



Made in Derby 2018 Profile

Philip Noel-Baker

An MP in Derby for 34 years, Philip Noel-Baker is famously credited with “saving” the 1948 Olympic Games for Britain through his dogged lobbying.

But Noel-Baker had a vested interest in the event going ahead because he knew from first-hand experience the value of the Games, having been an Olympic silver medallist in hurdling in 1920 - one of three Games he took part in.

He won a silver medal in the 1,500 metres at Antwerp in 1920 but first represented Britain at the Stockholm Olympics in 1912 and in 1924 was both a competitor and team track manager in Paris.

A Quaker and pacifist, Noel-Baker, who was born in Canada in 1889, served as an ambulance driver during the First World War at the front in France and became adjutant of the First British Ambulance Unit for Italy, receiving medals from France, Italy and Britain for his work.

He also worked to establish both the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations. He worked with refugees and prisoners of war and campaigned for multilateral disarmament.

As a result, he was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1959 as a “lifelong ardent worker for international peace and co-operation”.

On receiving the honour, Noel-Baker said: “War is a damnable, filthy thing and has destroyed civilisation after civilisation – that is the essence of my belief.”

In 1936, after J H Thomas resigned, he won the by-election in Derby and remained an MP until 1970. In 1977, he was made a life peer as Baron Noel-Baker of the City of Derby. He died in 1982.

As well as serving under Winston Churchill during the war, he was in a succession of junior ministries in the Attlee Labour Government. He was also chairman of the Labour Party in 1946 and served on what became the United Nations, helping to draft its charter.

Ensuring the Olympics came to London in 1948 was at a time when the world was still reeling from the effects of the Second World War and Britain was in the grip of rationing and in the process of rebuilding after the Blitz.

Five months after the war ended in 1945, members of the International Olympic Committee met and recommended that London should host the 1948 event, an idea which had been put forward before the conflict began. But it was only confirmed that the city would stage the games in March the following year after all members of the committee had voted on the proposal.

Noel-Baker was a cabinet minister at the time and helped to find many solutions to the problems thrown up by the lack of funding from the Government and the damage left by the war.

Noel-Baker School, in Alvaston, now an academy, was named after him.