

Battles and Sieges of the English Civil War

Source-Based Activities

Activity 3: The Siege of Newcastle

Background:

In January 1644 the Scottish army (who were on the side of Parliament in the Civil War) invaded England. Newcastle, a Royalist stronghold, refused to surrender so in August 1644 the Scots laid siege to Newcastle. William Lithgow, a Scottish traveller and writer, was present when the besieging Scottish forces eventually captured Newcastle and wrote a detailed account of it.

Source 3a) An extract from an eyewitness account of the day Newcastle fell to the Scots by William Lithgow

Now the Mynes being ready to spring, and the batteries brought to their greatest perfection, about three a clock in the afternoon, the two most available Mynes were sprung, one at Whytefriers Tower Westward, and the other, neare Carres Fort, or Sandgate Eastward; (notwithstanding there were other two sprung here, one of which miscarried), so also, I say, the breaches of the walles by the batteries being made open and passable, and leddars set to at diverse parts for scalleting:

Then entred mainely and manfully all the Regiments of our commanded men at all quarters, but more facily and lesse dangerous where the Mynes sprung: The greatest difficultie, and mightiest opposition, nay, and the sorest slaughter we received, was at the climbing up of these steep and stay breaches, where truely, and too truely, the enemie did more harme with hand garnads, then either with Musket, Pyke, or Herculean clubs: This Club hath a long iron-banded staffe, with a round falling head (like to a Pomegranate) and that is set with sharpe iron pikes, to slay or strike with; the forehead whereof being set with a long poynted pyke of iron; it grimely looketh like to the pale face of murther.

BRAD 9.42.062 LIT, A full relation of the Scots besieging Newcastle... (1644), Bradshaw Collection, Newcastle University Special Collections, GB 186.

Study Source 3a) carefully.

- 1) Which 5 weapons are mentioned in this source?
- 2) At what time did the Scots break through Newcastle town walls?
- 3) How did the Scots 'breach' (break through) the town walls?
- 4) Was it easy for the Scots to enter the town? Why or why not?
- 5) What language does the author use to paint a vivid picture of the fighting and weapons used?

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Source-Based Activities

Activity 3: The Siege of Newcastle (continued)

Source 3b) An eyewitness account of the day Newcastle fell to the Scots by William Lithgow

Now our men being enterd, and fighting for enterye at all quarters round about, Let me pause a while and consider! How grievous: And how dreadfull hot, that cruell conflict was for a long houres space: That truelie it was more than admirable! To behold the desperat courage both of the Assailants and Defendants: The thundering Cannon roaring from our batteries without, and theirs rebounding from the Castle within; the thousands of Musket balls flyeing at others faces, Like to the droving haylestones from septentrion blasts; the clangour and carving Of naked and unsheathed swords; the pushing of brangling Pykes, crying for blood; and the pittypfull clamour, of heart-fainting woemen, imploring for mercie to their husbands, themselves, and their children.

BRAD 9.42.062 LIT, A full relation of the Scots besieging Newcastle... (1644), Bradshaw Collection, Newcastle University Special Collections, GB 186.

Study Source 3b) carefully.

- 1) Using the information in the source, if you had been in Newcastle during this fighting, what you have seen, heard and felt?
- 2) What do you think it would have been like to have been in Newcastle during the fighting?
- 3) Although the author was a Scottish soldier, he clearly has respect for both sides. Pick out the words that show this.

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