6, entitled: “Greek Origin and Illusions”. John works with the owners of stately homes advising them on how to make visits by the public more interesting. He explained the “language” of architecture - what the architect is trying to say - communicating ideas and culture. He described the basics of Greek architecture - eg Doric, Ionic and Corinthian pillars, and the illusions the designers employed to make their buildings more pleasing to the eye. He plans to cover a wide range of architectural styles, up to the present day, and promises to be most enlightening and interesting. He introduced us to the

Historic Houses Association (HHA), which is like the National Trust but covers privately-owned houses; becoming a Friend entitles you to free access to them all.

In the afternoon, we decided to watch the recently released movie “Wonder”, starring Julia Roberts, Owen Wilson, Jacob Tremblay, and Mandy Patinkin. A delightful heart-warming story (a little tear-jerking, too) about a disfigured boy’s move from home schooling to public schooling.

I’m not sure what we did for the remainder of the afternoon - catching our breath, I think! No, I spent some time reviewing a submission which AARNet has just made to the Department of Education about future arrangements for the management and support of eResearch Infrastructure, which task I continued with after dinner.

Dinner was a formal affair, having to dress up in dinner suit, with commensurate ladies’ attire.

After dinner, the nightly concert in the Royal Court Theatre was performed by the ship’s troupe of singers and dancers, entitled “Broadway Rocks”, featuring, of course, songs from Broadway musicals like West Side Story (and many others).

Another very full day draws to a close - it’s not looking good for my original plans!!

#### ***Day 4, Saturday, 13-Jan-18 (in North Atlantic Ocean):***

Another beautiful sunrise, this time off Portugal; not quite as red as yesterday, and a good deal of blue sky, sun even! But still “near gale force” winds.

After breakfast I completed my AARNet submission review then ventured back to the main theatre to hear Mary Robinson again, this time in a Q&A format. I hadn’t realised that she had spent most of her career as a member of Ireland’s Senate, having also practised law as a barrister. She revitalised the presidency, having studied the constitutional requirements of the office, and drawing on that to change it from being mainly ceremonial to a role with much greater activation. She finished her 7-year term in 1997 and immediately became UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, something Kofi Annan twisted her arm to take on, staying for an extra year until the end of 2002. She answered questions on Brexit and the border with Northern Ireland, renewable energy options, nuclear power, population growth, climate policy and policing, one world government (she doesn’t believe in it, but does believe in the EU, which she said has made the Irish more Irish, whereas the British she thinks probably hanker for the bygone days of empire). When asked finally if she considered herself an optimist, she quoted Bishop Tutu who said in response to a similar question: “I’m not an optimist, but a prisoner to hope” - we need to find something in the half-full glass that we can work on, lest we give way to despair.

I then went to a session in the Planetarium on “Asteroid: Mission Extreme”. Fascinating how they turned the second theatre into a planetarium, and we were shown a National Geographic presentation on asteroids - their origin, location, how we find them, what dangers they pose, how to deal with those dangers, and the opportunities they represent.

Instead of lunch, we treated ourselves to a Barista-made flat white coffee; this is one of the few items (the others being alcohol of all kinds!) for which extra payment is required. It cost about \$4.50 each (USD), so not cheap, but very nice!

After this un-lunch, I attended a Matinee Performance by The Overtures (see Thursday evening), which was equally agreeable, this time the encore being “You’ll Never Walk Alone”!

During the afternoon, we also did some laundry (there is a free laundromat nearby, with washers and dryers). We also visited the medical station - Helen had woken up with an aching wrist, something that happens every now and then (tendonitis), usually when she’s knocked or strained it. Sadly, she couldn’t find her elastic bandage that is used to bind the wrist while it recovers in a day or so. The nurse was very helpful, but pointed out that they were not allowed to sell bandages without a doctor’s examination (there seemed to be no other source on board). However, seeing that this was a known condition and appropriate measures (eg piroxicam) had been taken, she slipped us one free of charge - don’t tell anyone!!

I also worked on the monthly eResearch Newsletter that I edit and which is due to go out next Monday. Most of this could be done offline, once the contributions has been received (there were only 10 articles this month), but it still took nearly 30 minutes online to load up and schedule the newsletter using MailChimp. We have subscribed to an Internet package which gives us 240 minutes, and cost us \$88.95 (USD). I have been very agreeably surprised by the performance, which doesn’t seem much worse than at my home (not the highest standard to measure against, of course!). BTW, by being frugal we managed to eke out this subscription until we just reached Fremantle.

Dinner in the Britannia Restaurant was billed as “informal”; this means semi-formal, really, as a jacket must be worn (by the men). There is no such thing as “casual” for dinner in the restaurant! We had no company this evening, but joined the table next door for coffee, as we discovered we had met one of the couples there at breakfast. The other couple had some strong views about renewable energy (didn’t like it!), and didn’t think much of Mary Robinson, so some lively conversation!

After dinner, I attended the concert featuring comedian Mick Miller (see Wednesday evening). I found him a lot more original this time.

Then, I brought my blog up to date (working on into the wee small hours, nearly!). Otherwise, I’ll never catch up, tomorrow being a visit to Funchal on Madeira, so not much free time!

### ***Day 5, Sunday, 14-Jan-18 (in Madeira):***

We docked in Funchal, capital of Madeira at 7am this morning. After breakfast, we joined a few others at a daily “Christian Fellowship” gathering, not realising it was daily (not sure we’ll make it daily), but thinking it was a Sunday event. It seems that the Captain hosts a Sunday service in the main theatre on Sundays, but only when we’re at sea. So we have to wait till next Sunday for that. Anyway, we met some nice folk, a couple of them heavily involved with the Chorleywood church where Bishop David Pytches and musician Matt Redman were, so we had a good time with them.

We then went ashore and walked about a kilometre to the closest group of shops. Being Sunday, most regular shops were closed, but a Gelati café was open and serving coffee, and had free WiFi, so we had a lovely coffee and quick catch up on Facebook, etc (even fed a few dragons!) - the coffee cost us €1.20 each, and was really nice!

We walked back to the ship in time to join our 4-hour guided coach tour called "Leisurely Scenes of Madeira". This took us first to a great lookout overlooking Funchal - the Pico dos Barcelos. Since Funchal is built on a slope ever rising away from the coast (it was volcanic), it is not hard to find great vantage points! A lot of interest in what can be seen, including the church of St Martin, adjacent to which the famous footballer Christian Ronaldo was born. The coach then drove up a winding hairpin-bend-rich road through the Nuns' Valley (Curral das Freiras) up 1500m to a remote village surrounded by amazing mountains. We stopped there and had some light refreshments (chestnut cake and Madeira wine); of course, I had to buy some Madeira fortified wine...



Thence were taken back down the precipitous road (Helen was really brave and hardly complained - she definitely does not like that kind of road!). We made our way to the Cabo Girão, a towering cliff of 580m overlooking the sea, with a glass platform from which to admire its height (second highest sea cliffs in the world - the highest being in Hawaii). Then we made our way back down and along the coast back to Funchal and the ship, passing by Câmara de Lobos (a quaint fishing village made famous in paintings by Winston Churchill), and then Reid's Hotel (the oldest and most famous in Madeira - of course!).

The ship set sail at 5pm, and we had dinner with Laurie and Cathie (from Provence) in the Britannia Restaurant (informal, so I could slum it without a tie, though I did have to wear a jacket!).

The day was rounded out (for me) with the evening concert in the Royal Court Theatre featuring Nicola Loud, a virtuoso violinist, playing a wide selection of pieces, from Gunot's Ave Maria to Fiddler on the Roof, Sweet Georgia Brown, Sway, Over the Rainbow and finishing with Orpheus in the Underworld (Can Can).

Then bed! However, I have discovered I have lost a pair of trousers! I'm sure I wore them on the plane over, but they are not with me and not at the Brooks' house. Maybe my mind is playing tricks on me - Oh, No! Is this the start of the decline? Or perhaps one of you has pinched them to unsettle me...???

#### ***Day 6, Monday, 15-Jan-18 (in Tenerife):***

We arrived in Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the Canary Islands this morning at about 9am. By then we had already had our morning cup of tea and then breakfast. I forgot to mention earlier that we were most agreeably surprised to find we have been provided with tea-making facilities in our cabin. I don't think we have ever had this provision before on a cruise.

Anyway, by 10am we were on our coach to visit the other side of the island (near Puerto de la Cruz) to visit three gardens. The first was the Botanical Gardens, the second was the Sitio Litre (Little's Place) orchid garden, and thirdly the private Risco Bello garden (owned by two old ladies). We were



impressed by the variety of plants in the Botanical Garden, and how well they were labelled. The other two gardens were also quite varied and interesting; of course they largely focused on “exotic” plants, like strelitzia, bougainvillea, poinsettia, banyan trees, etc (!), but much appreciated all the same. On the way, we made an unscheduled stop at a lookout to view the 3,718m high extinct volcano El Teide, usually having a little cap of cloud. It was unscheduled because the conditions were good, and hadn’t been earlier in the day. We also had some classic “balcony houses” pointed out to us, with their stylish wooden balconies. Once a booming tourist destination, the North Coast is now suffering from overcapitalising accommodation, and some hotels are closing. Hard to know why - the local guide believes it’s because tourists are always complaining (but one wonders why?).



Helen has had a sore throat (or threatening one) for the last 2 days, so we took it easy for the rest of the day (following un-lunch) and just went to the buffet for dinner, and are missing the show tonight, featuring Laura Magann, a “classical crossover & musical theatre star” (a singer I presume). However, we did watch the movie “On Wings of Eagles” which was the feature film in the second theatre yesterday, and on continuous payback on the TV today; it was about Eric Liddell after he returned to China (he died there in 1945 just before the war ended), and starred Joseph Fiennes. I was not very impressed by the film, which seemed rather disjointed a lot of the time, and with rather wooden performances - I think the script was probably the chief culprit. But I was interested to know about Eric’s life after Chariots of Fire!

***Day 7, Tuesday, 16-Jan-18 (in North Atlantic Ocean):***

Something I forgot to mention yesterday concerns the variety of people, most of them rather interesting, that one meets on a cruise like this. As I think I’ve already said, a couple at our designated dinner table in the Britannia Restaurant (Laurie & Cathie) are English, but now live in Provence, near Orange. They have some interesting tales to tell about their interactions with the French people around them. We have not yet met the 3<sup>rd</sup> couple that have been allocated our table... On the tour yesterday, we met and chatted briefly with a couple (Nick and Carol) who have often been to Perth. Indeed, they visited during the defence of the America’s Cup in 1987, and went aboard Australia II with Alan Bond. They also put in a bid to buy Vasse Felix winery, but Janet Holmes-a-Court beat them to it (though they darkly hinted at shifty deals to thwart their highest bid...). It was interesting that at the time we were drinking a glass of wine provided gratis by one of the gardens we visited; not the most wonderful wine, they thought!

After breakfast today, Helen retired to the cabin to nurse her cold and keep it away from others, and I went to the “port talk” on Walvis Bay, Namibia. I had thought that I’d already booked a tour at Walvis Bay, but yesterday discovered that I hadn’t and that, indeed, all the tours were booked out; they wouldn’t even add me to the waiting lists. Walvis Bay is a fairly small place, not yet well developed for tourism, and all the vehicles have to be brought 300 km from the capital, Windhoek, so there are limited places on all tours. At the port talk, Graham Howell mentioned that they had managed to schedule some extra tours, so I made a bee-line to the Tour Desk after the talk and was able to book us on a tour that takes in flamingos, sand dunes and the place where dunes enter the sea. One advantage of not being mobility-challenged as most on board seem to be.

I then took in the follow-up talk given by airline pilot Andy Wyatt, sharing many anecdotes from his 40 years of flying, some quite scary! One less so was a clip of Brian Cox being taken up in an English Electric Lightning jet to some 60,000 feet to see the “thin blue line” that separates troposphere from stratosphere (or some such!). Andy used to fly them, and they were regarded as the pinnacle of jet fighter engineering (but hugely expensive in fuel! - they were renowned for being able to climb vertically straight after take-off).

Following that, I had a session in the Gym, my first in over 3 weeks; I took it easy, first time back, and was pleased to find that I weighed in (clothed) at barely any more than when we left Perth. I like the suggestion of my friend Adam who says he’s going to rename his “john” as “jim”, so instead of saying “I went to the john this morning”, he can say “I went to the jim this morning”!

During the afternoon, I attended a talk given by Giles Ramsay on “Christopher Marlowe: Poet and Spy”. Very rapid-fire description of Marlowe’s career, including his activity as a spy, under the patronage of Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth’s spy master. He actually lived a rather dissolute life, and although it seems clear he would have met Shakespeare, he had little truck with him as Will never went to university (Cambridge or Oxford). Finally killed (accidentally???) in a brawl following a meal and drinks in Deptford. A lot about the political and religious turmoil of the time.

Otherwise, we had a really relaxing day, the first of eight before we reach Namibia.

And we didn’t dress up for the formal dinner, but “slummed it” in the buffet dining room, King’s Court.

The evening entertainment tonight was the singers and dancers performing a variety of song and dance routines covering Glenn Miller (“Swing”) to the Tango - claimed to be some of the most incredible dances ever seen at sea (just as well the sea was classified as “slight”, else they’d be all falling over!). Indeed, many of the dances (eg Cossack dances) were hugely energetic and adventurous. By the way, while all of the education and entertainment is happening, Helen has missed much of it through nursing her cold, but has got through three books (one she brought with us, two from the well-stocked ship library).

### ***Day 8, Wednesday, 17-Jan-18 (in North Atlantic Ocean, abeam of Dakar):***

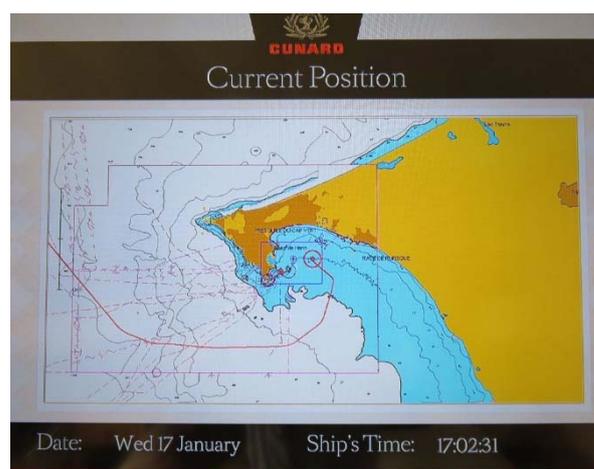
Another day with very interesting talks and other activities, which Helen is still avoiding so as not to pass on her infection to others. I hope I can avoid her bug! However, though she is not attending these talks, she’s able to watch yesterday’s talks on TV today.

I joined the Christian group after breakfast, and met a few more fellow travellers, including a former farming couple from Perth (near Brigadoon). Then I went to the talk by Giles Ramsay on Shakespeare, entitled “William Shakespeare: The Birth of Modern Show Business”. Actually, it wasn’t so much about Shakespeare himself as the theatre business and the impresarios (like John Burbage) who built theatres and sponsored the playwrights and actors.

This was followed by a talk from John Sherlock on architecture - Roman Ingenuity and Engineering. Of course, it featured many Roman inventions (or perfections) such as bricks and mortar, arches, ways of bolstering arches (arcades; smaller arches on the sides, like triumphal arches; domes, like in the Pantheon in Rome), a form of concrete, and so on.

In the afternoon, Chris Butler, Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, gave a very accessible presentation on identifying many constellations, with particular reference to what would be coming into view as we move further South. He is very enthusiastic about his subject (as are all the speakers), but is not at all stuffy - for instance, he’s quite happy to admit he can’t make out a dog in Canis Major (actually, being from California, perhaps, he rather thinks it more closely resembles a surfer). But it did help to hear why and how the constellations are thought to resemble various creatures. And I hadn’t realised that one of the most recognisable constellations, Orion, has his belt at exactly the Equator (which of course is why he can be seen in both hemispheres). He had prepared a great chart that we can hold up to the sky when we get to the equator to help identify stars.

At this stage, mid-afternoon, we were abeam of Dakar, Senegal, which is a port I called into on my migration voyage in 1957. We abruptly changed course and headed for the port, owing to a seriously ill passenger who had to be evacuated. We put into the bay and dropped anchor and awaited the arrival of the boat to take the passenger ashore. Apparently, the nurse and doctor accompanied the passenger to ensure facilities ashore were suitable, and then returned to the ship. So we didn’t get under way again till after 8pm. I hope the passenger received the appropriate medical care - and that they had suitable insurance! This happened once before on a cruise ship we were on, in the Mediterranean - a man had gall stones and was evacuated to Palermo for an operation. It was great to hear from the Captain the next day that the operation had been successful. On that occasion, they used a helicopter for the evacuation, but there were such high winds that it took a long time circling before the pilot was prepared to land it; we had earlier abandoned docking in Tunis, much to my regret, because the winds were too strong to enable the ship to get safely into port; soon after, unrest in Tunisia has put Tunis off the cruise schedule, and it still is, as far as I know; we had been scheduled to visit the picturesque village of Sidi Bou Said and then Carthage.



We again went to the buffet for dinner, Helen still not feeling well. Indeed, she did contemplate visiting the doctor at one stage, as her throat was so sore, but decided in the end that they would recommend rest, paracetamol, plenty of fluids, and maybe sore throat tablets (all of which she’d been doing). After dinner, I went to the concert in the main theatre, which featured flautist Suzanne Godfrey (who has worked with Andre Rieu and James Galway). Very pleasant.

***Day 9, Thursday, 18-Jan-18 (in North Atlantic Ocean):***

After breakfast today, I went to a table tennis competition in the Queens Room, crew versus guests. This went on from 10am till 11:45. I won one game (against one of the dance troupe) and narrowly lost another. Overall, the crew won 20 games to 15, though I suspect a little bit of manipulation of the results by Richie the Sports Director.

This meant I missed 3 talks during the morning, but I'm hoping to catch up with them on the TV later in the day or tomorrow. Helen did feel well enough this morning to attend the main celebrity speaker in the Royal Court Theatre, General Lord Dannatt, former head of the British Army, on the topic "Boots on the Ground - Britain and Her Army Since 1945". It wasn't exactly her cup of tea, but interesting none the less (I'll see what I think of it when/if I watch the replay) - [later] very good frank and perceptive analysis of the changes in the Army brought about by a range of factors, including the development of nuclear weapons, UN peacekeeping, disasters such as Palestine, Suez, etc.

At noon, we had the first of several times we will have to move our clocks forward, this time by one hour, with another one due before we reach Namibia on 24-Jan-18. Our cruise director suggested that a good idea would be to enter the on-board gym just before noon, wait a few moments, then step out, so you could say you went to the gym for an hour.

One of the current films shown in the Illuminations Theatre yesterday was "Kingsmen: The Golden Circle" (starring Colin Firth), which I think may be the sequel to the first Kingsmen movie (2015); they said it would be shown on the TV throughout today, but they are showing some other movie continuously. I'll try again later... [still no joy, but did see a good deal of "African Cats" narrated by Samuel L Jackson (some wonderful photography)].

During the afternoon, I went to a second talk by Captain John Nixon, entitled "The Work of the Marine Salvor". Interesting and quite technical: lots of facts and figures, relating to oil spills, fires on board (apparently the worst thing that can happen), collisions, navigation errors, structural failures, etc, etc. A little about the procedures that salvage operators follow, but mostly rather scary case studies, of course including the Costa Concordia, which cost upwards of \$US2B to salvage (then scrapped). Nixon used to work for Smit (maybe still does), one of the big 4 international salvage operators.

I also caught up on the TV with the port talk about Cape Town.

The entertainment tonight in the main theatre was Chas Burnett, a comedian from Newcastle. He had a few good lines, a few ones I'd heard before (eg "doctor, I keep dreaming that I'm a wigwam, then that I'm a tepee; what's wrong?") His verdict: "you're too tense"), some clever alterations to lyrics of 60s songs, a clever song about how he hates computers, and so on. Though Helen has been feeling rather better, comedians are not especially her cup of tea, and she preferred to stay put and finish her 4<sup>th</sup> book; we also went to the buffet dinner, as she wasn't up to making conversation all evening.

***Day 10, Friday, 19-Jan-18 (in Atlantic Ocean, crossing the Equator):***

Another full day today! When are we ever going to start that jigsaw we brought (actually, given to us for Christmas by Ian & Nikki)? We bought a special jigsaw board in Oxford so we could start it then slip it under the bed...

First up there was a talk by Andy Wyatt, taking us through a day in the life of a 747 airline pilot. He also included some interesting anecdotes, like the time someone actually died on board; they decided to move the body to a seat in business. As they were doing so, the business passengers all looked up, askance; whereupon the engineer who was helping to carry the body said “did anyone else have the fish?”. There’s a great website called nats.aero which shows the trails of aircraft across the Atlantic (I know there are also websites that will tell you the location of all aircraft in the sky at any one time).

This was followed by Captain John Nixon (the salvage guy) talking about The Race for Tea - all about the tea trade, the opium wars with China, the move to India as a source of tea (started with 20,000 plants smuggled out of China, but later supplanted by the discovery of a tea plant native to India, Assam). He also talked about the different kinds of tea, how they are created, and the best way to make a cup of tea. Also dealt with teabags (an accidental discovery made in 1903, as a US merchant sent out samples which were mistaken for the equivalent of the tea infusers that had been common and people put them straight in the cup and poured boiling water over them!). He then talked about the various races to get tea back to Britain first, and briefly mentioned the America’s Cup (relevant because of the many vain attempts Sir Thomas Lipton, tea magnate, made to win it back).

After our un-lunch, I went to have a look at the “Crossing the Line Ceremony”. We don’t actually cross the Equator till later tonight, but the ceremony has to be at a sociable hour. I recall elements of this ceremony from when I “Crossed the Line” back in 1957. It seems always to involve King Neptune, this time accompanied by Queen Neptuna (a guy in drag), along with several mermaids and the top 3 ship’s officers; the initiates are doused with spaghetti or other gunk, and then they have to kiss the dead fish, followed by a drop into the swimming pool. A clever variation this time was to have all the rites recited in rhyme; the initiates were charged with miscellaneous offences (eg reserving seats in the Theatre!), sentence was pronounced, and then the “surgeons” performed the dousing. They reserved the worst dousing for a few of the ship’s crew who had not Crossed the Line before. Needless to say, Helen kept well away! (of course, she was protecting her fellow passengers from her residual infection...).



Following that, I went to hear John Sherlock talk about Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic architecture. Another very interesting well-illustrated lecture, learning about Diocletian windows, domes and the transfer of square floor plans to domed ceilings, the lovely Romanesque church in Iffley (near Oxford), the development of the pointed arch by Abbot Suger in 1144 at St Denis near Paris and what a revolution that was (giving more light, taller structures, thinner columns, etc). Beauvais Cathedral (which we visited in 1978) is the tallest Gothic building in the world.

We then did some more washing (and drying) and I went to the Gym (not the renamed John!). Even sat out on the balcony afterwards to read: I’ve discovered the ship’s library has a supply of Andrea Camilleri novels - featuring Inspector Montalbano in Sicily, which I’ve always enjoyed - many of

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them have been made into TV films, and shown on SBS (with subtitles). It was quite warm out there!

We again went to the casual dining room, as Helen is not quite ready to talk with fellow guests all evening; maybe she will be by tomorrow - she is definitely improving!

In the concert tonight, the UK-based musician and vocalist Ben Mills performed. He played and sang songs by Leonard Cohen, Van Morrison and Rod Stewart (his voice is ideally suited to Stewart songs!). He was really good, no wonder he played to a packed audience at Wembley Stadium 3 times.

### ***Day 11, Saturday, 20-Jan-18 (in South Atlantic Ocean):***

First thing in the morning, we had another talk from Captain John Nixon, this time about the recovery by the CIA of a sunk Russian submarine, K-129. This was a conventional submarine, but carrying nuclear weapons and with encryption devices and code books on board. The year was 1968, at the height of the Cold War. The sub had been despatched to patrol the West coast of USA but disappeared without trace. The Russians could not find it, but the Americans did, with the help of SOSUS (Sound Surveillance System) deployed on the ocean floor. It was found about 750nm from Hawaii, in 5,000m of water, but the discovery kept top secret. The CIA designed and constructed a specially-built ship to raise the sub, the MV Hughes Glomar Explorer, with a cover story that they were looking for manganese nodules. Eventually, they asserted that they were only able to recover 12m of the front section of the sub, not including the nuclear missiles. But later the ship's bell was returned to Russia as an act of goodwill - but the bell is kept in the conning tower! Most of the details of this Project Azorian remain restricted.

Following this, there was a follow-up talk given by General Lord Richard Dannatt, with some input from his wife, Pippa. He talked about personal details of his army career, with a few comments about the various theatres of activity he was posted to (N Ireland, Bosnia, Afghanistan). His wife's perspective was quite poignant, pointing out the issues faced by wives and families, especially where soldiers have been injured and repatriated. She was awarded the MBE for fund-raising for a system of Naughton Houses to house families while soldiers were in hospital.

Then Chris Butler gave another talk on the stars and constellations of the Southern sky. He seems extremely excited about the opportunity the cruise is giving him (and other Northerners) to see the Southern sky. BTW, we crossed the Equator at about 5am this morning. I must admit to being interested in locating at least the Large and Small Magellenic Clouds (nothing like them is visible in the Northern hemisphere).

After un-lunch, I went to the Planetarium again, this time to hear a small group play Pink Floyd music to accompany a National Geographic video. The music was great, but I was disappointed that the video was the same asteroids one I saw a few days ago.

We watched a bit of the movie *Swallows and Amazons* (the 2016 remake) during the afternoon, and read our books (Helen returned 2 and we picked up 2 more).

For dinner (at 6pm) we ventured back at long last to the Britannia Restaurant, where only informal dress is required (that still involves a degree of dressing up!), and spent a pleasant dinner with Laurie and Cathy (still no sign of the third couple assigned to our table).

After dinner, the show tonight featured variety performer and magician, Philip Hitchcock. His tricks and illusions were quite amazing, some I'd seen before (eg tearing up a newspaper and then restoring it: still can't work it out), others (like the dancing scrunched piece of paper) I hadn't seen before and were just as intriguing. His signature act was blowing up a huge balloon and then jumping inside it. He had a good rapport with the audience, especially those in the front row, singling out Dennis who spoke out too readily at one point!

***Day 12, Sunday, 21-Jan-18 (in South Atlantic Ocean):***

This morning we're opposite Gabon, in the Gulf of Guinea, but with our closest landfall being Saint Helena (about 800nm, I think). The weather is lovely - gentle breeze (though our forward speed of 20knots (=37kmh) makes for quite a stiff breeze when we have our walk around the deck), and max temp of about 26°C. Hope it stays that way for our venture into Namibia next Wednesday. For the past several days there has been quite a bit of haze, initially created from sand being blown from the Sahara; today, the horizon is clear and crisp.

After breakfast today, we attended a church service conducted by the Captain in the main Theatre, which was very well attended. It was rather formal, using the 1620 Anglican liturgy (with which we're quite familiar), and included 4 hymns, which most people seemed to sign with gusto. One of them was "the sailor's hymn" - "for those in danger on the sea"!



Attending the service meant we missed the talk by Giles Ramsay on the development of theatre in Britain from the Restoration to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, we were able to catch it later on the TV, and what an interesting lecture it was. He explained the political, religious and economic forces that saw how the theatre developed during this era, including the rise of the impresarios and actor/producers. It started with the two players groups formed after the Restoration (Killigrew with his King's Men, and Davenant with his Duke's Men), finishing with David Garrick whose acting style won him huge public adulation, and lots of money, which he used to buy into the theatres themselves. We heard about the building of Drury Lane and how it changed hands, and the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, and how they were burnt down several times. It also covered the introduction of female actors, why they often dressed them as boys or men, and how the stage changed from a thrust to one with high technology in lighting and set changes, etc (including the introduction of the Eidophusikon in 1781). Then concluding with Sheridan and Goldsmith and characters like Mrs Malaprop, leading to Lady Bracknell, leading to Hyacinth Bucket! (extra detail included for Karen Goddard's benefit!).

John Sherlock followed with his history of architecture, finishing off Gothic and introducing Renaissance. This included the delay in the arrival (under Inigo Jones) of Renaissance to England, with the further development of Gothic in England, including the development of Early English (eg Salisbury) -> Decorated (eg Lincoln) -> Perpendicular (eg Winchester). One wonders whether the constant striving for height and decoration (especially in the Gothic) was always to the glory of God, or occasionally to serve the vanity of man! The Renaissance or neo-Classical started in Italy with architects like Brunelleschi (Florence), Bramante, Palladio, Bellini, Michelangelo (several of whom had a hand in St Peter's, Rome). This style rapidly spread across the world mainly due to the way in which the details were carefully documented (eg by Palladio). Coming to England late meant that

buildings like Kings College Chapel in Cambridge were still built in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century in the Gothic style (I'm thankful, because I regard that as one of the most beautiful buildings in the world). Sherlock then dealt with Vanbrugh (Blenheim palace), Hawksmoor (Castle Howard, along with Vanbrugh), James Gibbs (eg Oxford's Radcliffe Camera and Senate House, Cambridge), and explained how to distinguish Renaissance from Baroque and Rococo (basically, increases in decoration). Wren will be next...

Our clocks went forward another hour at noon today, so we're now only 6 hours behind Perth (2 hours ahead of London).

During the afternoon, we heard Andy Wyatt talk about the Enola Gay and the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima on 6th August 1945. A fascinating but quite sobering talk. Some of the aviation information was quite interesting (eg the specifications of the Boeing B-29 superfortress itself), as well as the details of the devastation caused (though I've heard some of that before).

We went to dinner in the main dining room, the Britannia Restaurant, through the dress was "informal" (ie dress up, but not \*quite\* as much as for formal!). We were on our own, as Laurie & Cathie went to the pub to watch the Tottenham vs Southampton game (ended in a 1:1 draw); Laurie is a Spurs fan...

After dinner was when we watched the Giles Ramsay talk, so I was late getting to the evening entertainment, and only saw the half with Laura Magann (missing the Suzanne Godfrey part). I'm glad I went, as I hadn't heard Laura before, and she has a wonderful voice, singing a selection of operatic and other music (eg a Sound of Music medley).

### ***Day 13, Monday, 22-Jan-18 (in South Atlantic Ocean):***

We are passing Angola this morning, but still basically in the middle of the Atlantic. Weather is still lovely, and a little cooler. A few "white horses" (there were none yesterday). Fewer clouds, as the day wore on. Another full day ahead of us.

First up was John Nixon talking about the Mutiny on the Bounty. Everyone knows all about the mutiny, of course, but a lot of interesting background and details about the mutiny itself that I wasn't aware of. For instance, Bligh was well regarded by Nelson, and sided with Nelson when he famously turned his blind eye to the signal to withdraw from the attack. He also was Cook's deputy on his final voyage; here he showed his impetuous side, taking a raiding party ashore to destroy a Hawaiian village after Cook was killed, but picked the wrong one. He actually covered himself in glory and admiration of his crew when he tried to get to Tahiti (to collect breadfruit plants for transplanting to the West Indies) by rounding Cape Horn - he spent 30 days trying but failed and ended up sailing the other way - but he lost no men, masts or sails in the attempt. The delay proved fatal, however, as they had missed the time to collect the saplings and had to wait there for 5 months for the next batch - by then, many of the crew had developed serious attachments to the locals...

Next up, Andy Wyatt talked all about the Concorde, from the idea to its first flight and 27-year history of flight, to its sad demise in 2003, following that terrible crash of an Air France plane. Some wonderful photos (it was such a beautiful plane) and videos. One video showed the flypast over Buckingham Palace with the Red Arrows (Andy was piloting one Red



Arrow). He talked briefly about the future prospects for supersonic passenger flight, but had very little to say, actually. He asked how many in the (packed) audience had flown in Concorde, and I guess about a quarter said they had - the large number surprised me.

I went to the Planetarium again for a show that was called “Infinity Express”, which was a general view of the stars and “flight” through them, though not especially exciting, otherwise.

During the afternoon, I went to another talk by Chris Butler, the astronomer. He’s so excited by his subject, it’s almost infectious (indeed it *is* infectious for some who he has induced to accompany him on deck at night to check out various stars, etc). This time, he talked about 3 stars “within reach” of Earth, only around 10 light years away. They exemplified the various stages in the life of a star (and any accompanying planets), from birth (like Epsilon Eridani), to middle-aged (like the Sun), to red giant (like Sirius A), to white dwarfs (like Sirius B, close to Sirius A but not readily visible because of how bright Sirius A is), to red giants (like Pollux in the Gemini constellation).

We also did a load of washing during the afternoon, as well as watch quite a bit of tennis - saw Djokovic go out, and Svitolina win). We then watched most of the Big Bash 20:20 cricket game Adelaide Strikers vs Melbourne Renegades at Etihad stadium in Melbourne; the highlight was an amazing catch where one player nearly caught it on the boundary but couldn’t prevent himself falling over the boundary, but was able to toss the ball up behind him before he hit the ground, and it was taken by another fielder.

Dinner was taken in the buffet dining room this evening, and the entertainment later was from the singers and dancers - a typical hugely energetic and loud event with amazing costumes. I should mention that there is a whole lot of other entertainment besides what we have been experiencing. For instance, there is a jazz band every evening; one evening there was a “big band” session; there are quiet instrumental performers all over the ship in various bars and theatres. Of course, there’s dancing in the Queens Room, and there’s the Casino. There is also live sports TV (eg English Premier League football) most nights in the Pub, as well as quizzes here and there.

#### ***Day 14, Tuesday, 23-Jan-18 (in South Atlantic Ocean):***

Today is our final day at sea before seeing land again! We’ve been so busy I’ve hardly noticed. The weather once again is pleasant, and a little cooler if anything. They’re forecasting a max of 23°C in Walvis Bay when we arrive tomorrow.

Something I forgot to mention yesterday is that we had a Chocolate Event! At lunch, there was a whole collection of specially made chocolate delicacies, from truffles to exotic sculptures. Of course, we are not eating lunch whilst on board are we? But then, who ever heard of eating chocolate for lunch. So I had some for my “unlunch”!

Our first talk this morning after going to the Christian Fellowship meeting was to hear Giles Ramsay talking about Oscar Wilde. Once again, a rapid-fire biography of Wilde. What a crazy character he was! Constantly pushing the boundaries of what was acceptable behaviour in his day and age, and always ignoring the advice of his best friends, taking the advice of a reprobate noble heir, who deserted him without ceremony when he came into his money. A sad life in many ways; his wife wrote on his tomb “He was not so much wicked as weak”.

We then heard General Lord Dannatt talking about the Tower of London, of which he was the Constable for 7 years when he left the Army. Lots of stories about people who had been imprisoned

there, were beheaded there, tried to steal the Crown Jewels, etc. Even included a portion of the banter that the Yeomen Warders tell as guides to the Tower (I remember noting how entertaining our guide was back in 1978); one has become a YouTube hit! He finished with the carpet of ceramic poppies (888,246 of them) installed in 2014 in the 16 acres of the former moat to commemorate the British soldiers killed in World War I.

After that, John Sherlock talked about the Industrial and Revival age in British architecture. This covered Wren (and quite a bit about St Paul's Cathedral, especially its triple-layered dome), as well as John Nash. He then discussed why there was a gothic revival in Britain – which in part was due to people like Ruskin who were leading people to consider their English roots, with Prince Albert also eager to assert “Englishness”. He then gave lots of examples of fine British architectural styles across the ages, concluding with the recovery (but yet to be restored) of the Greek arch from Euston Station, the largest Doric arch ever built.

I managed to fit in a few games of table tennis at this point, including a tournament in which I didn't get very far...

We then went to the Guest Choir “Last Night of the Proms” performance in the main theatre. They were very good, considering they'd had barely a week to meet and rehearse.

I missed part of (but later caught up on TV with) John Nixon talking about Admiral Lord Thomas Cochrane. I'd never heard of him, and that is partly because he repeatedly got on the wrong side of the British Establishment, so they have “written him out of history”. He had an absolutely amazing career as ship's captain, rising eventually to the rank of Admiral. He excelled in a “raider” style of naval warfare, as opposed to the fleet style used by, say, Nelson. He was a contemporary of Nelson's, and fought with him at the Battle of the Nile, arguably Nelson's most impressive victory. He got very upset about the way prize money was allocated - though he captured numerous ships and their treasures, etc, the bulk of the proceeds went to the commanding officer of the fleet, even though they may not have been involved at all. His men got the least portion, which irked him. He also “sailed close to the wind” in other matters and got involved in his uncle's scheme to defraud the Stock Exchange: the uncle escaped overseas, but Cochrane was sentenced and stripped of his commission, his knighthood, and thrown in gaol. When he got out, he headed for Chile where he was given charge of the Chilean navy in its fight to be rid of the Spanish (which he achieved), then did the same to the Spanish in Peru. Then appointed Admiral of the Brazilian fleet and did the same with the Portuguese, always by deeds of daring-do! Then he moved to Greece and attempted to do the same to rid them of the Turks. He did succeed, but achieved actually by the English, French and Russians who had moved in to keep the warring parties apart - an English Lieutenant got killed by a Turkish sniper and then the allies wiped out the Turkish/Egyptian fleet. During the Crimean War, they were afraid he'd end up attacking the Russians, so gave him a land post as Admiral aboard HMS Victory. He died in 1860 at age 85.

We then took in the recent movie *Murder on the Orient Express*, starring Kenneth Branagh as Poirot. We enjoyed it very much, especially as we couldn't remember “who done it” from the earlier versions. Then dinner in the casual restaurant - I defied (?) protocol by wearing shorts! Horror!

The evening concert featured a return of comedian Chas Burnet and musician Ben Mills. Very enjoyable.

***Day 15, Wednesday, 24-Jan-18 (at Walvis Bay, Namibia):***

So, today we have no on-board talks, etc, though there will be entertainment tonight. Instead, we took a tour of the sights of Walvis Bay. What are the sights, you might well ask, and the answer predominantly is “sand dunes”! We’re situated right on the edge of the Namib Desert, the oldest on Earth, and the dunes loom over the town when seen from the vantage point of the ship. There are actually a few other “sights”, and we caught two of these - vast numbers of flamingos in the lagoon on the edge of which the township is situated, and salt works (250,000 tonnes of salt a year, mostly exported to South Africa). Passing these attractions, our tour in a 4x4 vehicle took us to the sand dunes to the South of town, towards a place called Sandwich Harbour (now silted up, but a haven for migratory birds). I’m not sure we ever saw the Harbour, but we did see the dunes!



We saw and maybe went on the 2<sup>nd</sup>-highest dune (#2) in the world, the highest being dune #7 on the other side of town. A bit scary at times, especially as it was almost impossible to distinguish the edge of the dune you were on from those beyond, and could easily have careered over the edge! We trusted our driver/guide (Jan, born in South Africa but living in Namibia for the past 20 years, now a resident of Walvis Bay); just as well the vehicle (a Toyota Land Cruiser) didn’t break down (clutch problem) till we were well out of the dunes and on our way back along the beach: we got a tow from one of the other vehicles and arrived back safely and on time. Apart from sand, Namibia is the world’s biggest exporter of diamonds, also exports uranium, and salt. If you look at some of the sand under a magnifying glass (eg by taking a photo and then blowing it up) you can see lots of tiny rubies! Our guide at one time went to a place North of Walvis Bay where he was able over time to collect a large number of rubies, perhaps 5mm size each, and made them into a crown for his daughter when she married.

We went to the casual buffet for dinner tonight, and took in the entertainment, which is being given by a couple of acrobats, “Duo Gold Art”: really amazing acrobatics, gymnastics, sleight of hand and humour, maintaining the standard of quality and variety.

### ***Day 16, Thursday, 25-Jan-18 (in South Atlantic Ocean):***

After attending the Christian Fellowship gathering (the last with this group of 15+ folk), we attended the Q&A session with General Lord Dannatt and his wife. Some curly questions and he didn’t pull his punches on some of the replies. For instance, on Iraq, he was Deputy Chief of Staff at the time, and thought the intelligence about WMD was pretty unconvincing; however, he understood that Blair had given Bush an assurance that Britain would support them. He considers the Chilcott Report pulled its punches and that Blair has “got off lightly”. He was also pretty critical of the occupants of the Oval Office for the past 9 years - thought Obama was a weak leader, and has no time for Trump - surely, he muses, there are better candidates somewhere among the US’s 350 million population? He also answered questions on Putin, WWII turning points, Britain’s cultural heritage, NATO, Brexit, Scottish independence, Trident (Britain’s nuclear deterrent), Gibraltar, spending on defence and foreign aid.

We attended the final talk by astronomer Chris Butler; mostly, he talked about how celestial bodies get/got their names, starting with the main planets and days of the week. Astronomer actually, of

course, means “star namer”. He’s delighted to have had an asteroid named after him - Asteroid #13543. He finished with Plutarch’s saying “the mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be lit”: - he hoped he had lit a few fires with these talks.

The entertainment in the evening was Marcus Terrell and the Serenades, a singer and his two female vocalists who were semi-finalists in America’s Got Talent. They delivered a very dynamic mixture of vocal gymnastics, covering Motown, classic Rock-n-Roll and Soul.

I managed to fit in a gym session today.

***Day 17, Friday, 26-Jan-18 (at Cape Town):***

Today was the first of our two days in Cape Town. We were actually quite late docking: it was supposed to have been 7am, but was actually 9am. I think there were rough seas during the night so they took it easy. However, since our tour was supposed to start at 8:30am, things started to run late. This wasn’t helped by the 1 hour queue to get through immigration, so it was 11:50 before our tour coach got moving. It took us through the centre of town, pointing out various landmarks, etc, then climbed up to the cable car station. There we had another wait, of 1.5 hours, before we could get into the car to reach the top of Table Mountain (1082m above sea level). An interesting car, which revolves through 360° during the ascent (and descent), to give everyone the same views. The views from the top were quite splendid, though I think they were almost as good from the cable car station. The terrain and flora (and fauna, though I didn’t see any) at the top were really interesting, and a very interesting ecosystem (1,500 species of plant are unique to the mountain). We were fortunate that the day was clear and crisp (and not too hot); the legendary “table cloth” started to come in while we were there, and shortly after we had descended they had to close the cable car (mainly because of high winds coming in, I believe). We had another long (45-minute) wait at the bottom, waiting for some guests who never returned to the coach - I presume they must have found their own way back to the ship. Fortunately, in regard to both waits, the cable car service offered free WiFi, so I was able to put the time to good use.



This “blanket” on Table Mountain is caused when a South-Easterly wind brings air from the Indian Ocean side of the peninsular which is moist; as it rises over the mountain, it condenses into clouds which roll over the top and fall down the North side, only reaching a little way down before the warmer air on the North side prevents it going further. The blanket today remained all night and all the following day (Saturday), so anyone hoping to ride to the top for the views would have been disappointed. As I said, we were blessed with clear weather, in particular as we arrived into Cape Town in the morning - being late meant we did get great views of the mountain as we sailed in.



The tour guide shared a lot of interesting information about Cape Town (its history, economy, ethnicity, etc). Cape Town is actually in the middle of the most severe drought it has ever experienced; the water supplies (most from ground water, but also from nearby dams) are almost exhausted, and if no relief comes by 12 April, the supply to homes will be turned off and people will have to take a bucket to “stand pipes” to get water. I understand this is the first major city in the world that this has happened to. Of course, this would have been the same situation in Perth had the government not invested in 2 desalination plants, which together now furnish 40% of Perth’s water (powered by a solar farm and a wind farm). Desalination is on the drawing board for Cape Town, but the economic situation of the country does not permit such expensive investments at this time. The unemployment rate is 26% for South Africa as a whole, but 20% in Cape Town, which also has the strongest job creation, population growth and economic growth (it has a current population of about 4 million, SA having 57 million in total). Overall, Cape Town impressed me as a robust city, with plenty of new buildings and construction taking place, and generally clean and well kept. It was “discovered” in 1488 by the Portuguese sailor Diaz, the first to round the Cape, and first settled by the Dutchman Jan van Riebeeck in 1632 as a staging post for the Dutch East India Company.

We got back to the ship at about 3:30pm, and then watched (on replay) some of the one-day cricket match between England and Australia, but sadly missed the first 6 overs of the England innings when all the fireworks happened. England actually made a surprisingly good recover from the 5 wickets for 8 runs they started with, but Australia won comfortably (a consolation win, as England had already won the 1-day series by winning the first 3 matches).

We dined in the Britannia Restaurant his evening, partly in order to have the next 2 glasses from the bottle of wine we had ordered last night. Although we were on our own our table-mate Laurie dropped by to wish us a happy Australia Day! (they arrived back from their shore excursion too late to dine there themselves).

Afterwards, we enjoyed the entertainment in the Royal Court Theatre, which was provided by a local South African Folkloric group, comprising the champion Drum Majorettes, some ethnic dancers with jangles on their ankles, and a marimba band and singer.

### ***Day 18, Saturday, 27-Jan-18 (at Cape Town):***

Today I was booked on a safari to a nearby safari park, Aquila Private Nature Reserve. Another fine day, a little cloud cover (eg on Table Mountain), but with a max around 25°. Helen had decided not to join this tour, hoping that the one we planned to do together at Port Elizabeth would be sufficient. So she spent a quiet day “at home”, reading, colouring-in, and other peaceful pastimes. She had also hoped to do a load of washing, but the machines were closed for some reason - it can’t have been Cape Town’s water shortage, but she thinks there was some issue about soiling the harbour with our waste water.



I set off at 8:30am in a coach for the 1.5 hour journey to Aquila, which turned out to be 2.5 hours. We had a buffet lunch there then set off in open-sided vehicles for a 2.5 hour drive around the Reserve, seeking out the fauna they had there. They do have the “big 5” in attendance, as well as a lot of other wildlife. The “big 5” gets its name from the most difficult 5 animals to “bag” in the days

of big game hunting - it comprises lions, leopards, rhinos, elephants and water buffalo. We did get to see 3 of them, but leopards are rarely seen in the daytime, and I'm not sure I was too worried about not seeing water buffalo. The animals we did see (and stopped to observe, photograph and have explained to us) included, in order: springbok, hippo, zebra, rhino, eland, wildebeest, giraffe, lion, oryx, ostrich, elephant - all roaming free, except that the lions have their own enclosure, to prevent too much mayhem with the other animals. The hippos were mostly resting, but I did see one rear up and give us a big yawn (though I missed filming it!); we also saw a springbok doing its "spring" briefly, again missed on film. We stopped between a lion and his lionesses (either side of the track), but they were barely interested in us - far more important to catch up on their 22 hours of sleep a day! A bit hard to remember how dangerous they can be! I was surprised how barren the landscape in the Reserve was; very like the Nullarbor - no trees, plenty of low scrub, much exposed sandy soil, but rather mountainous. They also have been suffering somewhat from the drought, and have to supplement the food of most species by about 25%.



The journey there and back was also very interesting. Partly because of the spectacular mountains we travelled through, including a 4km tunnel, the Huguenot Tunnel, built by Italian prisoners of war in about 1942. There were lush valleys with lots of grape vines and other fruit trees, as well as some desolate areas, and several "townships", mostly comprising very rough patchwork corrugated iron dwellings, but with a lot of newer brick or stone houses being built by the government. A few solar farms, but no wind farms. Lots of folk walking along the road (a major highway, N1), mostly looking for a lift or trying to sell grapes.

I got back at about 6:30pm, so too late to dine in the Britannia, so we went to the buffet. The entertainment tonight was provided by a group called New Amen Corner, who specialised in 60's music, and have backed up several known 60's singers in later years. Very good, especially their lead singer (who looked like he was too young to remember the sixties!). This is the second 60's band that we've had, both very good, and clearly Cunard understand the demography of the clientele for whom they're catering!

So, an interesting day in all...

### ***Day 19, Sunday, 28-Jan-18 (rounding Cape of Good Hope):***

We were supposed to depart Cape Town last night at about 9pm, but the winds were too strong for the harbourmaster to let us leave; indeed, they remained strong till about 5:30am this morning, whereupon a quick request was made for permission to leave and for a pilot, and we departed just after 6am. A cloudless sky afforded spectacular views of Table Mountain and the adjacent 12 Apostles (a row of peaks to the South) as we left, very like when we arrived.

We attended the Captain's Church Service this morning, actually led by the Deputy Captain, Karl Shepherd, as Captain Wells would have been preoccupied with the late start.

We then heard Graham Howell talk about Réunion, its sights and attractions (lots of waterfalls!!!), and the various tours being offered, including the one we are booked on to Cirque de Salazie. We hope also to catch up with Fabrice Hoarau, who as a French exchange student stayed with us at the end of 1986.

We then heard the first of a new batch of speakers, Dr Andy Adam, a retired pathologist, talking about humour in medicine. He described the various categories of joke, from basic 1-liners, doctor-doctor and knock-knock jokes, through superiority and absurdity to release jokes, including doctors' "in jokes", like mortuary humour. He told a few on the way through, excepting the "release jokes" which are often vulgar - Freud said that they are told as a safety valve by men too immature to suppress their sexual urges. Here's an absurdity joke that I'm sure many of you will have heard: a market gardener went to the doctor complaining that he thought he had a lettuce growing out of his bottom: upon examination, the doctor declared, it's all right, it's just the tip of an iceberg.

Back in our cabin, we watched Federer win the Australian Open (we didn't watch all the match, but including the final set) - his 6<sup>th</sup> win, and his record-beating 20<sup>th</sup> Grand Slam victory. Gee, he hits the ball sweetly. Seems like he's decided the Hopman Cup (in Perth) is the ideal preparation - he won it this year with Belinda Bencic (who also played above herself in the Open this year). We don't mind a bit! We missed the Hopman Cup this year, but hoping he'll come back next year...

Later, we listened to Aldon Ferguson talk about various covert intelligence gathering activities undertaken during the Cold War, especially before the advent of satellites. There were several "overflying" expeditions by aircraft flying too high for the Soviets to intercept them (36,000 feet, now common for commercial airliners), before the advent of the American U2 aircraft. Some were conducted by the RAF at the instigation of the US, who had overflowed so often (and had 40 shot down) they were worried the Soviets would declare war on them; there were 3 such missions in April 1952 which in fact were not detected by the Soviets. I was also surprised to learn that the British had made an agreement with Stalin to allow up to 35 men of each side to roam (fairly) freely through East Germany observing troop and weapon deployments and movements; this group was called Brixmis. The Americans later tried to get in on the deal, but their access was quite a bit more restricted. These "spies" meant that NATO had pretty good intelligence about the forces arrayed against them in East Germany.

At dinner tonight, a formal affair in the Britannia Restaurant, we found we have a third couple at our table - Ron and Val Norman from Port Kennedy - he spent most of his career working for Wesfarmers. So, a full table for the first time ever!

The entertainment tonight was a singer paying tribute to Judy Garland - "A Garland for Judy". She was quite excellent as a Judy Garland substitute, especially that rather sad vibrato that Judy employed in many of her songs, including most happy ones.

We've also just found out that due to a problem with the electricals during the day, combined with leaving Cape Town late, means we'll be late arriving into Port Elizabeth tomorrow. They say it should not affect our tour times, which is a safari to Pumba Game Reserve. We'll see...

### ***Day 20, Monday, 29-Jan-18 (at Port Elizabeth):***

Well, I'm pleased to report that we arrived and docked in Port Elizabeth pretty well as the Captain had predicted, so were on our coach and on our way to Pumba Game Reserve by 8:15am (the early

rise not altogether welcome!). Pumba is one of a good number of private game reserves in this area (Eastern Cape), where the farms that had been established by the early settlers (from 1823 on) are gradually being returned to their native state. The wild animals had very largely been wiped out by farmers wanting to safeguard their livelihood, but starting with a few remaining elephants significant efforts are being made to rehabilitate the land and fauna and flora (a lot of Australian plants had been imported, like acacia). Even where there are no imported plants, I was surprised how similar the terrain looked (overall) to the Australian bushland (where there are few trees); no wonder in both cases it's called "the bush", and that they thought Australian plants would thrive. There is one very large national park (akin to Kruger) in this area, called Addo Elephant Reserve, which has established a thriving elephant conservation programme, and has now diversified into other animals. BTW, some refer to the "big 7", which includes Great White Sharks and Southern Right Whale, common to this coast.

Pumba is about 1.5 hours' drive from PE, and covers an area of about 6,000 hectares. They are home to the "big 5", as well as many other animals and about 300 species of bird. We had a drive



lasting about 2.5 hours around the park, and we saw (in order): tortoise, wildebeest, impala (a lot of them, and many young ones), olive thrush, warthog (many babies also), nyala (form of antelope), hippo (in the distance, and mostly submerged), white lioness (waiting quietly under a bush near a waterhole), kudu (another antelope), blesbuck (antelope), giant tortoise, elephant (with young), giraffe (with young), terrapin,



cape glossy starling, rhino, zebra, vervet monkeys (seen at the lodge, trying to steal our food). Once again, we didn't see buffalo, and we searched in vain for a cheetah that had been spotted earlier in the day, but the white lion was special - they are very proud of their pride (Ha!) of white lions, one of only 2 (I think) in the country). Pumba does not need to supplement the food for the animals (as in Aquila), as the vegetation is sufficient for the herbivores, and the predators also find enough food on their own (!). The journey around the park was on very bumpy roads, and being in the rear row of seats we were thrown about mercilessly! I think this may have contributed, along with the hotter weather (maybe up to about 30°) to Helen feeling rather sick after our lunch in the Lodge. There were 2



other ladies who were suffering, and the Park folk were extremely caring in looking after the 6 of us and then arranging for separate transport back to the ship.

We ate in the buffet restaurant, Kings Court, tonight, with Helen eating sparingly and selectively. I arranged to do a load of washing, too, while we ate - the laundrettes have been extremely busy, with mostly men on duty, it seems...

She had wanted to go to the entertainment this evening, but decided not to attempt it. A shame, because the introductory song & dance act celebrating Motown was well done, and then the ventriloquist, Jerry Goodspeed, was excellent. He had 2 dummies, one old man and an elderly woman who flirted shamelessly with a member of the audience. In another segment, he used another member of the audience as a dummy - had us all and the man himself in stitches. He finished up with a duet with the 2 dummies, even having them sing together at the end!

***Day 21, Tuesday, 30-Jan-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

We enjoyed a visit to the Christian Fellowship this morning, where we shared experiences of miracles, mostly of healing. Some might call them coincidences, and that is another way of looking at it, but we prefer to give credit to God...

The “keynote” speaker on this leg of the voyage is Martin Bell, former journalist with the BBC (mainly a war correspondent), and for a time member of Parliament (unseating Neil Hamilton). He is, of course, very well known in the UK, but we have been only vaguely aware of him. He has covered the Korea, Vietnam, Bosnia, Syria, and various other conflicts; he was injured by shrapnel in the Bosnian conflict and had to be flown home. He believes the Bosnian conflict was the worst, if only because the fleeing Muslims (being driven out and massacred by the Serbs), and with little intervention at first by the West, received widespread TV coverage in Muslim countries. He pointed out that there are no isolated events in a war - everything has consequences; he also asserted that armed conflict almost never achieves its goals. He developed a concept called the “journalism of attachment”, whereby journalists cannot or should not avoid getting involved in the tragedies of war. When approached to sit for the seat then held by Neil Hamilton (“cash for questions” scandal), he asked why Terry Waite (who was asked first) declined: Terry said he’d already served one 4-year term! Apart from his reflections as a war correspondent, Martin has taken to writing poetry and shared some marvellous limericks with us (eg about cruise ship laundrettes, and about how life is like a roll of toilet paper - it unrolls faster towards the end!). His facility with words, which served him well as a journalist as now as a poet, is not surprising given the abilities of members of his family: his father wrote the first Times crossword back in 1931, and his sister translates Asterix comics, turning bad French jokes into bad English jokes (eg she invented a character called “ginandtonicus”). I look forward to hearing more of his poetry in later talks.

We also heard Douglas Gibson talking about South Africa, Past, Present and Future. He is an optimist about the future of this country, despite serious problems with the economy, with corruption, with crime, and so on. His optimism is derived in part from what he believes is one of the most progressive Constitutions in the world, and from a variety of other encouraging signs. For instance, despite the 8 years of Jacob Zuma’s presidency, where poor policies, the rise of corruption, inept choices of ministers, adverse judgements have been rife (he has faced 783 charges of corruption), that presidency is coming to an end and his likely successor, Cyril Ramaphosa, is a much better prospect (though perhaps not squeaky clean). Also, the opposition party (Democratic Alliance) is better organised and has grown its parliamentary representation from 7% to 28%, and there are many good and upcoming politicians; furthermore, GDP has more than doubled, foreign reserves

have grown 17-fold, and there are now more middle-class blacks than the total white population. Although crime is still a big problem, the murder rate has dropped from 50,000 per annum in 1994 to 17,805 in 2015. But there is still a long way to go...

We missed Aldon Ferguson's talk about military photographic intelligence, but I instead went to the Gym.

Andy Adam talked about doctors who kill. He's done a study of the "golden age" of killers - the Victorian and Edwardian eras, focusing on the doctors among them, and gave us a number of examples. Apparently, Harold Shipman in 2000 was the first doctor to be convicted of killing a patient (more on him in a later lecture, I gather). The others killed the usual suspects - wives, mistresses, etc. Poison is almost always the chosen weapon. The most notorious case concerned Dr John Bodkin Adams, whom practised in Eastbourne; he was suspected of as many as 160 deaths of patients, most of whom left him money in their wills; he was tried for one case, in 1956, but it was badly managed and he was acquitted and the police were reluctant to bring further cases; he was struck off by the Medical Registrar, but later reinstated. In another case, that of Dr William Palmer, he was addicted to gambling and ended up murdering 14 people over 10 years for money, always by poison, leading to the expression "what's your poison?"

It was a formal night at the Britannia Restaurant tonight, and we decided to "dress up" for it, partly because we'd missed yesterday's dinner, and partly because we bumped into Laurie and Cathy and they said they hoped to see us there. So for only the second time we had a full complement tonight.

The entertainment tonight is a saxophonist called Yolanda Brown, who blends jazz, soul and reggae; let's see what she has to offer... [later] Well, she's certainly a very good musician and has a vibrant personality, but not entirely my kind of music; still, I appreciated the entertainment. Helen stayed "at home"...

### ***Day 22, Wednesday, 31-Jan-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

After Christian Fellowship again, we went to hear John Dowson give an illustrated talk about the history of the port of Fremantle. It was based on his recently published book, with lots of prints and old photos showing the port's development over time. It was actually only opened as a port (inside the river) after the limestone bar to the river mouth was blown up by C Y O'Connor using many tons of dynamite in 1897. I didn't realise that there was quite a competition for developing the port, called the Battle of the Plans, with O'Connor's plan controversially winning out (O'Connor was nothing if not always controversial!). It replaced a 1.4km long jetty that had served as the port just South of the current South Mole. I thought it a shame that Dowson didn't start his talk with giving an overall image of how Fremantle relates to the rest of the Swan River, to help those not familiar with Perth orientate themselves. He had lots of pictures of various ships over the years (including both World Wars) that visited Perth, including Queen Mary (I) many times, and Aquitania (during both wars).

Straight after this talk, we stayed on to hear Douglas Gibson, former South African ambassador to Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. He talked about his experience as an ambassador, which he really loved, though it was hard work (receptions day and night sometimes 7 days a week!). He reckoned he could get very used to being called "Your Excellency"! He was quite surprised to be asked to serve, as he was a prominent member of the opposition in South Africa and had been an outspoken critic of President Mbeki. It speaks a lot for his integrity that he was trusted with representing South Africa abroad, which he did with distinction. His job was to advocate the good

things about the country, not dwell on the bad - and he found plenty in his country's move from apartheid to a progressive constitutional democracy to advocate, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Indeed, he found the leaders of those countries eager to learn from South Africa's experience.

The clocks went forward again by 1 hour (now 5 hours behind Perth), and we watched yesterday's movie of the day, *The Glass Castle* (on constant play on the TV today).

After dinner in the Britannia Restaurant (informal dress required, ie "almost formal"), I went to hear Martin Bell read some of his poetry (I very much liked it - often topical, frequently humorous, always verbally satisfying), and then took in the English comedian, Phil Melbourne, in the main Theatre; he was very entertaining, though a couple of his jokes were the same as an earlier comedian we had...

### ***Day 23, Thursday, 1-Feb-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

Today in the Christian Fellowship we had Andy Adam (one of the Cunard Speakers) talk to us about the significance of Christianity's roots in Judaism, based on a course which he took and then adapted and gives himself (called, I think, the Keshet Course <http://www.keshetcourse.org.uk/>, originally developed by Murray Dixon). I was impressed with the way he condensed the first 5 lessons in a 10-lesson course into 40 minutes - he has a great facility with words and clarity of presentation (clearly, he's done this a lot!).

We didn't want to hear the 10am talk, and got caught up talking with fellow passengers from the Liverpool area (planning to visit their son and family in Perth). Then we went straight to hear journalist Martin Bell on the subject "The Changing Face of Television News - Can we trust what we see anymore?" Of course, he dealt mainly with war reporting, but even so I thought the differences in style of reporting were too subtle for me to fully appreciate. I thought he might have talked rather more about the rise of "fake news", but he didn't. He did talk about how you decide what the right balance is between showing too much and too little of the atrocities of war, and the fact that there's far more about the Kardashians shown on TV than about serious issues like Yemen, Congo and so on. A standard aphorism among news reporters is that the important people are the ones behind the camera, the people in front are the self-important ones.

After "un-lunch" we watched a good deal of the Big Bash semi-final between the Tassie Hurricanes and the Perth Scorchers, with the Scorchers well and truly beaten. Then it was off to the Illuminations Theatre to hear Douglas Gibson again, this time about Brexit, Trump and the Rise of Populism. A very perceptive analysis, which also covered Italy, Netherlands, France and Germany and the political upheavals common to them all, summarised by the Mayor of Johannesburg, "Communities across the world have become intolerant of deaf governments". In talking about Brexit, he noted that similar movements have been mooted in other countries, with appropriate names, eg departugal, italeave, finish, czechout, byegium. He observed that old certainties are crumbling, and with many jobs disappearing and new ones emerging, and significant unemployment in many Western countries, this next generation might be the first to be worse off than their parents. But he remains optimistic, as does Warren Buffett. He concluded with the view that a stronger USA that works will lead to the rest of the world working too.

We had dinner tonight in a little adjunct of the Kings Court buffet, Chef's Galley, where they specialise in pizza and pasta made to order. Very nice - might go there again. And the entertainment

tonight is being provided by the Royal Court singers (not the dancers too, I believe). We decided not to venture out on this occasion.

***Day 24, Friday, 2-Feb-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

Alison from Sydney shared at Christian Fellowship this morning. We then missed hearing Aldon Ferguson talking about “Military Intelligence: Interpreting the Results” (which the daily newsheet had incorrectly titled, as it happens - one of quite a few errors we’ve noticed). But we’ve decided to wind back our participation in these events a little.

Later, we did attend the Q&A session with Martin Bell. When asked about his proudest moment, he said he thought it was his reporting of the Bosnian conflict, at a time when the European nations had not woken up to what was happening; Douglas Hird, then UK Foreign Minister, praised him for being “the founder member of the something-must-be-done club”. He shared that a number of aspects of current news reporting worry him: one is the inequality of pay between men and women - he thinks this should be fixed by cutting the pay of the high flyers, who are excessively paid in his opinion. Another perhaps more serious trend is to sanitise the news too much; he also thinks that many news feeds trivialise the news, especially international news. Finally, he was lost for words when asked about Rupert Murdoch’s influence on news reporting: Murdoch says he doesn’t interfere in editorial decisions, but (eg) sacked the chief editor of The Times when he supported Obama rather than Trump - he thinks Fox News is hardly a source of enlightenment to viewers, indeed a malign influence. Finally, he is troubled that people go to the news feeds they prefer, leading to partisan news. He does like Al Jazeera (but not for its reporting on Qatar!). He finished with a couple of his odes, the second including the line that in life there’s a Play but no Rewind.

We had to advance our clocks by another hour at noon, bringing us to GMT+4, the same time zone as Réunion and Mauritius.

After un-lunch I did a session in the Gym and then we went to hear Douglas Gibson talking about “Peace or War in a Dangerous World?” He started by talking about the way that the nature of war has changed: it’s no longer nation against nation, but often involves just a few individuals on one side, and the tactics have changed significantly (eg cyber warfare, social media manipulation, geopolitical subversion, economic blackmail, etc). He talked a fair bit about the Pacific arena, and the possibility of some kind of showdown between USA (who’ve enjoyed unchallenged supremacy in the Pacific since just after Pearl Harbour) and the emergence of China, keen to put its stamp on this region (eg bases on South China Sea islands). He noted that no great power has emerged in the world without warfare of some sort, but being an optimist doesn’t believe that this is inevitable. On the other hand, he finds troubling that Lord Ashcroft polls in the US indicate 62% think that war with North Korea will happen during Trump’s presidency, 51% with Iran, 35% with Venezuela, and as much as 33% with China (Russia 32%). Contributing to tensions in the region are Japan’s plans to change its constitution to allow it to fight abroad, Taiwan’s status, China’s increased military spending (risen from \$30B in 2000 to \$216B in 2016; USA’s is still 3x that of the next 8 countries combined), and the US foreign policy which is committed to “strategic ambiguity”! He concluded that, for the foreseeable future, we should expect a kind of “grey zone”: not quite war but not quite peace.

Straight after that, we heard Andy Adam speaking to the subject “How the Victorians Turned Murder into Entertainment”. He gave a fascinating account of how attitudes to violence and murder in particular evolved during the Victorian era. He dwelt on a particular murder, that of Maria Marten in the Red Barn at Polstead; the body was not discovered for 12 months after the murder, whereupon

the media had a field day; the 1-page “broadsheets” of the day were full of lurid details (some of it fabricated); ballads were composed about it, theatres re-enacted it (“penny dreadfuls”), there was even a musical. He also described the “penny gaff” theatres in the back of pubs, Punch & Judy, and the rise of “crime tourism” (eg bits of the Red Barn were removed to make toothpicks, etc until it became unsafe and had to be demolished). There were 55,000 theatre seats in London in mid-Victorian times, vs 41,000 now. He covered public executions (special trains were put on to bring people to see them), crime prevention measures, and then crime investigation methods (primarily, post a reward), and then the advent of investigation based on science and logic (presaged by Sherlock Holmes). Arising from this background we have the current obsession with murder mystery TV programmes - a Nielson survey of US TV viewers in 1998 revealed that an average 18yo would have witnessed 16,000 murders and 200,000 violent “acts”, for a 75yo the figures being 110,000 and 1 million respectively. Since then with the rise of video games and other forms of semi-participative violence, things have only got worse. Andy’s advice: feed the white dog (based on that fable about the white dog and black dog within us).

We went to the Britannia Restaurant for dinner, despite the fact that it was billed as “formal” (but there’s actually very little difference, especially for the ladies). Following dinner, I went to hear the English comedian, Phil Melbourne (in reprise), followed by Jerry Goodspeed, the ventriloquist (also in reprise). Since Helen didn’t go, I took a note of some of Phil’s quips, which were mostly rather good (eg about visiting the Scottish highlands, sampling the water in a roadside burn, and admitting he was English... - ask me about it sometime!). Meantime, Helen watched the movie “Going in Style” on TV repeat, an excellent movie with Michael Caine, Morgan Freeman and Alan Arkin.

***Day 25, Saturday, 3-Feb-18 (in Réunion):***

This morning we docked in Le Port, Réunion, at 7am, on a clear cloudless day. We had booked on a morning tour, that took us along the coast to the principal city, St Denis (they insist that Paris is their capital, Réunion being a full “department” of France). We passed through that city, then on to a vanilla plantation near St André, thence into the interior to Salazie (this is a village in one of the 3 “cirques”, or calderas of extinct volcanoes, on the island); it is surrounded by giant mountain walls, with multitudes of waterfalls. The pièce de résistance is the Bridal Veil waterfall (actually accompanied by several others); also worthy of mention is the White Falls, the highest in Réunion, and the “Pisse en l’air” waterfall, part of which falls on the road and under which the coach drives (translation not necessary!). There were numerous other falls here and there up and down the valley of the Rivière du Mât.



At the Bridal Falls just beyond Salazie, we turned round and retraced our steps, getting back to the ship at 1:45pm.



Réunion has a total population of 850,000, with St Denis having 150,000. It has a very colourful racial and religious mix, but they don’t know the relative sizes of religious groups as it is illegal in France to make such a count. Slavery was abolished on 20-Dec-1848, which has become a national holiday, and then they brought indentured

workers to work the sugar cane fields from India and other places, so introducing a rich Hindu element to the island's cultural mix. The mix of racial types gives rise to a significant Créole presence; in Créole, St Denis is spelt "Sin-Dni". It was interesting to visit the vanilla plantation, it being one of 200 producers on the island. The average age on the island is 36, and the overall unemployment rate is 26%, but is as high as 60% among the 20-25yo group. Everywhere there was incredibly lush vegetation, and Réunion has 3 distinct climate zones - tropical (where we were), temperate and mountain.

After we returned, we tried again to make contact with Fabrice, the former exchange student we had hoped to meet, and we waited at the entrance to the harbour all afternoon. Sadly, the meeting didn't happen, and we didn't discover why until I was able to pick up a message the next day when I had Internet access - it turns out he was at a tennis tournament all day (he's the president of his tennis club), and left his phone home. Actually, the wait wasn't wasted as a local reggae band and dancers put on a great show for the passing tourists; to enter the harbour area, buses had to offload all their passengers, who then went through customs (showing only their cruise card) and got back onto the same bus once it had been checked (I guess to see that no-one had stowed away, and no untoward packages left on board). I had caught a glimpse of a wonderful red and orange bird on the bus journey through the harbour to the ship, so I wanted to walk back to get a better look and a photo, but I wasn't allowed to! I could take photos from the ship, but not even of the ship outside it!

We shared our experiences with the folk at our table at dinner in the Britannia Restaurant, and then retired for the night (skipping the entertainment - we'd had quite enough for one day!).

#### ***Day 26, Sunday, 4-Feb-18 (in Mauritius):***

This morning we docked in Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius. Port Louis has a population of about 250,000, with the whole



of Mauritius having 1.3 million. We had booked a tour that took us over a lot of the island, mostly the Western side, lasting a lot of the day. Although this is their rainy season, the day started out fine and clear, though we did get a bit of rain later in the day (actually, in some areas there was a lot of rain, resulting in some flooding across the road when we passed by). A couple of weeks ago they had a cyclone hit the island - it didn't do much damage, but it did dump a lot of rain, and the reservoirs are all full. We first visited a dormant volcano 500m high, with great views over residential areas to the mountains and sea. Then a souvenir shop (obligatory, of course, but also a toilet break, though the whole time for some was spent waiting in the queue!). About the only thing in the shop that interested me were the model ships, which is a speciality of the island; I resisted the urge to buy one... Then it was the Sacred Lake, a place of pilgrimage for Hindus (of which there are very many on the island, a heritage of the indentured workers brought in from India by the English to work the sugar fields when slavery was abolished in 1835). These waters are connected with the sacred river Ganges, and an annual festival takes place (this year) on 13-Feb; being the weekend, and with only a week to go, there were many already performing their rituals, so very crowded.

We then travelled to nearby Black River Gorge National Park, where there was another great lookout and waterfall. Mauritius is, of course, of volcanic origin, and though there are no active volcanoes now, and nothing very high, there are still plenty of wonderfully-shaped mountains. Then we stopped at a nearby restaurant, La Varangue sur Morne, also with great views; we were able to savour Chou Chou, a local vegetable, which is reminiscent of potato, quite pleasant. Our next stop was at the Chamarel waterfall, 100m high (I think), and quite an impressive sight. Nearby is the Chamarel 7-coloured earth site, a fascinating patch of bare earth with waves of colours running through it (ochre, brown, yellow, blue, purple and 2 other shades, combinations of iron and aluminium oxide); they were caused by 2 sets of lava flows, one really ancient, and another between 2 and 3 million years ago. We also saw some giant tortoises, reintroduced recently (they became extinct at the same time as the Dodo, for the same reason - Dutch taste buds!). From there, we travelled along the West coast back to the ship, stopping at another great viewpoint over most of the West coast.



So, lots to see on our day out, and left us wanting a quiet night “in” at home...

#### ***Day 27, Monday, 5-Feb-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

The first of 7 sea days in a row before we reach Fremantle. Talking of which, we didn’t attend, but did watch on TV later, the Tour Director’s guide to Fremantle (and Perth), and also a guide to Busselton area (the QM2 stops there after Freo, anchors 3 miles off shore, and they use tenders to bring people in to the 1.8km jetty). Interesting to get a visitor’s perspective on where we live, and he didn’t get too many things wrong (but he couldn’t pronounce Geographe Bay), and he did say a lot of lovely things about our home town/State.

At Christian Fellowship, Andy Adam gave a great overview of Christianity’s debt to the Jewish heritage, but documented the sad separation of the two faiths, leading ultimately to outright persecution of the Jews by the established church. He traced the history of the relationship through the Dark Ages, the Crusades, the vacillating attitude of nations and even church leaders like Luther to them, right through the Middle Ages and modern times.

We had the first presentation by Michael Howard, former Home Secretary and then leader of the Conservative Party in opposition (now Lord Howard of Lympne). He talked about the 3 weeks after Churchill became Prime Minister in May 1940: Howard considered these the most critical 3 weeks of Churchill’s career, maybe turning the course of the war. The War Cabinet comprised him, the Foreign Secretary (Lord Halifax), and another Conservative, together with Clement Atlee and another Labour man (it was a War Unity Government). The Conservatives wanted to seek some kind of appeasement with Hitler, as the French were doing, but their rapprochement ultimately meant full occupation. There were 9 Cabinet meetings held over 3 days at that time, as Calais was falling to the Germans. It was a very close-run thing, but ultimately Churchill’s preference for making a stand won out, which meant there was a base from which the Allies could launch an invasion later in the war. Thereafter, Churchill started his great speeches; as Halifax said “Churchill mobilised the English language and sent it into battle”.

The clocks went forward by an hour, bringing us within 3 hours of Perth's time. We missed John Dowson's lecture on Fremantle's heritage, but caught it later on the TV. He obviously has a "bee in his bonnet" about this, though he did cite a number of examples where the Freo Council is ignoring its own guidelines in approving certain high-rise developments. His passion for retaining the Western End in its current form is borne out by his purchase of the Adelaide Steam Ship Company building, where he now lives. He is not impressed by Notre Dame University, which to my mind has done an amazing job of reusing, repurposing, and preserving so many old buildings (they own 49 in the West End). Maintaining a balance between development and preservation is always an issue, especially when sometimes development is necessary to achieve preservation (lest buildings just crumble).

I had a bit of a cold most of the day, which started with a raspy throat after the long periods in the bus with a powerful airconditioner yesterday. Nothing serious, but we thought it advisable not to associate with others at dinner, so we went to the buffet.

The evening entertainment was given by Liverpudlian comedian, John Evans, and he had a number of very good tales with twists to tell, like the JW who came knocking at his door - he invited him in, sat him down, offered him a cup of tea; when asked what he wanted to say, he replied "I don't know, I've never got this far before"!

#### ***Day 28, Tuesday, 6-Feb-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

I shared some thoughts about my Christian pilgrimage at the Christian Fellowship meeting, but then we all quickly decamped to hear Andy Adam speak on "Matters of Life and Death: What we can learn from near-death experiences." There are now some 3,500 to 4,000 cases documented in the medical literature, so it's no longer dismissed as fanciful. In summary, it's a medical event (but not notifiable); it's not exclusive to people of any one faith (or none); it challenges current scientific theories; it can't be "medicalised" away (Southampton University is a centre for research into the phenomenon): there are lots of objections to believing they actually happen, but these are easily dismissed. Most find it extremely difficult to describe what they've seen, "like trying to write with only half the alphabet"; what they do describe has a remarkable correlation to the Biblical picture of heaven, though most are not Christian. Interestingly, blind people have had them and recounted what they've seen (see Prof Kenneth Ring's book "Mindsight"), as well as people having "out of body" experiences looking down on themselves then describe what they've seen on top of a cupboard. It's still not at all clear what these incidents are saying, though follow-ups indicate that for most people they are life-transforming, with 80% saying they have a new life purpose. Curiously, also, some people experience a change in their personal electro-magnetic field. One word of warning: don't talk about the will when Aunt Agatha lies dying - she may be able to hear you! The sign on a gate to a field said "Is there life after death? Trespass here and find out"!

We stayed on in the Illuminations Theatre to listen to Lady Sandra Howard, Lord Howard's wife, who used to be a model and has more recently started writing novels. She had quite a successful modelling career, appearing on the cover of Vogue twice, modelling in London and New York. At one time, her first husband embarked on a project to write about Frank Sinatra's music, so was invited to stay in his Palm Springs mansion, meeting lots of the beautiful people; she even dined at the White House with President Kennedy, who kept on ducking out to take phone calls, but then returned to the pleasantries and trivialities of the dinner conversation: he was being briefed on the escalating situation over Cuba and instructed what to put in his landmark speech the following day. She thought about writing up these experiences in an autobiography, but has instead incorporated them into works of fiction, like "Tell the Girl".

During the afternoon, we watched yesterday's prime movie, *In the Heart of the Sea*, which was repeated continuously on the TV. It was based on an event on which *Moby Dick* was based. Lots of sea scenes, most not as pleasant as we've been having!

We went to the Britannia Restaurant for dinner, whose dress code today was "formal". Interestingly, on the blurb we got before embarking, it was quite insistent that "formal dress code" meant dinner suit (for men); however, looking through the "hotel guide" in our room today, I noticed that it said that a dark suit and tie is also acceptable. This is what has been prescribed on other cruises we have taken, so I wonder why they stressed the dinner suit in our pre-cruise briefing? One of the men at our table had decided to "defy the code" and wear a suit and tie, so he was very disappointed to find out that he wasn't actually being a rebel!

The entertainment tonight was provided by Roy Locke, a cross-over operatic and musical singer, who sang a range of lovely (mostly romantic) songs from musicals, like "Some Enchanted Evening", and of course a couple from *Les Mis*. Interestingly, he also sang *Mack the Knife*, which was actually from a German musical! Turns out he uses a stage name, his being unpronounceable German, and he hails from Sydney.

#### ***Day 29, Wednesday, 7-Feb-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

After the Christian Fellowship meeting (we have developed some good friendships with folk here, including Andy Adam, one of the Cunard speakers), I went to hear Aldon Ferguson talk about the Berlin Airlift, which took place from August 1948 through to May 1949 (though elements of it continued to September that year). The blockade started on 24th June, 1948, and very quickly supplies of everything from toilet paper to flour and fuel oil were depleted, West Berlin becoming totally dependent on air supplies. There were 394 Douglas C54 Skymaster planes used in the airlift, together with numerous DC3's, and Lancaster bombers that Freddie Laker had converted to use in his airline. Planes landed every 90-180 seconds day and night, totalling 180,708 flights during the blockade, amassing 560,000 flying hours and 80,900,000 miles flown. Although the Russians would deliberately fly and manoeuvre in the flight corridors to put off the pilots, there was only ever one crash, with 31 USAF servicemen and 10 UK civilians and few others killed. A new airport was opened in the French sector, Tegel, built by Berlin women (there were few German men available), but the main airport was Tempelhof.

I stayed on to hear Jacki Hill-Murphy talk about the expedition she undertook in the Amazon to retrace the journey of Isabella Godin in 1769. Isabella seemed to have been left alone in Ecuador while her husband went off on a mission to measure the circumference of the Earth to see if it was "pinched in" at the Equator. She never saw him for 21 years, and undertook a journey down the Amazon to reach a boat that had been sent for her. All of her party (except her) died, including all her children. The boat waited for 5 years for her! Anyway, Jacki told Isabella's story as well as her own, retracing Isabella's journey, in a rather disjointed fashion - I was not quite sure whether she was talking about the original journey or her own at times! Parts of the journey were extremely dangerous; it took her from Ecuador through Peru (down tributaries of the Amazon) into Brazil, through territory controlled by some very warlike tribes. I'm not quite sure why she undertook this retracing journey, but apparently that's the sort of thing she does! (I missed her first talk, where perhaps she set the scene).

We lost another hour at noon today, now only 2 hours behind Perth.

I spent much of the rest of the day (as for the past two days) reading (and commenting on, producing an index for) the Memoires of Monte Sala. He was a brilliant inventor about whom, together with Dennis Moore (my boss when I first joined UWA), Terry Woodings (a colleague from the UWA Computing Centre) and Tony Sala, Monte's eldest son, we are writing a biography. I finished the Memoires in the evening, and don't feel that it has much that we can add to the biography, but I did find it very interesting reading, especially his origin in the Italian enclaves in Dalmatia, his wartime experience (he was drafted into Tito's partisan army to fight against the Italians), and his experience as a refugee migrant to Australia (he was required to work for 2 years for the government, and spent some of that time in a sewage works in Werribee outside Melbourne).

We went to the Britannia Restaurant for dinner, but were on our own on this occasion.

The entertainment this evening was provided by an amazing multi-instrumentalist - piano, trumpet, flugelhorn, mini-trumpet, drums, hose pipe, shower head, etc!! Very dynamic and multi-talented (oh, he also sang). A guy from Great Yarmouth called Davie Howes.

### ***Day 30, Thursday, 8-Feb-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

Today Andy Adam completed his talks to the Christian Fellowship group about Israel, covering the period since late in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when Jews started to return to the land of Israel, the Balfour Declaration, the British Mandate (not a glorious period in British history). He commented on the decision made by the British to abandon Balfour in 1939 and propose an Arab-dominated state (rejected by the Arabs). He referred to many Biblical prophecies and how they appear to be being fulfilled by these events. After the establishment of a Jewish state in 1947/8, there was a sudden influx of refugees (many from Russia), totalling 175,000, with a similar number of Arabs moving (or being moved) out. There has been quite a transformation to the land since the Jews started to return, but it's hard to know how much would have happened if the land had remained under Arab control. Hard to see how the future will map out without lots more conflict...

I went from there to hear Michael Howard again, talking about "My Life and Times". He just chatted, and then answered questions on a range of issues, from Brexit to Margaret Thatcher. He was particularly proud of the fact that, after 50 years of growing at 5% per year, crime rates dropped by 18% during his term as Home Secretary. He attributed this to 4 measures, which he undertook after spending a good deal of time listening (to police, etc): he massively increased CCTV coverage (despite protests); established a national DNA database (again, despite protests); adjusted the "right to silence" ruling; and promoted the view that "prison works" (ie when crooks are in prison, crime rates fall).

I went to the Gym in the afternoon, and then took part in a table tennis competition (but didn't progress, with my doubles partner very far).

We went to the buffet for dinner tonight, and then I went to hear the Liverpudlian comedian, John Evans, again as the entertainment for the night. Equally entertaining...

### ***Day 31, Friday, 9-Feb-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

At Christian Fellowship this morning, Henke & Henelie from South Africa shared about the various Jewish feasts, and their significance for Christians. Following that, we went to hear Andy Adam again (we've really enjoyed his talks, and so have other passengers, as his sessions are getting more & more full, with several standing at the back this time). The title of his talk was "Dr Harold

Shipman, Beloved Physician and Friend”. He hastily pointed out that he was being ironic. Dr Shipman notoriously killed up to 285 of his patients. He was convicted in 1999 of killing 15, and following 887 investigations the total number that it was believed he killed came to 215, with 45 strong possibilities, and 25 “likelies”. He hanged himself in 2004 in Wakefield Gaol. He mostly practised in Hythe in Greater Manchester, where he was well-liked, it was said that “people were dying to get on his patient list”! Dr Adam covered such issues as his modus operandi, how he did it, why he did it (mostly to get in their wills), how he was able to get away with it for so long (1977-1998), what motivated him (he considered him to be “normal but amoral”, and evil through and through), and finally how he was apprehended (regarded by the police as “the dullest serial killer” they had ever encountered). Andy then drew out a number of lessons, which hopefully will prevent this sort of thing ever happening again.

Following this, we decamped to the other (main) Theatre to hear Roy Locke, the singer from 3 nights ago, talk about the background to the Phantom, together with what it’s like to play the part, as well as several other roles (like Raoul). He started with YouTube video clip of him singing The Music of the Night in Perth, illicitly recorded by someone!

The clocks went forward again at noon, cutting short our day again, with only 1 more to go before Perth. In the afternoon, we went to hear Aldon Ferguson describe the WWII Arctic Convoys that the British (later including the Americans) sent to provide Stalin with resources to support the Eastern Front. When German invaded Russia on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1941, it was in contravention of the non-aggression pact that Ribbenhof and Stalin had agreed, and Russia was totally unprepared. It lost 22,000 tanks and 5,900 aircraft in the first 9 days. Churchill agreed to supply Stalin with resources he could ill afford, as it meant German forces would be divided between the 2 fronts. The convoys started in Britain and went via Iceland and the as far East and North as they could to avoid contact with the Germans who controlled the whole coastline of Norway, Demark, Netherlands and France, finally reaching either Murmansk or Archangel on the Arctic coast of Russia. A few convoys got through relatively unscathed, but a disastrous one undertaken in June 1942 (PQ17) meant they didn’t attempt any more in Summer (too much daylight time). One of the reasons it was so damaged (only 11 of the 35 cargo ships got through) was because it was feared the German battleship Tirpitz, at anchor in Trondheim, was about to engage in battle and it could outperform anything the British had. So the order was given to the escort naval ships to “Scatter”, leaving the convoy unguarded; in fact, the Tirpitz never did engage, but the U-boats had a field day. Altogether, the convoys, which ran from August 1942 to May 1945, successfully transported 4 million tons of equipment and supplies (including many tanks, aircraft, etc); there were 78 convoys in all, with 792 ships of which 90 cargo and 16 naval ships were lost. I gather Stalin hardly said “Thank you”!

We went to dinner in the Britannia Restaurant, and afterwards I went for a short while to hear the entertainment tonight, which was provided by a trio of female singers (from English Opera, I believe) called Virtuosity. They sang really well together, and said they’d mostly focus on duets tonight, starting with a beautiful rendition of the Flower Duet from Lakme. I returned to the cabin (sorry, our “suite”) to try to finish of the third Camilleri book I discovered in the Library.

### ***Day 32, Saturday, 10-Feb-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

Today at Christian Fellowship we shared communion, which used leftover wine and bread from the Jewish Sabbath service held yesterday evening (which a few of our group had attended as guests). I got talking to a retired palliative care specialist from Haywards Heath in West Sussex, and also discovered that another couple in the group have recently moved into the Kingsley Meath Retirement Village, our sister village.

Following this, we went to hear Andy Adam again, this time talking about famous people and their illnesses. Among those he described were Charles Darwin, Alexander Pope, Beethoven, Helen Keller, Edward VII, Judge George Jeffreys (of the Bloody Assizes fame), as well as dealing with the symptoms and treatment for appendicitis (this is what Edward VII had, which caused his coronation to be postponed by 2 months). Jeffreys probably had kidney stones, which surely contributed hugely to his bad temper and summary sentencing. Andy tried to answer the question as to whether their illnesses contributed in any way to their success/fame, or whether it was in overcoming them that they excelled. In the case of someone like Pope, who contracted Pott's Disease of the Spine when about 10 years old, resulting in deformity and discomfort all his life, he was determined to live a normal life, and despite suffering a lot of personal abuse, ended up being the most-quoted poet in English history (after Shakespeare); eg "fools rush in where angels fear to tread".

We went to the planetarium in the afternoon, to see a show entitled "Wildest Weather in the Solar System" - quite amazing to have a proper planetarium on board!! They bring the ceiling down in the Illuminations Theatre, the one where most of the lectures are given. I've discovered that meteors and comets don't go "whoosh!", they go "ZZZZZZZZ" (sound of snoring) - as recounted by one of our comedians!

Then we heard John Dowson talk about the battle between HMAS Sydney and SMS Emden at the Cocos Islands on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1914. He has obtained copies of diaries of various participants in the action (eg the German captain, and the Sydney Captain's 14yo messenger boy), which make fascinating reading. He's writing a pictorial history of the engagement, the first of Australia in the war, and a resounding victory for HMAS Sydney. The Emden was a "raider" given licence by the German high command to roam freely attacking at will: it sank 22 vessels as well as a couple of military ships, really disrupting the flow of goods from India and the East Indies to Britain. Except for the military engagements, the Emden did not take a single life, with all crews and passengers safely taken to port. When the Sydney defeated the Emden, the German captain was taken prisoner and given the Captain's cabin. Thus both sides acted in a very gentlemanly fashion, with WWI later, of course, falling into barbarity and industrial scale killing.

At dinner tonight (a formal occasion, where I pushed the boundaries by wearing my dark "suit" and tie) we discovered that our table companion, Ron Norman, is related to the (MH17) Maslins through the father's mother. I also pushed the boundaries by enquiring as to whether a second helping of Bomb Alaska may be allowed - it was!

The entertainment tonight was provided by Roy Locke, who sang a variety of songs, from That's Amore, through As Time Goes By and Return to Sorrento and Unforgettable (Nat King Cole) to Nessun Dorma, including Figaro and Funicole. He also included Music of the Night, from Phantom, in German, which brought out all the sibilants that he used to mesmerise Christine. All lovely, but I think that in Nessun Dorma he was at his best.

### ***Day 33, Sunday, 11-Feb-18 (in Indian Ocean):***

Today, Sunday, our last day on board the RMS Queen Mary 2 (RMS stands for Royal Mail Ship, ie she is authorised to carry Her Majesty's mail!). We started (after breakfast, of course!) with the Christian Fellowship which was addressed by 92-year old Mordechai Perlov, who several of the group had met up with (maybe at the Sabbath celebration). Anyway, he is a Jew who was born in Lithuania and taken to the Russian gulags at age 14 to clear forests, etc in appalling conditions. He recounted his exploits, escaping, walking across Poland and Germany, Switzerland and Italy,

embarking on a ship to Israel that was turned back by the British and sent to camp in Cyprus. He eventually did get to Israel, joined the Haganah, had lots more adventures, eventually getting to South Africa where he built up a prosperous business (sufficiently prosperous to enable him to take several cruises aboard the QM2!).

We then attended the Captain's church service in the main Theatre, and after that, we went to hear Andy Adam again (they've been working him hard!), who spoke about Dr Thomas Cochrane, a medical missionary to China at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He survived the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), and through a series of coincidences gained the trust and patronage of the Empress-Dowager Cixi, the most powerful person in the land. He introduced Western medicine (eg to deal with cholera outbreaks) and had a vision to set up the first western medical school in China. This he did with the help of Cixi and Prince Su, establishing the Peking Union Medical College in 1901. Eventually, the Rockefellers invested in the College in 1914, and Tom left China in 1915. Andy, it turns out, is Tom's step-grandson.

Attending those last two events meant we missed both Aldon Ferguson (talking about GI's in Britain – All Americans are Cowboys or Gangsters”), and a Q&A session with Michael Howard and his wife, Sandra. However, we did catch some of both of those sessions later on the TV. For instance, I was intrigued that Michael Howard, who is patron of a Hospice Charity, recounted their plan to free up 50,000 beds in NHS hospitals by having patients cared for at home (of the 250,000 beds taken up by hospice patients). Aldon's talk was provocatively titled to emphasise that the only image that Brits had about Americans was from the movies, and John Wayne and James Cagney were the models for all Americans.

After advancing our clocks again by an hour, to bring us into line with Perth, I did attend another session by John Dowson, entitled “Swan River Postcards”, as I was intrigued to find out what it was about. It turns out that he has made a collection of postcards of various aspects of the Swan River since the first was printed in 1897. Sometimes, the messages on the reverse were intriguing, and as there were often 5 or 6 deliveries a day in those times, they often used them like text messages (eg “I hope to pop round this afternoon for tea”). He was clearly not happy with the way that the Swan River has been changed (“limestone walls rather than reed beds to edge the river”); he was chairman of the Swan Brewery Preservation Society, so clearly didn't share the view of some (many?) that it was an eyesore. His session was very poorly attended, maybe because little was said in the Daily Program to explain what it was about.

In the meantime, both Helen and I finished the books we had borrowed from the Library that day before. And then we went to dinner in the Britannia Restaurant. One of the couples at our table had forgotten to turn their watches forward, so turned up an hour late, and just had dessert with us - they didn't want to miss saying farewell (we all disembark in Fremantle).

We both went to the entertainment tonight, which firstly featured Davie Howes in a reprise performance (see Day 27, 7-Feb); not quite as manic as his first performance, but still did involve several instruments, a creative piece he's working on that involves time-lapse of a piece of forest and lake that he is beautifying, set to music, and incorporating some of his great impressionist artwork. He did a manic piano duet with the Orchestra pianist. Then the Royal Court singers and dancers came on for a short tribute to Neil Diamond.

***Day 34, Monday, 12-Feb-18 (arrive in Fremantle):***

Today we are scheduled to disembark at 9:50am, according to the information we have been given for “Independent Guest with Own Arrangements”. We plan to take a taxi from the quayside to home, taking about 30 mins. Since we have been “on a farm or place with animals” in the past 30 days (eg a South African safari park), I hope we won’t be delayed getting off - we will be wearing the shoes we wore then, so they can be checked (sterilised if necessary!). We have already passed through Immigration - Cunard brought some Australian Immigration officials on board at Mauritius, who have processed us already (they seem to have been given a week-long semi-holiday!).

Well, it all worked as planned, and we actually got out a little ahead of schedule (no inspection of our shoes required), but not before gliding gracefully just after sunrise into Fremantle Harbour, doing a 180° turn and pulling up alongside the terminal - quite beautiful! We were followed into the harbour by the Astor, which looked so tiny by comparison (and it is - 20,000 vs 150,000 tonnes, 600 vs 2,500 passengers, 580 vs 1,132 feet long). It remains for me to sum up our experience, which I’ll leave for a day or so. Suffice it to say (a) that it was a truly wonderful time, (b) we were not the least bit bored (I hardly got to look at any of the things I’d brought to keep me occupied), and (c) the ship and Cunard were excellent.

