CHAPTER FIVE

The 1703 Agreement – Hermann Mohll's arrest – The Hollow Blade mystery again – In business with William Cotesworth and Dan Heyford – The plight of the swordmakers.

After the 'shrouded years' the activities of the swordmakers – from 1703 to about the mid-twenties – are illuminated and made alive by letters, manuscripts and documents discovered in the Keep of the Old Castle at Blackgate.

Although there were very many receipts, letters, documents etc., concerned with the swordmakers when I examined them in the Gateshead library, they formed only a tiny fraction of the whole of the 'find'. The five or six chests, packed with manuscripts, were just saved from being sent to the pulp mill by the late Professor Edward Hughes who used this material to write his book *North Country Life in the Eighteenth Century.*

First discovered in 1940 this mass of papers and books were found to have belonged to the lords of the manors of Gateshead and Whickham – which were at one time, the richest coal-bearing manors in the country. Reposing in the strong room of the Gateshead Library they are now known as the *Ellison MSS* and the *Cotesworth MSS.* The Cotesworth papers alone were sorted into 13,000 separate items and it is mostly from these I found the business of the swordmakers.

If Mr. Hughes had discovered another chest of manuscripts relating to the years preceding 1703 (the 'shrouded' years), valuable as it might have been it would hardly have provided a more dramatic contrast which this chapter has within it.

For against the background of the meteoric career of the highly successful William Cotesworth (who handled the business affairs of the swordmakers) the steady sinking of the swordmakers into gloomy defeat is contrast at its most striking.

This period of work began by the signing of an agreement between five of the swordmakers and the Chartered Company on the 27th April, 1703. The drawn up agreement was part of the *Cotesworth MSS* and the full title of the Company is used – "The Governor and Company for making Hollow Sword Blades in England".

It was signed by only five swordmakers – Henry Wopper, John Wopper, Peter Tiergarden, Adam Ohligh and William Schafe. It was signed by the secretary of the Company – John Blunt and the period of agreement was six years. There was a penalty clause which bound the swordmakers to the Company with a threatened fine of £100 for each offence. A schedule attached stipulated thirty-seven different varieties and kinds of sword blades and bayonets. The list included rapiers, cutlasses, scimiters, hangers, and sizes and descriptions of all blades including the number of hollows – whether one, two or three.

In other words – hollow blades were stipulated in the long list. However, we must not jump to the conclusion that this was proof of

hollow blade manufacture. The genuine hollow blade was very expensive to manufacture and (it has been said), would cost the maker £1 apart from the furbishing of the blade. As the highest price to the makers – on the schedule price list – was £1 10s. per dozen (for large latsons, hollow), it is unlikely that any of these 'blades with hollows' were the triangular cross section blades with the flats hollowed out. Unless of course, some of these many varieties (perhaps only two or three), actually were the much sought after 'hollow blades' which to make, were a sacrifice of time to the worker.

The complete list of tools (to be returned intact), was interesting reading because although it included spindles it did not mention machines for 'rolling hollows' in the blades. At the foot of the long list were the names of the compilers – Thomas Lake and J. Bellamy.

It seems that now, after an uneasy peace of five years, the Alliance were once more at war against France and therefore the Chartered Company were re-starting the works after a long shut down. This would explain the small number of workers involved. Unless of course, the five were representing others as well.

The absence of Hermann Mohll is surprising but it has been suggested that he was back in Germany to recruit more labour. No doubt people concerned would be aware of the reasons why such an important name was left off the document and full provision was made in the wording of the agreement for the later inclusion of other swordmakers.

Hermann Mohll was a grinder, not a bladesmith like Adam Olligh. Being a grinder and to do with the hollowing process of blades, was he on a secret mission to Solingen or was it family business?

All we have proof of is that he returned from Germany several months after the agreement was signed; that he was accompanied by his wife and two children and that he had been away from Shotley Bridge for a year.

His arrival at North Shields (the mouth of the Tyne), signalled the beginning of a series of strange and what could be called sinister happenings. The upshot of the affair was that after being arrested and imprisoned in Morpeth gaol for one month Hermann Mohll was released and allowed to join his wife and children at Shotley Bridge. The papers relating to the court case are housed in the archives of the Northumberland Record Office. They are part of the Quarter Sessions Papers and cover December, 1703 and January, 1704. The papers are the actual letters which passed between Henry Villiers, Justice of the Peace and the Earl of Nottingham and also the statements of the witnesses. The letters from Villiers to Nottingham explains why he had arrested Mohll on the information of two witnesses.

Briefly what had happened since the vessel *The Saint Ann* had berthed in Shields harbour was this – The witnesses in the case were rowing past the Dutch ship *Saint Ann* at two o'clock on Sunday morning when they were hailed by some of the mariners on board the vessel. The witnesses were then asked to take some bundles of goods into their

wherry and convey them to some place of safety in North Shields until the next tide when a member of the ship's company would go along with them up the river to Gateshead. This they did and stowed the bundles in the house of one of the watermen who was Thomas Davidson – one of the witnesses.

Acting on information received, tide waiters from the Custom House Authorities examined the bundles, finding them to contain sword blades. Hermann Mohll arrived at the house, declaring that the blades were his and he had brought them from Germany to sell them. He had intended to carry the blades to Shotley Bridge where his correspondent was Peter Rennau (the last named was a director of the Hollow Sword Blade Company).

Mohll was unable to get surities and was committed to Morpeth gaol until the next sessions of the Peace.

In answer to Justice Villier's letter to the Secretary of State, Nottingham wrote the following – "Whitehall January, 8th 1704. Sir, Your letter of the third was laid before the committee and by their directions I am to tell you that ye armies that came in ye ship from Rotterdam must remain in your custody till their further order, and that you must endeavour to seize and secure the master of that vessel and also the Scottish and Irish soldiers which were on board her and take care that Davidson be further examined regarding this matter – Your humble servant Nottingham".

It is obvious that because most of the passengers were soldiers (about twenty), a Jacobite conspiracy was suspected in high quarters and accordingly Villiers tried to obtain more evidence. He was extraordinarily successful in obtaining more evidence of smuggling for, "Fishermen at South Shields who were gathering bait near the salt pans found about thirty more sword blades which had been sunk in the river. The blades being hollow, a weapon which at this time was made nowhere else in England except at Shotley Bridge".

The case underwent the strictest examination. Sir William Blackett – as well as others – assisted Colonel Villiers in his enquiries.

The result was that Mohll's antecedents seem to have been satisfactory and no plots were uncovered. Thomas Carnforth, a sword cutler of Newcastle and Henry Wopper, a swordmaker of Shotley Bridge testified to Mohll's good character. Carnforth had known Mohll for fourteen years and had often bought from him sword blades which he believed to have been made at Shotley Bridge. Two weeks before (probably just before Mohll was arrested), Mohll had offered to sell him some of the blades in question and he had partly agreed to buy twenty dozen of them. He would have done so had they not been seized.

Henry Wopper's testimony stated that he had *wrought* with Mohll as a swordmaker at Shotley Bridge for about fifteen years, both working for a sword blade company.

He also stated that the works had been closed for about twelve months before this occurrence and Hermann Mohll had returned to Germany – his native country. Then, at the response of persons con-

cerned in the company who had re-started the works, Mohll was on his way back to resume his old occupation at Shotley Bridge.

The witness – Henry Wopper 'verily believed' Hermann Mohll to be a 'very honest man'.

The court's findings were that there was no sinister significance about the affair. It was merely a case of swords made in Germany for the British market only at this time – 'the blades were of the finest quality'.

Several surities were found for Mohll's release but nothing in the Morpeth Sessions papers hint at how the affair was finally settled and disposed of.

In this proven case of smuggling which obviously had been glossed over to investigate a sterner charge (arming Jacobites), Mohll was lucky to be freed.

One cannot avoid the thought that the big names of the Chartered Company – Peter Rennau, the Vice-Governor and the Governor himself – Sir Stephen Evance may have acted behind the scenes. John Blunt – the secretary who signed the 1703 agreement was alone powerful enough to influence the Secretary of State the Earl of Nottingham. He was – later than this – Director of the East India Company and Adviser to the Government on State Lotteries. And there was Cotesworth, of whom more later.

So much for Mohll's arrest, his month's imprisonment at Morpeth and his return after a years' absence – it seems – to Shotley Bridge.

We find that from the occurrence the mystery of the hollow blades is deepened.

Why were only the hollow blades dumped in the river?

Had Mohll, carrying these special and most expensive blades himself, and on the way to the house of Thomas Davidson, 'got wind' that he was going into a trap?

If he wanted to keep secret the fact that Shotley were selling hollow blades which were made elsewhere he might impulsively have dropped them in the river.

Remember – in the summing up of the case – the official comment about the dumped blades – "a weapon which at this time was made nowhere else in England except at Shotley Bridge".

Which of course, showed that there was respect and some fame attached to the Shotley Bridge Swordmakers.

Surprisingly however, the probability that the fished out hollow blades had sailed from Rotterdam with the forty-six bundles was ignored. Would not an unbiased judge or jury call the lot 'smuggled'? There would be duty to pay on all blades and heavy duty on the hollow blades.

Hermann Mohll himself must have been surprised and certainly must have sensed an unseen kindly hand.

But was this Mohll's first case of smuggling? It was the first time

he had been caught but had he been trafficking back and forth for years? If he had – and it is only guess-work, then Shotley would have been able to supply a limited amount of hollow blades to the company.

Safe again in his old home in Shotley Bridge with his wife and children, Hermann Mohll took his rightful place as one of the leading swordmakers.

We know now that (despite the penalty), not only were sword blades sold to the company but also to individuals such as the cutler Thomas Carnforth and John Sandford, who habitually handed over 'one sword blade well made and tempered' as part of his local rents on land and properties. And we can be fairly sure Sandford's blades would be 'hollow' to fit the town sword. The small sword, in those days, was a precious weapon as well as an item of dress.

It was still a shrouded picture of the transition period from a state of comparative inactivity to what was again a booming industry after the agreement was signed in April, 1703. Hermann Mohll would be unable to lend his aid until January, 1704 and another year was to pass before it came clear that William Cotesworth – the Gateshead merchant – was managing the sales and business for the London company.

The son of a yeoman, he had served his apprenticeship in 'Gateside' after which his boundless energy was clinching business deals in almost every commodity and in every place. Tallow and candles were his main trading interest but he and his partner Sutton were also corn merchants. And this was only the beginning of Cotesworth's spectacular career.

However, he makes his bow upon the stage when we read the earliest letter to Cotesworth regarding the swordmakers. It is dated January, 1705 and John Beardmore (for the Company), writes – "Seeing as you say Clem Schaffe is very old pray let us know if he will be able to do our work. If not we will endeavour to get one abroad, but it will be a great trouble (?) and charge for they are very stiff and proud when they know that they are wanted". P.S. Please send up invoice of four chests of blades sent 30th November".

We remember that it was *William* Schaffe who signed the agreement, not Clement, who was the original immigrant and the father of William. It seems therefore that eighteen years after coming to Shotley Bridge here we have William, apprenticed to swordmaking with his name on an agreement and with his father growing almost too old to work.

One reads with relief a bill dated 31st October, 1711 which is an account of money owing for bar iron supplied to thirteen swordmakers and both William and his father 'Clem' had bought iron to forge into blades. This was six years later.

From managing the swordmaker's business affairs, William Cotesworth, to satisfy the demand for blades apparently didn't wait upon the Shotley men. By the year 1705 it was evident he was filling up the chests with other swordmakers blades. Where these came from is a mystery. Perhaps Darlington or Cumberland. However, Cotesworth received a

letter of complaint from Henry Benson – an official of the company. It ran – "Sir, all the cutlers complain of the blades being soft and ill-tempered. There is very few of them – especially ye tukes (?) but what stand like lead. It would give great satisfaction if they were made of such steel as formerly, for our workmen, by reason of their softness cannot bring them to coller like the German blades".

The image of disgruntled cutlers furbishing these unwelcome blades springs easily to mind.

But Cotesworth at this time (and indeed at all times), was hell-bent for success. In a letter to a friend during the year 1717 he summed up his own philosophy and his recipe for success. – "You know how natural it is to pursue private interest even against that Darling Principal of a more general good. . . . It is in the interest of the Public to be served by the man that can do it cheapest though several persons are injured by it. . . ."

Apropos of this attitude, in 1710, after the six year contract was ended Cotesworth drew up an agreement (for three years), with the Shotley Bridge swordmakers for them to make blades at 6d. a dozen cheaper than before. He also made a contract two months earlier than this with John Saunthorp and partners to make sword blades at one shilling a dozen cheaper than the German blades.

For twenty years the tallow and candle business was Cotesworth's main trading interest but sandwiched between – as well as the sword blades – were dealings in dyestuffs, indigo, argol, cochineal, copperas, galls, logwood and sanderswood, fustic and woad and other expensive dyestuffs from the Indies and the Levant. He dealt in various kinds of ashes, soap and oil. He supplied sugar, tea and chocolate to landladies and clergymen in Cumberland and even tobacco (made up in fourteen pound packets). Alderman Ramsey, who was now a relation by marriage, bought the tobacco in bulk. Both Ramsey and Cotesworth regularly purchased flax, tow, madder and whale fins from Rotterdam and alum from Hamburg. Remember too, that Ramsey was a famous goldsmith with his house and shop in Sandhill. A London wine agent – as well as his usual line – advised Cotesworth on the current prices of wheat, rye, barley and beans. Some of the barley and rye for the famous 'Geordie' loaf had to be imported but then Cotesworth also imported hops for the equally famous local ale and between wars he imported from France (Bordeaux), wines, cherry brandy and prunes.

On his own doorstep – Gateshead (Gateside) were the quarries of Whickham, Gateshead Fell, Wraken Dyke (Wrekenton), which gave up their grindstones and whetstones to pass through his hands at a profit. There were eleven quarries at Wracken Dyke alone and in addition to grindlestone quarries there was a stone quarry in Quarry Close, Gateshead to add to the Gateshead merchant's paper work. Dealing in salt, he acquired salt pans at Shields and by the end of Queen Anne's reign in 1714 he claimed to be the biggest salt proprietor in the country. Shortly after that he held the contract to supply the Victualling Office and his trading turnover had reached £30,000 a year. He boasted that he could make that amount in trading.

But this is only a small part of the success story of William Cotesworth and we must return to the story of the swordmakers at the year 1705 when Henry Benson had complained to him about a chest of blades. Many chests of blades later – in fact about a year – there was another letter of complaint. Worded rather meekly, it ran thus – "Received four chests of blades. . . . they are pretty sizeable but a little of ye weakest. Pray tell them to make them very stiff and well glazed and especially well tempered. I have a great many blades which stand like lead".

Over the years from 1705 to 1715 there are among the *Cotesworth MSS* a crop of accounts and bills which give an indication of the output of blades over separate periods. If therefore we apply the yardstick of one account for receiving 1,600 dozen blades costing £935 13s. 3½d., in the period from November, 1710 to 21st August 1712 we find that the swordmakers produced 19,200 blades in 557 days. Which is at least thirty-four blades a day.

At the most optimistic then, assuming there was a continuity of output from 1703, on a very rough average each swordmaker received four shillings daily for three blades. But remember there were other workers (forge hands, labourers, etc.), to pay out of the four shillings and out of it also had to come the cost of bar iron individually delivered to him by Den Heyford at 5d. a pound. However, this rough estimate only can be applied to the period I have quoted. The rest of the years, with their spasmodic production might vary the figures either way.

Considering the large numbers of acknowledgements of blades received there are suprisingly few complaints.

The war ended with the Peace of Utrecht in the year 1713 and Queen Anne, with a thankful prayer on her lips seemed to give way to a peaceful death – rather than to die – in August, 1714. Then, ironically for the Germans (if they could see it that way), George of Hanover came across the sea to sit on the throne in September. The new English King was a German.

This crowning and changing over from an uncertain to a certain line of Protestant succession coincided with the undoubted serious plight of the immigrant swordmakers of Shotley Bridge. Peace, for them, had its industrial problems and we begin to get hints, in all this correspondence, of hardship in the Derwent valley.

Blades, and the manufacturing of them was almost a luxury trade now. Engraving and etching embellished many blades and because of the cost of a good dress sword canes were beginning to oust them as items of dress. One of Cotesworth's friends – Joshua Geekie – writing from London commented – "Can't get a handsome sword for £5 or £6 so have ventured to £8 10s. . . . ."

However, if we examine more of the significant accounts and letters again it will be seen that even during war time the trend was always in the direction of a tip-over of the balance towards debt for the swordmakers. There are many accounts listing the individual sums of money owing to Den Heyford for bar iron supplied – "Sent to me

as per Bawdry Post. . . ." and the whole business of delivery and coercing for the payment of the iron was managed by Cotesworth. A letter to him from Heyford dated 10th May, 1712, "would consider it a great favour if you can by degree – urge payment of £49 10s. 5d., now due from the Germans. . . ."

The amount of costs of material also gives us a clue to the rate of usage. On the 31st October, 1711 all the swordmakers at Shotley (with their names appended), had settled an account for £375 4s. 10d. The names of the swordmakers (thirteen of them) also provides us with a hint of each man's capabilities.

It is a kind of league table with Adam Oley (evidently now Anglicised from Ohligh), owing £43 with Henry Wopper and the two John Woppers owing as much each, whilst the two Schaffes – William and Clemens – were at the bottom of the table owing the least. The list contains the names – Peter Tiergarden and Voose (no Christian name), John Hardcop, William Voes (or Voss), Abraham Mohll, Hermann and John Mohll. The last two Mohll's share the same bill, indicating that they are father and son. There was a *William* Mohll, absent from thebill who was mentioned a year previously. Adam Oley refers to the original Adam who was the immigrant in 1687, not his surviving son Adam (one of two in succession), who at this time was only aged fourteen.

This bill is interesting in that it shows who were the craftsmen and their sons. In the background, unmentioned would be the semi-skilled and labouring types. Among these should be Balfe, Himofan, Craggs and John Hindson. These names appear in correspondence. The important names, not on any list, are the men who are part and parcel of the whole set up – Bertram (the steel manufacturer and furnace expert), coupled with his associate Vintner.

The total amount owing on the joint account was paid eventually although it was settled in such a fashion that four of the swordmakers were shown to be in financial straights.

These were Adam Oley, John Hardcop and the two John Wupper's (father and son).

When the rest were shown to have paid their separate amounts owing, these four paid short by a total amount of £4 6s.

As can be seen, alongside on the same account is an amended settlement with the four names and shortages made up.

Quite often, during the years of 'prosperity' there are individual letters to Cotesworth about amounts owing by certain workers and it seems that Cotesworth may have had to 'hound' them to settle their debts to Den Heyford.

During the years 1712 and 1713 in particular – when trade was good – we are presented with proof, in the shape of personal letters to Cotesworth and a Covenant signed by Adam Oley, that income was not keeping pace with expenses.

The first letter, dated 8th February, 1712 is signed – John Wupper, junior and runs –

"Sir, Schaffe came to acquaint you that I have been lying very ill since New Year's day and am still not able to go to work or even go as far as the door. I humbly do ask you to send me with William Balfe forty shillings and do me this particular kindness for I. . . . (illegible), ...do not fail me for I have nothing to. . . . no more. . . . but resting, Your Humble servant".

This seems to be the first of the 'dunning' letters mentioned by Edward Hughes in his book – *North Country Life in the Eighteenth Century.*

There was no response to the letter for five days later the request was repeated stating that "he had sent William Balfe but he had not received it".

Wupper then urged in his second letter – "Sir, I wrote you about my poor condition but I have a boy who is also ill and I have had no money this month. I am very weak still. Please give forty shillings to the bearer John Himofan. Please do not fail me – Your Humble servant to command, John Wupper, junior".

This 'boy' would be the grandson of John Wupper, senior and weeks later we find the grandfather sending his own dunning letter. A long letter, difficult to make out except for one sentence – "I have an occasion for money. . . ."

Several months later John Hardcop briefly tells Cotesworth – "I have rent to make up to £1 18s. 11d. . . . ." then another figure – £5 4s. 11d. is quoted and finally the two words "fail nott".

Was the rent for his house or the only hint we have that the workers may have been charged a rent for using the works?

Always we have this problem of rents.

However, regarding these dunning letters – the last of them is dated as late as February, 1715. Like John Wupper, senior's, it is almost illegible. The word "ill" is repeated again and again and even in the last sentence with his signature (it was John Voose), the word 'ill' appears once again. The letters, in the manner of the time, are sheets of paper folded into squares so that the name and addresses are written on the outside. In some cases the letters are addressed to William Cotesworth – his shop in Gateside. The shop we know to have been in Bottle Bank (or Battle Bank).

In September of the year 1713 Adam Oley joined the other four men in a confession of not being able to make ends meet. However, Adam Oley had reached the status of being a Yeoman and was able to barter something in exchange for a loan.

Cotesworth obliged with a legally drawn up contract which was signed by Adam Oley. It can be seen that Adam Oley (described as a Yeoman), on the one hand William Cotesworth on the other hand by which, as a consideration of a loan of £5 15s. 4d., Adam Oley (Ollig),

agrees to assign over to William Cotesworth his two cows described as 'one all black and the other a hank one withall'.

At the beginning of the Covenant stands out in large type – To all Christian People – and about the middle of the many worded document in large type are the words – To Have and To Hold – meaning until the money is repaid.

Adam must have been about sixty years of age at this time. Out of the thirteen children he and his wife Mary had baptised perhaps (with the high mortality), only seven had survived. However, this is only a guess. What I can visualise are at least three of his sons serving their apprenticeships to be swordmakers. Perhaps the reason his sons do not appear on lists of names owing money to Heyford is that their father's large bill included theirs too.

However, referring back to the dunning letters – Hartcop and the Wuppers and the others who at different times asked Cotesworth for loans. How could they know Cotesworth's innumerable distractions, duties and elevated severence from Shotley's domestic affairs? One can imagine these notes of hand being read at his Gateshead shop whilst the boss was in London or across the river in Northumberland. In fact he could at any time have been anywhere in England. At that time the coal measures at Whickham and Gateside were the richest being mined in the whole country.

He was in London at about the time of the dunning letters negotiating for his brother-in-law Alderman William Ramsey the purchasing of the Manors of Gateside and Whickham.

Marrying Ramsey's sister eventually put into his possession Park House, the Gateshead mansion, as the bulk of Ramsey's fortune was left to him. However, Cotesworth hadn't time to settle there as he was often in London as secretary of the 'coal cartel' and beginning to form the first of the famous Alliances. He was (after 1716), Lord of the manors of Gateshead and Whickham and Joint-Lessee of Heaton Colliery across the Tyne. 1721 he was accused in parliament by W. Blakiston Bowes of 'endeavouring to engross all the Coal Trade himself'. Early in his career (when the swordmakers were ending theirs), he was the 'self styled' Mayor of Gateshead and when in 1719 the fortunes of the Shotley mills were in the past, he was appointed the High Sheriff of Northumberland.

One could go on and on about this remarkable man who has left his memory in place-names within Gateshead.

What could the swordmakers understand – when they sent their pleas to him – about all the other affairs to which Cotesworth was attending?

During the years 1712 and up to his death in 1716 Hermann Mohll was obviously, in his letters to Cotesworth, taking over the full authority of the Shotley works.

As early as February, 1711 a letter from him to Cotesworth said – "we have sent today by John Hindson two boxes of swords (order of the 2nd inst), mixed (?) as the description was not mentioned whether

hollow or plain required. . . . Pray keep £1 from the cost for Henry Wopper. . . ."

He ends his letter with – "A happy New Year, Your humble servant to command, Hermann Mohll".

As there was never a hint of Mohll borrowing money and because of his independent journeyings (back and forth to London as we may see later), in addition to his interests in Solingen, I imagine he alone could afford to buy or rent the Shotley works.

Although remaining aloof from writing anything but business letters for years, in 1715 – 24th May, when the works were at a low ebb – he almost begs Cotesworth's permission for "we grinders to ground Mr. Hayford's blades made by our smith here . . . . that is when we have not full employ". He then offers to make an allowance for the use of the mill (the grinding mill), which shows that the Chartered Company could never be approached except through Cotesworth.

Two weeks later Hermann Mohll showed by an almost despairing letter that Den (or Dan) Heyford had cast conspiring glances at the Shotley works and tried to buy or rent them.

Mohll's letter runs – "Sir, I hope you understand that Mr. Heyford is for the Company Works here" – and Mohll describes how his engineers measured all housing, shops and mills, taking water levels and "every thing he cut gite (get), and that if he (Cotesworth), had a kindness for the works here or for me to stop him and hold the old 'husie' back for we will all make blaides for rent and pay the rent every month. Some say he is for buying the works as they say the Company will bestow no more money here. . . ."

As can be seen by the letter Mohll grows more vehement as he proceeds and now calls Heyford 'a sliye youth', threatening to buy not one iron or steel from him.

He concludes by praying for, "a line by bearer whether I have hopes to prevent his aims" then concludes, "Your obedient servant to command, Hermann Mohll".

To me, this is an historic letter for it seems to have frustrated Den Heyford's attempts to take over the works.

William Cotesworth must after all have had 'a kindness for the works' or for Mohll because although this was Mohll's last letter (he died the following year in December), things must have remained unaltered for chests of blades continued to be sent to Sleigh.

It has been said – before the *Cotesworth MSS* were scrutinised – that throughout all this time, even from the year 1703 (the date of the agreement which has not Hermann Mohll's name upon it), that Hermann Mohll was given possession of the works for a yearly rent of forty-four dozen blades. This rent was supposed to necessitate a yearly journey down to London to deliver the blades.

Although I have found no evidence to show that this was so, it could very well be. It would agree with the theory that Mohll came back from Germany in December, 1703 to restart the works with the first

year's rent of smuggled in blades. The number of blades found as evidence – which kept him imprisoned for a month – was forty-four dozen or more. But we must remember that the Newcastle sword cutler Thomas Carnforth vouched for Mohll's character, stating that he had promised to buy most of these blades.

If the blades were the first year's rent, then Mohll's renting of the works was purposely kept secret – then and for years afterwards.

Historians have suggested that the promoters of the Charter, with Sir Stephen Evance at their head, lost interest in the swordmakers. But surely the 1703 agreement, sixteen years after bringing the settlers, disproves this? The full title of the company is stated and the agreement was to last six years.

However, if we follow the fortunes of the Governor of the company – Sir Stephen Evance, and the way he manipulated the powers of the Charter, it would seem *he* had lost interest in its swordmaking activities.

In the same year as the new agreement – 1703 – Sir Stephen sunk £20,000 of the Chartered Company's assets into the purchase of forfeited Irish Estates.

He was a London goldsmith and banker (all goldsmith's were bankers) and as early as 1698 he had been placed in a position of trust by Thomas Pitt who had sailed away to take up the Government of Madras. He gave Sir Evance the power of attorney and – later than 1703 – entrusted him with the handling of the great Pitt diamond.

By the year 1709 the Irish Parliament, afraid that the Chartered Company should become too powerful in Ireland refused to let the Company take conveyance of the land.

This was after years of the Company's efforts to enlarge its hold on the estates by attracting more capital through subscriptions and the like.

After this disastrous speculation we find that the charter was sold to a banking group headed by Sir George Caswell – Sheriff of the City of London – and Jacob Sawbridge who renamed the company The Sword Blade Bank.

We next hear of Caswell and Sawbridge attempting to found a Sword Blade Fire Office. Subscriptions were to be received at the Sword Blade Coffee house off Lombard Street.

So for the third time in fact, Sword Blade notes were issued which were in effect deposit receipts.

Unfortunately for the Sword Blade Bank, its principal customer was the South Sea Company and both Caswell and Sawbridge were directors.

In the bursting of the bubble all was irretrievably lost. In the Historical Register for 1720 came the statement:-

"The Sword Blade Company who had hitherto been the chief cash keepers for the South Sea Company, being almost drained of their ready money were forced to stop payment".

The previous year, Thomas Pitt's son Robert, suspicious of Sir Stephen Evance and his speculations had had the Pitt diamond transferred from Evance to the Bank of England and now after this new blow – the bursting of the bubble – Sir Stephen put his affairs in the hands of assignees.

Completely depressed and as he thought, bankrupt he 'shot himself in the temple with his pistol'.

After his death it was shown that he never had been insolvent after all and when his creditors had been paid in full there was still a handsome balance to his estate.

These money jugglings with the powers of a Royal Charter which primarily was to produce hollow sword blades were no doubt far above the heads of the Shotley Bridge swordmakers. However, the 'defectors', each and every one of them had been aware from the first whisperings of Clemens Hohemann in Solingen that people in high circles in England were behind the venture and providing expenses for the swordmakers to produce results.

That the settlers worked hard to produce the results they did, there is little doubt and there is also little doubt that the first generation of settlers made no fortunes for themselves. As always when the first generation, and even of subsequent generations, comes under discussion the vexed question crops up again. Did the swordmakers actually produce the hollow blades they were brought over to produce?

Because there never has been a sword with a hollow blade *on show* with the Shotley Bridge marks to identify it doubt has been cast on whether they ever made any. Mr. J. D. Aylward in his scholarly book – *The Small Sword in England*, expresses doubts because he has failed to identify a hollow sword blade as being a Shotley one. Since Mr. Aylward died – he was ninety-five – there has come to light this fresh evidence among the *Cotesworth MSS* detailing the descriptions – thirty-seven different ones – of the blades the swordmakers did produce. Again, there is enough to show in the letters and other correspondence relevant to the swordmakers that there were no disputes or differences of opinion about hollow blades.

I know that this implies that either (*a*) the men were packing their chests with the hollow blades they were expected to produce, or that (*b*) the disputes had been during the 'shrouded' years and now there was a tolerant understanding on the part of the company or even that (*c*) as no secret machines 'for rolling the hollows in the flats' had been installed at the Shotley mills there was tacit acceptance of the swordmaker's painstakingly slow 'hand hollowing' methods.

My own opinion inclines to the view that no machines were set up at Shotley Bridge and that hollow blades were nevertheless produced in *some* quantity by hand. Otherwise, if machines had been set up and hollow blades mass produced in consequence, then the fortunes would have been made of everyone concerned.