

MAYFLOWER SAILS FOR AMERICA:

The front at Plymouth is packed with crowds - for Mayflower's big moment has come. The 180-ton replica of the Pilgrim Fathers' ship is ready to sail, as those pioneers did from this same anchorage 337 years ago, to New Plymouth in Massachusetts. The last stores are going aboard - the gifts for the great country which the Pilgrim Fathers helped to found. Mayflower has already proved her worth - her sea voyage from the Brixham shipyard has shown her to be well-found and easy to handle. From the ship's cat to the ship's cook, her company is ready for the great adventure. Commander Villiers comes ashore from the anchored vessel, and some of his crew for a civic farewell from the Lord Mayor of Plymouth. All are wearing seventeenth century costume - as to the amner born.

This is no empty ceremony - for the Mayflower tradition has always meant a great deal to Plymouth. And Commander Villiers himself, fully at ease in his period clothes, might be a reincarnation of the tough skippers who made those early hazardous voyages.

"Have we forgotten our seafaring tradition that it was founded and built on sail - have we? If we have, we'd better remember it again, because for centuries now our people have sailed those ships, and it was little ships like that coming many times from the West Country here which opened up the world, not bloomin' big liners!"

The speeches over, Commander Villiers drinks the health of the Lord Mayor and the people of Plymouth in Mayflower sherry from a big loving cup, in reply to the Lord Mayor's toast.

Down the Mayflower steps, the Lord Mayor accompanies the Commander and his crew to the gig which is to carry them to the waiting vessel. Some critical onlookers point out that she should be wearing, not the Red Ensign, but the Cross of St. George; but she rules the customs of the sea change with the times, and not even this adventurous company can ignore them. Nor would they wish to; for the Red Ensign is the modern emblem of the old Mayflower spirit. And as the new Mayflower is towed out of Plymouth Sound, it is the sailors of Plymouth, in their little boats, who speed her on her way.

The tug Tactful pulling sturdily ahead, she passes the breakwater. Not much of a wind as yet, but she needs little to full her sails, and if she has to wait - well, so did the ancestors of her crew.

Here they are - the three mates, Godfrey Wicksteed, Danish Jan Junker, Bearded Adrian Small. Tending the galley, the chief cook, Walter Godfrey of Ilferd, with his assistant - Jack Scarr, an Oxford schoolmaster.

And for variety, London Publican Dick Brennan. The Mayflower's crew have many backgrounds, like the Pilgrims of long ago. One thing unites them - a love of adventure, of freedom for its own sake - the same love of freedom which drove Mayflower the First across the sea, and will bring Mayflower the Second safely to harbour.