

Chimneys in thatched properties

● *Wood burning or open fires in thatched properties present unique challenges for installers. In this issue's Technical Column Robert Burke of HETAS offers guidance on how to ensure chimneys installed in thatch comply with building regulations.*

THERE are around 60,000 thatched properties in the UK, many of them with open fires or wood burners" writes Robert Burke of HETAS. "This can present a challenge for installers, but it can be overcome by following the guidance in Part J to make sure the chimney complies with building regulations."

No more of a risk

"Statistically, homes with a thatched roof are no more likely to catch fire than those with conventional roofs if the owner is made aware and understands the risk of thatch fire. However, a thatched roof fire can be almost impossible to control and the results can be devastating."

"Thatch roof fires can be attributed to many causes including faulty electrical systems, bonfires or fireworks. However, Rob Norcott from the Thatching Advisory Services tells us that the main cause of thatch fires stems from chimneys used for wood burners, multi-fuel stoves or open fires, in the form of either heat transfer or ejected embers."

"Hot flue gases can transfer heat through the brickwork of the chimney, with thick beds of thatch against the chimney insulating the stack and preventing the release of high temperatures from the brickwork. Over time the thatch can become heated to the point where it will char or burn. This could be daunting for an installer,



Above, a detailed understanding of the Building Regulations is required.

but Part J of the building regulations offers adequate guidance on how to achieve a safe and compliant installation."

Distance from combustibles

"As thatch is flammable, a good place to start is the distance requirements from the chimney to combustible materials. Part J recommends that combustible material should be at least 200mm from the inside surface of a flue or fireplace recess, or 40mm from the outer surface of a masonry chimney or fireplace recess. Metal fixings in contact with combustible materials should be at least 50mm from the inside of the flue. On single chimneys it's unlikely that there'll be enough room to add a flue liner and maintain the required 200mm distance from the inside of the flue liner to the thatch. The only way to overcome this with a traditional lining system is to request that the thatch be cut away from

the chimney to provide an air gap."

Factory made systems

"The other option is to use a factory made system chimney which has been tested to European standards, with declared distances to combustible materials. A list of approved system chimneys can be found in the HETAS Guide, including ones with stainless steel or ceramic liners surrounded by high performance insulation and a stainless steel outer casing. Typical distances to combustibles are usually in the range from 50mm to 150mm, and it's possible to line a small two brick chimney stack with a 150mm system chimney."

Flexible liners

"On larger chimneys where the distance from the flue liner to the outside of the brickwork is greater than 200mm, Part J permits combustible materials to touch the outside of the brickwork. However, if you're relining the chimney make sure that the 200mm distance is maintained on all sides of the chimney. This is especially applicable to flexible lining systems which can snake within the chimney. In addition



Above, thatch removed from around the chimney.

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to the issues relating to Heat Transfer, Part J also gives guidance relating to chimney heights, which will help to reduce the risks associated with ejected embers or sparks.”

Available training

“To meet demand for qualified installers who can install safe chimney systems, HETAS has worked with the British



Above, once alight thatch fires spread quickly.



Above, there are 60,000 thatched properties in the UK.

Flue and Chimney Manufacturers Association and leading system chimney manufacturers to develop a systems chimney course. The H006 course lasts one day, including practical elements, and will focus on the safety, design and installation of factory made systems within a property. HETAS is also supporting the pilot of a specialist apprenticeship programme for chimney engineers, which has been developed in conjunction with the National

Association of Chimney Engineers and Construction Skills. HETAS also works closely with the Thatching Advisory Service to raise awareness of fire safety in thatched properties.”

Further information is available from HETAS at www.hetas.co.uk and Thatching Advisory Service at www.thatchingadvisoryservice.co.uk

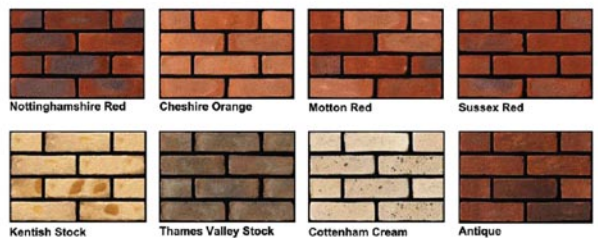
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