

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME

Borough in the County of Stafford

The Burgesses of the "loyal and ancient borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme in the County of Stafford" form a very important part of the long history of the town; and its inhabitants should be proud of this history, which begins in the 12th century.

Before this time, England was divided into small kingdoms such as Northumbria, Mercia and Wessex. In fact Tamworth in South East Staffordshire was the original capital of Mercia while Alfred the Great was King of Wessex. Gradually, by conflict or agreement, these smaller kingdoms fused into larger entities, finally uniting under a King of England. There were:

1. The Danish line of which Canute is probably the best known, owing to his apocryphal "stemming the tide" reputation.
2. The Saxon line which included Edward the Confessor (1042-1066) and Harold who was defeated at Hastings.
3. The Normans, beginning with William of Normandy. It was he who instigated the Domesday Book, which today may be seen in the Public Records Office, Shaftesbury Lane, London. It should be noted that in this survey or census of 1086, no reference to Newcastle can be found, but the Manors of Penkhull and Wolstanton (wlstanetone) are mentioned. This is not to say that Newcastle did not exist at that time, for recent scholarship does not accept the Domesday Book, because it is thought that the survey commissioners were somewhat cursory in their probing as they travelled north.
4. N.B. The Feudal System was a medieval system of service to the lord of the manor by his vassals. It was described as "servile tenure". It was virtually ended by the Black Death (bubonic plague) which had its origin in India.
5. Between 1349-1389 A.D. 40% of England's population perished.
6. Under the Normans, whose rule has been described thus, "Cold heart and bloody hand now ruled the English land" England was occupied. The Normans were an occupying force among strangers they despised and whose customs they had no desire to learn. They owned the people as they did cattle. (DROITE DE SEIGNEUR)
7. **LIFE UNDER THE NORMANS.**
8. Life for the masses, the peasants, revolved almost entirely around the Norman lords, who owned them in the same way that they owned horses and cows. The luckier peasants were VILLEINS. They had to work two days a week for their particular lord, (three days if they lived in Kent, Essex or Bedfordshire) but the rest of the week they could farm for themselves on strips of land in the fields around the village.
9. N.B. VILLEIN. In feudal times, a member of a class of serfs who held the legal status of FREEMAN in all dealings except with their lord, to whom they owed certain services or rents in return for their land. The poorer peasants were called COTTAGERS and they had no strips of land. They had to subsist on whatever they could grow in small gardens called TOFTS around their hovels and on performing menial tasks for their lord.
10. Villeins and cottagers lived in hovels made of wattle and daub, hazel-wood woven between upright stakes, then the gaps filled with mud, straw and dung. The hovels were smoke-grimed, without chimneys, sometimes a hole in the thatched roof above the fire which burned on a slab of stone in the middle of the floor. The single room was shared with dogs, chickens and sometimes other stock! The "beds" were sacks of straw on the hard mud floor.
11. The peasants ate POTTAGE, a thick stew of peas or beans. Very few had meat to eat (there was swift retribution for those who dared to hunt deer which were the lords' property) Weak beer, rather than water, was the main liquid drunk, as the water was often polluted. Women spent their lives cooking, brewing and spinning and working in the fields. Babies accompanied their mothers to the fields, wrapped tightly in cloth and hung up on a convenient tree out of harm's way.
12. Half the children born died in infancy and on occasions during Norman rule famine further depleted the population.

Ref. "Medieval Newcastle" - T. Pape

The first known reference to Newcastle is in an undetermined Charter granted to Ranulf, Earl of Chester by King Stephen of the House of Blois, in 1140. I write Newcastle because it would be fair to assume that the suffix "under-Lyme" came at a later date. From 1154 Newcastle remained a royal possession for some sixty years, although in 1146 the actual castle was given to Stephen, Earl of Chester.

The rights enjoyed by the Burgesses today derive from "ancient custom" which, over the years has been recognised as law. To be so recognised the custom must have existed since "time immemorial", which by English law means since 1189, the first year of the reign of Richard I, "Coeur de Lion" of Crusades fame.

The first charter granted to the town was by Henry II in 1173. This charter makes Newcastle, arguably the oldest borough in the country; and since the Burgesses themselves date from 1189, they too have claim to being the most long-standing freemen. Other boroughs have freemen e.g. Chester, York, Coventry and Preston, the last named being in rivalry with Newcastle in terms of seniority.

Ref. Orders from Corporation Books Regarding Admissions of Freemen 1590-1790- Newcastle-under-Lyme Museum.

Ref. "Freemen in England" - Harry Ward

"Preston has a charter of Henry II in 1179 granting to his Burgesses all the liberties of Newcastle-under-Lyme."

It is not entirely clear how Newcastle came to be so called. There are various theories;

- "New" because of the earlier Roman fortification at Chesterton,
- "New" as in novel, i.e. a new structure.

The origin of the "under-Lyme" is also hypothetical, viz;

- From the Lyme brook which flows through the area of Pooldam,
- A forest of lime trees in the area of the castle,
- A territorial name, Newcastle being in the region of the Pennine Uplands, the town could have been "under the lime edge".

In his book, *The History of Newcastle-u-Lyme*, J.T. Coulam suggests that the "Lyme" is derived from the lime woodlands surrounding the castle, proved by charter of Randle de Blundeville, Earl Palatine of Chester, dated 1218.

The castle itself was typically Norman in design as one would expect. It was thought to be a strong wooden structure built on a large mound of earth overlooking an area of land on which were built houses of wooden construction thatched with straw or turves. The mound and the surrounding area were fenced in by a wooden palisade and the whole area was surrounded by a large pool in the form of a moat. There would be one entrance / exit gate with a wooden bridge over the moat. All this would render the castle a safe refuge in times of strife.

Ref. Artist's impression of the castle – Newcastle-under-Lyme Museum

Names in use today should be noted; names which owe their origins to the past, viz Higherland, Pooldam, Castlehill, Brook Lane.

There is an interesting allusion to the castle in **Victoria County History Vol.8 O.U.P..**

In March 1206 King John was at Newcastle and the large expenditure on the maintenance and repair about this time may reflect his personal interest in the upkeep of the castle. Possibly as a result of the royal visit, expenditure on general works rose considerably in 1207 (£10) 1208 (£20) 1209 (£40), which included the repair of the gaol. Some part of this general expenditure was probably allotted to the repair and maintenance of the gateway which presumably stood to the north of the bridge on the landward side of the pool.

Without precise records it would then be pertinent to assume that a more solid stone-built castle gradually evolved from the original wooden structure, since there are remains of a stone-built castle in existence near St. Mary's R.C. School in Silverdale Road. This castle is considered to have been built by Henry 1st (1100-1135) It should be understood that Newcastle has little archaeological history but in 1935, excavation in the garden of John o' Gaunt's cottage near Silverdale Road (where

masonry and timber balks had been found in 1934) brought to light the end of the outer gateway including the base of a large corner buttress. South of this, and in continuation at a higher level, a length of solid wall 6ft thick was partially uncovered.

Ref. Artists impression of a stone-built castle – Newcastle-under-Lyme Museum.

Further extracts from Victoria County History make interesting reading;

In 1723 Thomas Burslem let the site of the castle to Samuel Proctor at £1-15s-0d per year. Thereafter for about a century, the mound, the adjoining bailey and the pool probably remained undisturbed, the haunt of the fisherman and the fowler.

Mention of John O' Gaunt leads me to remark that there has long been a local belief that earlier Burgesses received their land from him, as Duke of Lancaster. It is known the Manor of Newcastle belongs to the Duchy of Lancaster, it having been granted by Henry III to his son Edmund, Earl of Lancaster, in 1267, after Newcastle had been in the thrall of Simon de Montfort since 1264. In 1351 his descendant, also named Henry, was created Duke of Lancaster and formally invested with the properties of the Duchy, including the Manor of Newcastle. By that time the Burgesses had been in "enjoyment" of the common fields for nearly two hundred years, and thus there seems to be no foundation for the belief.

To return to the original castle, in the area beyond the moat were large tracts of land which were cultivated and grazed by the townspeople, who had sole rights to their use. When the castle was first built, a small settlement came into being around it. Originally the land would have been well wooded but as the settlement grew in size, the wood from the trees was used for house building, furniture and fuel. Thus the cleared land became "common" land which was known as "burgage" land and from this derived the name "burgess". In 1200 there were 160 burgage holdings which would suggest that there were 160 Burgesses at that time. The word "burgage" means literally "a strip of land".

To get some idea of England in the 12th century I would draw attention to the ITV programme "Cadfael". Although filmed in Hungary because of modern "progress" in the form of motorway traffic and buildings, it depicts Shrewsbury in the reign of Stephen 1135-54. The author of the Cadfael books, Ellis Peters, is assiduous in researching medieval times. From this T.V. series what is clearly portrayed is:

- Roughly grassed, wooden houses roofed with turves.
- Small glass-less windows, glass being only for the wealthy, and small to admit less cold air.
- Large tracts of woodland.
- The difference in dress and quality of life between the poor and the rich.
- The power and sanctuary of the clergy.
- The accepted craft of charcoal burning.

Ref. Family History Leaflet No. 17 Staffs Archive Service.

"A Burgess was by definition a person who occupied a burgage plot. He was granted special privileges especially in relation to trading within the town's boundaries and also in earlier times in relation to the feudal system. Burgesses also constituted the electorate for the election of the Town Corporation in an Incorporated borough and they were eligible to be involved in public affairs on a wider basis within the borough".

At some time, rent was charged for the use of this land by the Lord of the Manor or the castle incumbent, presumably as a form of taxation. It is recorded that a townsman could rent one hectare of land (2½ acres) for one shilling per year. Payment of this rental also allowed him to occupy a further strip of land, also of one hectare. Such Burgesses became important members of the community at a time when possession of land was the only wealth available. They were important enough not to be called upon for military service and they were empowered to act as guardians of the peace in removing undesirable visitors from the town precincts.

It is from the right of the 12th century Burgesses to participate in the use of the common fields that the Burgesses of today have the inalienable right to share in the income arising from the sale of that common land which has taken place over the years.

The Burgess Lands Act 1859

This Act stipulated that money accruing from the sale of land must be used to purchase more land; but in recent times this proved to be impossible owing to the dearth of land and the prohibitive pricing of any land available. This Act was remonstrated against by the Burgess Trustees, and in 1967 the ***Trustee Investment Act*** was passed, and this allowed monies from the sale of land to be invested in reputable shares.

In the first instance the word “burgess” is synonymous with “freeman”. I have pointed out that there are “freemen” in other towns and equally there are also “burgesses”, for example:

Ref. Freemen in England - Harry Ward

Chester, Burgesses 1200; Colchester, 1189; York, Granted a charter by Henry II.

The Burgesses of Newcastle are entitled to become Members of the Freemen of England and Wales Association. As a result, these badges may be worn on the Burgess robes:

- The Common Seal of the borough (Newcastle-under-Lyme seal illustrated on page 1),
- The badge of the Freemen of England - a shield containing the cross of St. George, the shield surmounted by crossed halberds:

The Common Seal (Newcastle-under-Lyme Armorial Bearings)

Newcastle-under-Lyme has enjoyed a prescriptive right to have a common seal from the earliest days of its corporate existence and it was probably used shortly after the grant of the Company of Master Craftsmen of the Charter Guild of Merchants by Henry III in 1235. The use of the seal was confirmed and recorded to the Corporation at the visitation of Heralds to the County of Stafford in 1583. The Charter of Queen Elizabeth I in 1590, after reciting “The Mayor, bailiffs and Burgesses shall from time to time have a common seal” goes on to grant authority to the Corporation “to break, charge and renew the seal at their pleasure, in such a manner as they shall best approve”

The common seal was granted to the Guild which administered the affairs of the borough before the coming into existence of the Mayor, Bailiffs and Company of Capital Burgesses. They adopted an architectural design to represent the Guild Hall, adding other features to indicate that the Borough had a moated castle. This seal remained in use until 1975.

By reason of a charter granted to the borough by Henry III in 1235, the Burgesses of Newcastle became burgesses of a “free borough” and thus enjoyed special rights and privileges:

- Exclusive right to form and belong to a Guild Merchant, an organisation which regulated the town’s trade. Today’s Chamber of Commerce would offer an apposite comparison,
- Exclusive right to trade in the town market. It is of interest to note that the current “Stones” Market was established in 1280,
- The right to vote at elections of the Mayor and Bailiffs, the predecessors of today’s Town council,
- More importantly, the right to vote at elections to return two of their members as Members of Parliament.

Ref. Freemen in England - Harry Ward

In this he gives the definition of a borough by Glanvil in 1181:

“A borough was originally a walled town or place of safety, a sanctuary for escaped serfs. Residence in a borough for a year and a day giveth a thrall for his freedom”.

Today’s definition is that it is entitled to send one member to Parliament.

The Guild Hall in Newcastle-under-Lyme was built in 1713, replacing an earlier timber structure, built on piles or stilts with the town market in situ beneath. The Town Cross dating from medieval times, now adjacent to the Guildhall, was restored in 1579 by Randle Bagnall, Mayor. It is interesting to note that banns of marriage were proclaimed at the cross by the Town Crier. The earlier timber building was called the Hall of the Newcastle Guild Merchants.

At this time there were in existence three forms of Guilds:

- Merchant Guilds
- Craft Guilds
- Religious Guilds

They were self-supporting corporations with their own lands, property and regulations, set up to organise and regulate matters in their own spheres of activity. Invariably they dominated the life of the town.

Charter by Elizabeth the First 1590

This Charter further declared Newcastle to be a “free borough”:

“Of our special grace and from our sure knowledge and our own accord do will, ordain, constitute and grant and by these presents, for us, our heirs and successors, do will, constitute grant and declare that the aforesaid borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme be and for ever hereafter continue to be, a free borough of itself.

“And that the Burgesses of the same borough in future be and shall be for ever one body corporate and politic, in deed, fact and name by the name of the Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses of the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme in the county of Stafford.

“And by the same they may have a perpetual succession.

“And the same Burgesses of the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme in the County of Stafford by the same Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses of the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme in the County of Stafford, one body corporate and politic, real and fully for us, our heirs and successors we create, appoint, ordain, make, constitute, declare and incorporate by the presents”.

In Newcastle Museum may be found original Burgess records circa 1680 and later, for example:

- 1680 “It is ordered and agreed that no foreign Burgess shall have any voice in the election of Burgesses to serve in Parliament for the Borough. But that the same be elected if chosen by such persons as shall be Burgess Inhabitants”.
- 1680 “Agreed that Peter Hammersley who hath lived a considerable time out of Town do pay for his readmission 2s-6d”.
- 1680 “Ordered that Mr Edward Nicholls be readmitted a Burgess of the Borough, paying one shilling for his fine, he having been 12 months out of the town since he was first sworn a Burgess”.
- 1708 “18th March. Order that no person shall be admitted a Burgess without consent of the Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses in Council assembled”.

Admission of Freeman 1858-71 (Newcastle Museum)

Freeborn Burgesses on Admission

To the Town Clerk	2s – 6d	
To the Town Crier	6d	
To each of the two Sergeants 6d	1s – 0d	4s – 0d

Apprentices on Admission

To the Town Clerk	2s - 6d
For filing the Indenture	1s - 0d
To the Town Crier	6d

To each of the two		
Sergeants 6d	1s – 0d	
To the Borough Friend, a		
fine	£1 – 13s – 4d	£1 – 18s – 4d

Today, each Burgess pays a token sum of 20 pence (4s – 0d) to the Mayor on admission.

Orders from the Corporation - Museum Archives

1590 - “It is also enacted and agreed that no man shall be admitted to his Burgessship of this Town before he have been resident in this Town by the space of one whole year, that the town may have sufficient trial of his behaviour”

Burgesses Today

There are today some 340 Burgesses on the roll.
The right to be a Burgess is by patrimony, i.e. generally from father to son.

Charles Sparrow K.St.J., Q.C., D.L., F.S.A., LL.B

“The right to become a freeman was and is a legal franchise recognised and enforced by the courts in accordance with local custom or charters as established by evidence. The details of right may vary from place to place but the opinion has been expressed by Mr Charles Sparrow, that subject to local custom or local statute, the right of admission by patrimony is a form of proprietary right which passes to a freeman’s descendants in accordance with the general laws of descent and is not restricted to descendants in the first generation, i.e. it can descend to grandsons and more remote male issue.”

Mr Sparrow was careful to remark that this general principle is subject to local custom.

In the past, Burgessship has been accorded by apprenticeship (see **Admission of Freeman 1656 - 71**) but that is unlikely today as there are few, if any, apprenticeships available. The most recent apprentice nomination was quite recently by John Wilson, a Past Chairman and a Master Butcher by trade. As shown by the following extract from page 93 of the Burgess Roll, other means of obtaining a Burgessship were itemised. None of these is available today.

Name	Residence	D of A	Birth/Servitude/Marriage/Gift/Purchase
Charles Morgan	Drayton St	July 1856	By Servitude to Richard Emery
Henry Goodall	High St	July 1856	By Birth
Joseph R ...	–	July 1856	Convicted of a felony, Knutsford Assizes

The last named was removed from the Burgess Roll.

The minimum age for enrolment is twenty one years.

In the more recent past, the then Town Clerk, now the Chief Executive, maintained a Burgess Roll, and their affairs were regulated by the Mayor and Bailiffs. The Mayor was charged with the duty of examining all claims and this continues today.

On enrolment a Burgess receives a certificate signed by the Mayor, the Chairman and the Clerk to the Trustees who is also a practising Solicitor - currently Derek Miller Esq. LL.B of Knight & Sons. Originally, all Burgesses were resident in the town but this is not so today. It should be clearly understood however that only Burgesses living in the town, that is within the borough boundaries, are eligible to receive a dividend. The recent changes in the boundaries of the borough have led to an increase in the number of Burgesses as the main criterion is that one must be born in the town. There is an old Minute Book in the museum archives which states that in 1833 there were 1,080 freemen (Burgesses) of whom 840 were resident within the Borough. The accepted yardstick for living within the borough is payment of community tax to the borough.

The contemporary history of the burgesses may be envisaged by taking the year 1800 as a starting point. At that time the town was surrounded by common fields.
See 1847 Map in the Civic Life Gallery - Newcastle Museum.

They were: Stubbs Field, Clayton Field, Brampton Field, King's Field, Stoney Field, Ash Field, Pool Field, in all a total of some 600 acres.

The Parish Enclosure Act 1816

By this act, 205 acres of these fields were allocated to a body nominated by the Act and styled "The trustees of the Burgesses of the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme".

These 205 acres were given to the Burgesses "in lieu of their immemorial rights", and they represented approximately one third of the area of Clayton field, Pool Field, Brampton Field, Kings Field, Stubbs Field and Ash Field. Over the years, this land has been sold with the exception of some eight acres, which was rented to Newcastle High school, now Newcastle School, on a long lease.

The money accruing from the sale of land is invested for the Burgesses under a registered Charity and a yearly dividend is paid out to each Burgess living within the borough boundaries. This money can be used for no other purpose.

The Municipal Corporation Act or Representation of the People Act.

This Act granted the right to vote to all male householders over twenty-one. This cancelled out the Burgesses only right to vote and effectively ended their sole right to vote members to Parliament..

The Burgess Lands Act of 1859, mentioned earlier, vested the land interests in the keeping of twenty four Trustees, elected by the corporate body of Burgesses and a Clerk to the Trustees. The Clerk maintains the Burgesses Roll which is published in November each year. It is in two parts, (a) Burgesses residing within the Borough and (b) Burgesses residing outside the Borough. These lists in their entirety are placed in the Guild Hall for public presentation.

The Trustees are elected each year on the first Tuesday in January and the votes are counted by the Clerk at the Guild Hall. Voting takes place between 09.00hrs and 16.00hrs, but is discontinued should one hour elapse during which no votes are cast. The Trustees, with advice, are responsible for the finances of the Burgesses. The money in their charge is invested in stocks and shares and advice is given by the Clerk and by stockbrokers. An audited account is prepared by the Clerk and submitted to the Burgesses each year at their AGM in February.

Each Trustee serves a four year term in office, six of them vacating office on the first Tuesday of each year (voting day). They are each eligible for re-election and a number of Trustees have served for many years. The Trustees vote for their Chairman who retains office for three years although he must be re-elected for each year of the three. The current Chairman is Roy Mason, Esq.

There are four meetings of the Trustees per year, in January, April, July and October. The AGM takes place in February, as stated, and the payment of a dividend on March 1st. Should March 1st be on a Saturday or Sunday, the next working day is chosen. The AGM and the pay-out are invariably attended by the Mayor, a fact much appreciated by the Burgesses. At the February meeting the amount of the dividend is announced by the Vice-Chairman, currently Brian Simpson, Esq.

Occupations of Burgesses 1734 - 1847 - Newcastle Museum Archives

Pattern Maker, Silk Weaver, Currier, Cordwainer, Potter, Shoe Maker, Plumber, Clock maker, Glazier, Grocer, Clerk to the Survey of Taxes, Cabinet Maker, Cooper, Pot Setter, Besom maker, Hatter, Book Keeper, Coach maker, Labourer, Hairdresser, Blacksmith, Tallow Chandler, Book Binder, Butcher, Printer, Clog maker, Brass Moulder, Saddler, Merchant's Clerk, Stone Mason, Writing Clerk, Assistant Sheriffs Officer, Tin Man, Gentleman.

Two Burgess Trustees currently act as Sergeants-at-Arms to the Mayor. They are Lawrence Tagg and Albert Edward Vincent Whittaker. They each wear black cloaks edged with gold, "Admiral's" hats and white gloves. Each carries a solid silver-gilt mace, believed to be the only two in existence, each being 3ft 8ins in length and weighing 9lbs, and currently valued at £320,000 the pair. The inscription on each mace reads:

"Anno 1680 The Worshipful William Middleton, Mayor. The gift of William Leveson Gower of Trentham, Esq. to the ancient and Worshipful Corporation of Newcastle-under-Lyme, having thrice successfully chosen to serve as one of their Burgesses in three several Parliaments".

Today the Burgesses have no civic authority but it would be very remiss for them to slide into obscurity. Their chief function could be said to support the Mayor on all civic occasions, e.g. laying a wreath on the cenotaph on Armistice Sunday; supporting the Mayor on Mayoral Sunday and being in attendance at civic functions. The Trustees keep in touch with freemen, Shrewsbury, York, Coventry etc., and there has recently been opened in the museum a “Civic Life Gallery” of which the Burgesses form a part.

The last words I leave to Charles Sparrow K.St.J., Q.C., DL., F.S.A., LL.B.

“With the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835 and the birth of the new local councils, freemen lost political and municipal power in their boroughs. They lost their ancient rights of sending members of Parliament to London and governing their own boroughs.”

In a period of our history when little interest is paid to matters of history and heritage, I am proud and privileged to be a Burgess of the loyal and ancient borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme and even prouder to serve as the Chairman of the Burgess Trustees.

James Goodall – Immediate Past Chairman of the Burgess Trustees
(Burgess by Birth 1943)

Footnote I

**The Burgesses
of the
Loyal and Ancient Borough
of Newcastle-under-Lyme
in the County of Stafford**

Henry II	Foundation of the Borough	1173
Henry III	Grant of Guild Merchant	1235
Henry III	Grant of Fee Farm Rent	1251
Edward I	Grant of Trinity Fair	1281
Edward III	Confirmation of Guild Merchants	1372
Richard II	Confirmation of Guild Merchants	1378
Elizabeth I	Charter of Incorporation	1590
Charles II	Charter of Extended Rights	1664
James II	Charter of Extended Rights	1685

N.B. The grant of “Fee Farm Rent”(FERMA BURGI) gave to the townsmen the right to collect their own taxes and to pay a fixed sum annually to the crown!

The above, suitably lettered and embellished with the Common Seal of the Burgesses, is provided for presentation to other societies of freemen in lieu of the plaque so often presented.

The scroll is lettered by I.Rees, Esq. who, although not a Burgess, is a member of the British Society of Calligraphists and a former head teacher in the borough.

Robin Studd - “Staffordshire Studies Volume 3” -

Pape’s book , “Medieval Newcastle” remains important as an account of an individual town. It is the most original, the most thorough and the most stimulating of the accounts of Newcastle’s early history.

William Camden 1586 - “Britannia”

Newcastle’s rise was consequent upon Chesterton’s fall as an urban and castle centre.

William Pitt 1817 - “Topographical History of Staffordshire

He agreed that the perpetuation of the error that Newcastle succeeded Chesterton as the urban centre in North Staffordshire was due to a misreading.

John Ward 1843 - "Borough of Stoke-on-Trent"

He gave the view that Henry I, with the greatest degree of probability, was the founder of our Newcastle. He asserts that no documentary proof could be found for the existence of the castle until towards the end of Stephen's reign. The town must have grown up in the shadow of the castle as a community of freemen and traders attracted to it by the security it afforded against rapine and disorder.

Victoria County History 1963

The town grew up around the 12th century castle which stood in an extensive tract of waste land fed by the Lune Brook and other streams. The early inhabitants probably built their houses within the castle's outer bailey in the Upper green area.

The town had acquired the right to nominate its own Mayor at some date between 1235 and 1251, i.e. within half a century of London itself. By the middle of the 14th century it was sending representatives to Parliament.

The earliest extant Royal Charter in favour of Newcastle Burgesses was neither an exemplification of its precursors nor were its terms based upon it. It was issued in September 1235 and was, according to Pape, the critical event of the town's fortunes. It gave to the men of Newcastle, not only privileges of a free borough, i.e. the freedom to develop the town as they wished, but it also gave them the right to form a Guild Merchant with its attendant privileges of exemption from trading dues and tolls throughout the land. Thus Newcastle was probably the most populous place in 13th century Staffordshire.

Newcastle's geographical position gave it importance, since it lay between London and Carlisle to the north and to Chester in the west.

Pipe Roll 1172-3

The first time any record of Newcastle being a borough. From this date there is mention of burgage plots and burgesses. The effect of this was to emancipate the inhabitants from their former manorial status and to give them the right to hold regular markets and to collect tolls from their economic activities for themselves and also to liberate them from feudal service and suit of court to the prior and canons of Trentham.

Rev. J. Conway 1903 - "Newcastle-under-Lyme in the County of Stafford" XII-XVI Century

Chapter 1 Norman origin and castle.

Chapter 2 Conditions under John and Henry III.

Chapter 3 New borough 1235.

The Statute Law." The Newcastle-under-Lyme Burgess Lands Statute Law.(R.L.333.2 NEW.)

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Relating to the management of the Burgess lands and the disposition thereof

"History of Newcastle-under-Lyme" J.T. Coulam.Rectors' Warden.(R.L.942.1 NEW.COU).

CHAP.1.Newcastle.Its name and origin.

CHAP.2.The Castle.

CHAPS 3-7.The Castle and its Lords and Constables.

CHAP.8.The Manor of Newcastle and its Fiefs.

CHAP 9.Knight Service and Grand Sergeanty

.

Both of these volumes may be seen in Newcastle-under Lyme Reference Librar

Extracts from "The History of Newcastle-under-Lyme" by J.T.Coulam

.The Castle.

1. The castle is generally supposed to replace a castle at Chesterton. Considered to have been built by Henry 1st (1100-1135). Previous to the Conquest castles were few and built of wood. Afterwards they were much stronger stone-built fortresses.

There would be a barbican or outward defence with a watch-tower and possibly a drawbridge. The entrance to the ballium or outer court was secured by a powerful gate, flanked by towers and defended by a portcullis raised and lowered by iron chains and pulleys. In the centre of the interior space stood the citadel, keep or master tower in which lived the feudal possessor or governor.

2. An entry written in an edition of Chaucer's poems in 1602, (Chaucer was related to John of Gaunt by marriage) is as follows.

"The "New Castle" was no more than 150 paces from south to north but well nigh 200 from east to west and had two transepts and four bays with dungeon tower of twenty paces square which rose to a full height of seventy feet. A low portal and a not well-lighted passage did admit to the hall, very large and spacious with a lofty roof and painted with devices, a gallery for minstrels and walls clothed with gear of warfare, helmets, coats of mail, armour, buff jerkins, like shirts and such like doublets".