



THATCH

IN SOUTH SOMERSET



A GUIDE TO MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

South Somerset District Council

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Conservation and Environment Unit

THATCH IN SOUTH SOMERSET

A GUIDE TO MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

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INTRODUCTION

South Somerset possesses a rich variety of traditional buildings which contribute to the distinctive character of our towns, villages and countryside. These old buildings are built of local, natural materials and include many with thatched roofs. The conservation of these buildings is important in helping to preserve and enhance the appearance of our district. Traditional buildings often require special care and understanding in order to maintain and repair them appropriately and this is particularly true of thatched buildings. Furthermore, many thatched buildings in South Somerset are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest and this may impose certain restrictions on repairs and alterations.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide guidance to owners of thatched buildings in South Somerset about the care and maintenance of their property and about the legislation and policies affecting those buildings which are listed.

THATCH IN SOUTH SOMERSET

THATCHING MATERIALS The earliest material used for roof coverings in most parts of the country was vegetation such as bracken, heather, turf or reeds, depending on what grew locally. In wetland areas such as East Anglia, and in some coastal areas of Suffolk, Hampshire, Wales and Dorset water reed was commonly used. Nowadays it is often called Norfolk Reed. With the development of cultivated cereals such as rye, wheat, oats and barley the straw from such crops became popular for thatching in arable areas using a technique of thatching known as long straw thatching. Long straw is still used in East Anglia and parts of the Midlands, but is no longer used in the south west.

In the early nineteenth century the invention of a machine called a reed comber revolutionised the use of straw, especially wheat, for thatching. The comber removes the grain from the ears of wheat and strips the leaf from the stems producing clean, aligned reeds known as combed wheat reed or Devon reed. Combed wheat reed is quicker to use and it soon became the most common thatching material in the south west. It has been widely used in South Somerset for almost two hundred years.

In the last two or three decades water reed has started to become popular in South Somerset. As transport costs have fallen it has become economical to import water reed from Scotland, East Anglia, Hungary and even further afield to areas where there is no tradition of its use. The use of water reed on a roof previously thatched in combed wheat reed may alter the character and appearance of the building and may also cause damage to surviving early features of the roof structure. For listed buildings it is necessary to obtain listed building consent

to change from wheat reed to water reed. Furthermore, grant aid will not normally be given for re-thatching in water reed.

The use of combed wheat reed in South Somerset will help to ensure the survival of a local craft tradition and help to maintain the distinctive character of South Somerset thatch. As well as providing work for local thatchers skilled in the use of wheat reed it can also help to provide income for local farmers who grow wheat reed and help to support ancillary activities such as hazel coppicing, spar making, and reed combing.

ROOF TYPES

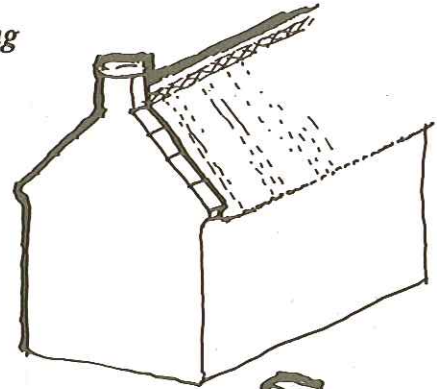
Many cottages and smaller houses in South Somerset were built of rubble stone or cob. These materials do not lend themselves to the construction of gabled walls so the top of the wall usually end at eaves height or halfway up the gable. This gave rise to the hipped or half hipped roof which, when coated with thatch, created the characteristic rounded appearance of many thatched roofs in this area. Initially many of these houses were single storey and open to the underside of the roof. At a later date a floor was often inserted to create an attic, with thatched dormer or eyebrow windows formed in the roof. The thatch followed the contours of the windows, adding to the roof's curved shape.

If good quality ashlar stone was used for building it was much easier to construct gables. The gables were finished above the level of the thatch and the tops protected with coping stones angled to shed water back onto the roof rather than down the walls. In these cases the thatch would simply form a flat coat between the copings. This shape of roof is also common in South Somerset, especially on buildings from the seventeenth century onwards.

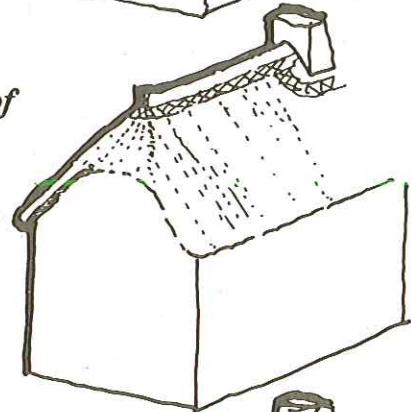
Many two storey buildings had a single storey extension, known as an outshut, against one wall with the thatched roof continuing from the main roof across the outshut, forming a catslide.

These roof forms are important as they reflect the building's constructional history. Listed building consent is required for any alterations to the form or structure of thatched roofs and dormer windows on listed buildings. If your house is in a conservation area you may also need consent for alterations to the roof, even if your building is not listed. Contact the Development Control Unit for further advice on specific proposals.

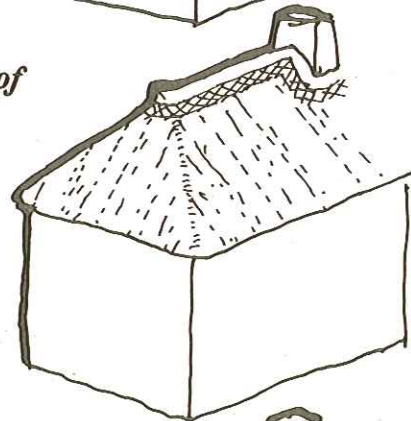
gabled roof with water tabling



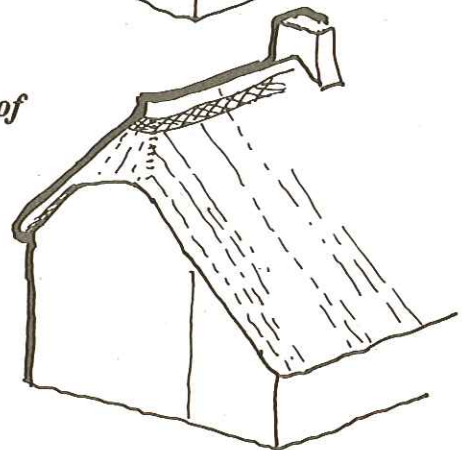
half-hipped roof



hipped roof



catslide roof



dormer windows

ROOF FORMS

RIDGES

The apex of a thatched roof is finished with a thatched ridge. For combed wheat reed the ridge is usually also made of wheat reed. Water reed is too stiff to be used for ridging so wheat reed or sedge is normally used for the ridge of a water reed roof. There are many different methods of forming a ridge and most areas have a traditional style. In South Somerset the most usual type is known as a flush butt-up ridge. This means that the sides of the ridge are flush with the surface of the thatch and that the apex of the ridge is formed by butting up the ends of the reeds. This is a simple and un-fussy finish, suitable for many types of buildings.

The tradition in many other areas is for a block ridge which is thicker and stands proud of the main surface of thatch. Block ridges are often decorated with patterns formed by hazel spars and the lower edges may be cut into decorative scallops and points. The extra materials and time needed to make a block ridge add to the cost, but a block ridge will not last any longer than a flush ridge of the same type. Decorative block ridges became popular in the nineteenth century and are seen in South Somerset, but they are not appropriate for earlier buildings or for utilitarian buildings.

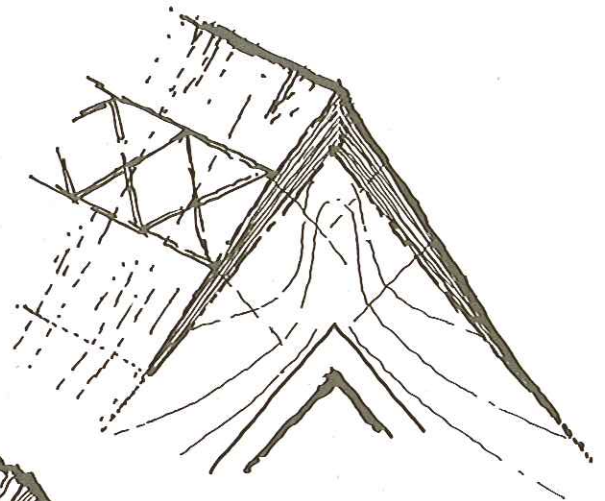
A further variation is for the ridge to be formed by laying reed across the ridge from one side to the other forming a wrapover ridge. Wrapover ridges usually last longer than butt-up ridges. A wrapover ridge may be finished flush or cut to a block. Similarly a butt up ridge may also be block cut. There are further regional variations on these basic types which are not seen in South Somerset.

On a hipped or half-hipped roof the ridge will end in a peak or pinnacle above the hip. In South Somerset the preference for a butt-up ridge gave rise to a distinctive form of end peak as the reeds were pulled tight at the end of the ridge. This feature was a function of the way in which the straw was used and not a purely stylistic detail. Such details should always be reproduced when re-ridging, or even reinstated on roofs where they have been lost, if appropriate.

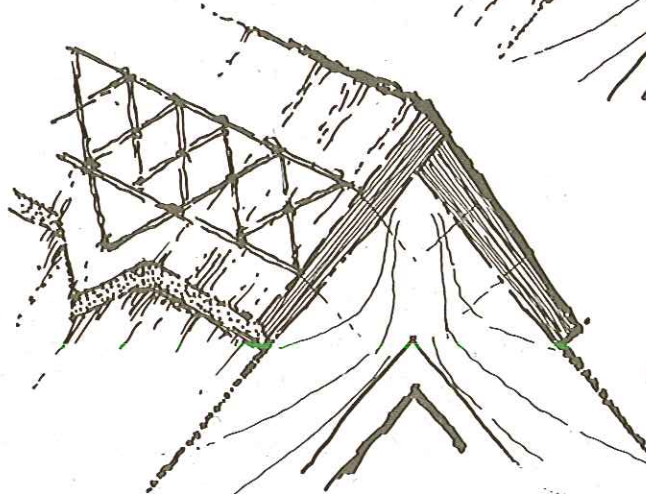
Many ridges are further ornamented by straw animals and birds, especially foxes, pheasants and owls. This is an extension of the custom of finishing a rick of newly harvested wheat with a corn dolly to bring luck in future harvests. Some thatchers like to use such figures as their trademark but they were not traditionally used on buildings.

The type of ridge contributes greatly to the character of a thatched building. For listed buildings consent will be needed to change from a flush ridge to a block ridge or vice versa. For most roofs in South Somerset the preference should be for a simple flush ridge, and for hipped roofs the butt-up technique should be used so that an end peak is formed.

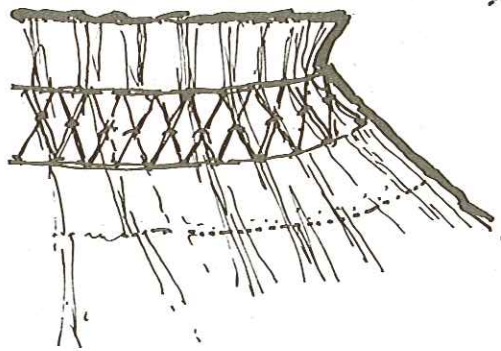
RIDGE STYLES



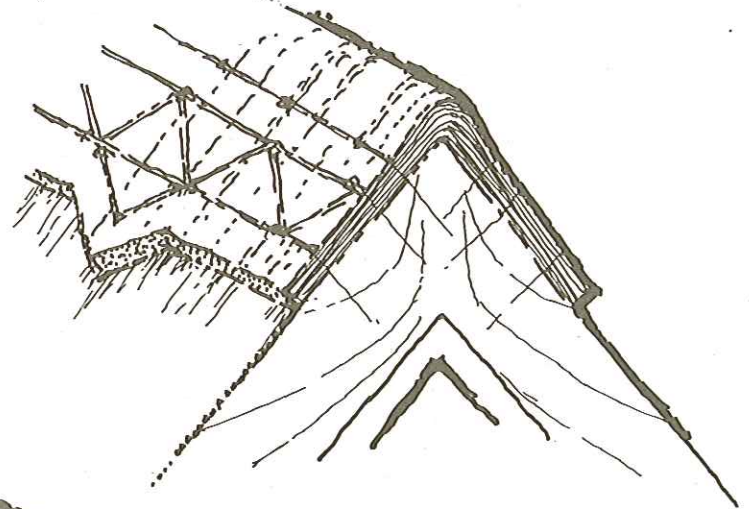
flush butt-up ridge



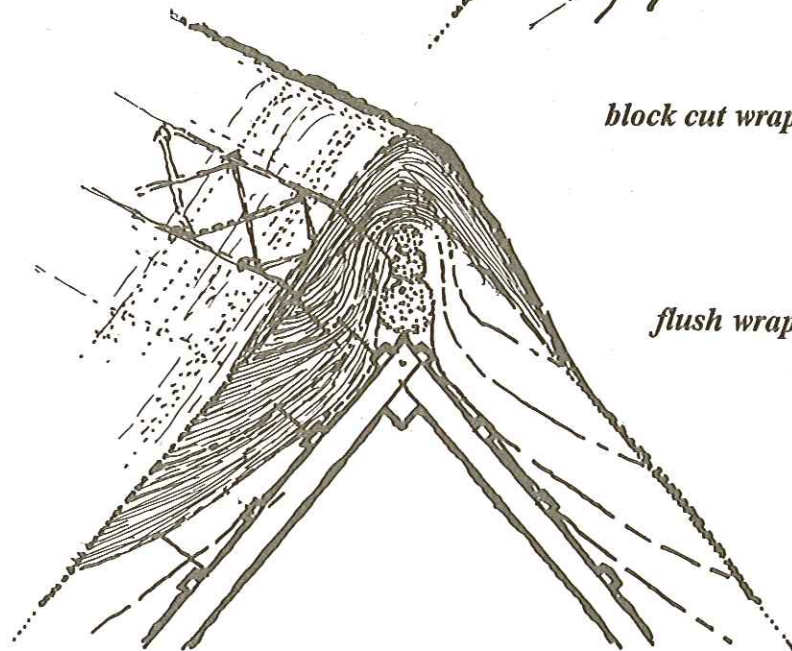
block cut butt-up ridge



ridge end peak



block cut wrap over ridge



flush wrap over ridge

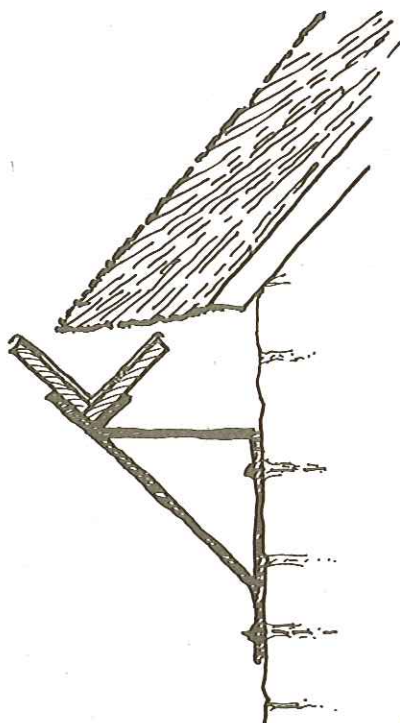
NETTING

Occasionally a combed wheat reed roof is prone to damage by birds pulling out the straws for nesting material. The holes left can be repaired by a thatcher but if the damage is persistent it may be advisable to protect the thatch with wire netting. In most cases it is best to avoid netting as it can accelerate decay by holding water on the surface of the thatch, especially if it becomes clogged with debris from overhanging trees, and it can delay action in the event of a fire.

Netting is often used to protect just the gables and ridge which are more exposed and vulnerable to storm damage. In such situations it does not affect the main coat and poses less of a problem in the event of a fire.

GUTTERS

Thatched roofs are constructed with a wide eaves overhang to throw rainwater clear of the walls so they are seldom provided with gutters. If gutters are used they need to be much wider than for a normal roof so that they will still catch the run-off several years later when the thatch has worn back. Occasionally V-shaped wooden gutters about 9" wide were used but unless they are lined with lead which is costly they are inclined to leak. Gutters on thatched roofs quickly become choked with debris and need regular inspection and clearing. For listed buildings consent will be required for the introduction of gutters on a thatched building.

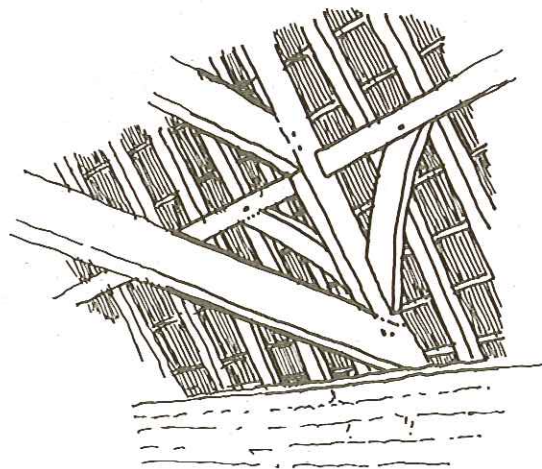


thatch gutter

INTERNAL FEATURES

When repairing a combed wheat reed roof it is customary to strip off only the surface layers of decayed thatch and to leave the sound under-layers as a bed for the new coat. This means that layers of early thatch often survive beneath later coats, and occasionally medieval thatch may be preserved. These old layers of thatch can provide a fascinating insight into the craft of thatching in the past. The thatch may contain unusual varieties of straw such as rye or oat, and may be tied onto the battens using honeysuckle, withies or bramble stems and other unusual fixings may be preserved. Sometimes the underside of the thatch may be smeared with clay or plaster or painted with limewash as an early form of fire protection. Blackening on the underside of the thatch suggest medieval origins for the building: medieval open halls lacked chimneys and smoke escaped through a hole or louvre in the roof, leaving tarry and sooty deposits on the underside of the roof.

Early roof structures may also be evident, and are more likely to have survived beneath thatch than beneath any other type of covering. Features such as wind-bracing and carpentry details are helpful in dating a building and interpreting its history. Very often the rafters are made from roughly hewn timbers or even from poles cut straight from the tree with no squaring up. The method of supporting the thatch between the rafters may include riven battens, woven reed mats, and wattle panels.



Windbracing

All these features provide valuable information about the history and construction of the building and about developments in the craft of thatching, and are often the only clues if there are no documentary records. It is vital that such evidence is preserved or at least recorded before alteration or repair. If such features are found listed building consent will be required for their alteration or removal. When changing from wheat reed to water reed the existing thatch is sometimes completely stripped and listed building consent is required. In such cases the roof should be inspected and any interesting features recorded.

DURABILITY OF THATCH

FACTORS AFFECTING THE DURABILITY OF THATCH

Thatch decays primarily as a result of microbiological activity which only occurs when water is present. The steep pitch of thatched roofs helps to ensure that water is shed quickly off the surface of the thatch. Roofs with a pitch lower than 45 degrees will deteriorate rapidly. Winds help to dry out the thatch so roofs in an exposed location or in a windy part of the country may last longer provided the winds do not bring additional rainfall. The decay is speeded up in warm conditions so thatched roofs in an area with a mild climate will generally not last as long as those in a colder area with comparable levels of rainfall. The aspect of a roof may also affect its durability by governing its degree of exposure to wind, rain and sunshine. The climate in the south west of England is not generally ideal for thatch as it tends to be mild and damp. The south east is drier and colder and thatch lasts longer in that part of the country.

Overhanging trees can speed up decay of thatch as leaf debris clinging to the roof holds water against the thatch, slowing down the rate of run-off. Moss and wire netting may have a similar effect. Coniferous trees are particularly harmful as their needles increase the acidity of the water which they trap, speeding up microbiological activity. Trees growing close to a thatched roof should be kept well trimmed so that they do not overhang the roof. Consent may be needed to prune a tree if it has a Tree Preservation Order on it or is in a Conservation Area. Trees planted as shelter belts close to a thatched building can also have a detrimental effect. By reducing exposure to wind and sunshine and by providing a source of moisture through transpiration they help to keep the thatch damp increasing the chances of decay. Evergreen trees are especially harmful as they help to keep the roof damp all year round and provide a constant source of acidic moisture.

The life expectancy of thatch also depends very much on the skill of the thatcher. It is also prone to damage during maintenance if it is compressed by a ladder or a person leaning against it. It is always advisable to employ a reputable thatcher even for small patching jobs.

RECENT TRENDS

In recent years there has been some concern in the thatching industry that thatch is not lasting as long as it used to do. English Heritage has commissioned research by the Building Research Establishment to try to identify the causes. Amongst the causes being investigated are the effects of fertilizers on straw quality, the effect of treating reed with fire retardants and the possible increase in condensation caused by fixing impermeable membranes, such as polythene, roofing felt or fire retardant boards, between the thatch and the roof timbers.

WATER REED VERSUS WHEAT REED

For several years there has been debate in South Somerset about the durability of water reed compared to wheat reed. It is often hoped that a water reed roof will last longer than a wheat reed roof. However, most of the data about the life expectancy of water reed is derived from the south east of England where it has been used for centuries and where the climate is favourable to thatch. The south west has a milder, wetter climate so it is likely that water reed will not last as long in South Somerset as it does in the south east. However, because water reed has only been introduced into South Somerset in the last few decades there are few roofs to provide statistics about water reed durability in this area.

MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

MAINTENANCE

A thatched roof requires a few simple maintenance measures to help extend its life.

- Overhanging trees and climbing plants should be cut back to avoid leaf litter collecting on the surface of the thatch and to allow maximum airflow and sunshine to reach the roof.
- Any valley gutters or back gutters behind chimneys should be cleared out each year to prevent blockages and overflows.
- Heavy growths of moss or lichen may be removed to reduce the retention of water on the thatch. This should be done by a thatcher as it is easy to damage the thatch in the process. In some cases it is better not to remove the moss - your thatcher will be able to advise you.
- Look for any areas of the roof which appear to be wearing more rapidly than the rest. This could indicate a problem and you should draw it to your thatcher's attention.

When carrying out any maintenance or repair it is essential to avoid crushing the thatch by resting a ladder on it or clambering over it. You should employ a thatcher for all maintenance to the thatch itself and most thatchers will also be happy to carry out minor maintenance to chimneys and clear out gutters. You should also seek advice from a thatcher before allowing any one else to climb onto the thatch to carry out repairs and maintenance to chimneys or television aerials. A pair of binoculars may help you to assess the condition of chimney pointing and flashings without the need for climbing onto the thatch.



REPAIRS

The most common type of repair to a thatched roof is re-ridging. The ridge wears faster than the coat of thatch and may need renewal several times during the life of the thatch, possibly every eight to fifteen years. Signs that the ridge may be ready for renewal include large gaps between the wire netting and the top of the ridge and loosening of the spars securing the ridge, the development of large undulations in the ridge and leaks inside. Consult a thatcher for advice if you suspect that the ridge needs attention.

Ideally a thatched roof should decay gradually and evenly until the fixings securing it are almost exposed, at which time it will need re-thatching. With wheat reed the decayed outer layers are stripped off and a new coat of reed sparred on. Only if the roof has been badly neglected or if the timbers are decayed is it normally necessary to strip the roof and completely re-thatch. Thatch decays at different rates on different facing roof slopes so it is unlikely that both slopes of a roof would need re-coating at the same time. Usually one side of the coat is renewed along with the complete ridge. If a butt-up ridge is used it may be possible to renew one side at a time. This enables the cost of maintenance to be spread.

Sometimes roofs wear unevenly and some areas may need attention before others. Bird damage creates small holes which are points of weakness around which decay may take place faster than elsewhere. Uneven run-off around chimneys or variations in the compaction of the thatch can lead to differential decay forming gullies or depressions on the surface. Once this starts further decay is concentrated in these areas. If you notice holes or depressions contact your thatcher promptly. Further damage can be avoided and the life of the thatch prolonged if such problems are caught at an early stage.

Flaunchings and flashings around chimneys and abutments must be well maintained to prevent water penetration. When re-ridging ask the thatcher to strip off the thatch around the base of chimneys to check for cracks and perished masonry and have any remedial work done before the new ridge is fixed.

Many roofs suffer from timber decay caused by insects or damp penetration. In severe cases timbers may become structurally unsound and require strengthening or replacement. This can often be done by inserting a new timber from below, placing it next to the original one. This saves stripping off all the thatch to expose the timbers from above.

EMERGENCY PROTECTION

If a roof has been allowed to decay to the point where it leaks it may be necessary to protect it using tarpaulins until it can be repaired. However, this is very much a last resort and is no substitute for regular maintenance and prompt repair. Fixing a tarpaulin is likely to damage the thatch and decay can continue beneath the sheeting.

PAYING FOR THATCHING

Usually a thatched roof decays slowly and with visible results, so the need for repair should not normally come as a surprise to the owner. However, when the time comes the costs involved will probably be substantial. It is advisable to make provision for the inevitable re-thatching either by making regular savings or by ensuring that you can fund the cost out of existing savings or capital, or by raising a mortgage or loan. Even if you are elderly and could not meet loan repayments it may be possible to raise finance against the value of your home, to be repaid out of your estate. It is advisable to obtain independent financial advice before committing yourself to a mortgage of this sort.

If you are on a low income you may be eligible for a grant under the Housing Act, from the District Council. Contact your area Environmental Health Officer for further advice. The District Council also operates a Historic Building Grants scheme for listed buildings, but at present grants are limited to buildings at risk and redundant or uneconomic buildings such as unused farm buildings or dovecotes. Re-thatching of an occupied dwelling would not normally be eligible for a Historic Building Grant. Contact your area Conservation Planner for further advice. English Heritage grants for re-thatching are usually limited to listed buildings at risk which are either grade I or grade II* or in a conservation area. See the list of useful addresses at the end of this booklet.

CHOOSING A THATCHER

Many thatchers advertise in the Yellow Pages and you can also obtain a list of thatchers working in this area from the Master Thatchers Association. The majority of thatchers work in a fairly small area so it is usually possible to see examples of a particular thatchers work within a few miles of your property. As with most repair work to historic buildings it is worthwhile obtaining more than one quote for the cost of the work, but make sure that each thatcher quotes for the same items of work, such as the same type of ridge or netting, so the quotes are comparable.

FIRE PROTECTION

Thatched properties are often considered to be at great risk from fire. In fact, of the many thousands of thatched buildings in Britain, very few are damaged by fire. However, it is likely that if a fire does break out it will spread quickly causing extensive damage.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

There are a number of precautions which can be taken to help reduce the risk of thatch igniting and to reduce the chance of fire spreading.

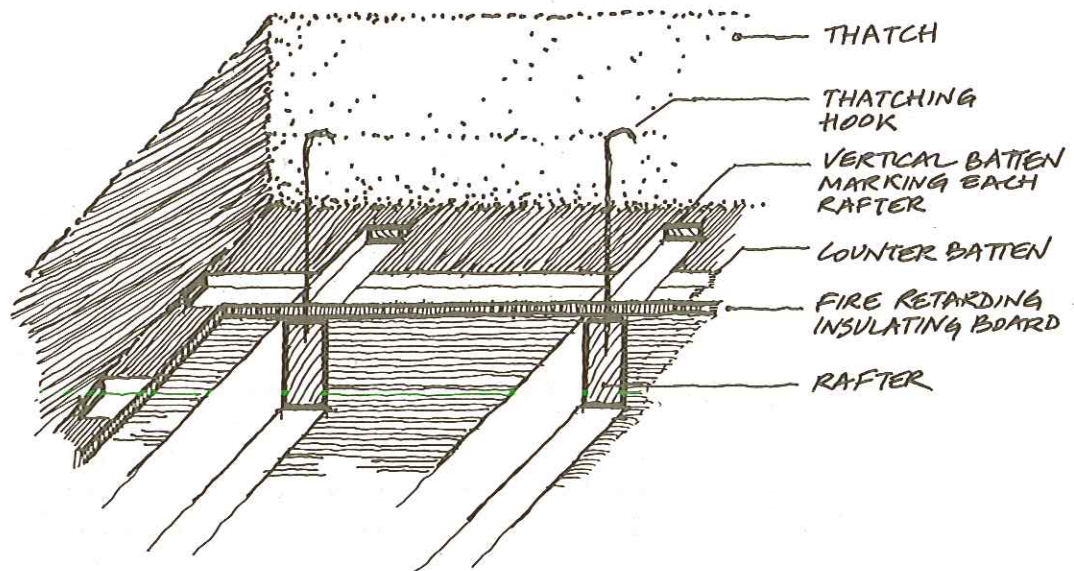
- Avoid lighting bonfires close to your house, or when the wind is blowing towards the thatch and ask your neighbours to do the same.
- Dampen down the charcoal after a barbecue so that it cannot re-kindle and do not place the barbecue close to the house.
- Avoid using paper to light an open fire - burning paper can be drawn up the chimney and drop back onto the thatch - use fire-lighters and wooden kindling.
- Ensure that a chimney in use is the correct height above the thatch - check with your local building control surveyor - if necessary raise the height by fitting a chimney pot.
- Avoid burning fuels which emit a lot of sparks or form a lot of soot.
- Have your chimney swept at least twice a year.
- Check the condition of the chimney stack especially the part below the level of the thatch and in the roof space and deal with any perished pointing and damaged masonry promptly.
- If your chimney is very old consider having it lined to ensure that smoke and sparks cannot escape through the masonry.
- Keep the loft space regularly cleared of straw debris and dust.
- Do not store combustible materials in the loft.
- Do not smoke in the loft.
- Do not use blow torches, hot air paint strippers or other heat generating equipment in the roof space or for stripping paint from dormer windows and barge boards or any other paint-work close to the thatch - if water pipes in the loft freeze help them to thaw by leaving the loft hatch open rather than by using a hot air gun.
- Have the electrical wiring in the roof space checked by an electrician to ensure that it is safe and conforms to the relevant

British Standards.

- Light fittings in the loft should be enclosed in a bulk-head or well glass fitting so that they do not touch the thatch and they should not be left switched on when there is no one in the loft.
- TV aerials are best fitted to a free standing pole about twenty feet away from the roof - for a listed building consent might be needed for the erection of such a pole and if it would look unsightly the aerial should be fitted to a gable chimney and the cable taken down the wall without touching the thatch.
- Make sure the loft access hatch is at least at least 3' x 2' to allow easy access for firemen in the event of an outbreak - if your roof has no loft access have one made -for a listed building you may need consent.
- Ensure that the ceiling joists are sufficiently strong to support firemen and their equipment - obtain advice from your local Building Control Surveyor.
- Find out where the nearest fire hydrant is.
- Keep a fire extinguisher in the house and keep a hose pipe outside permanently connected to a mains tap. The tap should be well lagged to protect it from freezing.
- Install smoke detectors in the roof space linked to an alarm downstairs so that a fire will be detected at the earliest opportunity - if using battery run detectors make a point of renewing the batteries at regular intervals.

Most of the above are common sense measures which can be undertaken on an existing roof at fairly low cost.

In the case of either a new thatched roof or if existing thatch has to be stripped back to the bare timbers a fire barrier may be introduced. The most effective systems work on the principle of isolating the thatch from the roof structure supporting it to prevent fire spreading from the thatch to the timbers and vice versa. The best method is to use half-hour a fire resistant board fixed over the rafters. Unfortunately it is rather inflexible and it may be hard to fit to an irregular roof structure, although furring pieces can be fixed to the joists to level up the timbers. Aluminium barrier foil is sometimes used instead. This is more flexible and can follow the undulations of an uneven roof but it is easily damaged during thatching and does not give very long protection in the event of a fire. It may also cause problems of condensation in the thatch.



Fire resistant boarding isolating thatch from rafters

If the existing thatch is not to be stripped half-hour fire resistant board can be fitted to the underside of the joists. This will help to contain a fire which starts in the roof space. If a fire starts in the thatch the timbers supporting the fire retardant boards are not protected and may burn, causing the boards to collapse and enabling the fire spread to the rest of the house. Glass fibre can be cut to fit snugly between the rafters protecting the underside of the thatch, but leaving the underside of the rafters exposed. This method works best with square cut rafters as it is hard to get a good tight fit in an irregular roof of unsawn, roughly shaped rafters. If the rafters are of reasonable dimensions, say about 4" deep, the exposed underside will probably char rather than burn right through, but smaller rafters are more likely to burn right through and collapse.

ACTION IN THE EVENT OF FIRE

Call the Fire Brigade immediately. Tell them the precise address and give the Ordnance Survey map reference (keep this next to the phone). Give directions if the property is very isolated or hard to find. Tell them that the house is thatched.

Make sure that everyone leaves the building.

Reduce draughts inside the building to slow down the rate of spread, so

- ensure the loft hatch door is closed - **DO NOT OPEN IT TO INSPECT THE FIRE IN THE ROOF SPACE**

- make sure that all doors and windows are closed as people leave the building

- **DO NOT PULL THATCH OFF THE ROOF** - this will allow more air in to feed the flames

If the fire has started from the outside of the thatch it may be possible to dampen it by spraying water onto it using a hose pipe - beware of burning thatch falling from the roof

If a small fire has started inside the building, but not in the roof space, it may be tackled using a fire extinguisher.

ONLY TACKLE A FIRE IF IT IS SAFE TO DO SO - DO NOT ENDANGER PERSONAL SAFETY

INSURANCE

Fire usually spreads more rapidly in a thatched building, is harder to tackle and therefore usually causes more damage than a fire in a non-thatched building. Consequently insurance premiums are higher, and many general property insurance companies will not insure thatched properties at all. Those that do often view thatch with a great deal of caution and demand very high premiums. It is often better to use a specialist thatch insurance company whose premiums are usually a truer reflection of the actual risk.

If your thatched building is listed it should be insured for its total rebuilding cost taking into account the cost of traditional materials and techniques. Because listed buildings are protected by legislation reinstatement following damage by fire may be required by the planning authority to be carried out using traditional materials and techniques in order to maintain the special character and appearance of the building. This may be more expensive than using modern materials, which might be acceptable for a non-listed building, so it is important to ensure that your building is adequately insured to reflect these higher costs. Remember that the rebuilding cost is likely to be quite different to the market value of your property. For further advice on insuring thatched buildings see the list of useful addresses at the end of this booklet.

ALTERATIONS AND NEW THATCH

PLANNING CONSENT

You may wish to make alterations to your thatched roof, such as changing the pitch of the roof to gain headroom inside the loft, introducing dormer or eyebrow windows, changing the style of the ridge and changing from wheat reed to water reed or from thatch to tile or slate for example, or to construct an extension to an existing thatched building or build an entirely new thatched building. It is likely that you will need one or more of the following consents

Listed Building Consent

- will be required for any alterations and extensions to the roof of a listed building and for new building and alterations to the roof of an existing building within the curtilage of a listed building. No fee is payable.

Conservation Area Consent

- will be required for some alterations to a thatched roof in a Conservation Area, for most extensions and for all new buildings in a Conservation Area. Advice on what needs consent can be obtained from the Development Control Officer for your area (see list of addresses at the back of the booklet). No fee is payable.

Planning Permission

- will be required for most extensions and all new buildings regardless of whether the building is listed or in a Conservation Area. In some cases planning permission will be required as well as Listed Building Consent or Conservation Area Consent. Your local Development Control Officer will advise you. A fee will be charged.

Building Regulations Approval

- will be required for some alterations and all new thatched roofs (except for a few exempt classes of structure). Check your Area Building Control Surveyor. A fee will be charged.

The purpose of requiring consent is to ensure that work is carried out sympathetically and safely. It is always advisable before starting work to check whether consent is required by contacting the Development Services Department (see the list of addresses at the back of this booklet) as in some cases it is a criminal offence to carry out unauthorised work.

Even if your house is not listed or in a conservation area think carefully before undertaking alterations which might alter or destroy the distinctive character of thatch in South Somerset.

REPLACEMENT OF THATCH

The replacement of thatch with tiles or slate is sometimes proposed for economic reasons. However, many thatched roofs have widely spaced rafters or are constructed from rough, unsquared timbers which may make them unsuitable for re-covering in slate or tile. In many cases a completely new roof structure would be required and the economic benefit of replacing thatch would be drastically reduced. On listed buildings consent will not normally be granted for replacement of thatch with another material.

DESIGN

Thatch is a flexible and adaptable roof covering suitable for a variety of building types both traditional and modern. However the design and detailing of the roof structure are critical to the good performance of thatch. If you are contemplating alterations or the construction of an extension or a new thatched building it is advisable to consult a thatcher at an early stage of the design process. It is a waste of time and money to obtain planning consent for your proposals only to find, when the thatcher comes on site, that the design is inappropriate for thatch.

FURTHER READING

Billet, Michael. Thatching and Thatched Buildings. Robert Hale Ltd, 1979.

Brocket, Peter, & Wright, Adela. The Care and Repair of Thatched Roofs. SPAB Technical pamphlet 10, 1986.

English Heritage & Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. Insuring Your Historic Building. English Heritage, 1994.

Fearn, Jacqueline. Thatch and Thatching. Shire Album 16, 1976.

Rural Development Commission. The Thatchers Craft. RDC, 1988.

South Somerset District Council. Insurance of Listed Buildings. SSDC, 1992.

South Somerset District Council, Thatched Buildings: Building Regulations Guidelines. SSDC 1991

USEFUL ADDRESSES

For further advice on thatching and repairs contact:

Somerset Master Thatchers Association
Secretary: Jack Lewis
The Red Barn
Compton Durville
South Petherton
Somerset TA13 5ET

Tel: 01460 240027

The National Society of Master Thatchers
73 Hughenden Avenue
Downley
High Wycombe
Bucks HP13 5SL

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
37 Spital Square
London E1 6DY

Tel: 0171 377 1644

For further advice on grants contact:

Environment Health Units
South Somerset District Council

Area North

Tel: 01935 462462

Area East

Tel: 01963 32281

Area South

Tel: 01935 462462

Area West

Tel: 01460 66570

Planning Units
South Somerset District Council

Area North

Tel: 01935 462462

Area East

Tel: 01963 32281

Area South

Tel: 01935 462462

Area West

Tel: 01460 66570

English Heritage
Fortress House
23 Savile Row
London W1X 1AB

Tel: 0171 973 3000

For further advice on insuring thatched buildings contact:

The Association of British Insurers
51 Gresham Street
London EC2V 7HQ

Tel: 0171 600 3333

Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
12 Great George Street
Parliament Square
London SW1P 3AD

Tel: 0171 222 7000

For further advice on fire protection and prevention contact:

Fire Protection Association
140 Aldersgate Street
London SW1X 7BB

Tel: 0171 259 5688

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
Address above

Building Control Units
South Somerset District Council

Area North

Tel: 01935 462462

Area East

Tel: 01963 32281

Area South

Tel: 01935 462462

Area West

Tel: 01460 66570

For further advice on the need for consent contact:

Planning Units
South Somerset District Council

As above

Building Control Units
South Somerset District Council

As above

For further information contact the Historic Buildings Advisor
or the Conservation Architect at the address shown on the back cover.

This booklet has been prepared by South Somerset District Council's
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