

**COLEORTON No.1. COLLIERY AT
PEGG'S GREEN c.1849 - 1873**

(KNOWN LOCALLY AS CALIFORNIA PIT)



TWO BRAVE COAL MINERS TIMBERING UP

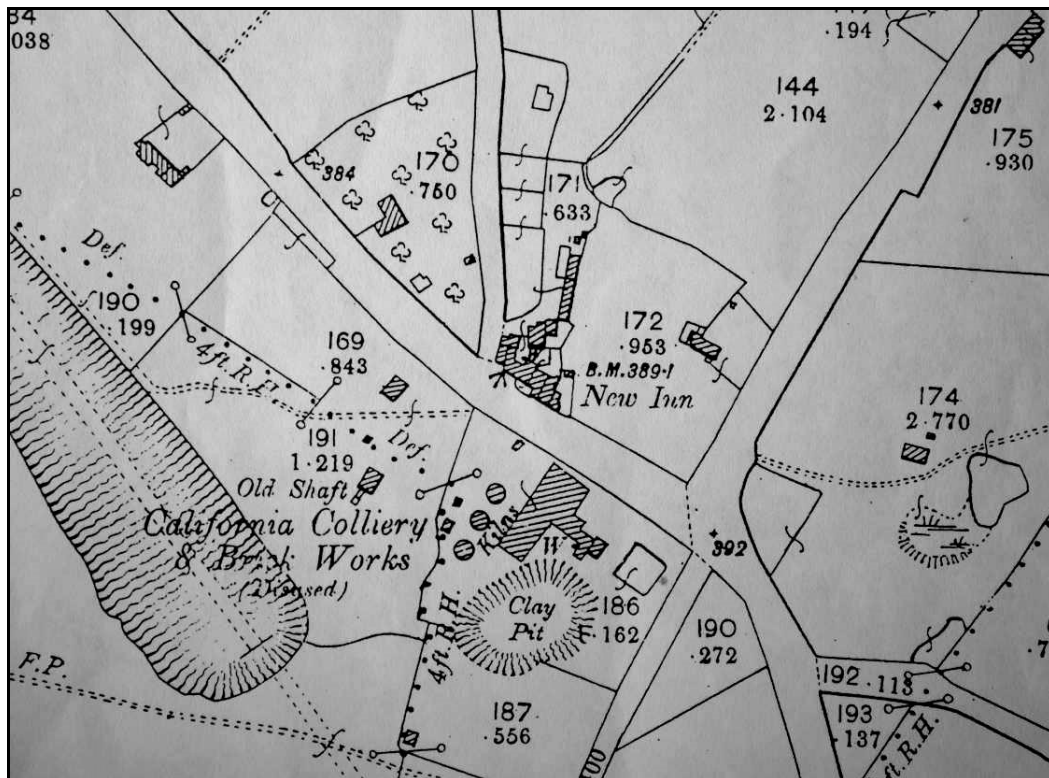
BY SAMUEL T STEWART - AUGUST 2022

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COLEORTON No.1. COLLIERY c.1849 - 1873



1903 O/S map showing the site of the Coleorton No.1. Colliery (California) in relation to the New Inn and the Coleorton Railway

At the time this colliery was sunk in 1849 by Benjamin Walker and William Worswick, on land leased from Sir George Howland Beaumont, 9th Baronet of Stoughton, it was in fact in the Township of Thringstone which in turn was part of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Whitwick. As a result of it being on land owned by Sir George Beaumont, it was officially designated as Coleorton No.1. Pit.

William Worswick was a wealthy property owner, coal merchant and contractor from Leicester, where he also owned the manors and halls of Normanton and Birstall, plus extensive lands at Thurcaston and Syston.

He first became involved in the "local" coal mining industry in NW Leicestershire when he formed an association with Benjamin Walker at some time around 1840 in the running of Smoile Colliery near Lount which was owned by and situated within Sir George Beaumont's estate and also the nearby Lount Colliery in Worthington Rough which had previously been run by two other members of the Walker family, Thomas and James, who had leased both the colliery and Smoile farm from Sir George Beaumont.

This resulted in William Worswick and Benjamin Walker both subsequently going on to develop two new collieries as partners on land owned by Sir George Beaumont at Coleorton between 1849 and 1856. The first shaft sunk was the Coleorton No.1. Colliery (known locally as California) and the other was Coleorton No.2. Colliery (known under various names as Califat, Alabama and Windmill pit). Following Benjamin Walker's retirement c.1861, Worswick went on to develop three further

collieries in the Swannington area as listed below, and by 1864, he either owned or had an interest in six collieries in the local area:-

- A) **Coleorton No1. (known as California Pit)**
Benjamin Walker & William Worsick
- B) **Coleorton No.2. (known as Califat / Alabama / Windmill pit) -**
Benjamin Walker & William Worsick
- C) **Swannington No.1. (known as Calcutta)**
William Worswick
- D) **Swannington No.2. (known as Sinope)**
William Worswick
- E) **Swannington No.3. (known as Clink)**
William Worswick

1849 was the year of the California gold rush, and due to the rush for coal at this time also in the locality, it became known locally as the "California Colliery / Pit"

However antiquated the horse drawn Coleorton Railway may have appeared by this time, it proved its worth in transporting materials to the colliery site, despite the fact that this had to be reached by a short branch line on a gradient of about 1 in 30.

Records survive, which show that in March 1850, iron bars, fish belly rails and building materials were delivered, presumably for the branch line and engine house. They were followed on April 26th by 7¼ tons of "engine works", and in October by "engine castings" and a beam weighing 10 tons 12 cwt, presumed to be for the colliery pumping engine. The following May saw a boiler and flywheels taken to the site of the "machine fan".

Output from the colliery began in February 1851, with production rising quickly to about 3,000 tons per month. It peaked at 3,878 tons in March 1854, the high water mark for both the colliery and the little railway system. Presumably, to help with the haulage of the coal, Benjamin Walker built a stable for his horses alongside the railway at Swannington.

Significant output from this colliery was short lived and by the end of 1854, production had fallen to unproductive low levels.

The California Colliery did not however cease to turn coal, and between 1865 and 1873 it was shipping an average of about 100 tons per month over the railway. A plan survives showing that during this period they were taking coal from the Main Seams under Coleorton Moor. Getting the coal must have been positively dangerous for the miners, who had to work in galleries developed between areas of old workings.