

Roger Hill

Growing wheat reed for thatch.

We usually start tilling around the end of the first week of October, then we always make sure the ground is the correct level of lime and we always use a compound fertilizer, no nitrogen, so we get all those levels right and then we shut the gate until next spring. The other thing that we do during the winter months, if it gets really proud, if we have a very mild winter we'll actually import a number of sheep and thus you actually graze the whole crop then, to keep it down, because I don't want a crop at the end of April looking very forward, I want it looking really miserable.

So the sheep are bringing it back?

So the sheep are actually bringing it back. But once that is done you're literally going then till... we start cutting around the 12th of July and that is around the 12th and that is one of my main jobs, it's my job to go around to see which field we're going to next, you know, that's the Old Man's job, but it's a job that, well let's say I wouldn't need to be paid to do it - it's the most wonderful feeling, because in October you tilled a little grain that's a quarter of an inch long, and you've seen that come through; and I can walk through the fields and I just put my arms out, I just close my eyes and it's the most therapeutic thing - if you've had troubles in this yard, if you go out and walk the fields at night or of an evening, and you've got the sun on your back and it's the most wonderful feeling, you know, it's a really great feeling, and you know darn well that by a week's time that we're going to have the binders in and its all going to be stoked up and it's a really, really lovely feeling; it is true, I just can't say enough about it really, I really cherish that time of year.

So you've got it stoked up in your fields?

We've got it stoked up, the old saying is you hear three church bells, so it could be a fortnight plus one day, if you see what I mean, that's the old saying, and rule of thumb it ain't vary far out - so that's what determines us when we can cart it off to the barn.

On the top of the machine you have your reed comber, that actually does what it says, it combs the reed, it thrashes the reed on the ear end, where the grains to, but it thrashes with metal spikes and they're going round at a terrific pace. And then it gets passed through two of these, 'cos you must get the grain out of the ear, that is the real optimum job of the

machine;, and when it's done that on the other side of the machine there's exactly the same principle but its combing out the butt end which takes off all the straw, all the flag off the reed so that when its on the roof its all taken away, 'cos if you had any flag left on it on the roof that's what would hold the dampness that rots the actual reed side of the product you see; that continues straight through the machine down out the other end and through what we call a trusser which makes it into the small bundle of reed, that then gets put into, we put it into bundles of 50 and, what we call, make a bale which then gets delivered to the thatcher on site.