

MEN AND ARMOUR FOR GLOUCESTERSHIRE, 1608

THE ARMOUR

by John W. Wyatt

On the last day of June 1608 the Privy Council sent a letter to the Lord Lieutenant of each county stating,

'It is so long since any generall Muster and Survey hath bin taken ... of the armed Forces of this Realme, as we cannot but very much doubt that in this happie time of peace, there hath been no less neglect and decay of necessary provisions for warr, than there is comonly in men an improvident forgetfulness of sickness as long as they find themselves in good health ... His Maties pleasure is that you cause a generall view to be taken of all the Forces in that county, both horse and foote ... and enrollment made of all the numbers trayned and untrayned, but especially that the trayned bands may be made complete ... as also by causing the defects of the Armor, weapons and furniture to be sufficiently repaired and amended. At which generall view it shall be likewise expedient that such of the Clergy that hath bin appointed to find Arms ... may be ordered to cause the same to be shewed at these musters.'

Each division of the county could be mustered separately so that the men did not have to travel so far, but, because it had been found in the past that persons who did not possess the armour they had been charged to provide had frequently borrowed the same from another division, the musters were all to be held on the same day if that could conveniently be done. A supply of gunpowder with match, bullets and other provisions was to be kept in a safe store in the county town or such other place as the Lord Lieutenant thought fit. Finally, the Lords Lieutenants were 'to returne a perfect and orderley Certificate unto us by the last of November next.' (1)

The Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire was Lord Berkeley, appointed in 1603 in place of Lord Chandos of Sudeley Castle who had held that office all through the troubled period of the Spanish Armada and was, naturally, not pleased by his replacement.(2) Lord Berkeley relied heavily upon John Smith, and the latter's serious illness in Gloucester for six weeks in July and August appears to have caused some delay in the necessary arrangements for the muster. (3)

Gloucestershire was divided into five divisions: three large ones - Kiftsgate, Berkeley, and Cirencester and the Seven Hundreds - and two smaller ones: the Forest, and Gloucester City and the Inshire. The three larger divisions were each expected to provide 26 per cent of the requisite men and armour; the Forest 12 per cent; the Inshire Division 10 per cent. (4) The certificate returned to the Privy Council after the muster twelve years earlier in 1596 stated that there were 3,000 trained men in Gloucestershire and sufficient armour for 4,000. (5) The certificate returned for the Inshire Division in 1618 stated that the Trained Bands for the division numbered 300. (6) As the Inshire supplied one-tenth of the county forces it may be assumed that the requisite strength of the Gloucestershire trained bands in 1618 was 3,000. We may assume therefore that the trained bands in 1608 were expected to number 3,000 men.

The Privy Council's fear that there had been 'neglect and decay in the necessary provisions for warr' was fully justified, and that is not surprising for, since the last threat of invasion from Spain in 1599, training had been suspended to save costs. (7) Of 18,622 able bodied men listed in Men and Armour, about 2,108 were trained: 742 as pikemen, 631 as musketeers and 506 as calivermen. The trained bands were, therefore, 892 men below full strength. The armour, too, though - except for muskets - sufficient to arm those men already trained, was insufficient to arm the trained bands at full strength.

The organisation of the military forces and the provision of arms and armour for their use, was based partly upon ancient tradition, partly upon feudal custom, and partly upon laws which had become obsolete but were, nevertheless, still observed in principle. It is impossible to give a precise and concise account of it because the system itself was imprecise, and anyone wishing for an adequate account of it should read Lindsay Boynton, The Elizabethan Militia 1558-1638, which has provided most of the background knowledge for this article. It tells how the Privy Council exerted continual pressure upon the county authorities to maintain and strengthen the efficiency of the militia, and how in general, the county authorities tried to evade the expense of doing so. The nobility still maintained the feudal tradition of exacting military service from their tenants and retainers and maintained their own forces, independent of the county militia. Consequently there is no information in Men and Armour of the armour held by them and, in particular, of that in the possession of Lord Berkeley and Lord Chandos, which must have been considerable. The clergy, exempt from personal service but obliged to provide armour for the militia, did so through the Bishop, not the Lord Lieutenant. Therefore their armour is not recorded in Men and Armour. Five years later, in 1613, when the Bishop took 'a view of the horse, armour, and other warlike furniture assessed upon the clergy wthin the dioces of Glouce.' they held

armour for 39 pikemen, 25 musketeers and 67 caliver men; a total of 131 foot soldiers, and in addition for 18 horsemen.
(8)

The corporate towns, too, strove to keep control of their own trained bands and armour, free from interference by the Lord Lieutenant. Bristol achieved complete independence and is not mentioned in Men and Armour. Gloucester's charter from Queen Elizabeth in 1561 states, 'We grant that the Mayor, Recorder, and Aldermen ... shall array and arm the musters of the city ... and no other ... shall interfere or have jurisdiction in the city.' (9) The Lord Lieutenant did, however, attend musters of the City and Inshire - acting through the Mayor, Recorder and Aldermen as Deputy Lieutenants, and all Gloucester's trained men and armour are listed in Men and Armour. Tewkesbury received a charter to the same effect in 1609 (10) but appears to have insisted on the same rights in 1608 for no armour was listed for that borough in Men and Armour and though 455 able-bodied men were recorded only two were stated to be trained. Possibly these two had recently come to live in the borough and had not been incorporated into the trained band of the town. No armour is listed for Cirencester though the trained men are, and that applies also to Tetbury borough although Lord Berkeley was lord of that town.

One basic principle held the military system - if such it can be called - together: no one disputed that it was the duty of every Englishman to fight in defence of his country and to provide the arms necessary for that purpose. That principle had been observed in Saxon times, and the Assize of Arms, 1181, and the Statute of Westminster, 1285, enacted that every man should arm himself with weapons appropriate to his wealth, and stated what those arms should be. Two Acts of 1558 (4 & 5 Philip and Mary c.2,3) repealed the earlier laws and substituted a scale of arms to be held according to the annual value of a man's estate or inheritance of freehold land, or the value of his moveable goods. There were ten groups of landowners, six groups for moveable goods. The extremes of each scale are shown below.

Land. £5 p.a.:-	1 corslet or almain rivet; 1 long-bow and sheaf of arrows; 1 steel cap; 1 bill or halberd.
£1,000 p.a.:-	6 demilaunces; 10 light horse; 40 corslets almain rivets and pikes; 30 long-bows, sheafs of arrows and steel caps; 20 bills or halberds, harquebuts and morions.
Goods. £10:-	1 long-bow, sheaf of arrows, steel cap and bill.
£200:-	1 light horse; 1 pike; 2 almain rivets, long-bows sheafs of arrows and steel caps; 1 harquebut and morion.

Failure to provide the arms was punishable by heavy fines. (11)

Most of the armour listed soon became obsolete and the Act of 1558 was repealed in the first year of the reign of James I, 1603. It was not replaced by a further act so future orders from the Privy Council for the provision of more modern arms were of dubious legality, based on the statutes of 1181 and 1285, though the legality of the Council's demands was never challenged. In 1600 Thomas Wilson wrote in his State of England: 'For the provision of armour every householder is charged to have in his house, in a readiness, such arms as is (sic) appointed by the Commissioner, and there is no householder so poor that is not charged with something ... unless he be a beggar.' (12)

The items of armour and the persons who held it, or were charged with its provision, are shown in Men and Armour in three different categories as illustrated by these entries for the village of Brockworth. First, in the list of able bodied men is stated

'George Longe husbandman. 2.p.tr. hath one corslet fur.'
etc.

Secondly, beneath the list of able bodied men is a further list of 'Inhabytants chardged with the findinge of Armour not before mentioned' (or 'not aforesaid')

'John Reeve, John Milton and John Thorne have betwene them one Calyver fur.'
etc.

Finally the last entry for the parish states

'Also the said Tythinge standeth chardged with the findinge of one Corslet and one Calyver with the fur.'

The entries vary, stating sometimes that a person 'hath', sometimes that he 'findeth', sometimes that he 'is charged with' some weapon. There is also some variation in the entries from different divisions. All the armour for Gloucester City and for the Forest Division is ascribed to individual holders, no mention is made of any tithing, parish or town being collectively charged with its provision, but in Kiftsgate Division, about five-sevenths of the armour is charged to the tithing or parish. In Dudstone and King's Barton Hundred, and in Berkeley and the Seven Hundreds Division, although most of the armour is charged to individuals some is charged to most of the tithings.

W.B. Willcox, in Gloucestershire, a Study in Local Government, 1590-1640, classifies the individually held armour as private equipment, that charged to the tithing or parish as public, but this does not appear to be a valid differentiation.(13) Frequently several persons were jointly charged with provision of some item. At English Bicknor five men shared a corslet; at Flaxley Elizabeth Hayll, widow, and an unspecified number of others had one musket; at Oldbury five men were each charged with provision of a fifth of a musket; at Redwick six men with a quarter of a musket; at Highnam and Hartpury men were charged 'with others' to provide some weapon. Obviously these weapons were just as publicly owned as those charged to a parish.

The armour listed consisted almost entirely of 'corslets fur.', 'muskets fur.', or 'calivers fur.'; fur.(furnished) indicating that it was complete with all its accoutrements. A corslet furnished was the complete equipment for a pikeman and consisted of armour protecting the upper half of the body, a helmet, or morion, and the pike which was 16 to 18 feet long. Pikemen were chosen from the tallest and strongest men. A musket furnished was the full equipment for a musketeer. He usually wore a jack - a leather jacket either quilted or strengthened by steel plate - a morion, and a bandolier to carry powder and shot. The musket was a heavy firearm with a barrel 4ft. 6ins. long; too heavy to be supported by the arms alone it had to be fired from a forked rest which the musketeer also had to carry, so he needed good physique. The advantage of the musket lay in its ability to pierce armour which the caliver could not do, being a lighter firearm which did not require a rest. The caliverman's other equipment was the same as the musketeer's.

A few odd items of equipment and obsolete weapons were listed: three bows and sheafs of arrows; six targets, or shields; eight halberds; two bills; six swords; three daggers; a gauntlet and two headpieces. Strangely, the oddest assortment of weapons was held by John Smyth himself: 'one corslet furnished, one birdinge peece, one Crossbowe and Gauntlet and Target, and three swordes and an holbert', and George James, clothier of North Nibley, also had 'a birdinge peece and a Crossbowe.'

Table 1 shows the amount of arms and armour available in each of the five divisions of the county. Table 2 shows: (a) the quota of armed men each division was expected to provide to maintain the trained bands at the strength of 3.00 men; (b) the number of men for whom armour was available; (c) what percentage of the quota could be armed.

TABLE 1

DIVISION	Charged to or held by individuals			Charged to Tithing or Parish			Total			Total Armed
	Cor.	Mus.	Cal	Cor.	Mus.	Cal.	Cor.	Mus.	Cal	
Gloucester	40	38	25				40	38	25	103
Dudstone & K.B.	51	35	47	29	8	24	80	43	71	194
Inshire Div.	91	73	72	29	8	24	120	81	96	297
Forest	82	57	110				82	57	110	249
Kiftsgate	40	20	41	118	36	101	158	56	142	356
Berkeley	203	208	137	49	28	15	253	236	152	641*
Seven Hunds.	162	96	122	68	33	95	230	129	217	576
Total for County	578	454	482	264	105	235	843	559	717	2119

* Half a corslet provided by an individual, half by tithing

TABLE 2

DIVISION	Full strength of trained bands	No. of men armed	% of 'quota'
City & Inshire	300	297	99.00
Forest	360	249	69.17
Kiftsgate	780	356	45.64
Berkeley	780	641	82.18
Seven Hundreds	780	576	73.85
Total	3000	2119	70.63

It should be remembered that, in addition to the armour shown in these tables, the clergy had armour - probably enough for about 130 men - and that the towns of Tewkesbury, Cirencester and Tetbury also had armour which should have been sufficient for about a hundred more men.

It appears, however, that the county was expected to provide more arms than were sufficient to equip the trained bands. The certificate sent to the Privy Council after the must in 1596 recorded armour for 4,000 men. In 1590 the Lord Lieutenant mustered the trained men and armour for the City and Inshire Division and a month later mustered all the able-bodied men and armour over and above that for the trained bands. On that occasion 'many made default, which defaults were afterwards mustered and diverse (divers) comitted for on(e) night.' There was armour complete for 70 men and incomplete for 166, so it appears that the Inshire was expected to provide arms for about 230 men in addition to the 300 in the trained band.(14)

These extra arms were needed to equip the pressed levies: men pressed to serve abroad in Ireland or on the continent. They were seldom taken from the trained bands, which were for home defence, but usually from the ranks of the unemployed, vagrants, ne'er-do-wells, or paupers. The Privy Council ordered the county to impress a specified number, usually at short notice, and the captains, magistrates and constables of each division decided which men should be pressed to provide the divisional quota. The county had to arm the men and to provide 'coat and conduct money' i.e. to provide each man with a coat and pay for his wages and subsistence until he reached the appointed rendezvous and became part of the royal army. Almost a thousand men were sent out of Gloucestershire between 1591 and 1608 for service in the Low Countries, Normandy, Brittany and Ireland.(15) One hundred were sent to Ireland just before the muster of 1608.(16) The pressed levies were a considerable expense for the county. When 200 men were pressed for service in Brittany in 1592 arms and armour for each of the pikemen cost 46s. 8d.; for each of the 28 musketeers 45s.; for each of the 102 calivermen 30s. The coat for each man cost 12s. and the conduct money amounted to £110. On this occasion the county paid £19 for some 'armour brought out of Normandy'.(17)

Arming the pressed levies was a steady drain on the supply of armour in the county. Moreover armour deteriorated rapidly unless well cared for; leather straps perished, steel armour rusted if not kept oiled and had to be rubbed down with sand which soon made it too thin to be serviceable. Calivers were gradually being replaced by muskets which were more expensive. It is not surprising that after suspension of training for seven years the muster of 1608 revealed a considerable deficiency of arms and armour.

Tables 1 and 2 show that of the five divisions the Inshire most nearly achieved its quota of armour. This might be expected for it was the most compact division, the one in which the men and armour could most easily be mustered and inspected, and amongst its citizens were many wealthy merchants and tradesmen. Kiftsgate Division failed even to supply half its quota, partly because the armour for Tewkesbury was not included, though even if it had been the division would not have achieved more than half. The Seven Hundreds division possessed 73 per cent of its quota of arms despite non-inclusion of armour from Cirencester and Tetbury. Possibly the replacement of Lord Chandos of Sudeley Castle as Lord Lieutenant by Lord Berkeley caused some resentment and lack of co-operation in the north of the county. Kiftsgate was the most scattered division; the most difficult to administer. Delay in arrangements for the muster caused by John Smyth's illness may well have added to the difficulty. It was not until 24 August that a meeting was held at Berkeley to make arrangements for the muster in September. The Berkeley muster rolls had been compiled before the meeting was held.(18) Berkeley was not a convenient meeting place for officials from Kiftsgate hundred.

Despite these qualifications, the returns of arms and armour reflect the varying wealth and prosperity of the five divisions of the county and particularly the difference in wealth between the Cotswolds and the Severn vale and the escarpment below Gloucester. Omitting the Inshire, Berkeley division was pre-eminent not only in the quantity but in the quality of its armour for it held almost half the muskets in the county. The good returns from the Seven Hundreds Division is principally due to the stocks of armour held in the vale villages in Whitestone Hundred: Hardwicke had complete arms for 17 men, Stonehouse for 16, Longney and Frocester for 14 each. John Smyth wrote of Berkeley hundred, 'For the state and eminency of the yeomanry this hundred is allowed the pre-eminence before any of the other thirty hundreds of the county.'(19) The growth of the woollen cloth industry had enhanced the wealth of this and the other Hundreds in the vale and escarpment abut the consequent decay of the wool trade had depleted the wealth of the Cotswolds. There was comparatively little armour in those Cotswold market towns whose magnificent churches bear witness to their former wealth: Chipping Campden had arms for 9 men, Stow-

on-the-Wold 5, Northleach 8, Winchcombe 3, Lechlade 11, Fairford 8. Cheltenham had more armour than any other place in Kiftsgate Division, enough for 13 men. Painswick in the Seven Hundreds had arms for 36.

The Privy Council ordered that the muster of 1608 should include 'all the forces in the countie both horse and foote.' Only brief mention may be made here of the horse. No direct information is readily available concerning the number of horse which Gloucestershire was expected to provide. The certificate returned by the Inshire after a muster in 1618 shows that it was then charged with the provision of twenty light horse (20) and as the Inshire provided one-tenth of the county force we may assume that the whole county was charged with the provision of 200 horse. In 1626, Berkeley hundred was charged with 18 horse; 3 heavily armed cuirassiers and 15 lightly armed dragoons.(21) The figure of 18 from Berkeley hundred is roughly in line with 200 from the county. The onus of providing horse fell on the gentry - men with freehold land worth £80 or more a year - or on the wealthier clergy, though by a sumptuary clause in the Act of 1558 husbands could also be charged if their wives were extravagantly dressed.

The returns for the horse in Men and Armour are remarkable for their scarcity; only 15 light horse were listed: 9 from the Seven Hundreds, 3 from the Forest, one each from the other three divisions. Two 'lances' - heavily armed horse - were also listed, one from Kiftsgate, one from Berkeley division. In addition Sir Robert Woodroofe of Alvington had 'armour for six horsemen' but, presumably, not the horses or men, and at Todenham, in Kiftsgate division there was 'furniture for one horseman' and one 'petronell fur.' A petronel was a cavalry pistol but in this instance could mean a horseman armed with that weapon. In all less than one tenth of the requisite strength of horse was available.

First thoughts suggest that Men and Armour must be inaccurate, but Lindsay Boynton in The Elizabethan Militia, writes at length on the reluctance of the gentry to provide horse even at the height of the Armada crisis, and Jeremy Goring and Dr. Joan Wake, Northamptonshire Lieutenancy Papers, 1580-1614 give a long account of the opposition by the gentry of that county to the orders of the Privy Council; opposition varying from procrastination and pleas of poverty to downright defiance.(22) One would like to think that the Gloucestershire gentry were more patriotic though at the Inshire muster in 1618 only half of the twenty horse required were forthcoming.(23) Judgement must be suspended until further research has been made into documents in the Public Record Office.

GLOSSARY

ALMAIN RIVET:	Flexible light body armour. Superseded by corslet.
BILL:	Light battle axe.
CORSLET:	Armour for upper part of body worn by pikemen.
CORSLET FUR. or FURNISHED:	Full equipment for pikeman including pike 16-18 feet long.
DEMILAUNCE or LANCE:	Heavy cavalry. Horse partly armoured. Men with three-quarter length armour and high boots armed with heavy lance. Superseded by CUIRASSIERS.
GAUNTLET:	Armoured glove.
HALBERD:	Combined spear and bill.
HARQUEBUT:	Early firearm superseded by caliver.
JACK:	Leather jacket, quilted or sewn with metal plates.
LIGHT HORSE:	Light cavalry wearing protective armour armed with pistol and staff. Later known as DRAGOONS.
MORION:	Visorless helmet.
TARGET:	Round shield.

For CALIVER and MUSKET see text.

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