

Current evidence suggests that the technique made its appearance in this region in the late 18th century (see: [John McCann](#), 'Is Clay Lump a Traditional Building Material?', [Vernacular Architecture vol. 18, 1987, 1-16.](#)) but is paralleled by similar techniques elsewhere in the world, (often termed mud bricks, or adobe in the Spanish-speaking world). It became very popular in the clayland parts of Norfolk and Suffolk in the first half of the 19th century when there was a tax (introduced 1784, repealed 1850) on fired bricks. It was particularly used for farm buildings and cottages. There was a slight revival of interest in the technique in the first quarter of the 20th century through the advocacy of architects such as [Clough Williams Ellis](#) and [G.J. Skipper](#) of Norwich.

Unfired earth was also used in the cob and pisé de terre (or rammed earth) techniques. Cob walls were built by forking balls of clay onto a prepared base and treading them down into a solid layer that was later trimmed into shape with a paring iron or spade. Sometimes the material was forced into place between shutter boards. In both cases the walling had to be done in layers or 'lifts', allowing time for the preceding layer to dry and become firm. In the pisé technique, a damp strawless mixture was rammed between shutters to produce similar solid walls. The cob technique is an ancient one and was probably the method used to produce the clay walls mentioned in medieval documents. In the 19th century it was used in Suffolk as an alternative to clay-lump, both methods being advocated in a prize-winning essay on cottages by the Rev. Copinger Hill of Buxhall that was published in 1843. Hill practised what he preached and Buxhall has one of the largest concentrations of clay buildings in Suffolk. The pisé method was introduced from France in the 19th century and had only a limited uptake in this region (eg. Swiss Cottage at Aspell).