

**JOSEPH NOWELL & SONS -
CONTRACTED TO BUILD THE COLEORTON RAILWAY**



**The remains of the bridge built by Joseph Nowell & Sons which carried the
Coleorton railway over Aqueduct Lane, Gelsmoor (known colloquially as
Akadoc lane)**

September 1981, SK407181 looking north-west

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - JANUARY 2025

PREVIEW

Joseph Nowell & Sons were the contractors appointed to build the Coleorton Railway. This publication is an attempt to provide some historical background information on the development of this important company who played an important part in the industrialisation of Great Britain in the early 19th century.

IMPORTANT COMPLIMENTARY READING

A HISTORY OF THE COLEORTON RAILWAY which can be found on the author's website samuelstewart.com under subsection **TRANSPORTATION**.

A HISTORY OF COLEORTON BRICKWORKS which can be found under subsection **OTHER INDUSTRIES**

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ABOUT THE NOWELLS' OF DEWSBURY

Parts of the following narrative were taken from the history of the Nowells recorded by Frederick Nowell of 193 Askew Road, London, W. in 1909.

Joseph Nowell was a member of a remarkable family of civil engineers prominent at the very moment when civil engineering was becoming an established and very important profession for the successful industrialisation of Britain in the early 19th century. The Nowell families hailed from Dewsbury, Yorkshire and early members were stonemasons and builders who completed many renowned projects, particularly in the building of bridges and churches. Joseph Nowell & Sons later became involved in the building of canals, tunnels and railways. For example, Joseph Nowell & Sons had completed 3 miles of canal and 12 locks on the Macclesfield Canal in 1831.

Jonathan Nowell, was born at Dewsbury in Yorkshire on February 6th 1757. He was by trade a stonemason, builder, and quarry owner, but with the exception of the Dewsbury Market House, which was pulled down some years back, and one of the bridges over the River Calder, nothing more is known of his works. He was married to Hannah Chadwick on October 10th 1781. Hannah was a staunch churchwoman and made it a rule to attend early morning celebration fasting. Mr Buckworth, the Vicar of the Dewsbury Parish Church, permitted her to breakfast in the vestry so that she might be present at the next service.

Jonathan Nowell and his wife Hannah were the parents of five sons and five daughters viz: Hannah - Mrs Cooper - born 1782; Joshua in 1784; Benjamin in 1785; Samuel in 1788; Jonathan in 1789; Rachel - Mrs Butler - in 1791; James in 1793; Sarah - Mrs Richardson - in 1795; Mary in 1798; Frances - Mrs John Craven - in 1800. Three of these five sons are known to have been stonemasons and builders by trade.

*Their eldest son born February 24th 1784 and named Joshua in the Dewsbury Parish Church register was always called and signed his name Joseph, and for this reason will be named Joseph for this narrative. Joseph Nowell was married to Alice Willans in 1804 and they were the parents of **John Willans born in 1806; Jonathan Willans born in 1809;** and Mary Willans in 1811.*

Joseph Nowell built many masonry bridges and churches and towards the end of his life constructed canal and railway works. He built the bridge at Stockport over the River Mersey and another bridge across the River Nidd at Pateley Bridge in Yorkshire and while engaged in this work he became acquainted with Hiram Craven of Dockroyd near Keighley. They joined in the building of a bridge over the River Ouse at York which cost £50,000 and was opened for traffic in 1820. They also joined in the building of a bridge over the river at Linlithgow in Scotland.

*Joseph Nowell built the Manchester Infirmary and his own residence in the suburbs of Dewsbury called "Quarry Hill House" which was later used as a Roman Catholic Convent. He erected churches at Liversedge and Ancoats and restored the Dewsbury Parish Church. The last church he built was the Holy Trinity Church of Ripon in Yorkshire and in this work he was assisted by his eldest son **John Willans**. The foundations were laid in July 1826 and the church was completed and consecrated for divine service in October 1827.*

At Ripon, Joseph Longbottom was engaged as the foreman of carpenters and he remained with the firm during the whole of his career, and was one of the most trusted and reliable assistants.

*After the completion of Holy Trinity Church, Ripon, **Joseph Nowell and his sons John Willans and Jonathan Willans traded under the style of 'Joseph Nowell and Sons'. This was the company that built the Coleorton Railway and its associated Pegg's Green and Newbold tunnels.***

Joseph Nowell & Sons constructed the aqueduct over the River Dane, and the chain of fourteen locks on the Macclesfield and Marple Canal, which lifts the canal 114 feet from the Plains of Cheshire to the Spurrings of the Derbyshire Hills and renders unnecessary any other lock. This is considered to be one of Thomas Telford's engineering masterpieces. The resident engineer was William Crosley and the inspector of works James Briggs. The Macclesfield and Marple Canal was completed in 1830.

Frederick Nowell then wrote:-

*After this, John Willans Nowell removed to a place called **Griffydam**, about seven miles from Ashby de la Zouch, in Leicestershire, and there constructed works of which I cannot ascertain the particulars.*

Although the author has not been able to find where John Willans Nowell resided in Griffydam he was clearly there as a result of Joseph Nowell and Sons being appointed to build the Coleorton Railway.

The Leicester Chronicle of the 2nd July 1836 provides further proof that Joseph Nowell & Sons were contracted to build the Coleorton Railway:-

John Williamson was appearing in court accused of stealing iron rail from the construction site some three years earlier. The contractors John and Jonathan Willans Nowell were said to be the owners of the rail. Jonathan gave evidence about the type of rail and how it was used. However, it could not be said that the rail the defendant had possession of was from the Coleorton site so he was acquitted.

Joseph Nowell & Sons were responsible for constructing the Coleorton Railway and its associated tunnels at Pegg's Green and Newbold and the dressed sandstone bridge on Aqueduct Lane. In addition to this they had to build a brick tunnel under the railway embankment for the Cart Brook to flow through which is still there today and as a child the author had the experience of playing around the entrance to this tunnel which was a special place where sticklebacks and minnows could be found and caught in jam jars.

One of their first major tasks was to build the 480 yard long tunnel at Peggs Green, to allow the railway which joined with the Leicester to Swannington Railway at the bottom of the Swannington incline to pass through, before heading north west towards 'Worthington Rough'. See the following plan and schematic diagram. The bricks for this tunnel were made at Coleorton Brickworks. A record exists that shows in September 1835, Joseph Nowell & Sons and Thomas Platts were paid for fencing, hedging and dykeing along the route.

Following the completion of the Coleorton Railway, Joseph Nowell & Sons next entered into contracts with the London and Birmingham Railway Company to construct the Kilsby Tunnel near Rugby, and to make a section of railway between Watford and Sudbury in Middlesex. Serious problems were experienced with the

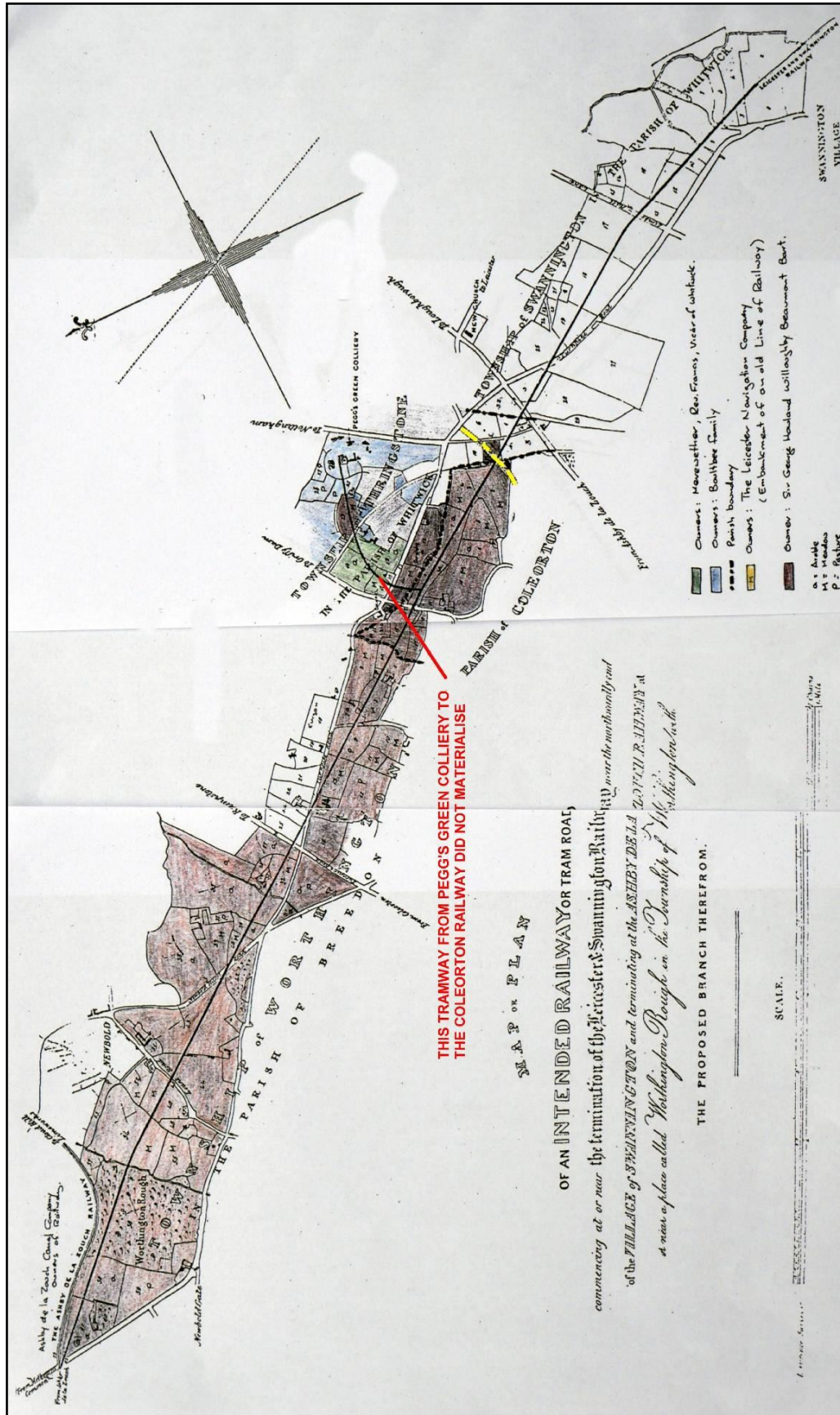
Kilsby tunnel due to a great inflow of water. This had an immediate impact on Joseph Nowell's health and he died on the 12th of January 1836. This saw the decline of the company and the Kilsby project was taken over by Robert Stephenson.

COMPANY DISSOLVED

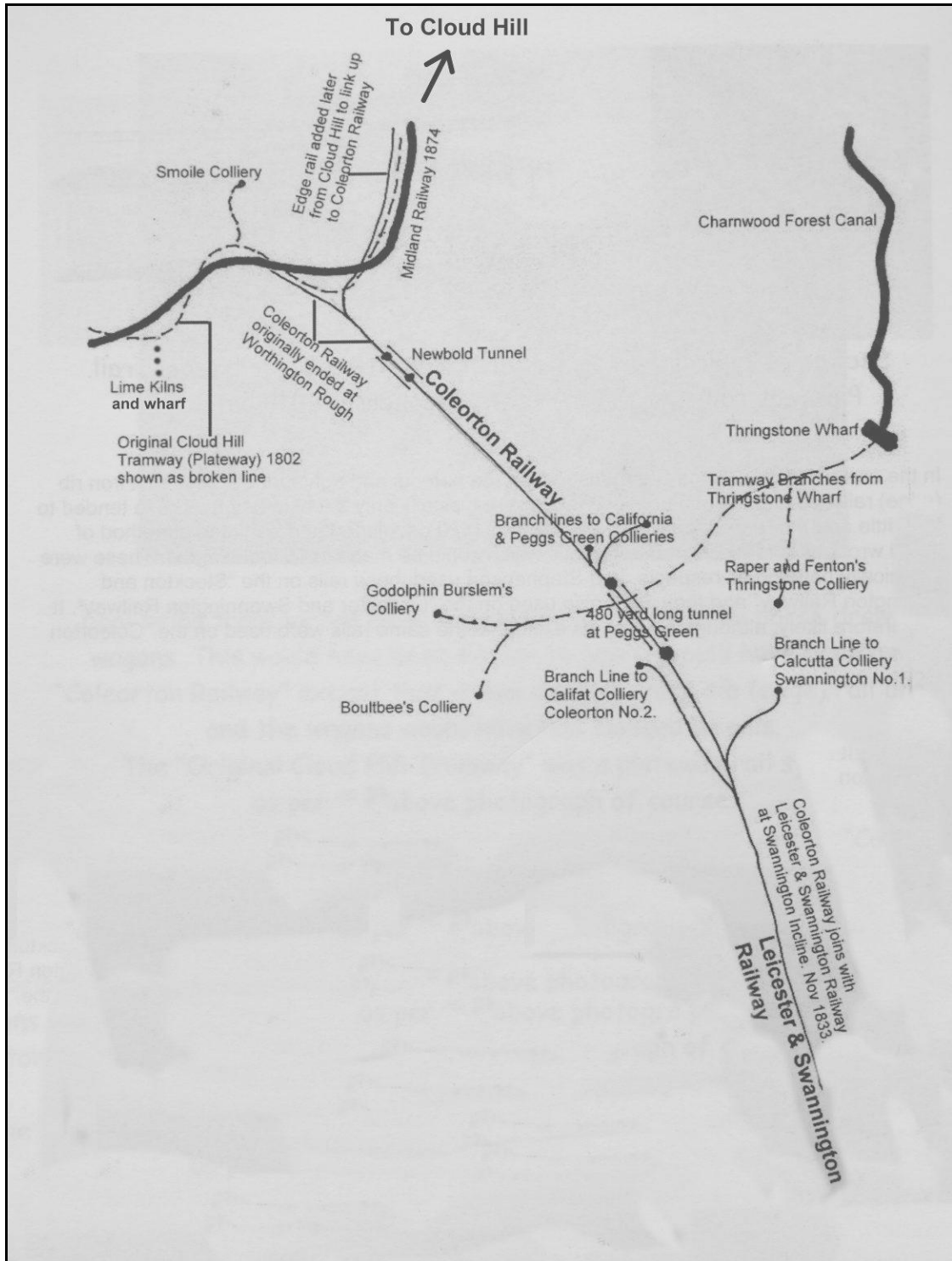
London Gazette 12th May 1840

NOTICE is hereby given, that the Partnership heretofore existing between [Joseph Nowell](#), [John Willans Nowell](#), and [Jonathan Willans Nowell](#), formerly of Dewsbury, in the county of York, and afterwards of Hatchend, in the township of Pinner, in the county of Middlesex, General Contractors for Public Works, under the firm of Joseph Nowell & Sons, was dissolved, by the death of the said Joseph Nowell, on the 12th day of January 1836.

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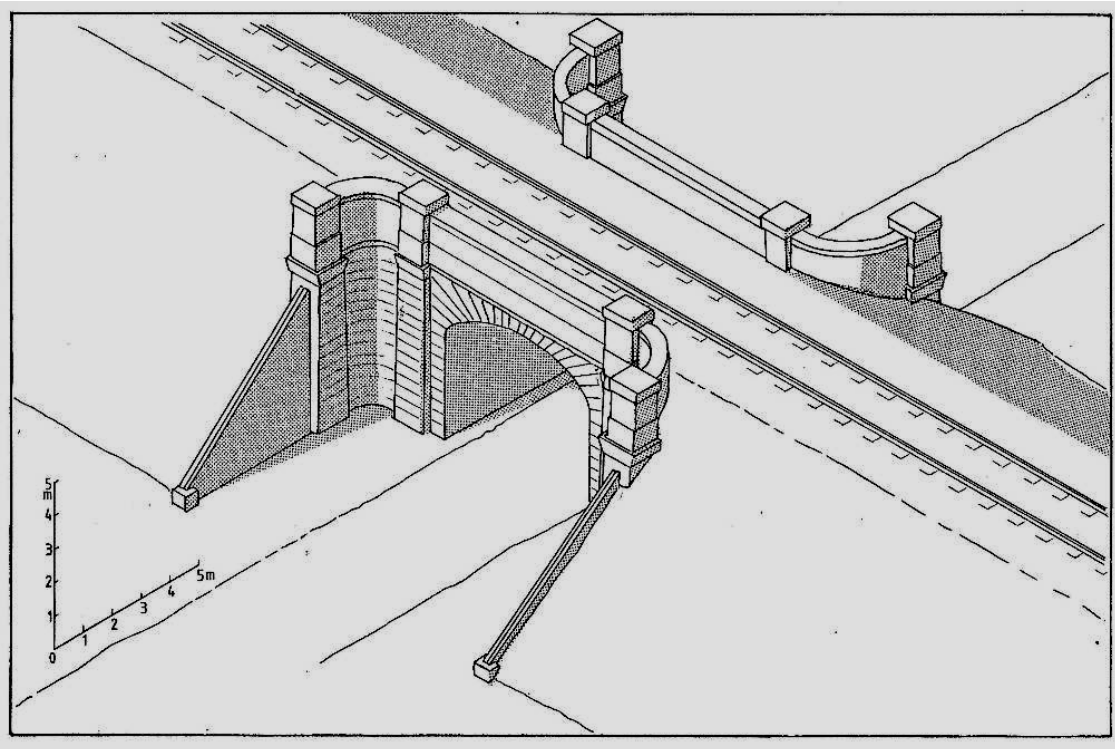
The original plan / proposal for the route of the Coleorton Railway



**A schematic drawing showing the route of the completed Coleorton Railway
(By Samuel Stewart)**



Photograph dated c.1900. looking east towards Gelsmoor road.



The Coleorton Railway Bridge over Aqueduct Lane, Gelsmoor, which was built by Joseph Nowell & Sons



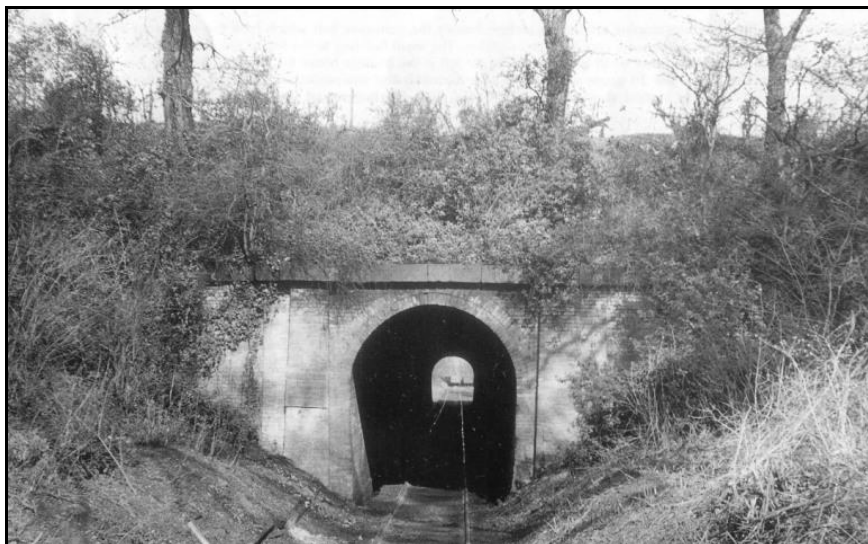
The bridge being demolished



The entrance to the Pegg's Green tunnel at St. George's Hill, Swannington which was built by Joseph Nowell & Sons



**Railway Tunnel under Melbourne road, Newbold – Southern Entrance
Photograph c.1971 – After rails were removed**



Before rails were removed

Built by Joseph Nowell & Sons

**EXAMPLE OF BRICKS SUPPLIED BY COLEORTON BRICKWORKS
TO JOSEPH NOWELL & SONS**

Date	Quantities of common bricks
Aug – Dec 1833	237,200
Dec 1833 to Jan 1834	112,350
Jan 1 st 1834	(25 ridge tiles)
Feb 7 th 1834	6,000
May 12 th 1834	102,000
June 14 th 1834	105,000
June 17 th 1834	39,200
June 25 th	66,450
July 7 th	16,950
July 22 nd	43,950
Aug 2 nd	13,600
Aug 20 th	30,600
Sept 2 nd	32,600
Sept 26 th	32,250
Oct 25 th	22,900
Nov 8 th	7,550
Total	868,600 bricks + 25 ridge tiles

TOTAL COST TO RAILWAY COMPANY £955 – 15s – 9d

Date	Common Bricks	Other materials
Jan 1834	12,800	450 plain tiles + 42 flue bricks
March 1834	13,600	320 Sough Tiles
April 1835	2,500	
May 20 th -21 st	300	1007 large quarries + 175 sough tiles
June 22 nd	250	
July 6 th	200	170 large sough tiles
Aug 1 st	100	120 sough tiles
Total	29,750	

FURTHER MATERIALS SUPPLIED TO THE COLEORTON RAILWAY COMPANY

The above provides evidence of approx 900,000 bricks being supplied to the Coleorton Railway project from Coleorton Brickworks. It is quite likely that further quantities were supplied. The above information was taken from a surviving Coleorton Brickworks ledger.

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Below is a record of monies paid to Coleorton Brickworks by Joseph Nowell & Sons for bricks made during the 1834 and 1835 season which were not paid till April 1835 and March 1837 respectively. These are signed in the top LH corner by Sir George Beaumont. These payments relate to the high volume of bricks being supplied to the Coleorton Railway during that period, as shown in the preceding tables. Thomas Thirlby was the brickmaker at the time.

<i>GMB</i>		<i>£ s d</i>
April 1835		
16 th Paid Mr Thirlby Bill for Making	}	707 3 11
Bricks &c at the Coleorton Bricks		
Yard - Season of 1834		
<hr/>		
<i>GMB</i>		
March 1837		
Mar 13 th Paid Mr Tho. Thirlby, bill for	}	245 13 9 ^{1/2}
Brick making at the Coleorton		
Brick Yard for the season of 1835		

GENEALOGY INFORMATION IN RELATION TO JOSEPH NOWELL & SONS

Joseph Nowell

c.1784 Born

1805 Married Alice Willans in Dewsbury

1806 Birth of son [John Willans Nowell](#)

1809 Birth of son [Jonathan Willans Nowell](#)

1836 Death Notice: 'On Tuesday the 12th instant, at [his son's](#) house, Kilsby, near Daventry, after a short but severe illness, Mr. Joseph Nowell, contractor, formerly of Dewsbury, but lately of Watford, Herts, aged 52. Mr. Nowell was eminently qualified by great natural powers of calculation for the extensive works in which he was engaged ; and for the masterly completion of those works he acquired a reputation for grappling with difficulties, and foreseeing and providing for hazardous contingencies, such as placed him by common consent at the head of his profession. He was man of sterling worth, and his death will be deplored by all who were privileged with his friendship.'

London Gazette 12 May 1840

John Willans Nowell

1806 Born; baptised in Dewsbury; son of [Joseph Nowell](#)

1851 John W. Nowell 43, railway contractor, lived in Ashton under Lyne with Sarah Nowell 41, Sarah Ann Nowell 5, Alice W Nowell 1.

1851 Died

Jonathan Willans Nowell

1809 Born son of [Joseph Nowell](#) and his wife Alice; baptised in Dewsbury. A member of the Nowell family who were involved in canal and railway construction for many years.

Married Martha Percival.

After working for his father on the [Macclesfield Canal](#), Jonathan supervised the first section of the [Leeds and Selby Railway](#) and subsequently developed a reputation for tunnelling, including the [Kilsby Tunnel](#).

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1835 Birth of son [Edward Henry Nowell](#) in Pinner

1836 On receiving news of the problems at Kilsby, his father was taken ill at Jonathan's house and died.

Birth of son Jonathan

1841 Builder, lived in Wickwar

1846 Died in Wickwar, Glos; buried in Dewsbury

Their daughter, Mary Willans Nowell, married [Edward Craven](#)