



# The Hundred Parishes

## An introductory article about THATCH

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Thatch has been used as a roofing material for thousands of years. It was once common in rural areas because the material was cheap and readily available. Now, a thatched roof is much more expensive but the skill of the thatcher can still be seen throughout The Hundred Parishes. Just a few examples are pictured in this article.

This photo of Lantern Thatch in Clavering was taken in 2022.

A thatcher undertakes a five-year apprenticeship with a master thatcher before becoming a master thatcher himself.

Most properties in the UK use either long straw, wheat reed or water reed. Many thatched properties are listed and when re-thatching is needed there is a requirement to use the same type of material as before.



In medieval times wheat grew to nearly 6 feet tall, while today's modern farming methods produce shorter-stemmed wheat. This has weakened the straw and its longevity. Now specialist growers produce taller-stemmed varieties, grown especially for thatching.

There is some debate about the longevity of a thatched roof. To some extent, life expectancy relates to the material used, but it is also dependent on factors such as pitch, orientation and air circulation. A good thatch will typically last from 20 to 50 years, providing excellent insulation. The ridge, along the top of the roof, will last between 10 and 20 years, so requires more frequent attention.



Traditionally a new layer of material is laid over the seasoned roof; this is called "spar coating". The bundles of straw taken up onto the roof are called "yelms". Twisted hazel sticks known as "spars" or "gads" are used to secure the thatch in place. Here, local master thatcher Mark Treadwell is seen securing long straw on a cottage in Ickleton.



The photos below show work in progress on Well Cottage in Rickling Green (on the left) and Church Cottage at Brent Pelham on the right.



On the left is 16th-century Thatched Cottage in Little Hadham.

The Olde Thatch in Thorley, shown below, also dates from the 16th century.







Partly-thatched Ash Tree House in High Roding dates from around 1600 AD and is pictured on the left.

Hempstead's Dick Turpin Cottage, from the 17th or 18th century, is shown below.



The Hundred Parishes has a good number of thatched or partly-thatched pubs including The Woodman in Nuthampstead, pictured on the right.



The Spotted Dog in High Easter, shown below, incorporates a 17th-century thatched cottage into the pub / restaurant.





Ashdon claims to have the only local village hall with a thatched roof, shown on the right.

A thatcher may mark his work by placing a distinctive feature on the ridge. Ashdon's village hall has two hares. Please see the separate article on Straw Finials.



The 16th-century Thatcher's pub at Hatfield Heath, pictured on the left, is appropriately situated on a road that was once part of the route for horse-drawn cartage of wheat from Suffolk to London.

In the parish of Elmdon, the Hamlet Church at Duddenhoe End was once a barn.

As can be seen in this photo, it still has a thatched roof.



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