

# GREAT BOWDEN HERITAGE & ARCHAEOLOGY



# MUD

## Housing the poor

After the Roman period and their influence in building dwindled the new rural dwellings and outbuildings were built predominately of wood. Very little now survives except the darkened earth patches, indicators of post holes etc. We have not found verifiable evidence of Anglo-Saxon and Medieval domestic buildings in the village although we know from documentary evidence and from pottery sherds that people lived here at that time.



It is also very difficult to find evidence of the housing of the rural poor right up to the second half of the 19th century when the mass production of bricks made brick and therefore enduring buildings possible and widespread. Stone had for the most part been used for houses of the more well to do villagers.

In earlier times we know that the material mostly used for the houses of the poor was mud. Easily available and easy to put up and to repair. Unfortunately, other than possible stone or pebble foundations to the walls, the mud walls and thatched roof just disappear back into the landscape and become invisible. There are a few examples of mud walls within old cottages but as far as we are aware mud barns have now disappeared from the parish with the redevelopment of the last barn in Sutton Road in recent years.

The mud walls that we see today are not medieval as they would have needed repair over the years. The long mud wall between Rectory House and Buckminster Close, possibly part of the boundary of the medieval manor enclosure was extensively renovated as late as the 1980s.

Anglo Saxon housing for ordinary people was mainly timber with thatch and this continued into the early medieval period with possibly some cob walls introduced particularly in areas like Bowden where clay was easily available.

The Black Death around 1340 saw a huge reduction in the size of the peasant population and meant that workers, now in greater demand, could themselves demand proper wages. As always more money meant better housing and the timber framed building appeared. With woven wattle wall panels and covered in daub this type of building became a more substantial and comfortable place to live.



*Probably Great Bowden's last mud barn, photo taken in 2002. The barn was demolished in 2017 for redevelopment.*

*Mud Barn in Nether Green, demolished about 2000*



## How to make your own mud walls (please note that GBHA haven't tried the following)

### Wattle & Daub

#### Ingredients:

For the wattles: timber framework, dry withies to fill,

For the daub: clay, soil, water, reinforced with dry straw, hair, or a mixture of these, lime plaster or lime wash, oxen optional.

#### Method:

**Make your framework** and tie in, weave or nail the withies to make a mesh. Make sure it is dry.

**Mix your daub** - traditionally this would have been done by walking oxen around in it. Add water as necessary (not too much) and leave to "temper". A little more water may be needed for the remix. **NB do not add the straw reinforcement until the second mix.**

**It takes 2 to daub.** Add handfuls of damp daub simultaneously from both sides and press into the wattle. This needs to be done quickly and should form a uniform layer. Once hardened the surface needs to be painted with lime plaster or lime wash.



### Mud walls

**Ingredients:** clay, soil and/or sand, water, long, dry straw, tarpaulin, human feet or oxen to mix.

**Method:** a) unfired bricks, b) mud rammed in-between shuttering or c) the favoured local method (Ros Willatts) clay layers 1½ ft deep. Add a layer of straw between layers. Trim straw once wall is dry.

Whatever method is used the wall needs "a good hat and pair of boots". Stone or cobbles for the base, thatch or tile/slate for the hat. Walls are about 2ft thick.

*Photo left shows damage to the mud wall where a tile is missing.*

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**Mud Facts: The oldest mud building known was built in Jericho 8,000BC, and 30% of the world's population still live in houses made of earth.**