

ADVICE NOTES

Broadland District Council Planning Information



No. 14

Thatching

Roofs have been thatched almost since men first started building houses. In some areas, such as parts of Kent, clay tiles had become more popular by the Medieval period. In other Counties, such as Norfolk, thatch remained the most common roofing material in rural areas until earlier this century.

Water reed thatch. The thatch mansard roof with patterned ridge usually found in East Anglia.



If you require further information about this leaflet or thatching generally, please telephone Norwich 430508

Thatching is a highly traditional craft. It is still learnt through apprenticeship and methods of laying thatch vary from one thatcher to another. There are, however, broad regional traditions, and at the moment it is still possible to distinguish a roof laid in Norfolk for example, from one laid in Suffolk or Devon.

The three principal thatching materials used in England are long straw, water reed and combed wheat reed.

WATER REED

In the Broadland District Council area most thatch is of water reed, this may be Norfolk Reed, or imported from other areas of England or from abroad.

Water reed thatch has a compact, even texture with very clean-cut edges. The heads of the reeds are all laid in the same direction. Ridge patterns tend to be quite simple. The ends of the roof are often enclosed by brick gables, but where they are not, the thatch is finished to a sharp plain outline.

LONG STRAW

In some parts of Norfolk, particularly near the Suffolk border, long straw thatch is used. The straw is normally obtained from winter-grown wheat, grown specially for thatching.

Long straw thatch is usually a little thicker than water reed thatch, and has a shaggier texture and more rounded outline. A bundle of long straw will contain heads and tails mixed together.

COMBED WHEAT REED

Combed Wheat Reed is not a water reed thatch. Wheat straw is used, as for long straw thatch, but it is passed through a reed comber so that all the heads lie in one direction.

Combed wheat is laid in a similar fashion to water reed and can resemble it from a distance.

WATCHING STANDARDS

Regional traditions are beginning to be eroded, partly by outside thatchers and partly by the copying of, for example, ridge patterns from other areas.

Standards and ultimately also the reputation of thatch, are also threatened by commercialisation. Some thatchers are setting up in business without having served an adequate apprenticeship and are taking short cuts in laying the thatch; this can lead to early failure of the thatch.

Use of the title "Master Thatcher" is uncontrolled. It means nothing. Beware! For guidance on choosing a thatcher, see overleaf.

REPAIRS

Different forms of thatch are repaired in different ways. This leaflet concentrates on water reed repairs. For advice on the repair of other thatches, please contact the Secretary of the East

Anglia Master Thatchers' Association* For more detailed advice on water reed repairs, contact either the same Association or a well-established and highly regarded Norfolk water reed thatcher.

The advice given below is for guidance only.

WHEN TO REPAIR

Water reed thatch should last for at least 50 years before it needs to be completely replaced. Good quality water reed laid to a high standard may last 70 to 100 years in favourable conditions, whereas poor quality reed may last less than 50 years.

Ridges are normally laid in sedge and usually need to be completely replaced after 10 to 15 years. It is not usually necessary to repair them.

The body of the thatch (casework) can be repaired if necessary at the same time. Disturbance or compaction, for example, by laying ladders across it at more frequent intervals, can be damaging.

Take the advice of a well-established water reed thatcher before accepting insurance policies which stipulate repair at more frequent intervals than 10 to 15 years or even inspection, if this involves mounting the roof.

WHEN TO REPLACE

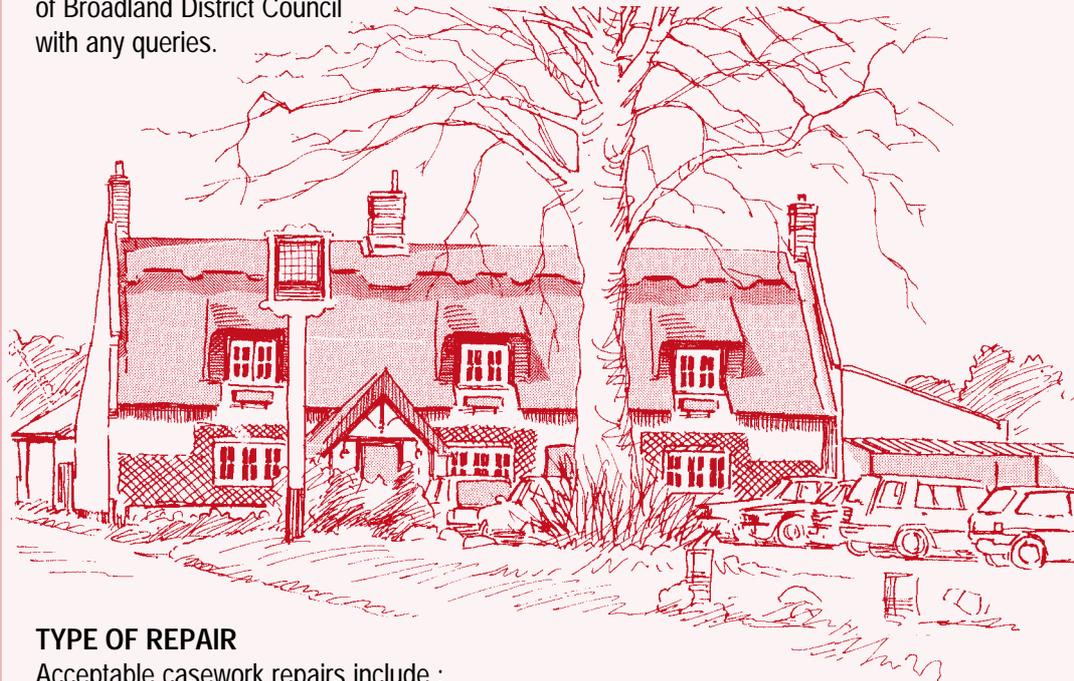
Ridges: See above.

Thatch: (Casework)

Usually if the body of the thatch has deteriorated so badly that the fixings are visible, or if large-scale slippage is evident. Occasionally other factors may make replacement necessary.

NB. If the building is Listed, Listed Building Consent is normally required for complete replacement and owners should seek advice about how to record evidence of old work or techniques before it is removed eg. woven reed matting or flecking over the rafters. See bibliography and references at the end of this leaflet. Please contact the Conservation Section of Broadland District Council with any queries.

*The Chequers
Public House, Hainford.*



TYPE OF REPAIR

Acceptable casework repairs include :

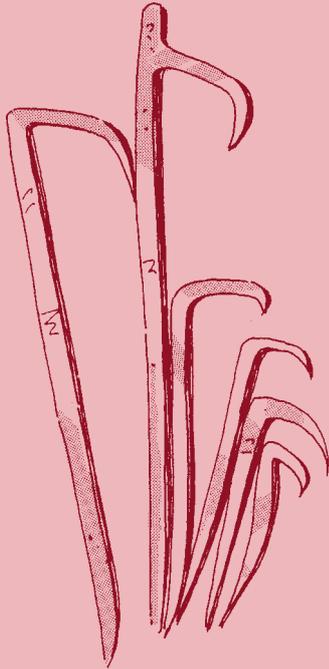
(a) **Dressing Up**

Reed thatch deteriorates very gradually. Up to 1" thickness may be lost over a 10 year period, causing the thatch to loosen very slightly from its fixings. In dressing up, the butts, or ends of the reeds are knocked evenly and securely back up into their fixings.

(b) **Brushing Down**

The surface of the casework may at the same time be brushed down to remove loose material and moss, which can retain moisture and gradually damage the body of the thatch.

* See end of Advice Note.



Thatching hooks (crooks)

(c) **Repairing Holes**

Thatch which is well-laid and maintained should not normally be damaged by wind or develop holes. If isolated holes do appear, however, it can sometimes be possible to repair them provided they are not associated with major underlying problems eg. major general slippage. Seek the advice of a well established thatcher.

(d) **Replacement of Wire Netting**

Netting is usually applied to the ridge, but may not be required for the casework. The need for netting may depend upon the nature of the water reed; not all kinds require it. Netting can also encourage moss and debris to lodge. Where it is used, it is chiefly to discourage birds.

Ask the advice of a thatcher before it is applied. It can be replaced every 10 to 18 years, if needed, when the ridge is replaced.

(See note 13 overleaf)

CHECKING NEW WORK & REPAIR WORK

It can be difficult to check standards in thatching because of different regional traditions and personal working practices. The quality of the roof will depend not only on its finished appearance, but also on the standard of work hidden from view - the laying and fixings.

If you are in doubt about the quality of workmanship, you may approach the East Anglia Master Thatchers' Association* for an opinion, but check first whether the representative is professionally qualified to comment on water reed; not all thatchers specialise in it!

The Suffolk Master Thatchers' Association also publishes a booklet called "Standards and Specifications of Work for the Thatching of Buildings in East Anglia" which is available from the Hon. Secretary*. This is a guide to basic standards which are generally accepted, but you should also check with your thatcher whether he accept them all, and if not, why not. He may have good reason.

The following notes are based on the above booklet and may be regarded as a rule of thumb :

1. Long straw and combed wheat reed thatch can often be repaired by stripping off unsound top coats and laying new work directly onto sound surviving base layers. This practice is not normally accepted for water reed.
2. Newly laid water reed should normally be at least 12" thick, measured at right angles out from the rafters. Valleys may be up to 16" deep.
3. In new work, the fixings usually hazel should be applied 7" out from the rafters, measured at right-angles, and therefore 5" below the surface of the thatch. The fixings should be firm enough to prevent bundles being pulled out from under them.
4. Every course of reed should be fixed to every rafter.
5. There should be no bowing between rafters.
6. The reed should be laid to an even density, but not so tightly compacted that water is sucked in.
7. The surface of the reed should conform to the pitch of the rafters, which should not normally be less than 45 degrees.
8. Reed saddle-pieces should be applied at junctions with other features.
9. Flashings should be adequate.
10. Ridges should be at least 3" thick above the thatch body, and secured by liggers and cross-spars.
11. A reed roll should be fixed to the apex and covered with a turnover at least 4" thick.
12. The ridge should be in pitch with the rafters.
13. Any wire netting should be 20 gauge x 19mm (maximum) galvanised wire netting or polythene equivalent, and conform closely to the thatch.
14. Reed should normally be laid dry.

* See end of Advice Note.

For further details see the booklet and other publications listed at the end of this leaflet.

FIRE PRECAUTIONS

Thatchers maintain that if sensible precautions are taken, fire should be no more of a problem with a thatched building than with any other. An information pack published by the National Council of Master Thatchers' Associations advises on suitable precautions. (See end of this leaflet). The use of chemicals is not normally advised.

CHOOSING A THATCHER

A water reed thatcher is usually considered competent to work alone once he has served an apprenticeship of 2 to 4 years with a thatcher of established repute. Some serve a 5 year apprenticeship.

Water reed thatching techniques are not the same as for long straw or combed wheat reed, so check that the apprenticeship has been served on water reed work.

A freshly qualified thatcher can be asked for references from the thatcher with whom he served his apprenticeship, and for a list of past work and clients' addresses (if their permission has been obtained). The Regional representative of the East Anglia Master Thatchers' Association could then be approached to give an opinion on the standard of work, in non-controversial cases. He may require a fee.

The thatcher could be asked for written assurance that he will use a specification no less than that set out in the Suffolk Master Thatchers' booklet referred to above.

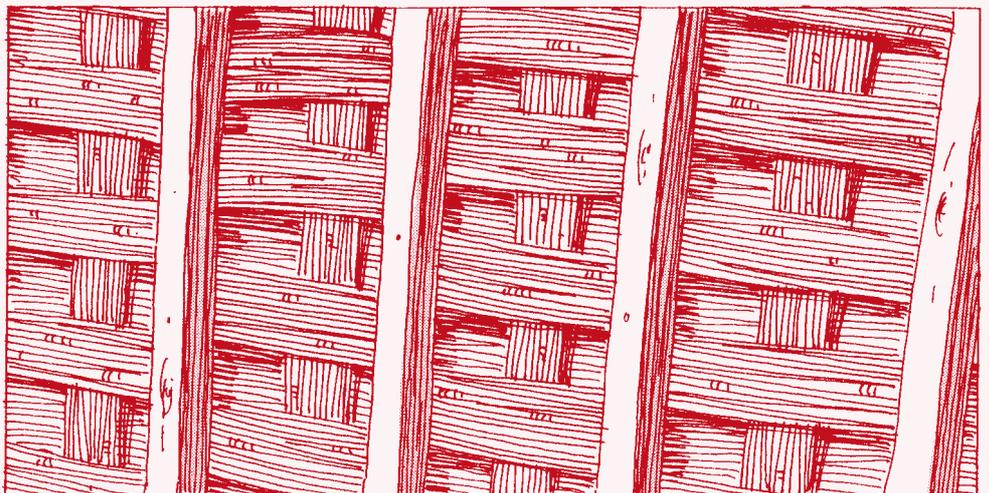
A list of thatchers who have carried out work in the Broadland District Council area to an acceptable standard is enclosed. The list may be capable of extension. Broadland District Council accepts no responsibility for the standard of work of those listed.

GRANTS

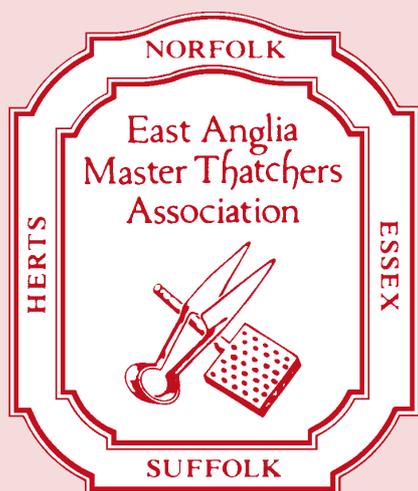
Grant aid may be available towards thatch repair or renewal. For further information, contact the Conservation Section, Broadland District Council.

ADDRESSES & REFERENCES

1. The National Council of Master Thatchers Association
Thatchers' Rest, Levens Green, Great Munden, Nr. Ware, Hertfordshire, SG11 1HD
c/o 133 High Street, Hadleigh, Suffolk, IP7 5EJ
2. The Honorary Secretary
East Anglia Master Thatchers' Association
c/o 133 High Street, Hadleigh, Suffolk, IP7 5EJ
3. Peter Brockett and Adela Wright
The Care and Repair of Thatched Roofs
(Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and Rural Development Commission, Technical Pamphlet 10 1986).



Fleeking, a woven mat of water reed on the underside of thatch.



The following are all members of the: East Anglia Master Thatchers' Association.

Full Members

Mr.J.D. Bangs, Yard at: The Old Black Barn, Hepworth, Diss. Inquiries to: 10 Harrington Close, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, IP33 2AE.

Tel: Stanton (01284) 767966.

Mr.I.N. Blanchard, Honeysuckle Cottage, The Green, Redgrave, Diss, Norfolk, IP22 1RR.

Tel: (01379) 898184.

Mr.T.J. Claxton, Darkens Piece, Merton, Thetford, Norfolk.

Tel:(01953) 881689.

Mr.P.A. Congdon, 81 Queens Road, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 1PQ.

Tel: Sudbury (01787) 374600.

Mr.J.M. Cousins, Hulvertree Farm, Laxfield, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP13 8HR.

Tel: Badingham (01728) 638721.

Mr.T.H. Cox, Thatchers Cottage, Shop Hill, Wickhambrook, Nr. Newmarket, Suffolk. CB8 8XL.

Tel:(01440) 820042.

Mr.K. Dunthorne, Green Farm, Burgate, Great Green, Wortham, Diss, Norfolk, IP22 1QL

Tel: Diss (01379) 783457.

Mr.A.E. Farman and Son, Station Road, Salhouse, Norwich, Norfolk, NR13 6NX

Tel: Norwich (01603) 721744.

Mr.T.J. Hargraves, 40 Mazoe Road, Bishop's Stortford, Herts. CM23 3JT.

Tel: (01279) 501492.

Mr.S.J. Letch, Laurel Farm, Skinners Lane, Starston, Harleston, Norfolk, IP20 9PX

Tel: (01379) 852335.

Mr.J.P. Lewis, Thatchers Rest, Levens Green, Great Munden, Nr Ware, Hertfordshire, SG11 1HD.

Tel: Ware (01920) 438710.

Mr.T.L. Mansell, The Thatched Cottage, Lower Raydon. Nr. Hadleigh, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP7 5QS.

Tel: Hadleigh (01473) 822457.

Mr.P.A. Nottage, 58 Garden Fields, Stebbing, Nr Great Dunmow, Essex, CM6 3RG.

Tel: Gt. Dunmow (01371) 856472.

Mr.A.H. Osborne & Son, Potter Farm, Green Lane, Boxted, Colchester, Essex, CO4 5TS.

Tel: Colchester (01206) 271861.

Mr.M.C. Potter, Long Meadow, Wethersfield Road. Sible Hedingham, Halstead, Essex, CO9 3LA.

Tel: (01787) 460009.

Mr.P.A. Shannan, Jarrahdene, Snow Hill, Clare, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 8QE.

Tel: (01787) 277014.

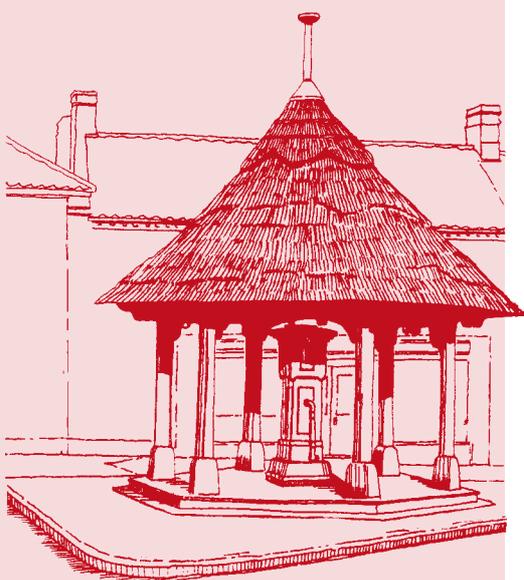
Mr.S.P. Williams, Maris Widgeon, Flintwich Manor, Newlands Spring, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 4YP.

Tel: (01245) 442617.

Mr. R.A.Yates, Lake Farmhouse, Rougham Green, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP30 9JT.

Tel: (01284) 386365.

The Town Pump at Aylsham.



Associate Members

Mr.E.W. Baddeley, 39 Britannia Road, Ipswich, Suffolk.

Tel: (01473) 726237.

Mr.P.D. Letch, 2 Paddock Cottages, Woodhill Common Lane, Danbury, Chelmsford, Essex, CM3 4AN.

Tel: (01245) 225791.

Mr.J.P. James, Roselan, The Street, Lawshall, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP29 4QA.

Tel: (01284) 827136.

Mr.K.L.Savage, The Crown, Acton, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 0AT.

Tel: 01787 377204.

The following thatchers can also be recommended:

S.J. Aldred Jnr., Holly Cottage, Long Common, East Ruston, Norfolk, NR12 9HH.

Tel: Stalham (01692) 811 20.

B. Attew, Alvista, Johnson Street, Ludham, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk.

Tel: Horning (01692) 481.

C.T. Cossey, Broom Hill, Lower Street, Salhouse, Norwich, Norfolk.

Tel: Norwich (01603) 720059.

M.S. Lloyd, Majority Cottage, Wymondham Road, East Carleton, Norwich.

Tel: (01508) 578124.

M&B Thompson, 45 Aylsham Road, Norwich NR3 3EZ.

Tel: (01603) 612076 or (05086 4458 answerphone).



*The Church of St.Andrew
and St.Peter, Blofield.*