

Shingle Roof Project Report 2022/2023

Progress Made

Thanks to all those involved, from felling the trees through to making and fitting battens and shingles, the Winter of 2022 / 2023, has seen excellent, steady progress being made to the Long House roof, and we now have around 1/5th of the roof complete. That is both east and west faces along the bottom third of the roof. During this period there has been an estimated 4,000 shingles and 1/6th of a mile of battens dressed and fitted by the team of volunteers, all hand made using traditional green woodworking tools and methods.

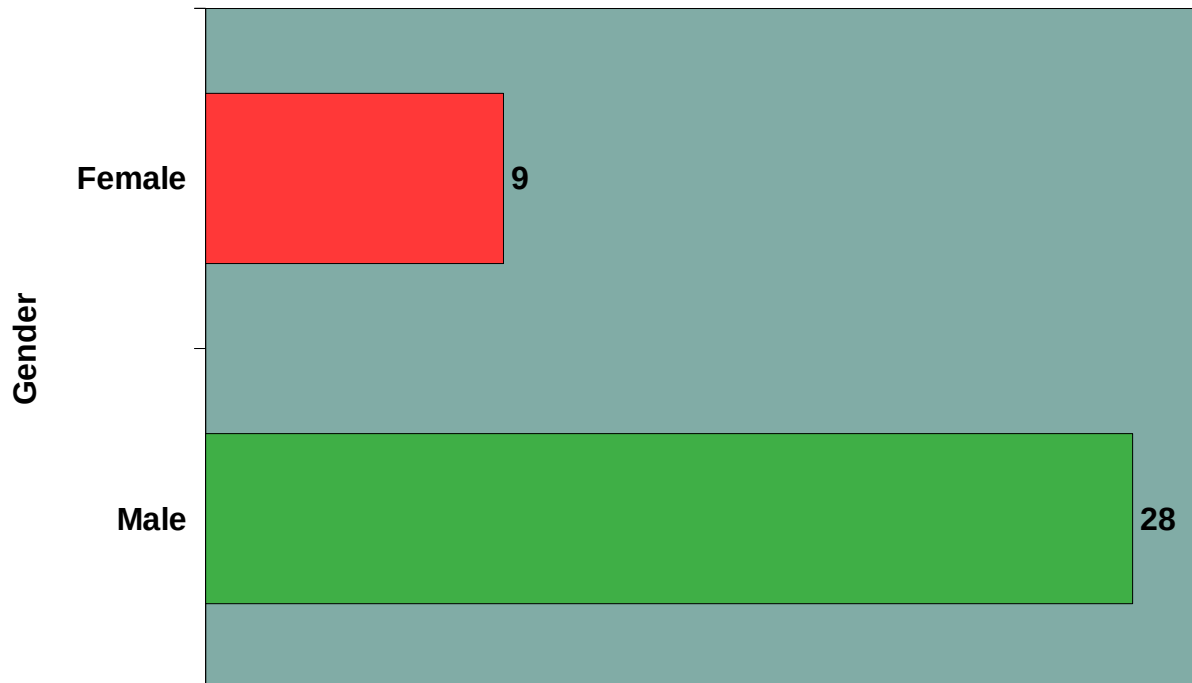


Volunteer figures

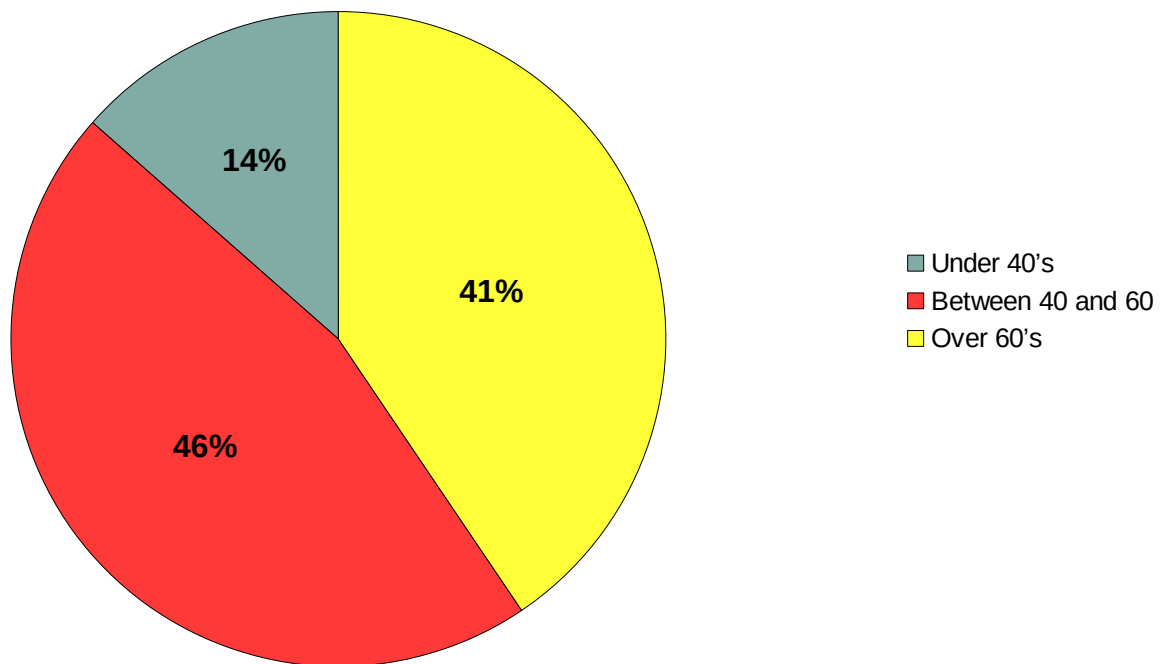
During the project there have been **37** volunteers involved in the shingle roof project. A good number of the volunteers have been weekly regulars, which has been vital to get to the point we have. During this period there has been **48** days for the opportunity to volunteer with us, including one Saturday a month for those who could not make it during the week, giving a total of **204** volunteer days.

Volunteer stats

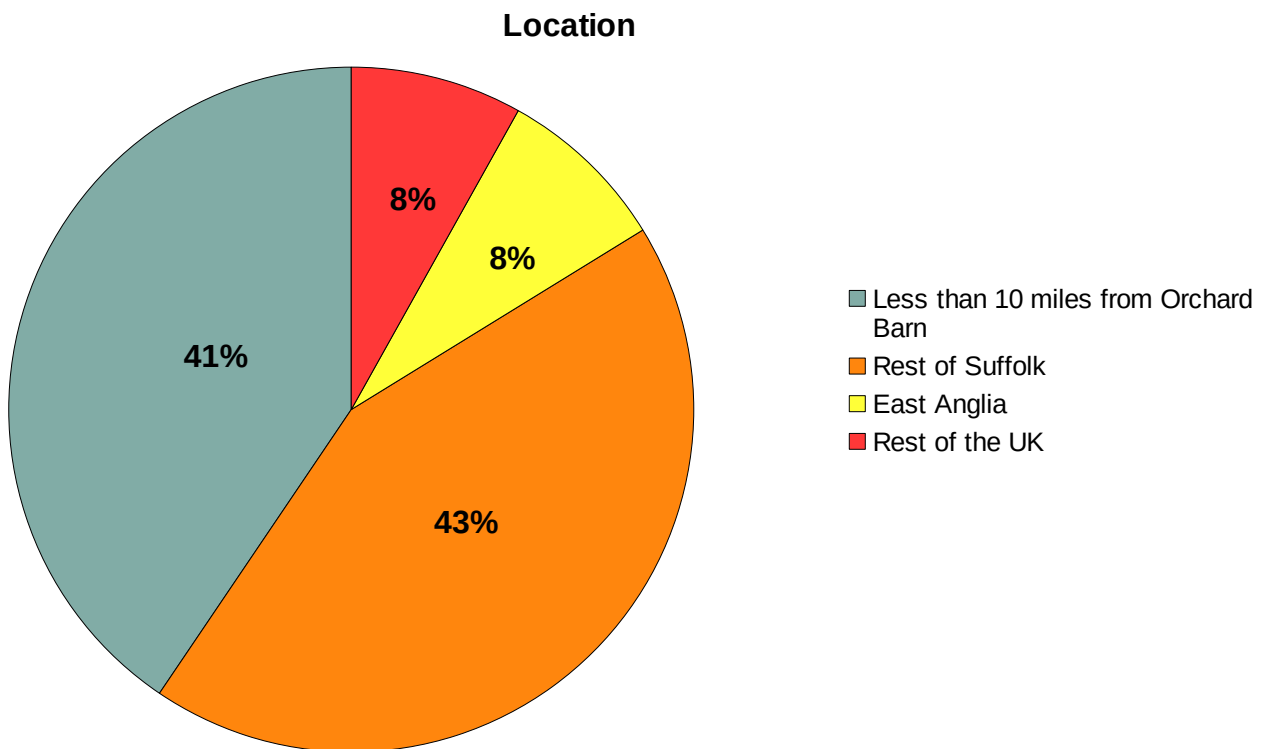
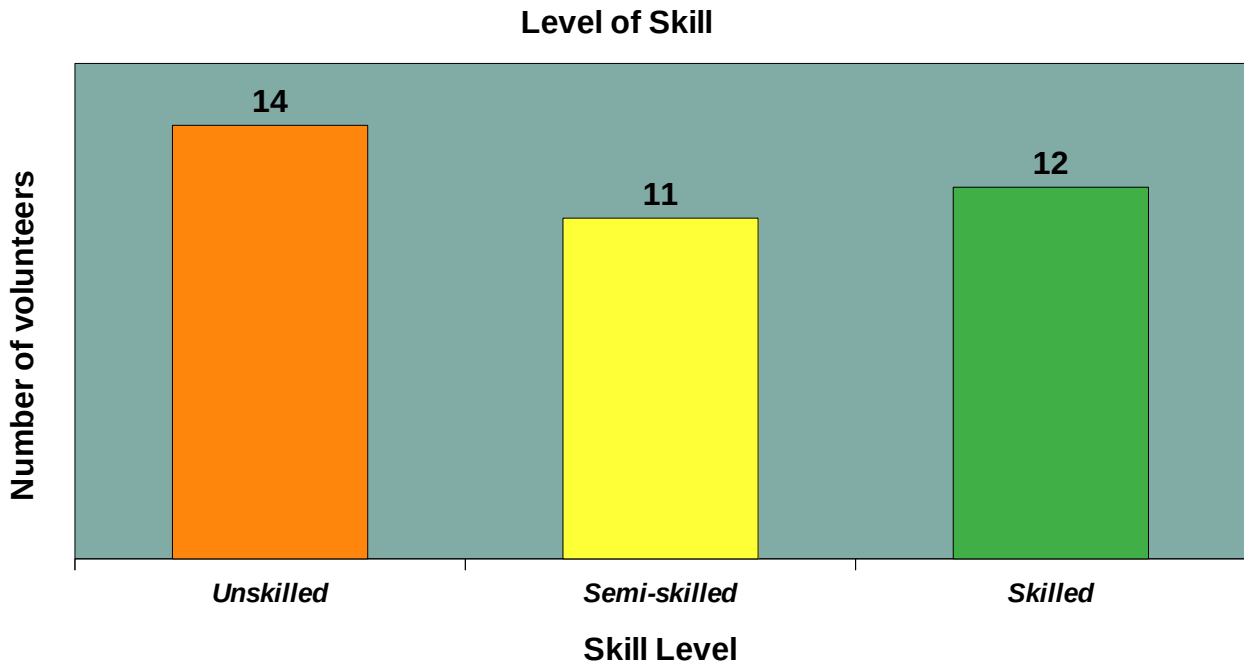
See below for a breakdown of figures showing various statistics.



Age Range



More Stats!



Learning and skills development

There are a multitude of traditional skills and hand tools needed for the making of a shingle, some of which are simple to learn; like a saw and some requiring more skill; like the drawknife and side axe. Each volunteer has the opportunity to try all the tools available for the various stages of the process, with proper training and instruction in best practice, safe use, maintenance and storage of tools.



Some volunteers are keen to learn multiple skills to help with all the stages involved in shingle making; from cleaving the sweet chestnut logs with a froe and mallet then processing the cleft sweet chestnut with a side axe, to final finishing with a plane and drawknife. This is great for the project as well as the volunteers as it means jobs can be rotated between the team throughout the day, this is less tiresome and reduces the chance of repetitive strain injury and gives the volunteers the opportunity to develop a variety of new skills, and I think it makes it more fun and interesting.

On the other hand, some volunteers are happy to carry out the same task, working to their strengths. This may be because they find it difficult to use other tools, or for physical health reasons are only able to do one task; however they have been more than willing to learn and help with another part of the process if needed, when we have been short of people.



There have been other volunteering opportunities available, for example help with gardening, site maintenance, tool repairs and maintenance, and preparing other structures for future projects. This has allowed the volunteers unable to help with the shingle making to continue being involved.

It has been a great opportunity for personal development too for myself as well as the volunteers, together we have learnt and become more skilled and confident in a number of disciplines, communicated and worked well as a team. This may have benefits in other areas of our lives, for example; those looking for work or a new direction in life, increased confidence and mental well being and friendship. For some, it is doing something meaningful and interesting in

their retirement, and a space for people to practice and apply their hobby on a live build.

The physicality of the work too, has been good exercise to keep fit and develop strength, all in a wonderful setting with fresh air, natural surroundings and wildlife, which is great for the mind, body and soul.



Friendships and socials

Orchard Barn is an inspiring and unique community driven project drawing many like minded folk together, both locally and from around the world. It has developed a good following and has very talented and passionate people with a wealth of knowledge at it's core. It is a very welcoming and friendly environment to all, new and old, and lots of new friendships have been made. All these things keep bringing people back, and those who live further away or have moved on, still like to be involved when they can.

Orchard Barn often hold social gatherings celebrating the seasons and the gifts of nature, we held an end of year celebration with music and food, inviting volunteers past, present and future, and combined this with an induction day,

which was a great way for everyone to learn about Orchard Barn's achievements and visions and how they operate. On another occasion a Wassailing was held: an ancient ceremony to encourage a good crop for the apple trees. This was enjoyed with home made cakes and freshly squeezed apple juice from the orchard by volunteers and the local community. Volunteers also like to get together outside of the project too, one gathering involved an autumnal walk with a roasting of sweet chestnuts around a warm fire in the woods, and another saw several volunteers meet up for a spring snowdrops stroll at Lamarsh. The volunteer working day itself is a very sociable time and at breaks, everyone likes to gather together for a hot drink, food and a good chinwag, sometimes around a warm fire when it gets really cold!

Good things, and the challenges we faced

Throughout the project we have been lucky to have a great bunch of people work together as a team and enjoy being in each others company. The things volunteers liked most about the project have been the chance to gain new skills in traditional crafts. They have found it a very satisfying experience to see through the whole process of turning logs of wood into a roof: a product of all their hard work which they can see the final results in front of them. And the combination of the social and community aspect and being part of such an historically interesting project have been valuable to them too.

The shingle making process has evolved over time and has eventually developed a very efficient working practice, which has come from a combined input from the volunteers and staff on the best way to do things. Often when we have someone new, the longer term volunteers have been very helpful in teaching them the process and tool use. I found encouraging the volunteers to be part of the quality control helped speed up the process and made them more aware of what to look out for. Involving the volunteers like this is important as it empowers them and makes them feel more valued.

The nature of the work, such as time of year and working with natural materials provided a few challenges; there were a few very cold icy spells which made uncomfortable working at times and put a few people off. However, there was

still a good turnout of volunteers: the work warmed us up and break times were spent inside in front of a wood stove to help keep us warm. Some of the trees turned out to have a lot of twist and knots in them which made it a little frustrating to work with. Another time, a tree was mistakenly sectioned over length by a few inches which then required extra processing by cutting each individual shingle to the right size, initially by hand which turned out to be quite time consuming, so instead all logs were later cut down to the correct length with a chainsaw.

As well as shingles, we are making the battens upon which they are fitted. This has been another good learning curve and a process that evolved over time. We found that material selection was key, however good batten material was sometimes a struggle to find as there was limited felled material. Looking ahead though with more felling planned, I believe we will have more material to choose from which should help future progress.



An issue some of us encountered over the months was repetitive strain injuries, this highlighted to me the importance of encouraging others to learn another skill and take regular breaks so not to overwork the same muscles. Personally I experienced a frustrating recurring wrist injury which I felt held me back, it did however force me to practice with my left hand when doing axe work, and can

now use both hands, which is great when one side is getting tired, I can switch to the other.

Positive environmental impact

The use of sweet chestnut for the roof has been sourced from a local woodland once coppiced before the second world war, which like many coppices of this time have since been neglected and left to grow. In harvesting timber from this woodland the aim is to help re-establish the coppice, providing sustainable materials again for years to come. Sweet chestnut itself is very durable and contains tannin which naturally helps to preserve the wood and will last many years.



During the processing of shingles nothing is wasted: the bark provides material for composting, and the wood shavings are used for path mulch and they also dry quickly making them great for starting fires in the wood stove, and larger pieces are stacked and allowed to season for future firewood. Being off grid and everything made by hand means there is no need for noisy, dusty, energy hungry power tools.