Neil Jeffares, Dictionary of pastellists before 1800

Online edition

NOEL, Amelia, Mrs Henry, née Minka Levy

London 1759-1818

Mrs A. Noel of 38 St James's Place advertised in the *Times*, 19.X.1799, "to the ladies" lessons in "drawing & painting (in oil, water colours and crayons) landscapes, figures, cattle flowers, transparencies &c", 2 gns for 12 monthly lessons (more if the lessons were given away from St James's Place). Specimens of her works were for sale. She exhibited landscapes, history pieces and other undescribed drawings (probably watercolours) at the Royal Academy between 1795 and 1804, from various addresses, including 12 Edward Street, 190 Piccadilly and 32 Albemarle Street, the last as Mrs M. Noel. From the same address appeared an advertisement in the *Morning post* (15.III.1803) for—

PAINTING on VELVET, and laying the grounds of any colours to suit furniture, figures, flowers, fruit and landscape....every manner of Drawing and Painting, in crayons, chalks, opaque, water and oil colours; TAUGHT to LADIES, by Mrs and Miss NOEL, whose original works may be viewed as Specimens, and are for Sale.

(Velvet painting was also a speciality of the Jewish Town family: v. s.v. Towne; v.q. Isaacs.) A longer notice, describing Mrs Noel and 32 Albemarle Street, appeared in John Fetham's The picture of London, for 1804, pp. 260f:

The elegant and scientific works of this lady for her superior talents and genius, are patronized by the royal family, nobility, &c. They may be viewed gratis, and consist of paintings and drawings in oil, water colours, crayons, and chalks; and the grandeur, taste, and spirit, of the ancient masters are admirably preserved. The apartments are fitted up after the French, Turkish, and Chinese, style, decorated with ornamental paintings, by Mrs Noel. The chairs, sophas, borders, draperies, &c. are all of painted velvets, executed in a manner peculiarly tasteful, and exclusively her own, and consist of historical figures, landscapes, &c. the recesses are painted in imitation of bronzes, basso reliefs, cameos, and marbles; and the window blinds and screens are transparent paintings. A Turkish saloon, a Chinese Boudouin, and a French salle, form a most pleasing and unique coup d'œil. Mrs Noel and daughter engage to teach ladies, in a few lessons, these arts, by a manner peculiarly easy, and unclogged by the usual methods of protraction.

She was also an engraver and publisher. On 8.IV.1804 she visited Farington with her daughter Miss F. Noel to enlist the painter's support in having her submission accepted at that year's Academy, explaining how important this was for her teaching: "her scholars judged of her ability in the Art from that circumstance". She had four children to support, and her husband had absconded with her fortune.

We know more about her social background from the law case Horne v. Amelia Noel reported in the Times, 12.XII.1807. It concerned an action on her bill of exchange for £35 4s. (for coal supplied by the plaintiff). Her defence (which succeeded, notwithstanding the arguments of Sir William Garrow for the plaintiff) was that she had been sued in her own name, but was properly married to a Jew called Zebe, or Zvi, Noah, now known as Henry Noel, of Crosby Square; they were married in the synagogue in Duke's Place in 1781. The action failed as it should have been pursued against her husband. Ironically Noel had made and engraved a series of topographical drawings, including one of Garrow's seat at Pegwell Bay, in 1797, even

presenting a set to the royal princesses to whom she was said to be drawings mistress.

Henry Noah's bankruptcy (with his partner Henry Harrison) was noted in the European magazine in .III.1783. Amelia Noel's nephew was Major Mordecai Noel of New York. Her father was Judah Levy, "an America merchant", of Heydon Square, Minories (it seems a chapman, whose bankruptcy occurred in 1777), and her nephew Captain Uriah P. Levy, of the USS Vandalia, who owned a portrait of her said to be by Reynolds at his home, Jefferson's Monticello.

In addition to her artist daughter Frances Laura, later Mrs John Bell (1786–1863), two other children are known: Lewis Joseph John Noel (1784–1839), a solicitor (who by an astonishing coincidence was also involved in a case in which the adequacy of the name of the party was at issue), and Horace Morton Noel (1788–1814), lieutenant in the 8th Foot, killed in the assault on Fort Erie, following which Amelia Noel was granted a pension of £40 "in consideration of the destitute situation in which she is left."

It has been suggested that the artist was romantically linked to the painter Mather Brown, who exhibited a portrait of her at the Royal Academy in 1797 (no. 75, as "a lady"), but there is no firm evidence.

Bibliography

Bénézit; Dorinda Evans, Mather Brown, Middletown, Connecticut; [1982], pp. 142, 220; Farington 1978–84; Gentleman's magazine, 1818, p. 88; John Hostettler & Richard Braby, Sir William Garrow, 2010, pp. 113,121, 141; Benson J. Lossing, "Monticello", Harper's new monthly magazine, VII.1853, VII/38; The Scots magazine, XIIII, 1781, p. 222

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