

David Trant

The thatching process.

Not in my time, which is quite a long time, but before that they would put the base coat on and they would stitch it on with tar cord and before that they would use willow - withy - and they would tie it on, they'd lay the rye on and then they'd use a hazel or withy stick as a bind and then they thread it through around the beam, or the purlin rather and just pull it tight and that would be it, that's a very, very basic roof which would be medieval I would think, that's how they would have done it then.

So when you come to repair an existing roof what's the process there?

Well if an existing roof's worn out you'd probably take what you call the top coat off, and then totally re-thatch, if you get bits underneath chimneys where it runs off the corner of your chimney and you end up getting a gully all the way down through where the rain's gone in then you open it up normally, pin it back and then you let in what we call a lock-up, which means we're locking it up in underneath all the way up; or, what they used to do years ago was the local farm labourer who would have been thatching the ricks, would have come along before winter come in and just stuck some great big rick patches all over it, and they worked, they would work for two or three years that would, and then they'd take them off and if it wasn't gone that bad they'd do it again, but you can't generally patch on patches, its time to have it done then really.

So if you were going to do a proper job on one slope or half a slope what kind of thickness of thatch will you be taking off? And how much would you be putting on?

Well it will wear back so he's worn back from probably 14 inches to about seven or eight, it goes back into where your spars are, the fixing that goes on it, when the reed wares back in and that starts showing, that takes the water in, so that's the time to do it, so you just take that off and it probably only that thick then, six, eight inches, and that comes off and then that coat underneath should be reasonably good; if the wet's got through then you need to repair that and make that undercoat sound again and then that will take all your spars on the new coat, when you've done that you put it back another 14 inches, so your depth, every time it's recoated, should be 14, 16 inches; and the undercoat or the base coats are the ones that stay there all the time, and it might be two or three on this one, because of the pitch of it, and you won't alter it, when this one wears

out they'll just strip this one off and put another one over the top, especially it being wheat reed.

Its like going Tesco's now, just go into the warehouse, its all on the shelves and you buy it, that's down to the farmers getting their act together, which is great, its great for us, 'cos when I started you used to have to go and help your local farmer to harvest their reed and that was the only way you could get it, you know: unless you went and helped them you didn't have any chance of buying it.

So you bought the reed straight from the farmer?

Usually, yeah, you knew two or three farmers and you knew when they were doing it and you went and helped them do it, so then you got first chance of buying it, you know, you knew roughly what you were going to use that year, so you'd order so many bundles and they generally looked after it for you, but its not quite the same any more, comes in big bales now.