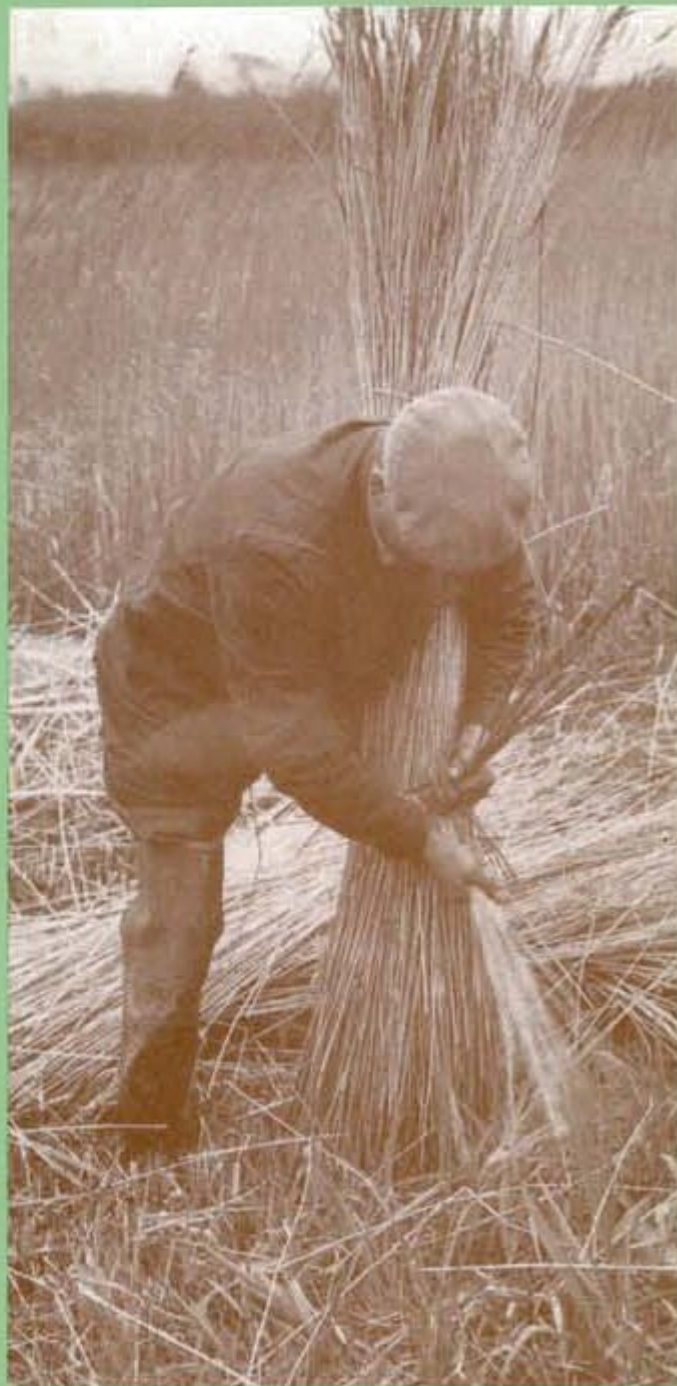


Reed



Buying and Selling Reed

A description of reed qualities

Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide information about reed as a product used for thatching. It describes reed quality and generalised standards useful for reed growers, thatchers or buyers interested in the value of reed as a roofing material.

Reed shape and quality vary considerably from year to year and within the same bed. This leaflet describes the variations and provides a useful guide to the general types and appearance of reed available for thatching.

There is only one plant commonly called water reed, grown for thatching in Great Britain. It grows naturally on freshwater marshlands or estuarine salt marshes. These areas are often



of great value to wildlife particularly birds where they provide suitable nesting habitat for Marsh Harrier, Bittern and Bearded Tit

Many reed beds in Britain have disappeared as a result of land drainage or development. Therefore it is vitally important to retain the few remaining areas and manage them in a manner sympathetic to the needs of nature conservation. Fortunately, one of the best ways to achieve this is to cut the

reed beds in alternate winters and remove the material from the marsh a process which is ideally suited to the reed cutting industry

Regular low cutting and clearing prevents a gradual build up of dead material, therefore ensuring a strong growth of young reed shoots the following spring and producing a more vigorous reed. Neglected reed beds tend to dry out as the dead litter accumulates. Freshwater areas may even disappear under a succession of scrub and young trees, so a cycle of cutting benefits both reed and wildlife alike.

Timing of the cut is very important. The winter cutting season extends from late December to mid April. Reed cut early may be too green or leafy and therefore not suitable for thatching. Late cutting disturbs nesting birds and will damage the young reed shoots of the following winters harvest. Wet weather should also be avoided as damp reed will not store and soon become of no value for thatching.

Reed quality may vary within a bed so it is important to harvest areas with the strongest stems for selling. Other less commercial areas should be cut or burnt to promote better growth in future years. Many nesting birds require dead standing reeds, though, so it is very important to leave some areas uncut each year.

As a roofing material reed has good insulating properties, keeping the house warm in winter and cool in summer. It is also a good sound insulation material. Good quality reed is the longest lasting form of thatch.

Reed Qualities

Reed Length (a description)

Short reed should be between 3ft(91.4cm) and 4ft(1.2m).

Medium reed should be between 4ft(1.2m) and 5ft 6"(1.7m).

Long reed should be above 5ft 6"(1.7m) with the majority of the reed around 6ft(1.8m). Any reeds above 6ft 6"(2m) should be notified to the buyer.

Reed Shape (a description)

The common terms for reed shape are :-

Tapered, Straight (meaning cylindrical) and Big Topped.

Tapered Reed :- There are of course degrees of taper and it is useful to discover this as :-

- Where too much taper exists this can contribute to slippage on some roofs and designs of roofs.
- Where the pitch of the roof is slack and it is important to avoid "layback" of the reed and or over tightening of the reed.

N.B. Remember Tapered reed particularly when short in length will affect the coverage rate.

Cylindrical Reed ; - or reed with just a little taper is often sought for large expanses of unbroken roof areas. It is more desirable when associated with good length i.e., medium or long. Also liked for slacker pitches.

Big Topped Reed :- is often required for valleys and roofs in difficult drying conditions. It is most sought after when long and coarse - which are the associated qualities for helping difficult roof performance.

N.B. This reed is often confused with bent topped reed which may or may not be "big topped". Some thatchers are quite happy to take bent topped reed as long as they are made aware of the other accompanying qualities.

Twisted and Dog-Legged Reed ; - has very few favoured applications and is mostly not wanted

Reed Stems

Sometimes thatchers require a specific butt type. The butts are described in terms of :-

Reed Stem Diameter

This is important to thatchers when either finish is important or a coarse reed is required for durability purposes. As a guide reeds of a diameter of 1/4"(5.6mm) and over are regarded as coarse. Reeds of a diameter of 3/16"(4.8mm) are considered as medium and reeds of around 1/8"(3.2mm) are considered fine. (If reeds are in excess of 3/8"(9.5mm) in diameter this should be notified to the buyer).

The closeness of the reeds forming the bunch butt end

Close reeds are required where finish is important.

Slightly open reeds are preferred by many in difficult drying situations where the openness improves air circulation. Excessive dog legged butt ends are not favoured by thatchers and their presence should be notified to a buyer.

Reed Strength

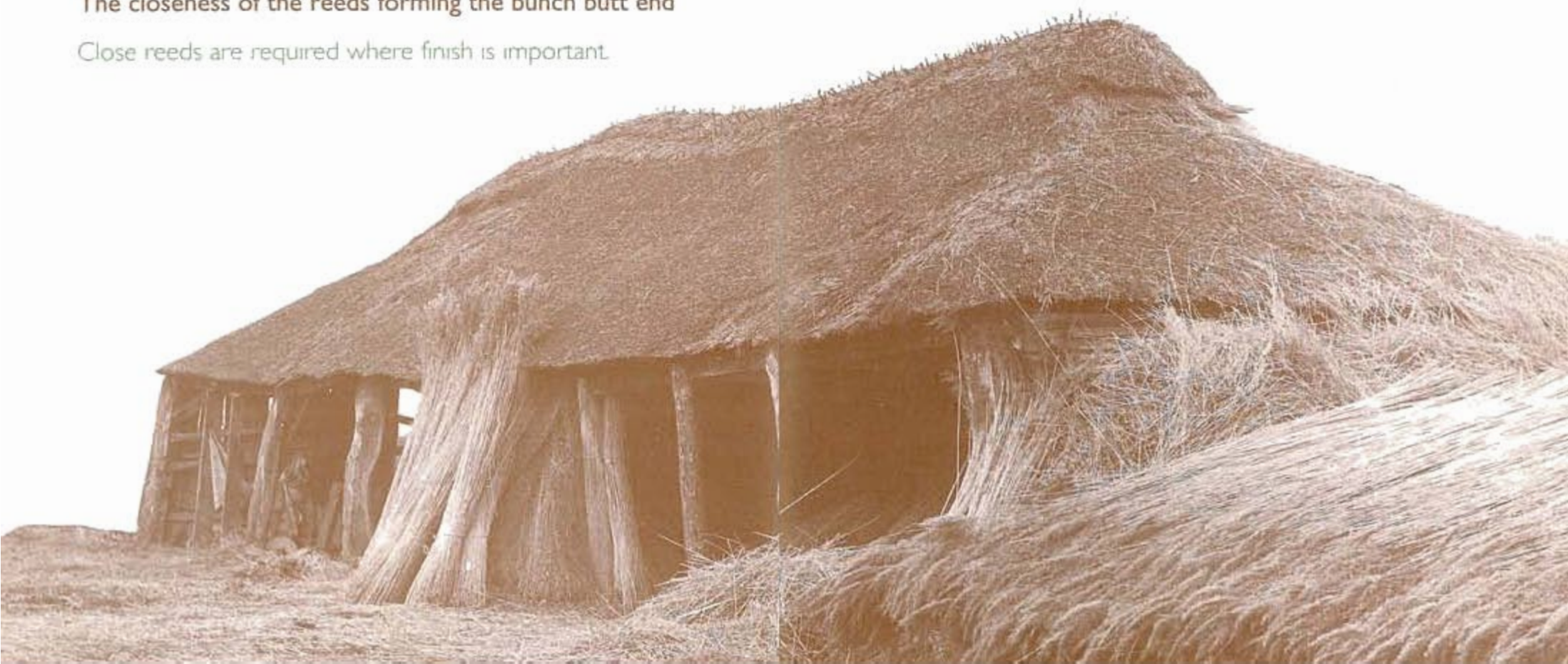
Reed strength is of course a major factor in thatched roof performance. This should not be confused with hardness when the reed may also be brittle. The reed should have a fibrous quality and should not break easily.

Reed Colour

Reeds come in a variety of shades. It is not known that colour has on it's own an affect on performance. However reeds should have a good bright clean appearance. Good reed often has a glazed appearance at the butt. Dark dull reeds are often brittle, (but do not confuse with reeds with mud covered butts.) Very pale reed is sometimes lightweight, this should be checked when it occurs for weakened stems

Note ; A reed bunch is made up of hundreds of reed stems, all will vary greatly and show differing degrees of the qualities discussed in this leaflet.

Reeds can only be considered as a bunch by taking an average of the reed stem condition throughout the bunch.



When Buying Reed

- 1 Ensure reeds meet the B.R.G.A. specification. Make the seller aware you know and understand these qualities.
- 2 Be clear in your ordering, understand the reed gradings set.
- 3 Quantities required will depend on a whole number of factors. Be accurate in your roof measurements particularly where complex shapes are involved.
- 4 Reed qualities will affect reed performance. Position geographically and topographically should be considered when ordering a reed type.

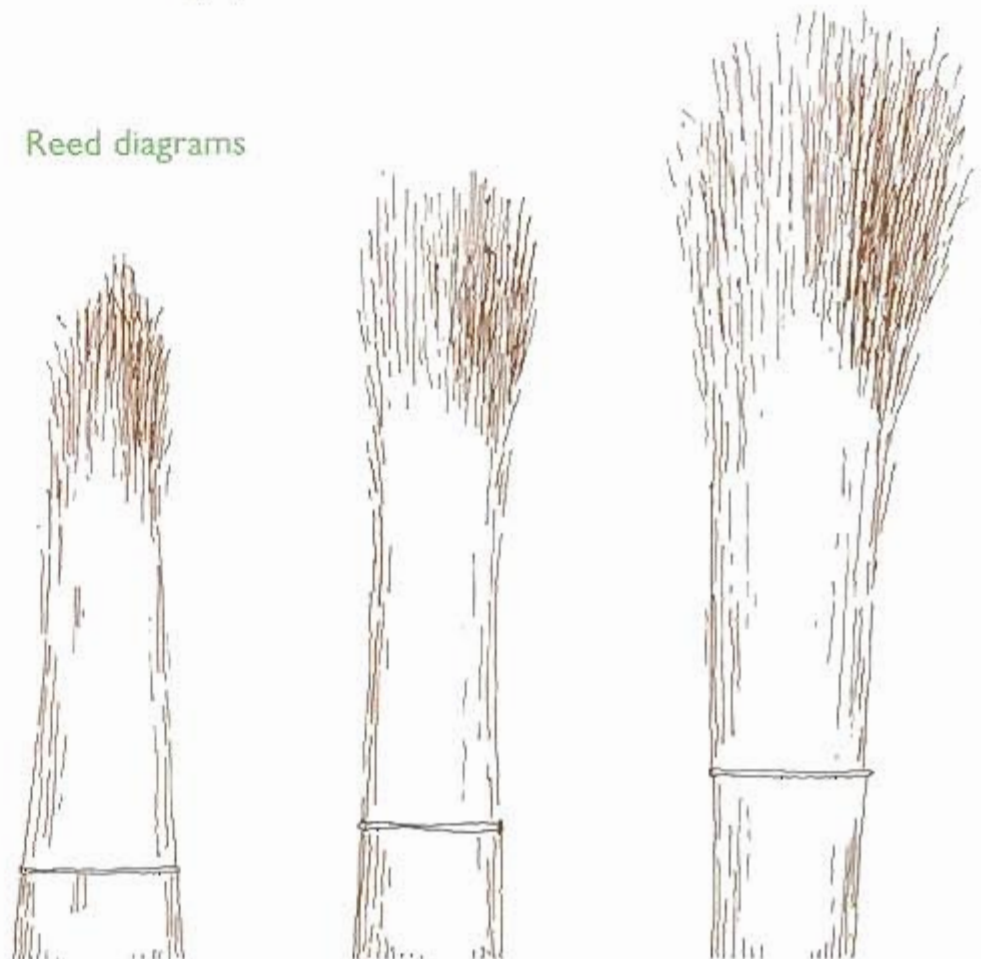


- 8 Unload reed keeping as dry as possible
- 9 Stack and sheet correctly.
- 10 Do not stack any wet - even slightly damp - reed into a stack.
- 11 Do not stack directly onto the ground. Preferably leave an air gap of at least 3" (7.6cm) under the stack by laying on pallets etc.,
- 12 Store reeds for long periods in a good open environment. Do not enclose the stack. Thatch to make water tight if preferred.

When Selling Reed

- 1 Ensure reeds meet the B.R.G.A. specification and grades set.
- 2 Establish that the purchaser understands these specifications and grades.
- 3 Ensure that you understand the purchasers requirements.

Reed diagrams



- 5 Where very tapered reeds are concerned, remember volume is decreased therefore more bunches per any given area to any given thickness will be required.
- 6 You cannot therefore always assume a consistent number of bunches to any given area. Shape and length will always affect coverage rate.
- 7 If you are not specific in your ordering you cannot complain if the reed type does not meet your requirements.



- 4 Tie with a non degradable material.
 - 5 Reeds should be tied between 9"(23cm) and 15"(38cm) from the butt at a point suitable to the bunch shape and length ensuring the reeds are securely held. (See diagrams)
 - 6 The reeds should be a minimum 24"(61cm) round at the point of the tie.
 - 7 Ensure reed is not cut too green (early) and with too much flag.
 - 8 Ensure the reed contains no more than 10% of other acceptable types of material i.e., marsh grass etc., which if present should be evenly distributed through out the bunch.
 - 9 Ensure the reed contains no unacceptable materials i.e., materials which gap the reeds or bind the reeds together or will affect it's performance.
 - 10 Avoid mixing different extremes of reed type and extreme differences in length of reed in the same bunch.
 - 11 Reeds should be dressed from a minimum point of 2ft(60.9cm) from the butt end.
 - 12 Ensure the reed is loaded dry and correctly.
 - 13 No bundles should include short reeds which are less than 50% of the average reed length.
- The British Reed Growers' Association aims to promote the reed growing industry and its products. Through its membership, the BRGA coordinates reed growing practices and marketing, to ensure a high quality product at a competitive price.



Photography :
R. Denyer (page 6),
R. Flowers (page 8)

For more information or
advice, please contact :
British Reed Growers'
Association

c/o Francis Hornor & Son
Old Bank of England Court
Queen Street
Norwich Norfolk NR2 4TA
Tel. 0603 629871



Broads Authority