

Sailing in April 1967 on the original *Queen Elizabeth* was a unique moment in time, so much so that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century I have yet to meet a single person who has sailed on her. Her stately old-world appointments and carved wood trim seemed already old, as indeed they were. She had been renovated after service in World War II and we did not know at the time that she was at the end of her career. In mid-ocean the ship passed the *Queen Mary* on her way to New York, and passengers flocked to the railings to watch the passage. *Queen Mary*, with her three smokestacks, and *Queen Elizabeth*, with her two huge ones, tooted loud signals to each other, surely more for the mirth of their passengers than for nautical reasons. The *Queen Mary* too was destined for imminent decommission.

On the fifth cruise day we sighted land and docked at Cherbourg, then departed again after unloading many passengers and turned back across the channel for our docking at Southampton. By this time the afternoon shadows were quite long. We watched the slow procedure from the railings, again dressed in coats and ties. After disembarking we had only to board the boat train to London, to where our bags had been checked. This trip ended long after sunset, so we had yet to see any countryside. Victoria Station was where we found our bags in an area for Cunard passengers, all in order. It was also there that I was grateful for the VIP treatment that Fred Hoyle had arranged for us. He had hired a Cambridge driver with instructions to take us to the home that they had booked for our stay. His meeting card read "Professor Clayton", held before his own coat and tie. Tired but enchanted, the London lights faded into the pitch black of the old A10 as I watched the occasional lights of English villages pass by. We encountered only a few autos on the entire trip after leaving greater London.

### **White Cottage and Kathleen**

It was almost 10:30 p.m. when the driver turned onto Storey's Way and then into the drive at number 15, *White Cottage*. The boys, ages six and seven, were exhausted. Barbara Hoyle was there to greet us and to introduce us to our housekeeper, Kathleen Bilham, who had lived in the house as housekeeper for two decades. Kathleen showed us to our rooms, where we deposited some bags, then asked if the boys would like a cup of Horlicks. I had no clue, so I said yes, one for us all. As we sat having our first taste of a warm English traditional sustenance, Devon, who was trying to be grown up, elegant, and stay awake, spilled his Horlicks cup onto his new suit. Slowly, as consciousness dawned of his great gaff, tears filled his eyes and he cried embarrassed exhausted tears. We led him up to bed, in his own sweet room after reassuring him that it all was OK and could be cleaned. Finally, after we were totally enchanted by the "cottage", Barbara Hoyle turned to us anxiously and said, "Oh, I do hope it will be all right", meaning the house and housekeeper. She had found it for us herself.

It will be difficult for the reader to credit my astonishment on the next morning. With morning sun playing on the window curtains, I rose to draw them back to expose my eyes for the first time to an April day in England. I must have gasped at the slight haze that hung over the rear garden, which ran back 200 feet or more to a simple wooden fence at its rear. Behind that fence lay a large green, which I learned was the Trinity Hall Sports Ground. The central grass walkway pierced topiary hedges cut in forms of large fowl atop cubic hedge bases. It seemed instantly the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. The central square of the rectangular garden was a green shortgrass lawn, whereas the portion nearer the house in front of the topiary was a mixed English flower garden, and

the rear portion behind the hedge-lined central square was blossoming fruit trees and strawberry beds. It seemed a country house rather than one in a busy market-and-university town. At that very instant I bonded with England, or perhaps with a dream of England, one that burst upon my senses with a magical grip. I stood at least ten minutes, Mary Lou rising at last to see what I gawked at. Perhaps that garden view, like so many in the seven years to follow, touched my childish imagination, filled with folk tales, nursery rhymes and legends. Perhaps it recalled as suddenly as a sharp pain the beautiful, well loved view of Grandma Kembery's vegetable and flower gardens behind their Iowa farmhouse, a view that I had deemed forever lost except within my yearning heart. But there through wispy morning mist it lay! To my astonishment I had similar experiences throughout England during the 1960s, truly then an idyllic emerald isle. It was *Hobbiton, in The Shire*, and the English were hobbits! Within weeks I was having fantasies, such as wanting to move to England and to raise my own boys there rather than in Houston or California. It is no exaggeration to admit that this fantasy haunted me for the next three decades, until reality asserted itself through my veil of yearnings.



*White Cottage from the garden*