

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

STIFFKEY OLD HALL

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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**STIFFKEY OLD HALL**

Name: STIFFKEY OLD HALL

County: Norfolk

District: North Norfolk (District Authority)

Parish: Stiffkey

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.947638  
Longitude: 0.93697062  
National Grid Reference: TF 97419 42954  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1001021  
Date first listed: 18-Sep-1987

## Details

The substantial remains of walled and terraced gardens laid out between 1592 and 1594 set within a later (date unknown) small park partly laid out over the C16 West Garden from which a small watercourse survives.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The building of Stiffkey Hall (later known as Stiffkey Old Hall) was started by Sir Nicholas Bacon, Keeper of the Great Seal, in 1576 on the site of a medieval manor house. The house was to be for his son Nathaniel, newly married to Anne Gresham and Sir Nicholas prepared detailed instructions for the design of the house and a series of gardens mathematically planned in relation to the proportions of the house. On his death in 1579 Sir Nicholas left only £200 to cover the cost of execution of his plan and thus it was only partly completed at the hands of his son. Nathaniel twice became Sheriff of Norfolk and was knighted by King James in 1604. On his death in 1622, the property passed to Nathaniel's grandson Sir Roger Townshend, who lived at Stiffkey whilst he completed his great house and garden at Raynham in Norfolk (qv). Thereafter, Stiffkey Old Hall became part of the Raynham estate, the house partly demolished and the land let to a series of tenant farmers. In 1779 Humphry Repton made a sketch of the Old Hall, and the result showed it to be in a half-ruined state. Following this some refitting was undertaken, including the addition of several Georgian windows and doors. From 1820 onwards, the tenancy was held by the Page family who farmed locally, passing to John Case c 1880 during whose time further internal refitting took place. In 1911 Lord Townshend sold the Old Hall, after which it went through two brief ownerships: Colonel Groom in 1911, and Colonel and Mrs Gray from 1912 to 1928, during which time the house was again altered internally and external repairs were made (CL 1912). There followed another brief tenancy, then the property passed into the hands of a wealthy businessman, Lewis Cafferata. Lewis and Dorothy Cafferata restored the house to good order and created a sunken garden and fishpool in the ruined Great Hall. Following Lewis Cafferata's death in 1942 the house was sold to a Welsh couple who visited rarely, again leaving the Hall in the hands of tenants. In 1953 they sold it to Miss Esme Greenyer, at which time the Hall and grounds were in excellent order. Following a long illness during which time the property once again fell into disrepair Esme died in 1978, leaving the Hall and grounds to Randle and Anne Feilden who subdivided the house to create self-contained units for other members of the family (information leaflet). The Hall remains (1999) in private ownership.

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**DESCRIPTION**

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The grounds of Stiffkey Old Hall lie on the south side of the A149 north Norfolk coast road, abutting the south and west walls of the Stiffkey parish church of St John the Baptist. The registered site covers an area of c 3.5ha between the village and coast road which form the northern boundary beyond a deep retaining wall, and the River Stiffkey which forms the southern boundary. The western boundary is formed by small grazing fields beside the river, north of which is the village. To the east lie more grazing fields and beyond the river to the south, farmland and woodlands. The land falls to the south and slightly to the west, with a steep gradient from the main road and churchyard, becoming more gradual between the Hall and the river. The Hall sits on rising ground beside the south-west corner of the churchyard, midway between the church and the river. This site commands views over the river valley up to the tree line in the south, and south-west along the valley floor. There is also a carefully controlled view of the church from the river bank, framed by the buildings of the Hall. The overall setting is of a rural village, focused on the farmland to the south, with no hint of the proximity of the coast c 1km to the north.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** There are two main entrances into the registered site. The north gate opens onto a drive which runs south beside the west wall of the churchyard to arrive at the west front of the Hall. The west gate gives entry from the village in the north-west corner of the park and the drive runs east past brick and flint gate piers to meet the north drive at the corner of the west front. The original entrance was from the south over the existing river bridge to the gatehouse before the south front. No drive exists here now (late C20) and the entrance has been disused for some time.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Stiffkey Old Hall (listed grade II\*) is a three-towered, three-storey building of brick and flint with stone dressings and a pantile roof. It represents the remains of a U-plan house, originally intended to be a symmetrical courtyard with eight turrets. The west range and half of the north range survive, as do three of the turrets. The range of window styles represents the many phases of repair and refurbishment the Old Hall has been through, including C16, early C20, and late C20 mullioned and transomed windows and Georgian leaded casements. At the east end of the north wing are the ruinous remains of the Great Hall (now a sunken garden, see below), with the south face of the north wing and east face of the west wing forming two sides of the original courtyard. On the south side of the courtyard is a detached flint and brick entrance gatehouse or lodge (listed grade II\*) dated 1604; the central arched entrance is now filled in. Sir Nicholas Bacon was responsible for the original plans for Stiffkey Old Hall and he began construction in 1576. His son Nathaniel completed a less elaborate version of the house, with wings, six turrets, and the detached gatehouse. Demolition to its present size occurred probably during the mid C18, the remainder of the structures retaining their historic fabric through a series of minor 'improvements'.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The gardens at Stiffkey lie to the north and east of the Hall and cover an area of c 0.5ha. The garden to the north is enclosed by banks topped with walls. There is a flat lawn at the level of the Hall, becoming a 'wilderness' lawn (so-called by the present owners) and rising steeply to the boundaries, the slopes planted with a range of ornamental trees and shrubs for winter interest, underplanted with spring bulbs. This area has been planted recently (late C20) within an original C16 compartment.

The main gardens lie to the east of the Hall and consist of a series of three terraces built by Nathaniel Bacon between 1592 and 1594, descending the slope of the land from the churchyard wall in the north to the level of the river in the south. The first terrace below the retaining wall of the churchyard is a grass walk, at the eastern end of which are the remains of a banqueting house (all walls listed grade II). The walk is bounded to the north by a rose border at the foot of the wall and to the south by a mixed shrub and herbaceous border with Irish yew. The retaining wall on this side forms the wall of the next terrace, at the foot of which is a mixed herbaceous border. The second terrace is laid out as a croquet lawn, its southern boundary being another retaining wall leading down to the third terrace at river level which is enclosed as a kitchen garden (see below). The ruins of the Great Hall which lie between the west end of the upper terrace walk and the east end of the main range of the Hall are laid out as a sunken garden with grass, rose borders, and herbs. The east terraces were planned by Sir Nicholas Bacon in 1576 as a series of compartments axially connected to the Hall. Their construction is detailed in his son Nathaniel's account books (Hassell Smith 1979). The upper terrace was laid out as a parterre, with beds edged in brick with posts and rails painted in the Bacon heraldic

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colours of black and white, the central terrace possibly as a knot garden, and the lower terrace as a bowling green. The church was used as an important element within the layout, its southern boundary wall being used to align both the Hall and the gardens. Beyond the gardens the remaining 3ha of the registered site, which lies to the west and south of the Hall, is laid to grass. It is lightly treed to the west, with two notably mature specimens of sycamore, the remainder of the planting being of mixed age and species. It appears in this form on the OS 6" map published in 1891. Near the western boundary of the registered site are the ground-level remains of a series of cottages and barns and a disused (early C20) tennis court, whilst between these and the river, in the south-west corner is a newly created (late C20) wildlife pond surrounded by ornamental planting and self-sown willow and alder. The grass to the west of the Hall was laid over the remains of the C16 Great West Garden. The remains of one of the canals survives as a small L-shaped channel in the grass. The River Stiffkey along the southern boundary was redirected and canalised by Sir Nicholas (present owners pers comm, 1999) to accord with the axes of his formal garden scheme although no evidence of this remains on the ground.

**KITCHEN GARDEN** The present flint and brick-walled kitchen garden is located on the lowest level of the terraced gardens to the east of the Hall. The modern (late C20) layout of vegetable plots and glass sits within the C16 garden enclosure, the western wall of which is composed of a range of workshops. Orchard trees grow in the grass beyond the south wall, in front of the river.

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 39 (16 February 1916), pp 240-4 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: North-east Norfolk and Norwich* (1962), pp 32/(2 A Hassell Smith, *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey* (Centre of East Anglian Studies 1979) *J Garden History* 11, (1991), nos 1 and 2, pp 94-7 A potted history of Stiffkey Old Hall, guide leaflet, (Stiffkey Old Hall 1996)

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1891 2nd edition published 1906 3rd edition published 1950 OS 25" to 1 mile: 2nd edition published 1906

Description written: February 1999 Amended: October 2000 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: March 2001

## Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.