Bertram also had a smelt mill and a forge in the area - along with his cottage – but further downstream on the opposite bank. It is quite possible, though by no means certain, that he also built and ran the Allensford set-up. One highly intriguing question that arises at this point is - did he perhaps set up in business there *before* the arrival of the German swordmakers? At least one writer seemed to imply that this was the case[40]. Yet again, any answer can only be pure speculation.

We have no idea for how long the ironstone was mined and processed locally, but it cannot have been for too long. Especially with the many impurities in the ironstone [41] the work must have been extremely costly and time-consuming for it to be carried on in that manner for any length of time. We do know (from the Cotesworth Manuscripts[42],) that eventually they turned to importing Swedish bar iron, which they purchased through an agent called Dan (or Den) Hayford (or Heyford) of Pontefract, of whom we shall hear more later. Another probable reason for switching to imported iron, apart from the cost of local mining, was local competition of sorts. In 1690 the ironmaster Ambrose Crowley moved his manufactory from Sunderland to nearby Winlaton, the supposed reason being labour problems on Wearside[43]. He had come to Sunderland from Greenwich eight years previously, having first had to present to Parliament a lengthy treatise on his reasons for that move. (This is an important factor that leads us to believe that at that time he had not become aware of the possible advantages of the Derwent valley.) Now, three years after the Germans had opened up the potential of the area, Crowley decided that it would suit him too, almost certainly for the same reasons Sandford and Bell had chosen their site – water, fuel and so on[44]. He was however not really in direct competition, except in the matter of mining the ironstone, for he manufactured knives, saws, chisels and the like, while for larger items such as chains, pumps or anchors he set up another works not far away at Swalwell.

We can also infer from local records that the sword trade was steadily increasing. For example, in 1691 the Hallmote Court Roll for the Manor of Lanchester (which included Shotley) shows that Hermann Mohll, Henry Woper, Angel Schimmelbusch, Oliffe Groats and John Voss took possession of a cottage with adjacent garth – almost without a doubt to expand the swordmaking trade, which was after all basically a cottage industry, despite the mechanisation. There is also the record in 1694 of a *"water corn milne"* at Lintzford[45] being leased to John Sandford by a Christopher Hunter - who was, intriguingly, a student at St John's College, Cambridge, according to the document - for an annual rent of £7 and *"one sword blade well made and tempered"*. We do not know what he did with the mill initially (though we do know that by 1703 it appears to have become a paper mill), but it seems very likely he turned it - or at least purposed to turn it - into a sword mill.

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[40] JENKINS: *"Bertram introduced the art of what became known as 'shear' steel [...] and that the art was taken from the Derwent Valley to Sheffield in the year 1767"*. The source quoted for this information was J S Jeans: *Steel* [1880].

[41] JENKINS; in "Correspondence" there is a very learned contribution from a Dr J A Smythe on the analysis done on a piece of slag from Allensford and another letter from the German expert Dr Otto Johannsen (*"author of* 'Die Geschichte des Eisens'") on the same subject. Both comment in no uncertain terms on the poor quality of the basic ore.

[42] See next chapter

[43] The given reason was that his original workers, Protestant Belgians from Liege, were being victimised by a predominantly Catholic labour force.

[44] However, he too began importing the Swedish iron for use in his works.

[45] It has been suggested that this placename acquired its slightly unusual spelling (i.e. the 'tz' in the middle) as a result of the Germans having an interest there, but of course there is no proof of this.

Barely three years after the acquisition of the mill at Lintzford, however, international events took a turn which must have given the *Governor & Company for the Making of Hollow Sword Blades in England,* not to mention the swordmakers themselves, great cause for concern. In 1697 the latest in a succession of campaigns waged by a coalition of England, Spain and the Netherlands against the expansionist policies of France under Louis XIV - the "War of the League of Augsburg" [46] - was brought to an end after eleven years by the Treaty of Ryswick. Peace was proclaimed, and armies were stood down all over Europe.

Obviously this would be a great blow for the swordmakers, since there would suddenly be much less demand for their products, which would quickly force on them certain cutbacks. Herein lies the probable reason for the Lintzford mill having become a papermill by 1703, and for an advertisement inserted in the *London Gazette* of July 10-13th 1699 by the Hollow Sword Blade Company, announcing that:

> *"... it will put to the candle[47] at Cutlers' Hall, Cloak Lane, what sword blades it has finished. The blades may be seen in the Company's warehouse in New Street three days next before the sale."*

From the phrase *"what sword blades it has finished"* it is not difficult to come to the conclusion that the business was well into the process of being run down and that for the swordmakers a period of recession of unknown length had come upon them. The outlook must indeed have seemed very bleak to them - the more so since it had arrived so soon (a mere twelve years) after they had set out from their one-time homes in Germany, filled with such high expectations of a successful new life in the "promised land" of England.

Gentlemen choosing swords (early 18th century illustration)

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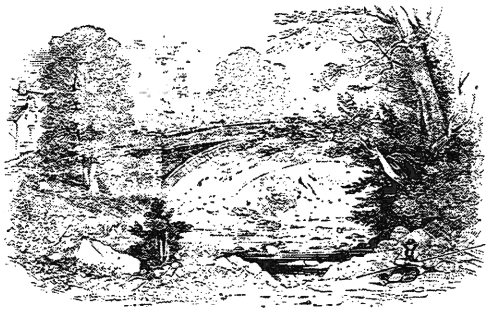
[46] Or "War of the Grand Alliance"

[47] An auction where the stump of a candle was lit and the last bid before it expired was accepted.

6. Regeneration



We have already mentioned in the previous chapter the Cotesworth Manuscripts. These, along with the Ellison Manuscripts, belonged to the lords of the manors of Gateshead and Whickham. Both sets, several chests of papers in all, were discovered in 1940 by Professor Edward Hughes, researching at that time in the Blackgate Keep at Newcastle for his book on *North Country Life in the Eighteenth Century*. They were only just saved from being sent to the pulp mill as rubbish and are now in the possession of Tyne & Wear Archives. The Cotesworth papers, some 13000 of them, contained a great deal of information – letters, receipts, agreements and other documents - on the swordmakers after 1700 but unfortunately not before that date. It is thanks to this mass of papers that we know so much more about the Shotley swordmakers. But why the "Cotesworth" Manuscripts or Papers?

William Cotesworth was the son of a local yeoman. After an apprenticeship in Gateshead he embarked, full of energy and determination, on a career as merchant – in whatever commodity he could lay his hands on. In about 1704 he became the agent for the Company managing the sales of Shotley Bridge swords; we only know for certain that he was the agent in January 1705, when a letter was sent to him about the welfare of certain swordmakers. For the next twenty years or so he was the link between the swordmakers and their new employers. It seems correct to say that he was also their friend, for he appears to have regularly done his best to bring their problems to the Company's notice. At the same time, though, he was obviously highly determined to succeed in life[48] as well as in business, letting nothing stand in his way. In 1717 he wrote to a friend: *"You know how natural it is to pursue private interest even against the Darling Principle of a more general good.* [...] *It is in the interest of the Public to be served by the man who can do it cheapest though several persons are injured by it...."* Nonetheless he seems, generally speaking, to have looked after the interests of the swordmakers pretty well – at least when those did not conflict with his. It was usually done from a distance however, for more often than not he was in London or elsewhere. The real link between him and the men was Hermann Mohll, who by now, Richardson suggests, may have been wealthy enough to buy or at least to rent the Shotley works. (There is a story that

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[48] He managed to buy the titles of Lord of the Manors of Gateshead and Whickham, then proclaimed himself unofficial Mayor of Gateshead, in 1719 he became High Sheriff of Northumberland.

from 1703 the works had been leased to Mohll at an annual rent of four dozen blades. If this was so, it was done in total secrecy, for there is no record of it.) It is ironic, however, that Cotesworth's meteoric rise to eminence should have been matched by the steady decline in the fortunes of the workers towards almost total demise.

He was not exclusively the local agent for the Sword Company, however. He was at the same time: a trader in tallow and candles; a dealer in exotic dyestuffs; a supplier of ashes soap and oil; a purveyor of tea, sugar and chocolate; a retailer of tobacco; and leader of a local coal cartel – as well as having other widely varied sidelines far too numerous to mention. By 1714 he was boasting he could make over £30,000 a year from trading – an enormous sum for those days! It is fairly safe to say that his family would not be left in penury when he finally died in 1726.

Cotesworth was just one of the new names connected with the swordmakers in the early years of the eighteenth century. In 1703 a new agreement was drawn up between the Shotley Bridge men and the now reformed Company. Evance was still Governor of the Company, but joined by Peter Reneau (or Renew; originally from Bordeaux, naturalised in 1667) as Vice-Governor and John Blunt as Secretary[49]. (It was this last named who drew up the 1703 Agreement on behalf of the Company.) This agreement, to be in force for six years, contained, among other clauses, one binding the swordmakers to the Company and threatening them with a fine of £100 for anything the Company considered an offence. (Selling swords privately is one such offence mentioned.) An attached schedule listed the different kinds of blades to be produced to the order of the Company – rapiers, scimitars, cutlasses, bayonets, etc. - and included the number of hollows to be applied to each. So "hollow blades" were at least – and at last – *mentioned* in legal black and white. Attached to the Agreement was also a complete list of tools to be maintained and returned at the end of the set term *"... in as good order and condition of repair as the same are at the sealing of these presents*[50]*"*. It was signed on the one hand by *"The Governor and Company for the Making of Hollow Sword Blades in England"* but on the other by only four of the original immigrant swordmakers– namely, Henry Wooper, John Wooper, Peter Tiergarden and Adam Oligh. The fifth signatory was William Schaf(f)e, but it was not he who was among the original settlers but his father Clement, referred as Clem,.

(Incidentally, we have still a letter (among the Cotesworth Papers) concerning Clem, the first letter known to be sent to Cotesworth, from John Beardmore of the Company in January 1705. He wrote: *"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*[51] *abroad, but it will be a great trouble and charge for they are very stiff and proud when they know that they are wanted ...".* Happily, six years later, Clem was still *"able to do the work"*, for a bill exists for bar iron supplied to swordmakers, among those mentioned being Clem.

The one name that *ought* to have been among the signatories is surprisingly missing – that of Hermann Mohll. He should have been there by right as one of the senior swordsmiths, but we can be pretty safe in assuming that, under the circumstances, he was happy enough to leave the negotiations in the capable hands of the others. But why was he not present? We know he was in Shotley Bridge in 1702; we know he was there in 1704. What happened to him in the interim, however, why it is fairly safe to assume he was not in the North-East for the signing of the Agreement, is an involved story which contains a number of surprises, not the least for Mohll himself.

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[49] One of Blunt's later posts was as Adviser to the Government on State Lotteries. In view of what happened to the Hollow Sword Blades Company in the years following the 1703 Agreement, this might have been a case either of sound reasoning on the government's part or simply of poetic justice!

[50] i.e. the agreement.

[51] i.e. another swordmaker

It has been stated that he was probably in Germany in 1703, and the evidence does lend great weight to this theory. We know for a fact that he returned to this country with his wife and two children some months after the Agreement had been signed; that he had apparently been absent from Shotley for over a year; and that on his return he landed at North Shields. His arrival there, however, on the Dutch ship *Saint Ann,* was far from routine and marked the start of a strange chain of events during which he was arrested, thrown into Morpeth Jail for over a month and finally released to return to Shotley Bridge. The charge against him had been no light one, for he had been arrested on suspicion of treason.

Two witnesses deposed that one Sunday morning about two o'clock, while rowing past the *Saint Ann,* they were hailed and asked to convey some bundles in their boat to a place of safety in North Shields. They would further be required to take the bundles, with a member of the ship's crew, up to Gateshead on the next tide. It seems the boatmen complied with the first part of the request, taking the bundles to the house of one of their number. Then, however, it is presumed that, being suspicious, they informed the authorities, who came and found they contained swords. Fishermen also discovered a further bundle of swords sunk in the estuary near South Shields. The swords were described in a letter sent to the Secretary of State by Justice Villiers, who had oversight of the case, as such: *"..., the blades being hollow, a weapon which at this time was made nowhere else in England except at Shotley Bridge."*[52]

This might not have been too serious in itself – though Mohll could easily have been indicted for smuggling on these grounds alone. To aggravate his position, however, the boat he had come over on had also brought about twenty Scottish and Irish soldiers, which made the authorities suspect a Jacobite conspiracy. It is very possible that they had received a tip-off about these men and that it was only they who were initially under suspicion. In the circumstances Mohll may well have panicked and tried to get rid of his contraband as quickly as possible, thus arousing the suspicion of the boatmen, who had probably by then learned of the detention of the soldiers. There was a great deal of investigation. In court several testimonies were given as to the good character of Mohll by, among others, Thomas Carnforth and Henry Wooper. This was when Carnforth stated he had known Mohll for fourteen years and had even worked with him. Wooper declared that the works had been closed down about a year before this and that Mohll had then gone back to Germany; when work restarted, word had been sent to him to return to his old job, which was what he was doing when arrested. Wooper also averred that he *"verily believed"* Mohll to be a *"very honest man"*. In the end it was decided there was no conspiracy charge to answer and Mohll was freed[53].

(There is, however, an extremely interesting postscript to this tale. It seems that a century later, in 1815, searches were going on throughout the north-east during the Napoleonic Wars for possible infiltrators. An amazing discovery was made at Danby Hall, in a concealed room in a chimney-stack, of a large cache of swords said to be destined for the Jacobite rebel army – many of them marked as originating from Shotley Bridge.)

Several things here, however, are puzzling. For a start, there is no record of how the case was brought to its conclusion, and no reason was ever given for not bringing the much more obvious charge of smuggling against Mohll. Can we detect here some work behind the scenes to get the whole case played down? This is quite possible, for Evance, Reneau and Blunt were all very influential in government circles.

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[52] This seems to indicate the high standing of the Shotley blades at the time, but it seems also to skirt neatly round the point that they were *not* Shotley blades at all. Political economy with the truth?

[53] The papers relating to the case - letters between Villiers and the Earl of Nottingham and the witnesses' statements - form part of the records of Morpeth Quarter Sessions covering December 1703 and January 1704, now in Northumberland Records Office.

And what was Mohll doing in Germany? The story that he had just gone back home because there was no work at Shotley does not seem convincing in the light of what happened on his return. It is unlikely that he would have any "home" there, let alone family, to go back to after all these years, and not many friends either. (At least we can be certain that he could return, since, as you may remember, he was not a guild member and therefore not under the interdict of 1688.) It is also said that he went there to try and bring back more swordmakers, to replace those who had died or who were by now too old. This is slightly more likely, but the fact no mention was made during the investigation at North Shields of any other swordmakers being on board the *Saint Ann* might be taken as evidence to the contrary. (On the other hand, it may just have been that there were no others willing to take the risk and leave Solingen.)

Yet the oddest and most telling piece of evidence is probably those forty-six bundles of swords. Richardson suggests Mohll might not have wanted people to realise that some of the swords emerging from Shotley Bridge did not originate there; and that he may have been trying to avoid the heavy duties payable on such imports. He further wonders if this was in fact *not* Mohll's first such trip. The implications of all this will be looked at in Chapter 9.[54]

Mohll, doubtless much relieved, finally returned to Shotley Bridge to find the mood was one of hope after the new agreement, and indeed business was starting to look up, probably even more so when Cotesworth took a hand in it.

It seems not to have looked up as much as Cotesworth could have wished, however, for by 1705 he is found coping with the increasing demands made on the Company by buying in swords from several other sources. Where these sources were remains a mystery, but we do know that he soon started receiving letters of complaint from dissatisfied customers - and from his employers. An official of the Company, Henry Benson, wrote:

"Sir, all the cutlers complain of the blades being soft and ill-tempered. There is very few of them - especially ye tukes[55] 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[56] like the Germans."

A year later Benson is still complaining, but in a lower key. *"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."* But considering - if we accept Richardson's projection from the bills between November 1710 and August 1712 - that the swordmakers produced about 19,000 blades in that period alone, the complaints are not that numerous.

In the meantime however, it is obvious that things were not going quite so well, for when, in 1710, another agreement was drawn up, for three years, between the swordmakers and (this time) Cotesworth, we see that he has contracted them to produce blades at sixpence per dozen cheaper than before. Moreover, at about the same time, he contracted with one John Saunthrop and Partners to have swords made at one shilling per dozen cheaper than that.

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[54] There is an interesting side-light on Mohll's swords in information from the Cologne archives, provided by Dr H.Haedeke and Herr Rodenkirchen, in the form of a 17th century document from Solingen stating that *"no swordmakers are to export incomplete swords.* There is no documentary evidence of sword-furnishers in Solingen, but this sentence seems to say they were there. Mohll's exploit(s?) seems to indicate that the swordmakers of Solingen were getting round this ban without too much difficulty.

[55] Please don't ask me what these might be! (The OED gives only *"tarpaulin"* as a meaning.)

[56] Nor what this might mean - but it *may* just be *"colour"*. Or does it mean to *"collar"*, i.e. to affix a collar or hand-guard? As so often in this story, one has to resort to pure speculation!

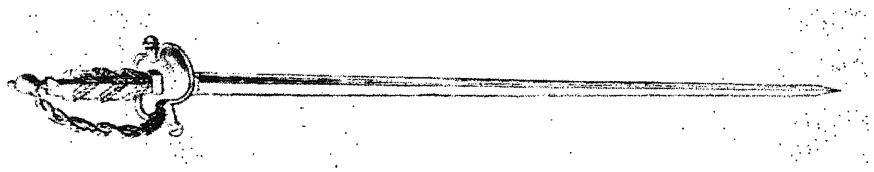
But in 1713 the Peace of Utrecht brought the latest war to an end, meaning once again a reduced demands for swords. The fact that Queen Anne died the following year and George of Hanover came over from Germany to succeed her changed little for the swordmakers.

Blades were now becoming more of a luxury than a necessity, and prices and *decorative*[57] standards were rising. The utilitarian though very practical and durable blade produced at Shotley was slowly going out of fashion. It was the decoration that mattered, and this drove prices steadily upwards. Joshua Geekie, a friend of Cotesworth, wrote to him from London about this time: *"Can't get a handsome sword for £5 or £6 so have ventured to £8 10s. ...".*

An examination of accounts and letters of the early 1700s reveal that even before the end of the war things were becoming tough for the men at Shotley. Prices of raw materials were rising, but the returns from the Company, who after all were allowed by the 1703 agreement to fix prices, were not. So the swordsmiths found it more and more difficult to settle their bills. Their supplier of iron, Dan Heyford, had to write to Cotesworth in May 1712 that he *"would consider it a great favour if you can by degree urge payment of £49 10s 5d, now due from the Germans..."* Considering "the Germans" had just settled a bill for £375 4s 10d the previous October, one can see how costly their trade was becoming. Of that £375 - the amount owed jointly by thirteen of them - Adam Oley (the original settler, not his son), Henry Wooper and the two John Woopers owed over £40 each. That it took some time for the debt to be paid off is evident; it is equally clear that Adam Oley, the two John Woopers and John Hartcop could not pay in full, still owing £4 6s in all. But there is a later bill showing the debt finally settled. In September 1713 we know that Adam Oley, who by now had a small farm, could only settle another debt, for £5 15s 4d, by handing over his two cows to Cotesworth[58].

But the correspondence sent to Cotesworth show that this was only temporary respite. Over the next few years letters from or about various men - quite a few of them asking for money because the person named in them was ill and had not been able to work for some time - show that things were getting worse, not better, at Shotley Bridge.

And as for the Hollow Sword Blade Company ....



Early 18th century sword, a type that might have been made at Shotley.

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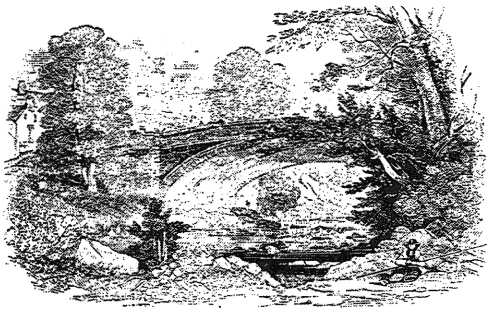
[57] Swords were becoming decorations rather than weapons, so the quality of their blades became less important.

[58] According to RICHARDSON. HUGHES (p.62) says however that the two cows were assigned to Cotesworth as a covenant (signed by Oley with a signature that, as Hughes so eloquently puts it, *"suggests a Rembrandtesque hand that could scarcely push a pen along"*) against a loan, to be returned if the amount was repaid. Very likely they stayed with Cotesworth.

7. Degeneration



What of the Hollow Sword Blade Company, then? They obviously had confidence in the business and in the men in 1703, enough confidence to draw up a six-year contract, despite possible reservations about the running of the business that I shall return to in the final chapter.

Yet the position of the Company itself was being undermined, by, of all people - its leading light, Sir Steven Evance. A respected banker and goldsmith, he was given several positions of trust, but, as so often happened with such people at this time, he became dissatisfied with his lot. In the year the Agreement was signed, he persuaded the Company to divert £20,000 of its assets into the purchase of estates in Ireland which had been forfeited. The Company then proceeded to try to increase its hold on them by advertising for subscriptions to its capital fund; we can assume the response was very modest, however, since the fund stayed open for several years. But finally, in 1709, the Irish Parliament, ever more fearful of the Company becoming too powerful a force in Ireland, voted to deny it the final conveyance of the deeds.

The Company was now in a precarious financial position, and the only way out seems to have been to sell the Charter for the Hollow Sword Blade Company to the highest bidder and cut its losses. Evance retained his other positions of trust for a time, but things went slowly but surely further wrong for him, as we have already seen.

The new owners of the Charter were a group of bankers headed by Sir George Caswell, Sheriff of the City of London, and Jacob Sawbridge. They renamed the Company "The Sword Blade Bank" – and life apparently went on as normal for the workers back in Shotley. Yet, as we know, life was not quite as normal as it had been, with bills mounting and trade decreasing. This would not have been helped by the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, which brought to an end yet another war and so reduced the need for arms.

At least they had Hermann Mohll at their head from about the year 1712. He seems to have been in full charge of the day-to-day running of the works (judging by his letters to Cotesworth) and seems to have tried to keep things going as best he could, seeking work wherever he might find it. He even tried, in a letter of 1715, to persuade Cotesworth to allow

them to grind blades for Heyford[59] at a time when there was little else for them to do. We do not know what the reply was. But in 1715 he wrote despairingly to Cotesworth that *"the sliye youth"* Heyford was trying to take over the works (his engineers were already on site measuring up and taking stock), on the apparent pretext that the Company was unable to pay the workers any longer and had no further financial interest in Shotley. (This was *probably* false, though one can never be sure, considering the way the Company was being run at the time.) In his turn Mohll threatened to stop buying his iron from Heyford if he persisted. His plea to Cotesworth for something to be done seems to have had effect, for we know the works remained in the hands of the Company, or - more precisely - of Cotesworth, with Mohll still in practical overall charge. Unfortunately, the following year, 1716, saw the death of Hermann Mohll, surely a bitter blow to the sword-makers. He left his mills to his son William; we know he had two other sons, James and John, but we have to assume they were no longer living by this time, since they do not seem to have figured in the disposal of his assets.

Their new (nominal) employers, however, do not seem to have done much for the benefit of the Shotley workers, despite Cotesworth's best efforts. As the Sword Blade Bank they were more concerned with increasing their capital (and of course their personal profits), issuing banknotes and accepting new customers willy-nilly. Unfortunately for everyone concerned, the Bank's principal client was a group called the "South Sea Company", of which Sawbridge and Caswell were also directors. In 1720 the "Bubble" burst, of course, and the Sword Blade Bank was forced to stop trading, since it had nothing left but debts. What happened to Sawbridge and Caswell is not certain, but, as we know, Evance committed suicide.

The result of all these machinations in London by the Company was the slow decrease of contact with - and cash to - the workers. They soldiered on for several years more, but their numbers were steadily decreasing. On a visit to Bertram's works at Blackhall Mill in 1719 Henrick Kalmeter, a young Swedish engineer probably trying to sell Swedish bar iron in the area, noted that there were only nineteen workers now, whereas before there had been thirty.[60] In 1723 Cotesworth, writing to a relation, said that: *"... those of the Sword Blade Company that were there concerned are all in adversity and misfortunes by hastening to be rich."* - which seems to refer to employers trying to get rich by ignoring the workforce.

By 1723 almost all the original settlers had died or left the village, though a Mohll was still in charge - now William. Gradually they were becoming more and more independent, mainly because the Company was showing less and less interest in them. In 1723, when a petition was brought before Parliament to renew the Charter, it was rejected, meaning the end of the Hollow Sword Blade Company (or Bank) altogether. Yet it made little difference to those working at Shotley Bridge. Under Cotesworth's guidance the settlers reorganised themselves and kept forges and mills going. (I also wonder at this point just how much of Cotesworth's own *money,* not to mention effort, went into maintaining the group over the years - especially after Heyford's allegations in 1715 about the Company not being able to pay the workers.)

The following year William Mohll advertised the sale of his swordmill and house in the *Newcastle Weekly Courant,* and it was bought by Robert Oley. (That may well have been pre-arranged and the notice a mere legal obligation.) At this point Mohll seems to drop quietly out of the picture, and we hear nothing more of him.

Then in 1726 came two deaths that directly affected the swordmakers. The first was that of Adam Oley, at an advanced age, meaning that the last of the original settlers had gone, as far as we can make out. The other death was more significant, for it was that of Cotesworth. This

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[59] Although it seems from the letter that these were manufactured at Shotley,

[60] KALMETER. He also claimed demand was down to 4500 blades per year from a production potential of 21,000.

must have been another setback for the swordsmiths, as well as a big worry, considering the years of help and encouragement he had given them. Richardson says that a few years later, in 1731, Henry Carr Esq. of Shotley Bridge received a letter from a Charles Turner, lawyer of Staples Inn in London, that the Company's mills at Shotley Bridge had been sold to a London client for £200. Exactly which mills is not apparent, but Richardson goes on to say that Carr, Cotesworth's son-in-law, makes it clear in a letter two years later that the properties at Shotley had been copyhold in the name of Cotesworth as a trustee for the Company.

Other, English names now begin to appear as swordmakers and mill owners in Shotley, notably Leaton and Johnson. From what we can gather from records, these two were local landowners; we can only presume they managed to get their sons apprenticed to the trade, probably by agreeing to pay handsomely for the privilege and the indentures[61]. As things got harder and harder for the swordmakers, it may be that Leaton and Johnson stepped in with "offers too good to refuse" and so made themselves sword-mill owners, in competition with "the Germans". It was possibly Leaton's mill that Angerstein saw (see chapter 2) when he wrote that there were only eight workers remaining - though he does say the works were owned by a "Mr Blanchenschep" (almost certainly Blenkinsop) of Newcastle (what his connection with Leaton was we are not at all sure). He also remarked on *"the German laziness and arrogance"* that had brought about the dispersal of the community - though what he meant by this is also unclear. He does not seem to have gained a very precise picture of what was going on at Shotley, for he ignores certain facts: that there were three other mills still working and that the one he visited was *English* run. (Also that he had no idea how to spell Blenkinsop!)

As orders for army swords slowly dwindled, the swordmakers had to turn their hands to other things, and the Oleys and Moles (as they were by now) started producing scythes and carving knives, but it cannot have been a very lucrative a business. In 1767 we know that two Oleys, William[62] and Nicholas, ran one sword-manufactory jointly, and in the same year, as we learn from his memoirs, Thomas Bewick, the famous wood engraver, began his career as an apprentice to the Beilby brothers. One of his early tasks was *"... etching sword blades for William and Nicholas Oley, sword manufacturers, &c., at Shotley Bridge."*[63] A third event in 1767 was the presentation to William Oley and his wife Ann (who had been married in 1759) of a unique glass drinking vessel[64], specially made by the Beilbys.

On the one side of the glass is:

Succefs to the
Swordmakers

... while the reverse is inscribed:

O
W • A
1767

Twenty years later, the same William Oley completed the construction of Cutlers Hall[65], where the couple lived for many years, and set in the façade a stone bearing an inscription just like the one on the reverse of the Beilby goblet, except for the date,1787. (Surely it can be no

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[61] For an apprenticeship to a merchant or to a profession at this time, fees of up to £1000 were being demanded – and paid.

[62] There were two William Oleys at this time – cousins - one born in 1736 and the other three years later. It was the elder of the two, son of Richard Oley and grandson of the original Adam Oley, who got together with Nicholas, probably his brother, to run the business.

[63] BEWICK, p.57 of the first edition. Unfortunately, this is all he has to say about the Oleys.

[64] Last heard of in the boardroom at the London headquarters of the Wilkinson Sword Company.

[65] Still on Cutlers Hall Road, Bridgehill; now a listed building, divided into three separate residences.