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Newsells Estate

Newsells was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 and has been a major manor within Barkway over the centuries. The estate was in the possession of the Scales family for a long period in medieval times, but since then had not been in the ownership of a particular family for any lengthy period. However, in the early Georgian period the Jennings family contributed to a significant enhancement with grand designs.

George Jennings inherited the Newsells estate from his father Sir John Jennings in 1743 following his father's death. In 1763 he commissioned landscape improver Richard Woods to create a design for Newsells. Woods, a contemporary of 'Capability Brown', developed his own style and designed 'pleasure parks' for at least 48 clients. The 125-acre park at Newsells was reminiscent of a 'Ferme Ornee'. The mature trees surrounding the park are part of the original shelter belt that contained a circuit walk. An obelisk was erected close to the southern boundary providing a terminating vista. (Listed grade 2, constructed of cement rendered brick with ashlar plinth and cornice to pedestal, and about 15 metres in height. Possibly rebuilt around 1900)

The pleasure grounds included lawns, ha-ha, shrubberies, an evergreen walk, rose ground, sun dial, grotto, a tent, a Little House and Ice House, as well as a walled kitchen garden, orchard, and several pools. To the north a sunk fence enabled uninterrupted views, which were framed by trees in irregular clumps.

Sadly Newsells House was burnt down in 1943, and replaced on the same site in 1954.

A major contributor to the life of Barkway, the estate gave land in the 1630s for the erection of the town house opposite the present school to incorporate a meeting room and school. In the 19th century they organised much needed improvements to the fabric of the church, including the rebuilding of the tower. They also provided a Bath House, and a Reading Room in the High Street. In the 20th century they had built the Village Hall, and the Social Club.

The main street of Newsells hamlet contained many estate workers cottages. In the period 1897 to 1900 with change of estate ownership, 11 of these cottages on the eastern side were knocked down. The few remaining have been consolidated into much larger dwellings.