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Newsells Estate – Part II

The article in the January diary referred to the gift to the village in the 1630s of land for a school and meeting room. The owner of the manor of Newsells at the time was Frances the Dowager Duchess of Lennox and Richmond.

Henry Prannell was a very wealthy London vintner and became an Alderman of the City. He must have amassed a considerable fortune as the sixteenth-century historian, Stowe, recorded that he made an annual distribution of £50 to the London Hospitals. As one of the new class of wealthy Elizabethan merchants he aspired to a country seat, and set his sights on Hertfordshire. He probably felt that it was the fashionable place to be with the Royal Palace at Hatfield and Queen Elizabeth paying frequent visits to local worthies.

He bought the Newsells Estate in 1579, and he and his wife and family moved to live in Rushingwells. He died in 1588, and in his will left two thirds of his estate to his wife, and the other third to son Henry. In 1591 the young Henry Prannell was married to the 13-year-old Frances Howard. Both her grandfathers were Dukes, and it was said to be a mystery why she was married off to a mere vintners son, perhaps attracted by the fortune amassed by Henry's father. Henry died in 1599 still in his thirties, and a memorial plaque can be seen in the chancel floor of Barkway church. It tellingly gives much detail of her, and little of him. Frances then took possession of Newsells and other local manors which Henry had purchased. She soon married the Earl of Hertford, who died in 1621 aged 81. Contemporaneous reports say that she was being courted by the Duke of Lennox before the Earl's death. A week after the earl's death she secretly married the Duke, and henceforth maintained great pomp, not so much as attending chapel without a stately procession. In 1623 they were made Duke and Duchess of Richmond as well as Lennox. The Duke died in 1624, and Frances continued a widow until her death in 1639. She is interred beside the Duke in a stately monument erected for herself and her husband under her direction and at her own expense in Westminster Abbey. Frances was childless, and Newsells was sold following her death.