

JANUARY 2ND

1548: On this day, an inventory was taken of all the munitions and ordnance of war held within Newcastle. These give us a fascinating insight into the machinery of sixteenth-century warfare, as well as Newcastle's often surprising provisions for conflict. Most of the foot soldiers were equipped with black bills (a hooked blade on a 5-6 feet long stick) or bows – there were 2,000 of each! Others had pikes (400), and demi-lances (250) with smaller numbers of staves. Also held in the city were weapons made by converting farming equipment – hedging bills, scythes, sickles and axes. Cannons were now an important part of the city's armoury, with one 'saker' and forty-four 'bases' – both early forms of cannon – and 1,700 iron shots of various types for them. Two hundred smaller guns, called 'hackbuts', were also available. The inventory also lists chemicals such as serpentine powder (gunpowder), and the ingredients to make it: saltpetre, sulphur and charcoal, plus mortars and pestles. Added to the munitions were tools – an array of spades and pick axes, mining equipment, leather buckets, coils of thick rope, and cressets (metal cages for making lit torches). And to carry it all? Newcastle had fifty new carts and six old ones, twenty privy carts, and gear for 100 horses. (Welford, R., *History of Newcastle and Gateshead*, 1884)