went round the whole superstructure, standing against the bulkheads with our hands behind our backs. If the magnet stuck, it was steel; if it didn’t, we had aluminium. By this method, we assessed the extent of aluminium on the entire ship.

When we returned, I went back to the drawing board. We resubmitted the company quote – and the QE2 came to the Clyde.

I HAVE absolutely no qualms at all about the subterfuge. Let’s be honest, who would argue with the contention that “Clyde-built” has a much nicer ring to it than “Newcastle-built”?

Few would argue. He and the yard built a classic ship that would serve Cunard longer than any other vessel in its fleet. The QE2 was nearly 1,000ft long, weighed more than 70,000 tons and was capable of carrying nearly 2,000 passengers.

Powered by four steam turbines, geared to two shafts, with a total output of 110,000shp, she was capable of a speed of 28.5 knots. In an incredible 39-year sailing career, she would be the Cunard flagship until 2004, when she was replaced by RMS Queen Mary II.

Throughout her life, she was the epitome of style and grace on the high seas – a magnet for some of the world’s most famous and glamorous people. Hollywood golden couple Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor were frequent transatlantic travelers. Rod Stewart and his wife or girlfriend of the hour often made the trip between Southampton and New York and singing superstar Elton John was a fan of the ship.

But as well as being glamorous, the great ship also served her country during the Falklands War. Over a period of eight days in May, 1982, she was transformed into a troop ship, complete with helicopter landing pads, dormitories and new fuel pipes to allow refuelling at sea.

She was soon on her way to the South Atlantic, carrying 650 volunteer crew and 3,000 troops of the 5th Infantry Brigade. When the vessel returned to the UK in June, she was greeted at Southampton by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

The great ship would sail on for another generation – until her final voyage to Dubai in November 2008.

TICKETS for the final voyage had gone on sale 18 months earlier and sold out in 30 minutes. More than 1,600 passengers paid between £4,000 and £20,000 to share her last voyage.

One of the last of her most loyal clients to walk down the gangplank was millionaire New Yorker Beatrice Muller, who had lived permanently on board for 14 years at a cost of £62,000 a year. It was, she said, ‘far superior to, and less expensive than, a retirement community in Florida’.

It is that degree of love and loyalty that could make the ship such a success in London. As John Chillingworth puts it: ‘If she comes home, she will be as loved and cherished as she ever was.’