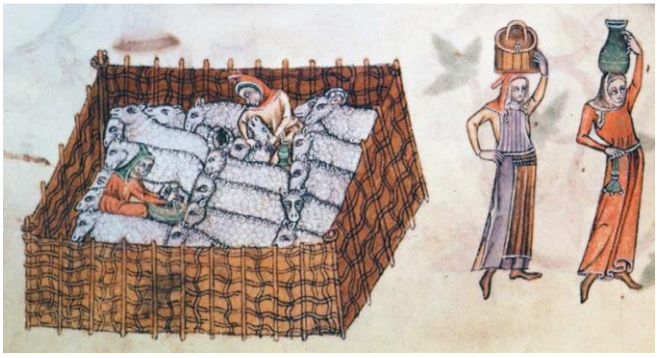
Wattle and Daub

The ancient craft of wattle and daub was once practiced throughout the world. The Iron Age people of Britain used the technique to build circular dwellings and hurdles for sheep penning. Wicker bee hives were also daubed to keep the rain out. In medieval times, wealthier folk engaged workmen called daubers or daubatores to make wattle infill panels for timber buildings. As a weatherproofing, wattle and daub was not entirely satisfactory as it was liable to damp and required constant maintenance. An exposed section of wattle and daub can be found in a wall in the Eden Valley Museum. The building was originally an open-hall farmhouse known as ‘Doggetts’ and dates from about 1378. The jettied front was most likely added in the 16th century and it now thought that jettying was not built just for aesthetic reasons but to help protect the lower walls from damp.



Medieval wattle sheep pen

Wattle and dab at Eden Valley Museum

In the High Weald, coppiced hazel and sallow wood were cut from the shaws in late winter or early spring to make wattle. The green flexible twigs were woven through vertical staves of oak or ash to make a lattice panel. Panels within a timber-framed building varied in size considerably, especially at intersections with curved braces and around openings where they had to be made smaller or narrower. The section shown here is near a door. A tool called a froe would have been used to split the laths for the upright timbers. The top of the lath was pointed to fit into a hole in the timber above and the chiselled end fitted into a groove in the timber below. Smaller timbers were either nailed onto the lath or tied on, as seen here.

Daub was made from a mixture of clay or mud, chopped straw, horsehair or wool and aggregate. The daub shown here was probably a mixture of sandstone and chalk. Clay served as a binder and sometimes dung was added, perhaps for the same purpose. Skilled was required to obtain the required consistency because if the daub was too wet, it tended to shrink. The mixture was then trampled by foot, or sometimes by ox hoof in order to stick it together (no skill there!) The mixture was then moulded in the palm of the hand to form a ball or ‘cat’ and pressed onto the wattle on either side. The daub was then left to dry and re-daubed to the desired thickness. The surface was scratched to form a key for a coating of lime plaster and limewashing. Small areas were left un-plastered for ventilation.