

Heritage matters

Daubing Delights

- Sarah Partridge, from community-run Orchard Barn Environmental Education Centre at Ringshall, writes

The old daub is the best daub

Earlier this summer, a 'Wesides' timber frame house in Boxford was badly damaged by a supermarket home delivery van reversing against its front elevation, causing considerable damage. The owners, SPS Members, asked if I could reinstaate wattle and daub panels in their building which dates back to the 1400s - the timber frame being repaired by K.E. Jones & Son Limited based at Newton Green. Old daub is always the nicest to work with because it has weathered for centuries and reinstaates well so I approached this task with delight.

Building with the local landscape

When people ask me what I do, I frequently tell them I build with mud and sticks. There are many things about this medieval form of construction that I love. Not least its green credentials

'Wesides' House in Boxford under going repair

using a coppiced woodland product that supports traditional woodland management, and the low carbon footprint of digging one's own daub.

Harvesting the sticks

I visited Raydon Great Woods as I had estimated that I needed six hazel rods per panel and harvested four bundles of ten rods. The diameter varied from 1-2cm and the length needed to be as straight as I could find.

Close timber framing

Typically, our timber frame buildings in Suffolk comprise vertical wattles bound to three horizontal spars. The width of the panel varies according to the wealth of the person who had the house built and how much timber they could afford. The panels I reinstaated were 30-40cm wide.

Flexibility needed

Hazel is coppiced on a seven-year rotation and it was the young and still flexible rods that I needed as I wanted to 'spring' them into place. I also needed 18 shorter but stouter pieces for the horizontal spars.

Instructing the builders

The builders engaged on site agreed to save all the old daub they had taken out of the wall. So instead of dumping this in a skip, as often happens, this veteran building material was salvaged for my use. Tip number one, if you ever have to disturb a vintage wattle and daub panel, always keep the daub. You can re-use every last bit of it.

Uncovering the past

Protecting my eyes and using my experience and judgement, and wishing to retain as much building material as possible, I took my lump hammer to the old daub panels and smoothed it off

