CAVALRY and SIEGES –

The First Report of 'UNDER SIEGE: THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT'

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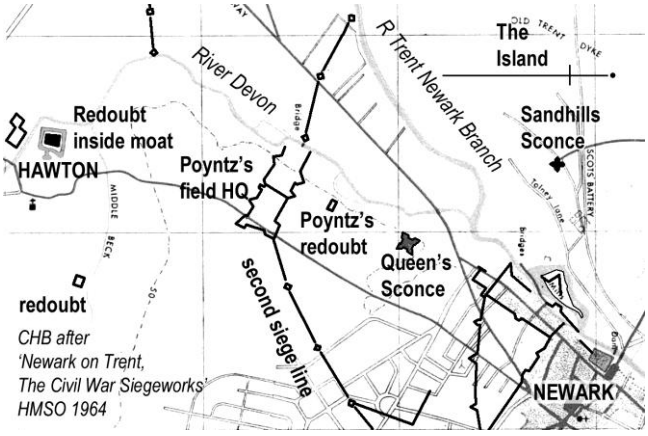
The test 'digs' for the *Newark under Siege* project planned for the summer of 2013 sadly failed to take place as intended (see *Casemate* 96[1]). Despite the support and interest the project was (and is) attracting both locally and further afield, at the 11th hour circumstances beyond our control forced not just the cancellation of the digs but have also forced the project to move away from Newark and look for a site elsewhere. As a result, we have changed the name to *Under Siege: the English Civil War Archaeological Project*.

Leaving Newark was a great pity as we had identified a really interesting site, a cannon-shot away from the Queen's Sconce in the hamlet of **Hawton**. Located just 3 km south-west of Newark, it is dominated by **All Saint's** church, which was largely rebuilt during the later C15th by Sir Thomas Molyneux (who also built Hawton manor-house). It was from the tower of the church that, so local tradition has it, Henry VII watched the Battle of Stoke Field on 16th June 1487[2].

One of the opening moves of the final siege of Newark occurred towards the end of November 1645 when the Parliamentarian Colonel-General Sydenham Poyntz advanced on the town from the south-west, capturing Hawton and establishing a redoubt *(above)* on the site of Molyneux's moated manor-house. Protected by the River Devon to the south and west, and by the diverted Middle Beck to the north, the redoubt was 160m across and was surrounded by a ditch, (now) 6m wide and 1m deep[3].



Within range of the Royalist Queen's Sconce, Hawton formed a key part of Poyntz's siege-lines during the winter of 1645-6 until superseded by the siege-lines constructed closer to Newark in the spring of 1646[4]. The commanding views from the tower of All Saint's Church over the surrounding countryside led to its probable use as an observation post by the Parliamentarians and in 1925 a musket ball was discovered lodged in the west door of the church[5]. Our site was to have been the field between the redoubt and the church *(below)*.

Hawton Redoubt with All Saints Church in the background. The feature in the middle of the picture is the medieval fish tank, part of the original manor house.

But the time spent investigating Newark was far from wasted as, in addition to the initial investigation of Hawton, analysis of musket shot uncovered by a number of people over a period of time around Newark has prompted discussion about cavalry during Civil War sieges. Traditionally, their role was seen to be limited to the more mobile phases of the siege. The besiegers used their cavalry to be 'first on the scene', to patrol, reconnoitre, provide the cavalry screen and prevent communication in and out of the besieged town or castle. And there were a number of occasions where cavalry were involved in attacks on the more outlying features of defences such as forts and fortified villages.

The garrison looked towards its horse to 'beat up' any hostile local garrisons, harry the besiegers, to maintain communication with the outside world, and to help bring in supplies and hopefully relief[6]. The accounts of the sieges of Newark between 1643 and 1646 make mention of the garrison's cavalry making forays 'to gather taxes, plunder the country and take prisoners'[7], and even after the crushing defeat at Naseby in June 1645, the garrison continued to raid local Parliamentary outposts. Then, of course, there were the famous 'flying columns', which brought supplies and often relief to the besieged (such as at Basing House in September 1644 and Pontefract Castle in February 1645[8]).

But once the noose had tightened around the garrison, the cavalry would have to be dispersed (such was the case in Newark at the commencement of the 1644 siege, when the garrison's cavalry escaped[9]) or, if holed up indefinitely, the cavalry's mounts could well end up supplementing the diet of the garrison[10]. No longer mobile, the cavalry had no option but to fight on foot. The besieger's cavalry might also fight as infantry – John Tincey suggested that

'Cavalrymen often took part in the final assault of the siege, firstly to justify their share in the plunder but also because of their higher morale and better armour.'[11]

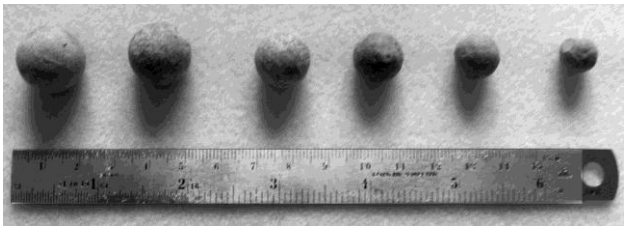
But the actual evidence for cavalry fighting in the lines of the besieged or besieger is less common. There is the example where the Royalist Newark horse distinguished themselves fighting on foot with sword and pistol at the storm of Leicester in 1645[12], yet relatively few other accounts specifically mention cavalry (as opposed to dragoons) fighting on foot. For instance, the detailed order for the Royalist storming of Nantwich in January 1644 mentions dragoneers, musketeers, pikemen, but no cavalrymen[13]. However, for Newark at least, actual physical evidence might indicate that the presence of cavalry in the siege-lines could be more common than the lack of eyewitness accounts might suggest.

The Newark investigation has, to date, brought together some 69 pieces of lead shot in six separate collections from around the town. Unfortunately, in three of the six instances, no specific location has been identified, but for the other three sites it has been possible to approximate the general vicinity where the shot were discovered. Using the criteria developed by D F Harding in his ground-breaking study, *Lead Shot of the English Civil War*[14], all the shot has been categorised according to the type of firearm: Musket, Arquebus/Caliver, Carbine, and Pistol[15]. Typically, the heavier weapons, muskets especially, would be used by foot-soldiers (hence 'musketeers'), whilst the cavalry would be armed with lighter firearms, carbines and pistols.

The three 'unidentified' Newark sites provided a total of 24 pieces of shot, three of which are classified as Musket or Arquebus/Caliver whilst the remaining 21 (88% of the total) are Carbine or Pistol. In addition, six pieces of shot, identified as 'buck shot' have also been recovered.

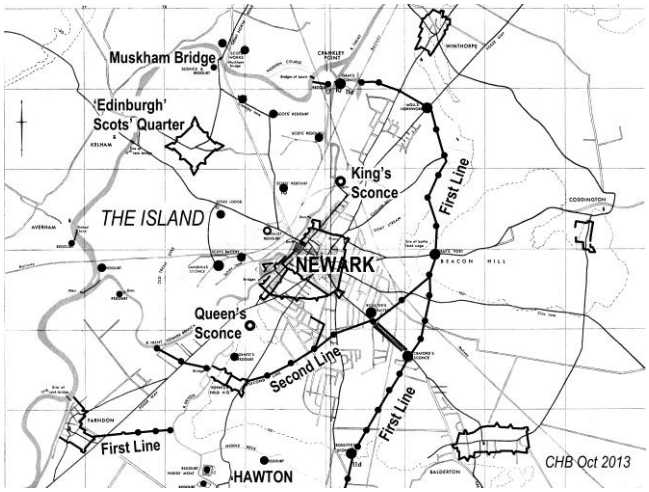
The most Musket or Arquebus/Caliver shot recovered from a single location was six (out of a total of 16) from a site just north of Swinderby, some 10km north-east of Newark. Given its distance from Newark, the site is probably not directly associated with the sieges *per se*, but may be from a related action of perhaps an example of the activity of an aggressive garrison outwith the actual sieges. Given Swinderby's location on the Fosse Way, it was on the direct line of advance between Lincoln and Newark, so a skirmish in this vicinity would not be unusual.

The division and re-joining of the River Trent creates a geographical feature immediately to the west of Newark known as *The Island*, which, overlooked by Newark Castle, was strategically important. A collection of some 10 shot have been uncovered from a site on The Island, close to Newark Rugby Club. This comprises of eight smaller calibre shot and just two musket shot.



A selection of shot from the 'bridge-head'. Left to right: large musket ball, musket ball, carbine ball, large pistol ball, small pistol ball and very small pistol ball.

One of the final actions of the 1644 siege of Newark was the escape of the Parliamentarian cavalry across The Island towards Muskham Bridge, hotly pursued by the relieving Royalist horse[16]. Whilst this action would have left shot behind, it is probably too far north (some 1.5 km to the north of this site and 2 km to the north of The Island bridgehead site, discussed later) to have been the reason for shot in either of the two collections from The Island.



Map based on 'Newark on Trent, The Civil War Siegeworks' HMSO 1964

The Island featured prominently during the final siege, where, despite the presence of the Scots army (they established their headquarters and main encampment, known as 'Edinburgh', early in 1646), the Royalists maintained a bridgehead opposite the castle and it is from the vicinity of this bridgehead that a collection of 13 shot has been discovered.

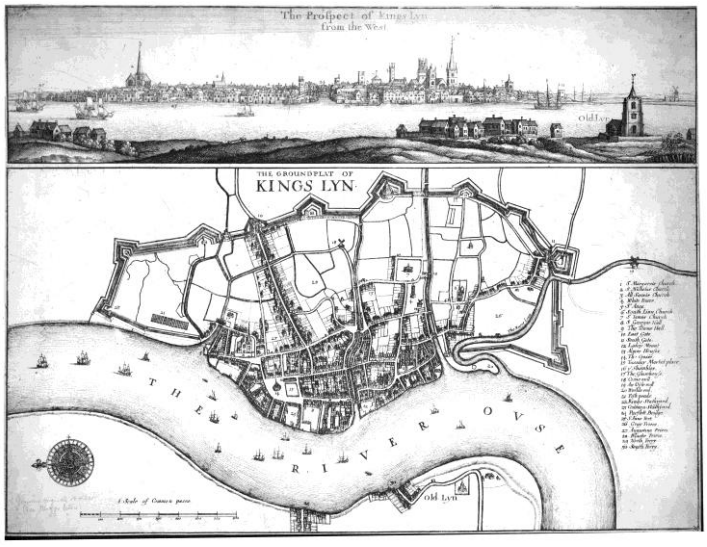
Until the Scots tightened their grip, the Royalists grazed their cattle and horses on The Island, and from the bridgehead, and its accompanying redoubt, the Royalists did mount raids upon the Scots, on one occasion 1,000 foot and 400 horse sallied out[17]. This action might explain the presence of shot opposite the castle, although given the ratio of foot to horse, it may not necessarily explain why there should be a far greater number of smaller calibre shot (12 carbine/pistol shot compared with just a single musket ball). An alternative explanation is that on at least one occasion, the Parliamentarians sent a boat equipped with cannon and muskets along the Trent to attack the town[18]. At the end of March 1646, Newark was invested by some 7,000 Scots and 9,000 English troops and by the end of the following month the noose had tightened to the extent that the besiegers 'were within carbine shot of the defences.'[19]

Surprising as the ratio of smaller calibre shot to larger shot found at Newark might be, it is not unique. Glenn Foard has studied shot found at several sieges: Grafton Regis, Basing House, Beeston Castle, Sandal Castle and Wareham. Charting the balls found, both Basing House and Beeston Castle peak, as would be expected, in the realm of the larger calibre (caliver and musket, etc.), but both Grafton Regis and Sandal Castle peak in the carbine and pistol sizes (this is despite the predominance of infantry among the besiegers of the former). Uniquely, Wareham peaks in the smallest buck-shot sizes. By way of comparison, the chart of the Battle of Edgehill peaks in the musket sizes[20].

This can never be a definitive study – the tiny number of shot studied, the vagaries surrounding location and the impact of centuries of weather, agriculture, etc., all mean that this represents just a fraction of what was actually fired. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from it must be treated with a great deal of caution, and it is, of course, possible to draw alternative verdicts from this analysis. For instance, does the comparative absence of musket shot suggest a shortage of muskets (or even shot or powder)? However, this is unlikely as when the garrison marched out of Newark following its surrender in May 1646, they left behind 4,000 muskets, carbines and pistols, 60 barrels of gunpowder and a great store of match and ball[21]. Or have we been particularly unlucky in as much as all six collections have missed the larger shot or perhaps the musket shot (which are generally easier to discover) have already been gathered? But despite this, and accepting that assessing the calibre of weapons from excavated shot is inevitably compromised[22], it does suggest a need for a more detailed investigation and re-assessment of the role of cavalry in sieges.

So what of the future for the project? With Newark denied to us (hopefully only temporarily), *Under Siege* is busy looking at alternative sites to investigate. We are considering several possibilities, although with the focus of battlefield archaeologists firmly fixed on the Great War for the next few years, it might be a while before we actually get digging.

The search for an alternative to Newark has brought the project to King's Lynn which was besieged in August 1643. As this view of Red Chapel Mount suggests, it is a location with considerable potential and already, analysis of a small quantity of shot from just outside the town has raised some intriguing questions as to their origin.



NOTES

[1] FLINTHAM, DAVID, 'Newark-upon-Trent and the English Civil Wars', *Casemate*, (Fortress Study Group), No. 96, January 2013, pp. 35-36.
[2] http://southwellchurches.nottingham.ac.uk/hawton/hhistory.php
[3] ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MONUMENTS (ENGLAND), *Newark on Trent: The Civil War Siegeworks*, (London, 1964), p. 40.
[4] Also see the forthcoming *Defending Nottinghamshire* by MIKE OSBORNE (due 2014).
[5] BURNSIDE, REV. F. H., 'Hawton Church and Newark Museum' in *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, no. 29, (1925).
[6] The actions of the Royalist cavalry in the early days of the 1648 Siege of Colchester are an example of this. See JONES, PHIL, *The Siege of Colchester, 1648*, (Stroud, 2003), pp. 55-6 and p. 76.
[7] PORTLAND, quoted in *Newark on Trent: The Civil War Siegeworks*, p. 22.
[8] YOUNG, PETER, and EMBERTON, WILFRID, *Sieges of the Great Civil War*, (London, 1978), pp. 93-4, and COOKE, DAVID, *Yorkshire Sieges of the Civil Wars*, (Barnsley, 2011), pp. 95-8.
[9] HUTCHINSON, LUCY, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, (London, 1995), p. 154.
[10] CARTER, MATTHEW, *A True Relation of that Honourable, Though Unfortunate Expedition of Kent, Essex and Colchester in 1648*, (Colchester, 1650) and quoted in JONES, pp. 55-6 and p. 76.
[11] TINCEY, JOHN, *Soldiers of the English Civil War (2): Cavalry*, (London, 1990), p. 57.
[12] TIBUTT, H. G., (editor), *The Letter Books of Sir Samuel Luke*, (Oxford, 1963), p. 298.
[13] HALL, JAMES (editor), *Memorials of the Civil War in Cheshire*, (Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, 1876), p. 106.
[14] HARDING, D. F., *Lead Shot of the English Civil War: A Radical Study*, (Foresight Books, London, 2012).
[15] D. F. HARDING categorises the shot as follows: Large Musket Ball; Musket Ball; Arquebus/Caliver Ball; Carbine Ball; Large Pistol Ball; Small Pistol Ball; Very Small Pistol Ball; Buck-shot, pp. 187-8. However, as the author stresses, "It is evident that the assessment of calibre (original diameter) from the weight of excavated lead balls is inevitably compromised. Any attempt to use excavated shot to assess armies' success in standardising ball size is therefore unsound, and written sources are far preferable. Even the allocation of shot to traditional categories such as pistol, carbine and musket sizes is not wholly safe – and yet for all its limitations this approach is the best way we have of assessing the mix of shot found on a site, and it can still be used with due caution." (p. 29).
[16] *A Briefe Relation of the Siege at Newark*, (London, 1644), p. 7.
[17] 'A great Fight at Newarke', *The Moderate Intelligencer*, 5th – 12th March, (London, 1646).
[18] HOPKINS, GLYN, *The Third and Final Siege of Newark*, 1645-1646, (Stratford-upon-Avon, 2005), p. 7.
[19] *Newark on Trent: The Civil War Siegeworks*, p. 7.
[20] FOARD, GLENN in HARDING, pp. 35-6.
[21] HOPKINS, p. 10, and WARNER, TIM, *Newark: Civil War and Siegeworks*, (Nottingham, 1992), p. 55.
[22] HARDING, p. 29.

Left, Kings Lynn in the 17th Century, Wenceslaus Hollar, 1607-1677

Photographs by ***David Flintham*** ⬟