

Featured Felines: Cats' Adventures & Travels 12

(page checked May 2026)

Chibley (2008+)

Round-the-world
voyager
(several times)
on the barque *Picton
Castle*

then . . .

George, Fiji &
Suva, Tigress,
Riki & Tea



The *Picton Castle* (named after a real castle in Pembrokeshire, western Wales) was built in 1928 as a motorised fishing trawler operating out of South Wales. She was modern for her time, and in World War II was conscripted into the Royal Navy as a minesweeper — a very dangerous occupation — but she survived and after the war was used as a freighter in the North Sea and Scandinavia. In the early 1990s her current captain, Daniel Moreland, was seeking a vessel that could be converted into a square-rigged barque. He came across *Picton Castle*, then languishing in a Norwegian fjord, and she fitted the bill.

She was taken across the Atlantic, to New York and eventually to Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, where she was transformed with a 2-million-dollar refit during 1996–97.

Since then she has travelled the world participating in worthwhile projects, trading goods, delivering educational resources to remote island schools, and acting as a sail-training vessel. *Picton Castle* has taken part in a number of tall-ships festivals, and during 2010–11 completed her fifth round-the-world voyage. Although Lunenburg is her usual operating base, where most of her voyages begin and end, she is registered in the Pacific Cook Islands, so whenever *Picton* visits the island of Rarotonga it's often referred to as her home port.

Apparently there were two cats aboard for the Atlantic crossing before the conversion to sail. Called **Micky** and **Ficky**, they hailed from Ipswich in England, but I've no further information about them.

The ship's cat

Naturally any self-respecting sailing ship needs a resident cat, and **Chibley** was holder of the post on *Picton* for 14 years. Her full name was Miss Chibley Bits. No, I didn't know either! — apparently 'chibley bits' is an old sailors' term for little pieces of 'stuff' that are picked up on the feet from walking barefoot on a wooden deck. When you roll into and out of your bunk at the end of your watch or the start of a new one, these bits get left behind. As 'Chibs', to use her familiar name, was very small when she first came on board — and remained quite small — the captain came up with the name Miss Chibley Bits. She was a six-toed (polydactyl) cat.

She was rescued from the SHAID animal shelter in Nova Scotia in 1997 while very young and held the position of ship's cat since then. She was described as 'free-range', meaning that she went where she pleased, and she was said to exert nearly as much influence on board as the captain! She would

personally check out all new trainees when they came aboard, and sometimes supervised dockside sales of merchandise such as T-shirts, hats and the like inscribed *Chibley — the only cat with a barque*. Chibley had a tendency to steal the show wherever the ship called and was a great favourite — which she knew, of course!



Chibley's adventures

As a free-range cat, Chibs was usually allowed ashore in port (she hated being confined to ship and would protest vehemently), and usually had that uncanny ability of ships' cats to appear again shortly before sailing time. On a couple of occasions, though, she caused mayhem and delayed departure by not reporting for duty on time, presumably having had unfinished business to attend to on shore. In 2000 even the city police of Halifax, Nova Scotia, were enlisted to search for her when she didn't return after a Parade of Sail. The ship was in the process of leaving port when Chibs was found to be absent, was turned back, and wouldn't sail off without her; she reappeared in her own time (after national media attention!).

A similar thing happened on another occasion, following a Tall Ships event in Bergen, Norway, when sailing time arrived and no cat had returned. Crew members wandered around the streets frantically shaking bags of cat treats, and someone turned up at the ship with a struggling and indignant tabby that was not Chibley! It transpired that a Norwegian couple had come across her in an alley, eating a cheeseburger and, thinking she was a stray, had taken her home. Only when they found out from the news media about the search did they realise they had the ship's cat — who, meanwhile, had had a nice cosy nap in their home! After that she always wore a collar when the ship was in port, with instructions about what to do if she was found wandering.

A cat of character

It's been said of Chibley that she didn't think she was a cat: she thought she was a sailor, and one not of inconsequential rank, either. In June 2008 Captain Moreland wrote in his log that the cat had been very talkative of late, and he thought that when she meowed at someone she was clearly articulating some specific and logical point, and quite possibly giving instructions. She would then look up with her big, soulful eyes, give a little flick of her tail and, with a final backward glance, go off to see to other business, having left her instructions to be followed. Although much loved, and affectionate in her own way, she wasn't always a great one for tummy rubs, ear scratching or cuddles; when faced with such situations she would often stalk off and find something more important to do!



Round the world for the fifth time

Chibley's last major adventure began in May 2010, when *Picton Castle* started her fifth round-the-world voyage, expected to be the last of that kind under the command of Captain Daniel Moreland. Lasting 14 months, the ship set out from her home port of Lunenburg, then sailed westwards after passage through the Panama Canal. *Picton* returned to Lunenburg in mid-June 2011 after a successful voyage, and there's an account of her [homecoming \(archived copy\)](#) by the purser. Images from current and past voyages are posted at *Picton's* [Flickr photostream \(use Edge\)](#) and, from those, photos of Chibs can be found with this [search link](#): the results are not exclusively of her as many where she isn't pictured have been tagged with her name, but a number of her are there (*this doesn't seem to work, April 2024*). She's also seen a couple of times in this *Picton* video at [YouTube](#).

While she was alive Chibley had full billing as a crew member of the ship, with a photograph and a bio in her own words. As this is no longer available the last version, for her 5th round-the-world voyage, is reproduced here:

Chibley (Chibs, Bits)

Post: RCO - Chief Rodent Control Officer and Boss of *Picton Castle*.

Hometown: I hail from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, but my home will always be the Barque *Picton Castle*

Age: None of your business - I am without 'age' - Meow very much!

What I was doing before I joined the ship: Cleaning my paws...

Why I joined the Picton Castle: Captain Daniel Moreland... 52 comfortable bunks to sleep in... 52 loving crew members... 2 grandmothers... thousands of fans all over the world... celebrity.... fame... treats... see the world... keep these rascals in line.

What I am looking forward to most on the voyage: Setting a record for the first feline to sail around the world five times... seeing the world through older, wiser eyes... Donald's cooking... flying fish... seeing old friends on docks the world over... meow...

Previously undisclosed talents: Catching flying fish with one paw, staying dry on deck and wake-ups. Meow!

Previously undisclosed passion: Giving Mr. Mate fishy presents... getting my belly rubbed by Lauren... peanut butter in Ollie's beard...

Dream Job: Chief Rodent Control Officer! Meow!

Secret to the good life: Demand attention and then act aloof... meow!

When the ship is in port between voyages for repairs and maintenance, there are always a few crew members around, working on projects and ensuring security, so Chibs was able to remain aboard in familiar surroundings and be looked after. Apparently Captain Moreland had tried taking her to his house while they were ashore — but apart from short visits there, Chibley didn't want to know!

Tragedy — and a tribute

Sadly, Chibley was no longer aboard by the time the ship took part in the Tall Ships Challenge in mid-2012 and visited various ports along the American eastern seaboard. On the stormy and dark evening of 10 November 2011 in Lunenburg, as she was making her way back to the ship from Captain

Moreland's house after a good meal, she was hit by a car and killed, at the age of about 15. What a tragic and bizarrely inappropriate fate for a cat that had sailed around the world five times, clocking up a total of some 250,000 miles (400,000 km) on her voyages. Fortunately her body was found and recovered shortly after the accident. A memorial service was held on the 12 November, at which a number of her friends and admirers gave her a 'good send-off', and she is buried on the Lunenburg waterfront. In that way shipmates who weren't able to be at the service are able to visit her grave and pay their respects when they come back to the port, and she has a nice view of the harbour so she can watch the ships come and go.

Captain Daniel Moreland wrote a comprehensive and heart-felt tribute to Chibley following her death. It can be seen [in his log](#) (*archived copy*) for 11 November 2011.



**And so to
George . . .**

Chibley's successor

Following Chibley's sad loss, a new ship's cat was needed. During *Picton's* 2012 summer voyage, tabby cat George was just eight weeks old when he was adopted by Chief Mate Michael Moreland in Savannah, Georgia, where he had been rescued that very same day. When he was found, little **George** was a street moggy, all skin and bones and big, scared eyes — a tiny bundle of fur with big ears and a whippet-thin tail. He has four white paws and a white nose, so he looked as if he'd been caught stealing the cream.

He spent his first day on the ship just sleeping and eating. Soon his belly grew fat and round, and 'the rest of him will plump up soon enough', as Moreland put it. To start with George lived in the mate's cabin as he began learning his job as ship's cat, but it wasn't long before he was enjoying trips to the

charthouse and promenades around the deck, 'accompanied by the cooing of otherwise thoroughly salty sailor girls'. He enjoyed playing with string and hiding in dark corners, like behind the desk in the office, and he also enjoyed having his face and tummy rubbed. George was pretty pleased when the crew caught fresh fish, and was always on the lookout for unattended food. He'd been providing great entertainment and was described as a 'scamp', hunting shadows and still exploring — his world expanded a little more once he managed to climb the charthouse ladder, but he also spent a lot of time snoozing in the office.



In mid-August 2012 the ship returned home to Lunenburg to prepare for her next voyage to the Pacific, starting in October. Listed among a number of reasons to join the voyage was George, as he was 'excellent for crew morale', adding that he 'already knows how to attend musters, inspect bunks and climb the sheets made fast on the mainmast'.

By May 2013 it was reported from *Picton Castle* that, nearing the end of his first major voyage, 'the smallest, furriest shipmate George has got his sea legs now and the movement of the ship doesn't bother him, as long as he can keep his paws dry and find people to give him his daily dose of petting. With 30 people aboard he doesn't exactly want for attention.'

Grounded!

During *Picton Castle*'s 2013 visit to Australia to take part in the Tall Ships festival, strict quarantine laws meant that George couldn't be allowed ashore; to avoid any possibility of his 'escaping' he had to be locked up in his 'cat condo' (a converted vegetable locker) for a week. However, he was allowed to stay on board. But things were not so simple when the ship moved on with the Tall Ships in late October to its next port of call, New Zealand, where it was planned to remain for six weeks. The authorities refused to accept the 'Australian solution' and gave *Picton*'s crew three choices: put him in quarantine ashore for the six weeks, send him home — or put him to sleep. This last was unthinkable, and neither did anyone want to see him imprisoned on shore for six weeks away from his friends. It was therefore decided he would have to fly home to Canada, where he would be looked after by Captain Michael Moreland. So New Zealand Air flew him from Auckland to Vancouver, where he had a 12-hour stopover with food, fresh water and cuddles provided by a pet travel service ('Better than any stopover I ever had,' remarked one crew member wryly). From there Air Canada took him to Toronto and on to Halifax, where he was met by Capt. Moreland. The whole journey lasted 36 hours. George was expected to rejoin his ship at some suitable point later in the voyage.

In fact George became a 'landlubber' and never did take up his seafaring life again; a reply to a later enquiry said that he was 'enjoying life on land, sharing his time between Mike Moreland and the awesome Inglis family'.



George back in Lunenburg
from New Zealand, Oct 2013

New ship's cats

In mid-2014 it was announced that two new feline crew members had been taken on board and, 'after a rigorous application process' they would be sharing the position of ship's kitten. Taken in from a shelter in Fiji during the ship's 2014 voyage, they were appropriately named **Fiji** and **Suva**. Suva was grey and quite bold and adventurous, while Fiji was more ginger-coloured and was shyer. Only about six weeks old at the time and both female, they weren't sisters but got on well together..

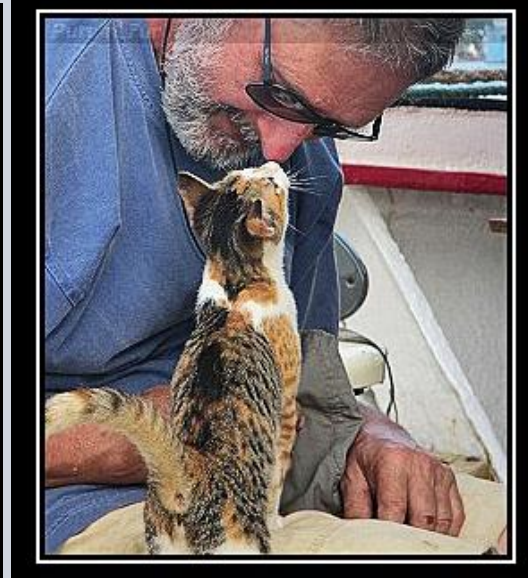
In October 2014 *Picton Castle* undertook her sixth round-the-world voyage, lasting until May 2015.



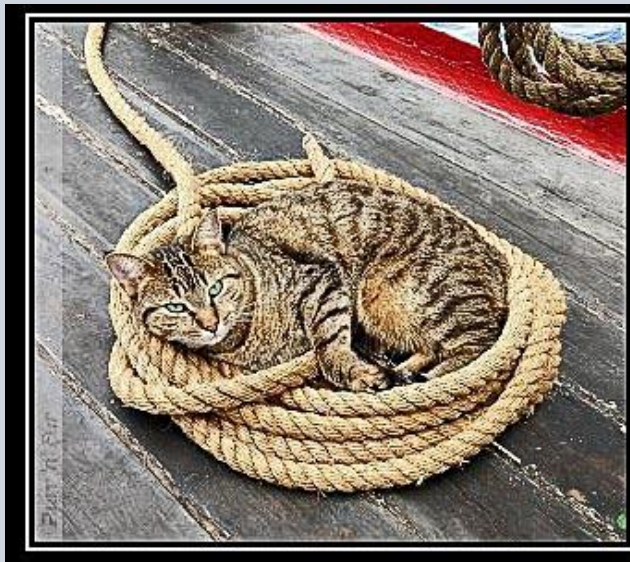
Suva

2018 update

Sadly, Suva died in early July 2015 after just a year on board — I don't know the circumstances but the crew, including Suva's feline crew-mate Fiji, were said to be devastated. However, in 2018 Fiji was alive and well and was reported as having just completed her world circumnavigation under sail. She was then 4 years old and an adored member of the crew. A new youngster, **Tigress** (*below*), was taken on in April 2018 at about 6 months old; she still had to earn Fiji's full approval, but was learning from her how to be a proper ship's cat!



Fiji ↑



Tigress ↑

In 2020 during the Covid pandemic there was no one on board to look after Fiji and, being a ship's cat, she needed a ship! So she was taken on by former *Picton Castle* mate Sam Sikkema on the Maine windjammer *Victory Chimes*, which he then captained. In 2023 Fiji continued to sail with him, but by then on the schooner *Grace Bailey*. It isn't clear where Tigress was during that time, but when planning the current voyage, Captain Moreland was told that he wouldn't be allowed to have the cat on board for a visit to the Galapagos Islands – so there was a scramble to find her a new home on land. (The information turned out to be incorrect anyway, but by then Tigress had left the ship.)

New kittens, 2023

So when the cat-less ship arrived at Mangareva, the largest of the Gambier Islands in French Polynesia, and it was reported there was a kitten at the local tattoo parlour possibly looking for a home, interest was piqued! There turned out to be two kittens, a calico female and a tuxedo male, who didn't belong to the parlour owner but had just wandered in. He was happy for them to be adopted as the new *Picton Castle* cats. So Riki, the male, and Tea, the female (named after Rikitea, the main town on Mangareva) became ship's cats. Cautious at first, they were soon finding their sea-legs and starting to explore their new home. There's a comprehensive account of their early days on board, as well as a summary of the earlier *Picton Castle* cats, at the Captain's Log [here](#) (Sept 2023).



Riki (left) and Tea



Riki



Links

- ❖ Material for the account of Chibley came from the following websites among others:
 - [Picton Castle](#) home site and [Captain's Log](#) (*archived copy*) relating to Chibley (then George, followed by Fiji and Suva)
 - Ben Rogers' [Wind and Wonder](#) blog (*last entry 2010*)
- ❖ Video:
 - YouTube video [Picton Castle](#) 2007
 - Nice YouTube footage with commentary of the *Picton* [pulling anchor and setting sail](#) from the Cape Verde Islands, Jan 2009
 - Noisy [homecoming](#) to Lunenburg, 2009; and [another](#)
 - *Picton* being [hailed into dry dock](#) at Lunenburg, March 2012

- ❖ Other:
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [Twitter](#)
 - Lunenburg webcams: [Harbour 1](#) : [Harbour 2](#).
- ❖ [Instagram](#)
- ❖ [Captain's log](#) mentioning all the ship's cats, September 2023.
- ❖ Feb. 2024 '[Ambassadors at Sea](#)', featuring Riki and Tea and some other ships' mascots.

Riki and Tea were still aboard and well settled in early 2025.



Books

Miss Chibley wrote her first children's book, assisted by Ruth Wells, who is a sailor herself and has spent time on Picton Castle. Entitled Chibley: The Cat who went to Sea (ISBN 978-1-896496-61-0), the book describes her arrival and early days on the ship, and has drawings by Doug McCabe. Profits from its sale went towards buying educational materials for distribution on Picton's voyage.

Chibley's second children's book was published during 2009, again with Ruth Wells' help and with lovely illustrations by Yolanda Poplawska. It tells of Chibley's adventures around the port of Halifax, when she meets [Clara and Erik the Red](#) from the Maritime Museum there.(; ISBN 978-1-896496-69-6.) Publishers of both books are Community Books Lockeport, Nova Scotia

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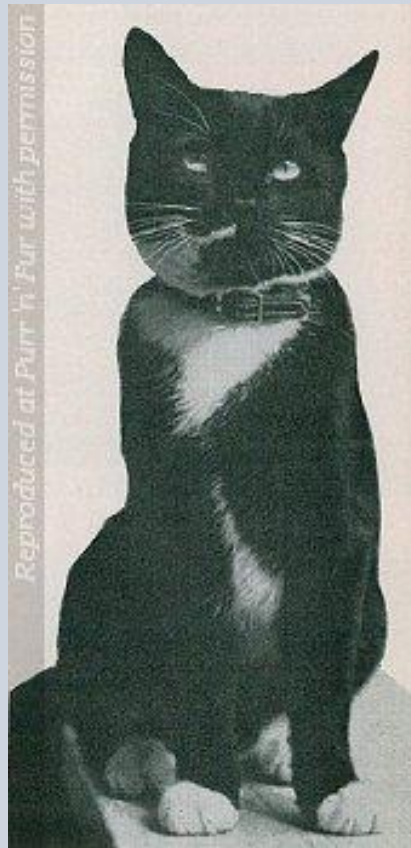
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Felix of *Mayflower II*

(2011)



The idea of building a replica of the *Mayflower* that took the Pilgrim Fathers to America in 1620 was conceived in the early 1950s, as a means of commemorating the friendship and cooperation between Britain and the United States during WW2.

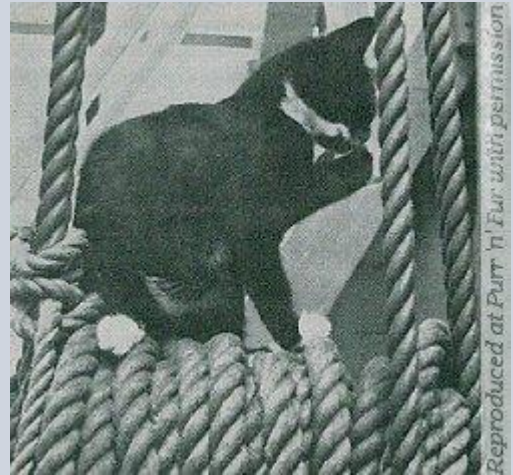
Project Mayflower came to fruition in 1955 and the ship was built during 1955–6 in Brixham, Devon, using the traditional methods of British shipbuilders and the original blueprints, which were held by the Plimouth Plantation museum in America. Finance came from that museum, from British sponsors and, according to some accounts, collections made by American schoolchildren. The vessel was launched on 22 September 1956, and set sail on her transatlantic crossing on 20 April the following year. The voyage to Plymouth, Massachusetts, where the ship is now preserved at the Plimouth Plantation Museum, took 55 days and was blessed with mostly good weather.

Not long before sailing, a tiny black-and-white kitten, just a few weeks old, was brought on board. Looking at the tiny ball of fluff, the captain Alan Villiers and some crew members felt it would never survive the voyage; **Felix**, as he was named, had other ideas. His principal carers were two cabin boys, the English Graham Nunn and his American cabin-mate — the only American aboard — Joseph Meany Jr; they wisely kept Felix out of the way until the ship was at sea, and fed him to start with on condensed milk. He did have a rough couple of weeks to start with, and his fur became all matted; then one day one of the boys, while taking a bath, decided to give Felix one too! Well soaped and scrubbed, this seemed to have the desired effect and he never looked back. After a few weeks he had grown apace and was eating just about any rations they gave him, including cooked flying fish, but had a preference for canned fish. The kitten gradually gained his sea legs and within about seven weeks was able to adjust his little body to the movement of the ship. Then there was no stopping him!



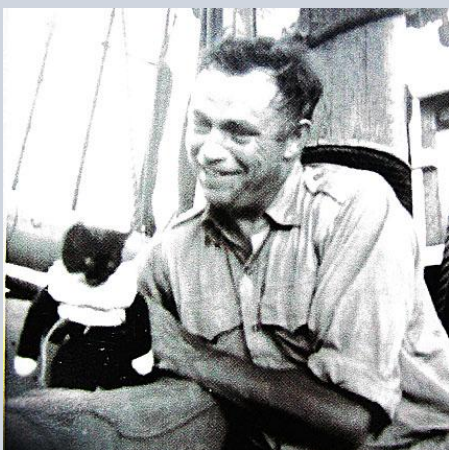
A real ship's cat!

He climbed ropes, visited every cabin, slept in every bunk — and commenced using up most of his nine lives with a series of narrow escapes! A small black kitten on a dark deck on a black night is not easy to see; he got stepped on once and a leg was broken. It was set by the ship's doctor, and then Felix was confined to quarters and fussed over by the boys; fortunately young bones heal quickly and there was no permanent damage. He was almost swept overboard by a large wave, being caught just in time by a crew member; on another occasion he was asleep on a coiled halyard when it was uncoiled and he was tangled in it and shot up into the air. He jumped safely to the deck and no harm was done. He had become a real ship's cat, and when it rained and leaking timbers made bunks wet, Felix would be sure to find the driest place on the ship. The only thing he wouldn't tolerate was a lifejacket; a crew member made him a tiny one — after all, he was a crew member like everyone else — but when the jacket was put on him he became semi-mutinous. After that, he went into hiding whenever there was a lifeboat drill!



Arrival in America

Upon arrival in Plymouth, Massachusetts the kitten stayed on board, knowing all the hiding places where he could avoid the numerous people who asked after him. The *Mayflower* then sailed to New York, where she docked at a pier that already held many exhibits, and she was opened to the public. There was a ticker-tape parade for the crew on Broadway, to which Felix allowed himself to be taken, but on being presented to the Mayor he scratched the dignitary's hand! When he started to wander around the pier exhibits, it was decided it was time to find him a home, before someone catnapped him or he was run over.



His guardian Graham Nunn wasn't able to return him to England because of the strict quarantine regulations at the time, so Joe Meany took charge of him and took him to his home in Waltham, outside Boston. There Felix learned about grass, and met his first cat! (He had already encountered a dog at a New York hotel.) He grew bigger, and a bit wilder; and as the Meany household already had several pets, Felix went to stay with the Barrys, family friends who lived not far away. His new guardian was Ann Barry, the 19-year-old daughter of the family. He became sleek, handsome and confident (*see main photo above*), wore a green collar and occasionally deigned to play with a green rubber mouse. As far as I know, he happily lived out his days with the Barry household; as for remembering his early days

on *Mayflower* — Felix twitched his tail and remained inscrutable.

This account is adapted from an article in the American Yankee magazine of November 1958, Felix, the Mayflower Cat, by Ora Dodd. We are most grateful to current Yankee

Executive Assistant Debbie Despres for sending us a copy of the article and giving permission to use it. Other accounts mentioning Felix appeared following the voyage in National Geographic and Life magazines.

Felix's life on Mayflower is also recounted in a children's book, *Felix and His Mayflower II Adventures* (right) by Peter Arenstam, published by Plimoth Plantation Press for the 50th anniversary of Mayflower's journey in 2007 (no ISBN given).



Links

- ❖ More information about the voyage can be found at the [Plimoth Plantation](#) pages
- ❖ An image of Felix aboard *Mayflower II* has been [posted at Flickr](#) by mmatins
- ❖ British Pathé has many newsreel clips of *Mayflower II*, through construction to her arrival in America — see these [search results](#) (most results are of *Mayflower*, though a few are irrelevant [archived copy](#) – April 2024). One in particular includes a [brief glimpse of Felix](#) with (it's believed) Graham Nunn, as the ship prepared to depart Plymouth ([Needed Flash Player – no longer available](#)).
- ❖ Castle Films newsreel: [The Voyage of Mayflower II](#) on YouTube, with another short appearance by Felix (at 5m 38s) and also showing the two cabin boys (from 4m 19s) who had care of him
- ❖ Pilgrim John Howland Society: [Warwick Charlton, Mayflower II Visionary](#) ([archived copy](#))
- ❖ Video of 1957 footage from BBC Devon: [Mayflower II sets sail](#) (requires RealPlayer)
- ❖ Wikipedia: [Mayflower II](#)

The image below is of a rendezvous in mid-Atlantic between HMS *Ark Royal* and *Mayflower II* in June 1957



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