

Doyle M (1844)

CYCLOPEDIA OF PRACTICAL HUSBANDRY, RURAL AFFAIRS IN GENERAL. BY MARTIN DOYLE, London 1844

Stones and bricks are often too scarce and expensive for the poorer classes of farmers and labourers; but happily for them, **clay walls, if properly constructed, and well plastered and dashed on the outside with lime-mortar, are cheap, durable, and warm.** The mode of preparing mud walls is as follows:

P161A sufficient quantity of cohesive clay, free from any stones, being collected, the labourer digs it thoroughly, and renders it as fine as possible; when well saturated with water, he works it with his shovel until it acquires the consistence and toughness of dough.

After lying eight or ten days, it should be again wetted sufficiently for use, and a small quantity of sound chopped straw (for if this be long and stringy, the surface of the wall will not be easily dressed and polished afterwards) is to be intermixed through the mass. The foundations of the walls are best laid with stone, or brick, two feet or more in depth, and two feet in thickness. On these, the mortar, being sufficiently turned and worked, should be placed in courses of two or two and a half feet in height. At this level it has been recommended by a recent writer, who himself attached great importance to the invention, to bed into the mortar at the angles, single or double ties or braces, of any timber, provided its scantling be not less than two inches and a half, and to pin them into the walls with pegs about nine inches long.

...Before the winter rains set in, the roof should be put on with double collars, and thatched with a considerably projecting eave, for the protection of the walls: walls left unthatched, soon become materially injured. Common farm-labourers are in many places very expert in building these walls, and smoothing them at both sides perfectly with spades. If the plastering and dashing, or either, be carefully preserved on the outside, such walls will last for a long series of years. The floor should be laid on a stone foundation, as well as the partition walls, and covered with tiles, bricks, or clay and lime mortar, well tempered and evenly laid.

Thatching is often very defectively executed. The thatcher, in order to save

the labour of his hands, allows the straw to be almost rotten before he uses it, instead of wetting and pressing it well as he requires it. Wheat or rye straw, not beaten by the flail, but left in a reedy state, is better than any other kind of straw; but the true Irish thatcher will not admit this. He asserts, from ignorance of his trade, that reedy straw soon decays from exposure to the weather — that its unfitness for compression causes it to fail — that it cannot be made to lie as close as barley straw, which is generally preferred by those who do not understand the English method of preparing strong straw, by combing off the short straws, and lapping the layers of thatch, (tied down at narrow intervals by twine to the rafters,) so that every drop of water quickly runs off as from a bundle of quills.

Wheat or rye straw is much more durable for thatch than spring corn straw, and resists the wet much better on account of the silex contained in it, which gives that varnished quality that enables it to throw off moisture. Barley and oat straw imbibe moisture like a sponge. Wheat and rye being sown in the autumn have longer time to absorb the silicious matter from the soil into which they push their roots often to a prodigious extent.

Thatch properly put on by an experienced hand, will last four or five times longer than the coat of straw, beaten, pressed, and half-rotted, in the usual Irish fashion. The English mode of fastening down the thatch on the ridge with bent twigs, fancifully arranged, is very neat. Where this is inconvenient, a coat of mortar on the ridge, with pointed elevations of the same substance at the extremities, in the form of gigantic comfits, as they are pasted over many of the cottages of Forth and Bargy, in the county of Wexford, and white-washed annually, has a very clean and decorative appearance.

In many parts of England walls of mud and straw are used about the farmer's house and yard, with a thatched eve; they last some time, if not exposed to severe frost, which soon crumbles them away; at best they are not very durable, and are much less permanent than wooden walls or paling, where timber is abundant and cheap.