

1 Sep 1669 Albert de Rochefort

[Note: The French cartographer Albert Jouvin de Rochefort passed through Newcastle during a tour of England and his short description of the town was included in his travelogue *Le voyageur d'Europe, où sont le voyage d'Allemagne at de Pologne, le Voyage D'Angleterre, de Dannemark et du Suede*, Vol III, (1672) pp. 511-14. He did not give precise dates for his travels but when in London mentioned that it was almost rebuilt after the fire of 'some years ago'. The Royal Exchange on Cheapside was said to have been almost rebuilt. Since the Great Fire was in 1666 and the Exchange was re-opened in 1669, it seems that his journey was made in 1669, presumably in the summer. He passed southwards through Newcastle towards the end of the British section of his journey after travelling through the south, to Ireland and Scotland, so he perhaps was in the north-east at the end of the summer. A date of 1st September is used here to locate the account in the database. This new translation makes some use of an earlier translation of the entire British section of his journey, which was published in in *The Antiquarian Repertory*, Vol IV (1809) pp. 549-627.]

NIEUCASSEL

Nieucassel is a sea port, frequented by all the Nations of the world, for the quantity and excellence of the coal which is loaded there, which is brought from the mines that are to be found in the outskirts of this big town and also of the lead and the pure tin, which makes it one of the busiest ports in the Kingdom. It is situated on the banks of the River of Tyne, which divides it into two unequal parts, both on the side of a hill declining gently to the great quay, which runs along this navigable river whose mouth is five miles from there, near Tynmouth, where is the good harbour of Chil [Shields] for the vessels ready to depart and sail; from thence the tide rises in to the town of Nieucassel, rising there two fathoms so that loaded vessels may come up close along the quay which is separated from the town by a thick wall upon which there is a fine walk, in order to have the view of this port, similar to that of Saint Malo in France.

To see the town of Neuchastel well, one must begin where I have entered, which is a wide road noted by a large market-place in the middle, which gently descends, where the houses are very well built of the large stone, such are used for grindstones for cutlers, and are brought from hence to Paris, and which are notable for their great size. This street, after having passed by the butchers, comes to the fish market, which is a big covered hall decorated with a fine fountain & a large basin which receives the water. I would say in passing that one cannot see meat at the butchers more beautiful nor better than in England. The sheep there are so big and so fat that they are bigger than small cows and they produce very fine wool from which we see in Paris, cloth which we call 'English cloth', as beautiful as if it were silk. The main road also ends at this fish market. Going up it can be seen a stream made by many fountains and which cleans it as it passes through. In the middle of this road there is a crossroads and a beautiful

fountain that disperses its waters into different places in the town. From one side you can go to see the big church quite near the old market, which is a large circular space, with many workers' houses all around about and where the market is held once a week.

One can go to see the castle which has a big circumference, as it is enclosed in its walls like a small town, which is the abode I believe, of all the Neuchastel Cobblers. There is, in the middle, a high keep which is a large square tower, very strong, made from large dressed stone; it serves at present as the town prison; there is no garrison nor soldiers to guard it; however it seems to me to be a very strong site, being on the corner of a cliff, enclosed on one side by thick walls & the escarpment on the other overlooks the town, which it commands. The next day I went to see the large square, there is definitely none bigger nor more beautiful in England; there one finds the Town Hall, one of the finest buildings I have seen on my travels; the architecture of the staircase must be admired, & its clock is ornamented with many figures. Below this tall building is the Exchange, where the merchants gather to handle their business in a great hall supported by many columns which has an exit onto the quay and another onto the square, in this neighbourhood is the quarter most populated by all the rich merchants of Neuchastel, which is without doubt one of the richest & biggest towns in the Kingdom. You must cross the river by a big stone bridge covered with houses and shops to go to the lesser part of the town which is called Gatesend, which is inhabited by many manufacturers who make cloth & worsted stockings in quantity which are here very cheap, and for this reason, they are sent throughout Europe and even to Paris. They are prized for the fineness of their wool and their excellent craftsmanship. I am told that in England they use simple machines to make them very quickly; but they knit them in the same way as in France, somewhat different from that that they adopt in Turkey & in Spain, as I noticed in those countries.

You can go down the river, at each tide, by means of small boats which are called 'Bots' to go to see at its mouth, the large port where the ships are loaded with coal and where one sees made a quantity of salt from seawater, which is boiled over a coal fire. There is all along the edge of this river as far as Neuchastel several lovely houses so that one can walk on a quay which is almost edged with large stones as far as the town, from where it appears completely surrounded by mountains.

From the time that the towns of Carlile and Neuchastel were frontiers towards Scotland, there was a large wall which formed the borders and separated the two kingdoms. I left to go to see some parts which I was told still appeared in the countryside, but I couldn't find any. It is said that there was a big wall which passed across England from one coast to the other which was from the town of Neuchastel to the town of Carlile and inside this fortified wall of several towers equipped with a garrison was hidden a lead or bronze pipe, by means of which one could speak to one another from one end to the other and raise the alarm to those who were guarding this

wall, who, by listening through a small hole in this pipe, following a signal from some canon shot, could hear what was being said to them from far away.

You must climb up to the exit of Neuchastel, and there you can see the coal mines before entering the woods near Chester, <b. 6.fur r.> from whence you pass mountains and moorland country right up to Durham.