

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

NOEL, Amelia, Mrs Henry, née Minka Levy

London 1759–1.I.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.g.* 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, sofas, 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 unobscured by the usual methods of protraction.

She was also an engraver and publisher. Among her pupils were the daughters of George III. She made a series of topographical etchings c.1797, presenting a set to Princess Elizabeth (now in the Royal collection, together with copies made by Princess Sophia).

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. On 1.III.1805, "Mrs Amelia Noel, and her daughter Miss Frances Noel, of 32 Albemarle Street, advertised in the *Gazette* to "rectify any misapprehension" that a partnership existed between them. It is likely that this was intended to protect the daughter from the financial difficulties they were suffering

We know more about her social background from the law case *Horne v. Amelia Noel* in the King's Bench, 11.XII.1807, reported the following day in the *Times*. 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 requiring production of the written contract of the marriage in Hebrew: apparently earlier hearings had relied on statements by witnesses to the ceremony only) was "coverture": she had been sued in her own name, but was properly Abinda Noah, being 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 on 4.IV.1781. (A lengthy account of the ceremony appeared in the press at the time.) The action failed as it should have been pursued against her husband. Ironically Noel's engraved a series of topographical drawings included one of Garrow's seat at Pegwell Bay.

Henry Noah's bankruptcy (with his partner Henry Harrison) was noted in the *European magazine* in .III.1783. Amelia Noel's father was Judah Levy, "an America merchant", of Heydon Square, Minorities (it seems a chapman, whose bankruptcy occurred in 1777). Amelia had at least four brothers: Michael, Isaac, Nathan and Lyon: Michael was a clockmaker who emigrated to Baltimore and then Philadelphia; his son, Amelia's nephew, was Captain Uriah Phillips Levy, of the USS *Vandalia*, who owned a portrait of her said to be by Reynolds at his home, Jefferson's Monticello. Amelia was also said to be related to Major Mordecai Noel of New York.

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.

The death, in Piccadilly, aged 58, of Mrs Amelia Noel, artist, on 1.I.1818, was announced in the *Gentleman's magazine*.

Alexander 2021, who does not cite this article, rejects our identification of Amelia Noel as Minka Levy (first published here in 2012).

Bibliography

Alexander 2021; Bénézit; Dorinda Evans, *Mather Brown*, Middletown, Connecticut; [1982], pp. 142, 220; Farington 1978–84; *Gentleman's magazine*, .I.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*, XLIII, 1781, p. 222; research by Brian Collins reported in Marc Leepson, *Saving Monticello: the newsletter*, XVIII/1, 2021