

Coalyard Farm – Northleach



Coalyard Farm, situated along the West End of the village of Northleach, has been the home of farmers and merchants for a large part of its history. The house was constructed in the late 18th century, but rebuilt in the early 19th century. Part of the Sherborne estate, Coalyard Farm can be traced back to the first residents who moved in during the 1780s. Today, the house is Grade II listed and features a symmetrical stone front, sash windows and hipped roof.

Georgian farmers

The first residents at Coalyard Farm were the Hall family, with land tax records showing James Hall paying the tax in 1786, only a few years after the house was believed to have been completed. At this time, Coalyard farm (although not recorded with this name at this time) belonged to the Sherborne estate, owned by James Dutton, 1st Baron Sherborne. Very little is known of the Hall family, but the surviving records show that James Hall was paying the land tax in 1786 to 1788, but by 1790 the records show 'widow Hall' paying the tax of 2 shillings and 10 pence. By 1792 a Mr. Charles Hall was next recorded, who remained the occupant of Coalyard Farm during the turn of the 19th century, until a survey of the lands of Lord Sherborne gives us complete details of property in 1820.

Sherborne Estate survey - 1820

The map and survey shows Mr. Charles Hall occupant of 'Coalyard House, Barn etc', along with further property and land, including the Mill, totally over 100 acres in Northleach. The survey, completed in 1820 coincides with the death of the 1st Baron Sherborne, and when the estates passed to his son, John Dutton, 2nd Baron Sherborne.

Coal in 19th century Britain

The business of dealing in coal at Coalyard Farm was established when it was fast becoming the fuel of choice for any Victorian, whether in the home of working on the land. The farm was also prominently located at the entrance to Northleach and well positioned for carts and wagons bringing coal from Cheltenham and elsewhere. Coal was also one of the largest burgeoning industries at this time, with Britain expanding to become the largest provider of coal in the world by the end of the 19th century.

James Walker – Coal merchant and farmer

The records towards the end of the 1820s become a little sketchy, but this also coincides with the rebuilding of Coalyard Farm and explains why the house may have been vacant for a time. By the end of the 1830s the farm and house had become the home of a Mr. James Walker. The 1841 census clearly labels the house 'Coalyard' and occupied by James Walker 'coal dealer', aged 30 along with his mother, Mary, 65 years old and recorded as 'independent'. Ten years later, at the time of the 1851 census, James Walker was recorded at Coalyard Farm, with his wife Ann and their four children, aged between 8 and 8 months. Also in the house at this time were an assistant, John Taylor and two house servants.



Successful business and family man

James Walker's business continued from strength to strength during the mid Victorian period, as the 1861 census records him at the farm and as a 'coal merchant and farmer of 360 acres of land – employing 18 men, 4 women & 6 boys'. His family were also growing and James and Ann[e] now had seven children. However, there were still only two servants living in the house. In the 1870s, it appears that James Walker continued as a farmer, but he also expanded into dealing in corn and seed. By the late 1870s, James Walker is recorded in the Gloucestershire directories as 'corn, seed and coal merchant and farmer'.

Late Victorian Coalyard Farm

The 1881 census records James, now aged 72 with his wife Ann, aged 60, along with daughters, Martha and Mabel and daughter-in-law, Emily, recorded as widow, with their grandson, Frank, aged four. Emily was the former wife of eldest son Joseph who passed away in 1879, but the details of his death are uncertain. A year later, in 1882, the rental book for the Sherborne estate shows James Walker at 'Coalyard Farm' along with further arable land, a pasture farm and land at Eastington amounting to a half yearly rent of £110. James Walker passed away in 1883 at the age of 74. His land and property appears to have passed to his wife Ann and then, after she passed away in 1899, to their son Thomas. Unfortunately, there is no specific record for the transfer of Coalyard Farm at this time, but by the early 1900s it had become the home of John Osborne Taylor.

Taylor family – brewers, maltsters and farmers

The Taylor family had already played a prominent role in the village of Northleach as brewers and maltsters. Thomas Taylor was the proprietor of the Wheatsheaf hotel and Taylor & Co. were owners of the Cotswold Brewery, recorded in the Gloucestershire directory as 'maltsters, wine & spirit merchants and aerated water manufacturers'. By 1914, at the outbreak of World War One, Coalyard Farm was occupied by John Taylor's widow and by 1918 was occupied by their son, Thomas Taylor, but shortly afterwards Coalyard Farm had become the home of Mr. John Bartlett.

Compact Agricultural Holding – For Sale

The parish rate books record John Bartlett moved into Coalyard Farm in the summer of 1919; however by 1925 Coalyard Farm was on the market and was auctioned at the Wheatsheaf Hotel on Wednesday 23rd September. The sales particulars described Coalyard Farm as a 'compact agricultural holding' at just over 77 acres, with the Farm House described simply as 'substantially built of stone and blue slated roof'. The particulars also show that the house and surrounding land were leased to Mr. John E. Bartlett. The farm was sold, along with additional buildings and neighbouring plots of pasture land and notes on the sales particulars appear to show a value of £3,750, but it is unclear if this was its final price at auction.

Businesses and a family home

After the sale of Coalyard Farm the details of ownership and occupation are unclear, but after World War II the electoral registers show that it had become the home of William and Agnes Leach. For the remainder of the 20th century, Coalyard Farm was occupied by different families, while continuing to be a place of business an enterprise, as well as a family home.

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<http://www.chestertonhumberts.com/details.dtx?propertyid=3B133686-815D-438E-BEB2-250EB57085F5>