

Martin Noel was a London scrivener. So widespread and varied were his activities that it may plausibly be suggested that for many years he was the most influential individual in England. Yet so self-effacing was he that few histories give him more than a passing reference, and many (including the Dictionary of National Biography) do no mention him at all.

In the Court Minutes of the East India Company Noel is frequently mentioned as a dealer in cotton goods and in munitions.¹⁹ In 1657, when Maurice Thompson became Governor of the East India Company, Noel was elected a "committee."²⁰ A James Noell also mentioned in the Court Minutes, who was a factor in India, was apparently Martin Noel's brother;²¹ and it is not unreasonable to assume that the Matthew Noell who was at Bombay in 1662 may also have been a relation.²² Martin Noel was a business associate of Maurice Thompson, and also of Thompson's partner Samuel Moyer.²³ Moyer was sufficiently important to be named to the Council of State in May 1653, and this is one of the few links connecting Noel with Cromwell.²⁴

some awkward questions in Parliament, but his explanations were accepted.²⁸

As a result of Noel's interest in colonies (and that of Thomas Povey) the Select Committee for Trade and Foreign Plantations was formed in 1657.²⁹ In the domestic sphere Noel was a prominent tax-farmer, paying at least £87,000 for the privilege in 1658.³⁰ He was also referred to as "ye great Salt Master of England" by Richard Cromwell, who called him "our very good friend Martin Noell."³¹ Some of Thurloe's spies were less complimentary, and complained about "Mr. Nowell's creatures" making a monopoly in salt. "Be assured, Sir, that farmers of this nature will bee the ruine of all trades but their owne."³² Richard Cromwell's letter makes it clear that Noel was also interested in Irish lands.³³

In 1656 Noel was returned to Parliament for Stafford, and was therefore on hand to support the Humble Petition and Advice presented by his fellow tax-farmer, Christopher Pack. He again represented Stafford in Richard's Parliament. His services were apparently as useful to the restored king as they had been to Cromwell, and he was re-
