

Combed Wheat Reed vs Water Reed Rambler Cottage Bersted

The appearance of Combed Wheat Reed and Water Reed can be extremely confusing and the appearance of the building is more to do with the number of layers of historic thatch rather than the product.

We would be happy to arrange site visits to any of the buildings below to see and explain further the appearance.

If Water Reed and Combed Wheat Reed were the same diameter you couldn't tell the difference between them. The Combed Wheat Reed (straw) is more golden when first thatched but following the first winter both would be the same silvery grey colour.

Usually in our area the more "tea cosy", fatter, softer round look that is associated with straw is produced by many layers of old thatch on top of each other and not the type of thatch used on the top layer.

Rambler Cottage had this softer, rounder, "tea cosy" look before the fire (the back was at least a metre thick) - the top layer was Combed Wheat Reed fixed onto older layers of thatch underneath.

The bottom layer of thatch, visible from the inside of the loft, was Water Reed and several hundred years, old possibly from Pagham Harbour or the Rife flood plain in Shripney Lane (before tidal defences were built the Rife would have flooded over at high tide, evidence of this was found during the archeological survey).

When Rambler Cottage is thatched after the fire whatever material (Combed Wheat Reed or Water Reed) is used the appearance will be different to its pre fire appearance as it will only be 350mm thick as it will be a single coat as first thatched. However it would look exactly the same as when it was first thatched hundreds of years ago.

After it's been thatched several times (100 years plus) it will look similar to its pre fire appearance, as the layers will be built up.

The new thatch will change the 'character' of the building, but it is not the type of thatch used, but the thickness of one coat rather than the remains of many creating a fatter look.

The use of Water Reed is considered to be more original as that is how it was when it was originally built.

I have attached some pictures that may help understand the difference between materials and appearance due to buildup of layers.

Whichever material is used we would thatch it in a rounded style as much as we can, we will round the eaves and the hips to create as much rounded look as possible but it will only be one coat thick.

Chris Tomkins
Master Thatcher



Several coats of old thatch with Water Reed on the surface (Coates Cottage West Burton)



One coat of Water Reed with a traditional flush ridge, softened as much as possible with only one coat (School Lane Fittleworth)



One coat of Water Reed with a traditional flush ridge, softened as much as possible with only one coat (School Lane Fittleworth)



One coat of Water Reed , flush ridge (Yeomans Bignor)



One coat of Combed Wheat Reed (Wepham)



Extension is one coat of Combed Wheat Reed main house several coats of Combed Wheat Reed (Tangmere)



Combed Wheat Reed but many layers thick creating that fatter softer look. Note it is the many layers creating this look rather than the top layers type of thatch (North Bersted Street Bognor Regis)