

# Circular Walk To Fiddleford Manor From The North Dorset Trailway

Fiddleford is a medieval manor house, completed in about 1370. It has undergone many changes since, but the splendid timber roofs over the great hall and solar are said to be the most spectacular in Dorset. They reflect the original owner's rising status and ambition: in the 14th century it was essential for a great man to entertain lavishly, and these rooms represent just the kind of conspicuous expenditure that would be expected of a man of authority and means.

The manor house has no recorded history, but it was probably built for William Latimer, sheriff of Somerset and Dorset. Men like Latimer, as sheriffs and justices, made the king's government work in the shires – a practical alliance between central authority and local influence.



Latimer had acquired the Fiddleford estate by marrying the daughter of its previous owner, John Maury, in 1355. There must already have been a manor house here or close by, and a mill at Fiddleford is mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086. However, Latimer clearly felt in need of a more up-to-date house to reflect his importance as a royal sheriff.

Though much of the building has been altered, the original solar roof is complete. It is a magnificent oak structure, with graceful arched braces or trusses. There are traces of a wall-painting in the solar, where part of the Angel Gabriel from an Annunciation scene survives to hint at the richness of the original decoration.

To the right of the entrance is the two-storey great hall, essential for Latimer's duties as a royal official. Again the room has been much altered, but the elaborate roof, though incomplete and smoke-blackened, is still a fine sight with its elegantly arched and cusped struts and braces. The gallery at the west end above the screens or service passage is a 16th-century addition, and is now supported on a modern structure.

With its beautifully decorated walls, painted furniture, rush matting and fabric hangings beneath the great roofs, Latimer's new house would have provided a statement of power that benefited both the king and his trusted agent, the new sheriff.



North Dorset Trailway   
Circular Walk   
Stour Valley Way 