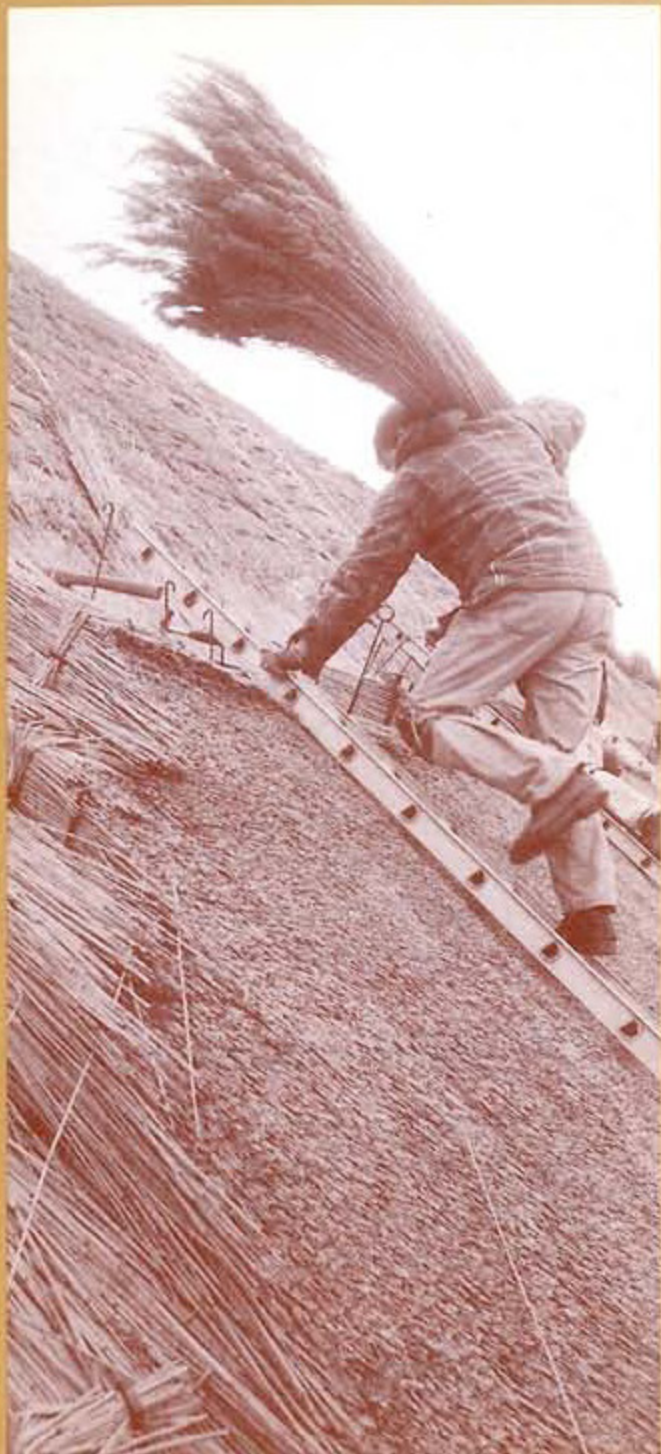


# Reed



## 'Norfolk Reed' Roofing Today

**A guide to the benefits of  
thatching with reed**



This leaflet is for anyone planning to build in a rural or village location. It provides guidance for those who are interested in using thatch as a roofing material for new properties as well as conversions and renovations.

'Norfolk Reed' is a term used to describe *Phragmites australis*, a wetland plant found extensively throughout Britain where it grows naturally in marshlands. The term is also used to describe a technique of thatching long associated with thatching durability. Originally, it was associated with roofs thatched in reeds from or close to the Norfolk marshes where the tradition of reed thatching in Britain began.

### Why Use 'Norfolk Reed' For Thatching?

For centuries, 'Norfolk Reed' has been synonymous with quality in thatching. British-grown reeds are still available and sought after to-day because of their unique qualities which include:



- **Durability**
- **Versatile application**
- **High standards of finish and appearance**

Other benefits include:

- It is a naturally occurring, renewable resource
- It is a British product which supports the rural economy
- A thatched roof fits well in the rural landscape
- The harvesting of reed maintains nationally important wildlife habitats





### **Does Reed Make A Durable Roofing Material?**

Good quality reed correctly installed on a roof of an appropriate design should last a minimum of fifty years. There are many examples throughout East Anglia of roofs lasting well over seventy years and in rare circumstances, good thatching can last over a hundred years. Climatic and micro-climatic conditions affect the durability of thatch so it is advisable to talk to an experienced local thatcher about these factors in any given location. Although there has been some concern that the quality of reed in East Anglia has declined due to poor water quality, national research has shown that this is unfounded. Good quality reed depends primarily on good reedbed management.

### **What Is The Best Material For Ridge-capping?**

The best traditional ridge-capping in Britain is made from sedge (*Cladium mariscus*), a plant which grows alongside reed in East Anglia. A good ridge-cap can last at least 20 years and often longer. Sedge is associated with 'Norfolk Reed' because of its excellent durability.

### **Is It A Good Insulating Material?**

The insulative value of thatch over other roofing forms has long been recognised. It is naturally energy-efficient and there is little need for extra insulation. The comfort of living under thatch in the severest of weathers is often lauded. Reed thatch also keeps a house cool in hot weather.



## **Is Thatching an Expensive Roofing Alternative?**

The cost of using reeds to roof your home need not be expensive if the roof is designed and detailed correctly. A well-designed thatch will prove durable, enhance village and other rural locations and gain approval from locals and planners alike. Seek advice in the early design stages both on cost options and on the placement of features. As a general rule, the simpler the design, the lower the cost and the greater the durability.

## **Does Thatch Require Frequent Maintenance?**

Apart from the need to re-ridge the roof approximately every 20 years, a well installed reed roof requires little or no maintenance, unlike for example, some tiled roofs which can suffer badly in storm conditions.

## **Are There Economic Benefits To Using Thatch?**

Thatched properties often carry a premium against other local housing and the aesthetic appeal of thatch has proved to be enduring. 'New' thatched houses were built at the beginning of the nineteenth century and again extensively during the 1920's and 1930's. Much of the thatch applied to these 20's and 30's roofs was still in place at the end of the 1980's and almost all of them were thatched in 'Norfolk Reed'. As illustrated, thatch can be used to good effect on a wide range of buildings from domestic dwellings to boatsheds.





## **Is It Difficult To Insure A Thatched Building?**

There are specialist insurance companies which offer reasonable rates for thatch insurance when the building itself is sound and the thatch is installed and maintained correctly. Fire need not be a particular hazard if the building is constructed and maintained properly. Good thatch has an excellent storm performance rating, often out performing other roofing materials in severe conditions such as the 1987 storms.

## **What Are The Environmental Benefits Of Using Reed And Sedge?**

A healthy reedbed requires annual or biennial harvesting. This not only ensures a regular supply of good, strong reed and sedge for thatching but is essential for maintaining a wetland habitat of enormous conservation value. Many species of wildlife depend on reedbeds for survival including, for example, the bittern and the marsh harrier. Reedbeds also play a valuable role in maintaining good water quality by absorbing nutrients from the water and in flood conditions can store excess water efficiently. The creation of new reedbeds is therefore being encouraged throughout the U.K by a number of agencies.



## Where Can I Find Out About Skilled Thatchers ?



Organised courses training skilled thatchers have been available since the early 1960's. Skilled practising thatchers can be contacted through your local county Master Thatchers Association. If you have difficulty contacting your local branch, your Local Authority Planning Department or the Rural Development Commission will be able to help.

### Photography:

Norfolk County Council - front cover

Matthew Dane - page 1 and 4

ECN - page 2

Patrick Sutherland - page 3

Broads Authority - page 5

### For further information, please contact:

British Reed Growers Association,

c/o Francis Hornor,

Old Bank of England Court, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 4TA

Tel: 01603 629871

