

FACT SHEET No 313

JOHN NOBLE – Railways Pioneer - Memorial Windows

By Diana Pitchford July 2020

This is an extended version of her article for THE STEWARD

In the Chapel of Light there are two windows that have intrigued me for some time. Designed by Christopher Whall they face east and were installed in 1906 [for details of the windows see FS191]. Along their base they have a Latin inscription with the words “Kendal”, “Little Over” and the surname “Noble” in English - obviously a memorial to someone. It rather begged the question why would someone with connections to Kendal, Westmorland and Littleover, Derbyshire have a memorial in deepest Nottinghamshire? Late last year I decided to try to find an answer to this question.



The memorial comprises two windows side by side the text continuing across the base of both windows.

In piam memoriam Joannis Noble de Little Over in Com de Darby Arm / qui apud Kendal in Com de Westmorland die VII Apr AD MDCCCXXVIII natus / die XV Nov AD MDCCCXCVI apud Little Over mortus est has fenestras dedicavit / filius eius natu maximus Guilelmus Jacobus Noble Templi Interiors Socius

The first thing was to read the inscription and translate it into English; from long experience of exploring family trees plus a little help from Google I have translated the inscription as,

In loving memory of John Noble of Little Over in the County of Derby, armiger / who was born in Kendal in the County of Westmorland 7th Apr 1828 and / died in Little Over 15th November 1896 these windows are dedicated / by his eldest son William James NOBLE, member of the Inner Temple ¹

So who were these people?



John Noble ² was born in Kendal on 7th April 1828 the son of James & Rachel Noble née Clarke. In the years following they baptized a further six children James (1830), Thomas (1831), Anne (1832), Joseph (c.1834), Elizabeth (1835), and Samuel Clarke (1837). James NOBLE had a medical practice on Stricklandgate in the centre of Kendal. In time Samuel Clarke followed his father into the medical profession joining the practice at Kendal and continuing after his father's death in 1858. On the 1841 census John is living in Stricklandgate with his parents and siblings and is described

as a scholar, aged 13. He attended the Friends' School on Stramongate and was apparently intended to go to Queen's College, Oxford and become a clergyman but the rise of the Oxford Movement gave his father pause for thought. So John went to London instead to be a clerk in the Railway Clearing House set up to manage the allocation of revenue collected between railway companies necessitated by through tickets and other matters. In 1851 he was living in Shoreditch, London with two of his brothers Joseph and Thomas all three were railway clerks. On 20th May 1852 John married Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas & Elizabeth Treacher at Chepping Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. They made a home at Cloudesley Terrace, Islington; sadly Elizabeth died aged 40 in August 1864 and John was left with a young family of six children, Ellen (1853), William James (1855), Alice Rachel (1857), Edith (1860), Bessie (1861), and Elizabeth Treacher (1864).

John married for the second time at St Jude's Church, West Derby, Lancashire on 23rd January 1866 to Marion Halls daughter of Charles & Sarah Harber. Later that year he left the Railway Clearing House where he has risen to be Merchandising Manager to become Traffic Manager at the Midland Railway Company one of the largest railway companies in Britain and the largest employer in Derby, where it had its headquarters. In December 1866 John and Marion welcomed a new addition to the family; Charles John, born in Islington but baptised at Derby in February 1867 the first child in another family of six which included, Marion Jesse (1868) Lake³ Samuel (1869), Sarah Maude (1870) Stuart (1873), and Eleanor (1875). By 1868 John was appointed Assistant General Manager of the Midland Railway Company. The 1871 census shows the family living at 2 Stafford Street, on the edge of the town centre. After Sir James Joseph Allport retired in 1880 John was appointed General Manager; the first accountant in the company to rise to this position. The census of the following year shows that John and his family have moved out of town to a house named "Oaklands" in a leafy part of Littleover where they were to stay for the remainder of John's life. In Kelly's Directory of 1891 John Noble's name is listed as one of the magistrates for the Borough of Derby and he is still on the list in 1895. In 1892 ill health forced his retirement; one newspaper⁴ made the suggestion that "Mr Noble had for some years suffered from an insidious brain mischief", most content themselves with the comment that he had been ill for some time. The half-yearly shareholders meeting held at the Midland Hotel, Derby on Friday 12th August 1892 was to be the last John Noble would attend as General Manager. After the meeting his fellow officers of the company arranged a luncheon at which they presented him with an illuminated address and a service of plate. The text of the address is as follows:

To John Noble Esq, J.P.

Dear Sir, -- We, the officers of the Midland Railway company, whose signatures are herto appended, desire that your retirement from the important position of General Manager, which you have filled with conscientious devotion and conspicuous ability, should not be allowed to pass without some practical recognition at our hands.

In the year 1868, in consequence of the enormous increase of the company's business, and the many important and difficult questions which presented themselves, the directors selected you as assistant General Manager, and in 1880 you were appointed to succeed Mr James J. Allport as General Manager. In both these capacities the bond of your colleagues' allegiance has been by you courtesy and tact firmly cemented.

It is our especial wish at this time to place upon record our admiration of the qualities and virtues which give true nobility to the character of those who wield their power as you have done with a kindly consideration for the feelings of others. We acknowledge with pride that your 12 years of general management of the Midland Railway have been marked not only by unfailing courtesy towards your brother officers and all ranks of the official staff, but by an active co-operation in every plan which has been put forward for their well being, and, above all, by an earnest sympathy with the moral and physical wants of the clerical and working classes in the employ of the Midland Railway Company.

Your appointment as a director of the company has been received by us with feelings of pleasure, and we feel it to be evidence of a confidence worthily merited, the honour being doubly welcome because it is only on rare occasions that an officer receives such a distinctive mark of appreciation, and we earnestly hope that you may be able to give the benefit of your mature experience in the guidance of the company's affairs.

We therefore ask your acceptance of this address together with the accompanying service of plate, and trust you may be spared to enjoy the esteem of your late colleagues, also the love and affection of your family.

(Signed)

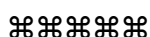
GEO. H. TURNER	C. H. JONES
JAMES WILLIAMS	W. H. ADAMS
W. H. HODGES	JOHN ARGYLE
SAML. W. JOHNSON	C. TRUBSHAW
J ALLEN McDONALD	P.S. MCCALLUM
J. PETTIFOR	G. MORRALL
THOS. G. CLAYTON	T. T. OSBORNE
W. L. MUGLISTON	W. WHITAKER
W. E. ADIE	P. PRINCE
J. SHAW	J. P. YOUNG
W. LANGDON	A. L. CHARLES
W. PERCY PAYNE	J. G. BRADLEY
FRANCES HOLT.	

John was made a Director of the Company in August 1892 and served in that capacity until not long before his death on 15th November 1896. There are reports in newspapers of quite an elaborate funeral attended by many mourners at All Saints church, Littleover where he had served as a chorister and church warden over many years.

When John died in 1896 Southwell Minster was the cathedral for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire as it had been since 1884. I have come to the conclusion that this is probably why it was chosen for his memorial.

His obituary [see below] reproduced from *The ENGINEER* magazine of 1896 shows how important a figure he was to the development of the railways during the second half of the C19th. We are used to learning about the laying the track and the development of steam locomotion but need to realise the great administrative organisation that was also required. Even with IT have the railways got 'through ticketing' organised? Another indication of his significance is the acquisition of arms [also see below].

The placement of memorial windows at this time was quite common, funding the 'explosive' growth of Victorian and Edwardian stained- glass manufacture.



1896 Obituary from THE ENGINEER

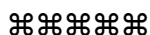
We regret to have to announce the decease, at his residence at Little Over, near Derby, of Mr. John Noble, on Sunday night last. John Noble, it may be scarcely necessary to state, was for some years general manager of the Midland Railway Company, to which position he was appointed 1880.

In 1892 being then in his sixty-fourth year, Mr. Noble, owing to failing health, retired from his position, and was appointed a director of the Midland Company. It was originally intended, says the *Time's*, that he should go to Oxford, and take holy orders; but his father was deterred from sending him by the spread of the Oxford Movement. He came up to London and entered the Railway Clearing House, where he ultimately became manager of the merchandise department. He left the Clearing House in 1866 to become accountant to the Midland Railway Company. He was appointed assistant general manager to Sir James Allport in 1868, and soon afterwards made his first appearance before Parliamentary Committee's in the interest of the Midland Company during Sir James's absence in America. He subsequently became well known in the Committee Rooms and to the Parliamentary Bar. He succeeded Sir James as general manager in 1880, being probably the only man with the training of an accountant who ever reached that high position. Not that he took by any means an accountant's view of business. His name will live among the merchants and manufacturers of the West Riding as the author of the "John Noble expresses," a series of trains which, in spite of worse gradients and a longer road, fairly challenged the Great Northern claim to a quasimonopoly of the traffic between Leeds and London.

Though by no means a mere servile follower of Sir James Allport's strong personality, Mr. Noble moved up to the Allport maxim- that where others went the Midland must go, what others did the Midland would do.

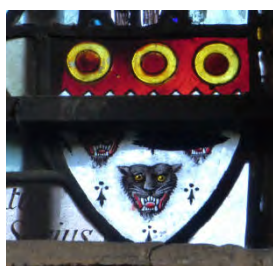
With his retirement a change came over the Midland policy. The "John Nobles" have been altered almost past recognition. That the Midland has lost or is losing, its former share of the passenger traffic between London and Scotland, between London and Liverpool, and between the West and North of England, is possible. The gain to the Midland shareholders from relaxed competition is not equally apparent. With what feelings Mr. Noble saw the word " deceleration" coined in the newspapers the other day to express the Midland alterations in its Scotch services, while East Coast and West Coast were constantly out-stripping all previous performances, we cannot say. He resigned his directorship in July of the present year.

Mr. Noble was twice married, and leaves several children.



John Noble's Armorial Bearings

The word "arm" in the memorial window inscription indicates that John Noble was an Armiger, i.e. he had been granted a coat of arms; his shield is depicted in the bottom corner of the right-hand window.



Left a photo of the shield as it is in the window and right a 'sketch' of how it would look without the window bar across it



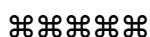
Below is a copy of the blazon for the achievement of arms granted to John Noble in 1886; this comprises the shield, the mantling (which hangs down from the helm), the crest (which sits above the helm) and a motto.

NOBLE. Littleover. *Ermine three leopards' faces sable, on a chief indented gules as many annulets or; Crest: issuant from a wreath of oak proper fructed or, a leopard's head coupé and affrontée sable collared or; Motto: 'Nomen et omen' (FD (1910) 1202). Gr. to Lt-Col. John Noble of Littleover 1886 with remainders, and borne by his son W.J. Noble, Recorder of Newark, Notts.⁵*

The blazon is a description of the coat of arms in words. It is always written very economically in a mixture of English and Old French, (pronounced in an Anglicized way) the latter being the language of the court from the time of William I onward. The various items that are used are described in a certain order so that anyone asked make any kind of illustrative depiction can do so. Once the rules are mastered it becomes much easier to "read" a coat of arms. Normally in each generation the eldest son inherits the coat of arms. Younger sons (so called cadets) are allowed to use their father's arms if they are "differenced" and there are charges which indicate the chronological order. The first son uses a Label – a horizontal bar with pendants hanging from it - until his father dies. The second son uses a Crescent moon, the third son a Mullet which looks rather like a five pointed star but is based on the spur worn for horse-riding, the fifth son a Martlet, a legless bird looking rather like a swift and so on; the marks of Cadency or Difference numbering to nine.

In the table below I have copied⁶ the blazon for John's arms in the first column and given an interpretation/explanation in English in the second column.

<p>The Shield Ermine, three leopards' faces sable, on a chief indented gules as many annulets, or.</p>	<p>The surface of the shield known as the field is always described first. "Ermine" is one of the principle furs used in heraldry and is white with black ermine dots or points. These are the main charges on the shield. Three Leopards "faces", i.e. just their heads "sable" is black The chief stretches across the top third of the shield. In this case it is "indented" has a zig-zag line along its bottom edge and is "gules" red. There are as many annulets as Leopard's heads so there are three. Annulets are discs with the centre cut out and these are "or" gold</p>
<p>Mantling Sable and argent</p>	<p>The mantling hangs down from the back of the helm In this case it is "sable" black with a lining of "argent" silver.</p>
<p>Crest- On a wreath of the colours issant from a wreath of oak proper fructed or, a leopard's head coupé and affrontée sable, collared or.</p>	<p>The crest is set on top of the helm. Usually means the two principal colours (and/or metals) here it should be "argent" silver and "sable" black "Issuant" is a little misleading, it is often interpreted as sat on top of - a wreath of oak. Proper means in its natural colours which will be "vert" green fructed, that is, with acorns of "or" gold. A leopard's head cut cleanly at the neck (coupé) and facing the viewer squarely (affrontée), with a plain collar of gold.</p>
<p>Motto – "<i>Nomen et omen</i>"</p>	<p>Name and omen</p>



Notes and References

¹ William James Noble, John's eldest son, became a Barrister-at-Law. In 1899 was appointed Reader for Newark, Nottinghamshire. William James, a bachelor, died in 1914 at the Midland Grand Hotel, St Pancras in London whilst recuperating from an appendectomy.

Wikipedia explains the historic office of Reader as follows: "In England and Wales, originally a recorder was a certain magistrate or judge having criminal and civil jurisdiction within the corporation of a city or borough. Such incorporated bodies were given the right by the Crown to appoint a recorder. He was a person with legal knowledge appointed by the mayor and aldermen of the corporation to 'record' the proceedings of their courts and the customs of the borough or city. Such recordings were regarded as the highest evidence of fact. Typically, the appointment would be given to a senior and distinguished practitioner at the Bar, and it was, therefore, usually executed part-time only, by a person whose usual practice was as a barrister. It carried a great deal of prestige and power of patronage. The recorder of a borough was often entrusted by the mayor and corporation to nominate its Members of Parliament, as was the case with the Recorder of Barnstaple, who in 1545 nominated the two MPs to represent the Borough of Barnstaple. The only survival today of the historic office is the Recorder of London who is still appointed by the Court of Aldermen of the Corporation of the City of London and thereby becomes a member of that court. He is a senior circuit judge sitting at the Central Criminal Court (the Old Bailey)."

² Portrait of John Noble taken from *The Illustrated London News* 21st November 1896

³ An unusual name, but he was indeed Lake Samuel Noble. He was presumably named for his mother's brother, Lake Harber. Later in life he became a clergyman and served as a missionary in Lagos and Southern Nigeria in Africa. Moving back to England he was rector of Hamstall Ridware, Staffordshire from 1929 then the vicar of Barrow-on-Trent with Twyford, Derbyshire from January 1934 until his death in December of that year.

⁴ *The Brighton Gazette & Sussex Telegraph*. They go on to mention John's philanthropic activities and to say that he had an especial interest in the Derbyshire Royal Infirmary and the Railway Servants' Orphanage.

⁵ *Grantees of Arms, 1687-1898*, published by the Harleian Society, 1917 A list, gathered from many different sources, of people who were granted arms between 1687 and 1898.

⁶ Blazon copied from *A Derbyshire Armory* Compiled by Maxwell Craven Page 119 Nottingham Central Library has a copy.