



The Canal Windmill's Thatched Cottage

For quite sometime I had thought about ways and means of doing a thatched roof. Many hours were spent looking at YouTube and how other people had trialed their methods — but nothing caught my fancy.

Some were reasonable, others were leaving a lot to the imagination. Being rather a stickler for “visual accuracy” — within reason, of course — I thought that I could do better. However, it was some time before I had a chance to start this project.

Then I saw the YouTube video of “Kingston Regis” by John and Jane Jacobs — <http://www.kingstonregis.com/index.shtml>. This was a OO9 layout, which is the scale that my own railway is built to — and I thought to myself — “At last, someone has shown me what I am after!”.

Even better, there was an article on “Thatched Roofs” by the same Jane Jacobs in the July 2014 issue of *Railway Modeller* — fantastic. For those of you who have not seen the article, Jane uses four-ply knitting wool on a card base (*see photo below courtesy of Railway Modeller*).



Jane Jacobs model as shown in the July 2014 Railway Modeller

Then “lo and behold”, another thatching article appeared in the January 2015 issue of *Railway Modeller*. This is an excellent article that goes into a great deal of instruction on creating an excellent thatched roof — here the author is using

Plumber's Hemp, a product used for wrapping around threads on pipe connections to alleviate leaks.

Now, the problem with this was that I could find no local Trade Plumbing suppliers who stock it any more because of all of the “new” products available to do the same thing as the hemp! Looking on ebay, I did find a supplier in the UK, but the quantity for sale was rather small in relation to the total cost of the item plus the postage to OZ!

Finally, I went back to my original thoughts on using the “old style” felt carpet underlay, which material I had a good supply. Of course, now-a-days we use rubber carpet underlay — a judicious search of “kerb side cleanups” will often produce the discarded “treasure” — if you are lucky, of course!

THE BUILDING PROJECT

So — to the building! Apart from the thatched roof, another task I wanted to trial on the cottage was creating a “stucco” finish to the outside walls of the building.

When you are building with the Linka tiles there is often need to fill air bubbles or more usually, the joins. No matter how careful with your casting, gaps are more than likely to happen with the “fingers” of the tile joins. I think all of us use a thin mixture of casting plaster to fill these areas, by whatever methods. I find that the mix “goes off” quite quickly — so I discarded the idea of using just the plaster.

I had a talk to the local Artists Supply shop to see what they suggested. I was initially thinking of using an Acrylic Gesso which is often used like an “undercoat” — also it can be used for “sculpting” areas on the painting canvas, before applying the colour, giving a raised surface.

Instead, the assistant suggested using Winsor & Newton Modelling Paste. This dries to a lightweight and flexible matt finish, it can be sanded or carved once dry, also the Modelling Paste can be mixed with acrylic paints or used on its own and painted

after it has dried. Layer it on with a painting knife or with a stiff brush. Holds brush strokes and detail of work from wet to dry, and does not crack or shrink.

I found this gave me the result I wanted, however you do have to be careful when applying around windows and door areas. If a slip is made it is easily removed with clean water on a cotton bud.

My suggestion is NOT to apply thickly, instead give the walls 2 coats of the Modelling Paste, allowing each coat to thoroughly dry before applying the next coat. When the first coat dries it is reasonably thin in coverage and the underlying brick/stone mortar joints can be discerned (this can be beneficial as described further on), a thicker second coat can then be applied where your texture can be controlled to your design idea.



I have purposely made my walls quite rough and lumpy (see photo above) because I wanted the appearance of a very old building. Once the paste has thoroughly dried through, it can then be painted to whatever colour scheme using your favourite paint medium.



As mentioned earlier, I had decided to leave patches of the walls showing some of the underlying brickwork, especially around doors

and windows — I wanted these to appear as “distressed and crumbled” where the stucco had broken away over the years (see photo bottom of previous column).

THE THATCHED ROOF

You will see from the photos that I have not completely covered the roof area, instead I have only a ridge pole made of balsa and then some mounting board covering about two thirds of the roof area. Also, I had the mounting board going to the EDGES ONLY of my building and NOT OVER THE EDGES as you would normally, allowing for the eaves.



Looking back I have no idea why I did it this way, because I then had to put in a support for the chimney in the middle of the roof. Doing it again I would completely cover the roof area with the mounting board — “old age is catching up”!

When using the felt underlay, initially it is quite thick (15-20mm). I gently pull the felt apart in the middle where a strengthening string “fishnet” is applied. The felt will divide into 2 layers, giving you a manageable piece for the roof thickness.



I chose to have my thatch going over the edge of the building's END roof with about a 5mm awning, rather than having it finishing flush at the edges (which also can be quite normal with thatching where a stone capping appears at the top of the end walls).

However, at the SIDES it is quite a different matter and the thatch will extend quite a ways out over the window spaces. Here I had an overhang of about 15-20mm all along the edges to allow for the thatch forming an arch over each window (see photos below).



To be able to support the "arch thatch" I formed a piece of thin plastic to the curvature I needed and glued this to the area above each window. To make the plastic retain its shape, I bent the plastic around a suitable cylindrical object and put rubber bands around to hold the plastic in place — then poured boiling hot water over the plastic; then immediately under the cold water tap. You will find this will now retain the curve permanently. This is an old trick used by military and aero modellers!

When cutting the roof felt for these window arches I allowed about a 5-7mm overhang width for either side of each window, and cutting back into the felt about 20mm. These measurements are up to the individual because it will depend on how much overhang you wish to display, also the "shape" above each window will also govern measurements!

I advise you to "go slowly" for these stages — cut and trial fit the felt at each stage, rather than cutting the entire lot in one hit. I found the felt has a tendency to "creep" and 1 window space was incorrect!

When happy with the (thatch) roof shape, glue the felt onto the underlying mounting board. I used

PVA white glue, thickly painted onto the board — NOT the felt. Also, apply glue to the arches above each window — and — apply a small amount of glue on the WALL either side of your windows.

Press the felt into position on the roof areas — also, pressing GENTLY on the plastic arch above the windows, then press the felt onto the wall area alongside each window. The end result will have your "thatch" attached so that it looks as if the thatch stands out above all of the windows (see photo), and lays neatly to the sides of your wall.

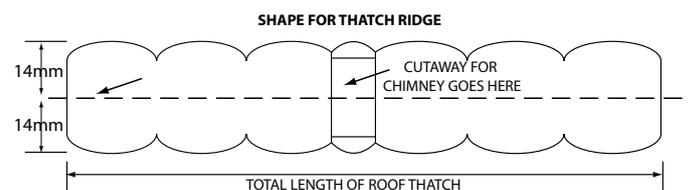


Set aside for all glued areas to dry thoroughly overnight before going onto the next step, which are the roof RIDGES. All thatched roofing will have reinforced areas along the ridge line of the roof to make it weathertight and waterproof (see photo below).



To create this, first choose a design for your thatching — suggest you check this out on the internet as there are quite different ones.

I drew mine up on the computer, but if you don't have a computer "Drawing Package" it can be done carefully by pencil and freehand. Do this onto a piece of thin but stiff card so that when folded lengthways you have a ridge capping and a replicated design on either side of the roof (see photo below).



Glue a piece of your felt onto the REVERSE SIDE of the card so that when the card is turned over you can see the printed/drawn design UNDERNEATH. Let the felt dry completely before attempting to cut.

You can then cut easily the felt to your required shape, using a SHARP pair of scissors. I found it easier to use scissors rather than a scalpel, but this is your choice!

Fit this to the ridge of your roof, folding over on the centreline so that you now have the felt EQUALLY either side of the roof. You may find there could be some minor adjustments to make — when happy, glue in place and set aside to dry completely.

For the next part there are a number of variations in the method you use — I must confess I chose an “easy” method, but again it is your choice, especially if you have been able to source a copy of the Railway Modellers as mentioned previously.

I used a product that plasterers use to reinforce corners, etc. when plastering walls, which is a 2” wide mesh with one side having a “tacky” glue already applied, enabling a simple press-down for it to adhere to the felt (*see photo*).



However, you need to cut this into a strip to the width and length you need before pressing it onto the felt. If you try to lift it away from the felt once it is allowed to stick, the felt will easily tear away spoiling the look — and the adhesion!

You could also use a thin twine and sew it into your felt ridging. If choosing this method, I suggest you do it BEFORE gluing the ridge piece to the roof! Again, look on the internet for the patterns, some have “crossed diagonals”, others simple verticals and horizontals.

My next effort will be more decorative having seen what can be accomplished with felt, and knowing the shortcomings I faced — after all, this was a FIRST EFFORT to trial ideas and I was pleasantly satisfied by the finished result.

PAINTING OF ROOF

I would say strongly here — using a paintbrush is NOT a good idea for painting felt. Because of the very absorbent nature of the felt, it will “suck up” all of your paint very quickly, the end result being very disappointing.

The paint I used was just an acrylic mixed thinly, but with a strong pigment content to it, so that when sprayed onto the felt it dries to a satisfying

appearance. I used an Airbrush, but if you don’t have one of these use an atomiser spray bottle that allows a fine misting spray application.

Remember, don’t try to do it all in one spray. I trialed different shades of greys and reed/thatch colours, before settling on the final dark colour. I wanted to replicate very old thatch with moss and grasses growing over the roof. Allow each paint spray to dry before applying the next coat. I was quite surprised how much the colour darkened once dry!

If you don’t like the colour try another, often by mixing variations the end mix of one colour over another will give you the result you are looking for. With the plasterer’s mesh, I did go over it with a brush using paint straight from the tube. Being of a plastic nature the airbrushing did not give me enough “coverage opacity”!

To finish off I used some good old “ground rubber foam” to simulate mosses and some grass scatter clumps here and there.

IN CONCLUSION

I was quite happy with my first attempt and I recommend you give it a go too. I know a lot of people would love to have a thatch roofed building, but are daunted by “how to do it”!

I think Martin had contemplated producing a mould to allow plaster roofs to be created — who knows, he may still, if asked nicely!

My advice to you all is to persevere, because when I first started and stuck the felt down, I thought — “this looks like crap!” But, I kept going and learnt a lot — with the knowledge gained, I will be doing another thatched building before too long and hopefully it will be much better than my first attempt.

For inspiration have a look on YouTube at the PENDON MUSEUM, <http://www.pendonmuseum.com/gallery/> — there you will see sublime thatched cottages, so realistic you could swear they were the real thing.

Also, or another variation on thatch have a look at this video on Roye England, the founder of Pendon Museum, where he uses human hair, <http://www.britishpathe.com/workspaces/philstubbington/dh2utD7m>

Happy Modelling,

Rob

See next page for more photos of the finished project and in its final situation on the Canal.

