



Fact Sheet 1

An Introduction To Thatch



For those new to owning, or contemplating buying a thatched home for the first time, there are inevitably many questions you may wish to ask. In this fact sheet we have tried to answer the most common queries and give you an idea as to the sorts of questions you might want to ask prior to purchasing a thatched property.

How long will the thatch last?

The life expectancy of a thatched roof will vary according to several factors. These factors include: regular maintenance, the quality of materials used, the skill of the Thatcher, the proximity of trees, pollutants in the environment and even the geographical location as a high humidity level shortens the life-span of the thatching materials.

The following figures, allowing five years either way, are a reasonable guide to any thatched roof which is not exposed to great extremes.

Water Reed (also known as Norfolk Reed)	50-60 years.
Combed Wheat	25-40 years
Long Straw	15-25 years.

Ridges, whatever their design or type, have a life-span of 10-15 years.

Fire Safety.

Fortunately, thatch fires are nowhere near as common as some would have us believe. These days there are fire retardant applications which can be put on to the thatch and to the internal timber work which further reduce the risk of fire. Some common sense tips on preventing the risk of fire are as follows:

- Ensure that the electrics are tested every 10 years by a professional electrician.
- Avoid wiring in the loft area or ensure that any wiring is housed in a verminproof.
- environment.

- Have chimneys swept annually.
- Do not light bonfires near to the thatched property.

Listed Buildings.

More than 75% of all thatched properties in England and Wales are "listed" by English Heritage. This means that they are put onto a register and graded according to historical or architectural importance. There are three types of grading:

- Grade 1: Buildings of exceptional interest (2% of all listed buildings)
- Grade 11*: Particularly important buildings of more than special interest (approximately 4% of the overall total)
- Grade 11: These are buildings of special interest which warrant every possible effort being made to preserve them.

As with any building, planning permission is required for major alterations, but in addition, you must also apply for "listed building consent" if the alterations affect the character of the building.

It is possible to get financial help if you are the owner of a listed building. Grants for the repair of Grade 1 and Grade 11* may be available from English Heritage. Local authorities have a much wider scope and are not restricted to outstanding buildings. Grant aid is made available by County and District Councils and you should contact your local authority for further information.

Purchasing a Thatched Property.

Below is a list of questions that it would be helpful to have answered if you are buying a thatched home.

- When was the roof last thatched?
- Has there been any repair work carried out over the past 10 years?
- When was the ridge re-thatched?
- When was the roof last surveyed?
- Has the thatch had any coatings applied to it?
- Have any of the roof timbers been replaced or repaired?
- Is the chimney lined?
- Has there been any electrical wiring carried out recently in the roof area? If not, when was it last checked?
- Who was the Thatcher who carried out the work?(sight of an invoice would be helpful)
- If open fires are in use, when was the chimney last swept?
- Is there a spark arrester ? When was it last serviced?

- Are there any types of fire resistant barrier?

Whether you are an owner or a prospective owner of a thatched property the Thatched Owners Group can offer you expert advice and practical help. Members receive advice on insurance, mortgages, roof surveys, re-thatching, property renovation, fire prevention applications and fire safety products, thatched property sales and much more.

Membership costs £95, which is a one-off payment.

For further details telephone **01406 330007** or visit our web site : www.thatched-group.com.

We wish you many happy years living under thatch.