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WOODEN ROOFING.

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WOODEN ROOFING.

ATTENTION is directed to the specimen-example of wooden roofing in the Western Australian collection. The shingles on this are of sawn sheoak, and the specimen gives a very good idea of the kind of roof which has been in use in Western Australia since the foundation of the Colony, in 1829, until to-day. The history of roofing in Western Australia is not without interest. The first settlers at Fremantle and Perth, knowing nothing of shingles, but being well acquainted with the picturesque and efficient thatched roof so common in English country districts, looked round for a thatching material, and they discovered a very suitable article in the sedges and rushes to be found along the banks of the Swan River. The first Government House in Perth, the first Court House, and the first Church had rush roofs. Long before the first decade of the Colony's existence had passed, the settlers, through communication with New South Wales, had learned something of the art of shingling, and they found materials for its practice in abundance at their hands. In Perth and Fremantle jarrah was the material used almost invariably for the making of roof shingles. It was sometimes sawn, but more often split.

The life of a jarrah-shingled roof which receives ordinary care and attention is marvellous. There are buildings to-day in Perth covered with shingles which have been in position more than half a century. The Town Hall of Perth, a fine and characteristic specimen of early colonial architecture is covered with a roof of sawn jarrah shingles, and is still faithfully doing its appointed work. The roof was put on in 1870. In the country districts settlers shingled their roofs with the timbers that they found in the immediate neighbourhood. The whole of the West Australian eucalypts can be used for shingling, although, it goes without saying,

some are distinctly better for the purpose than others. She-oak is decidedly the best shingling timber of the State, and has been very extensively used. It splits well and is easily put on. With the advent of galvanised iron, shingled roofs in the town ceased to have a monopoly, and prior to the war the shingle was used to a comparatively small degree even in the country districts. But the increased price and scarcity of roofing iron again attracted attention to wood as a material for covering roofs, and the trade in shingles has experienced a considerable revival. Within the war period a good number of forms of wooden roof covering other than shingles have been put upon the market, the claims of each being duly set forth by its projector or inventor. In most of these new forms of roofing the longitudinal board is used with various ingenious devices for making the joints quite tight.

There is no valid reason why wood should not be much more largely used in building construction in Australia than it is, more particularly in the case of dwelling houses. In the United States and Canada wood in building construction is used to a very much larger extent than here, and in those States where the forest areas are large whole towns are built of wood, the buildings being designed in a manner which makes them both attractive and picturesque. In Western Australia wood as a roofing material in the larger towns is now prohibited by the local governing bodies, the reason given being the danger from fire. It seems strange that Australian civic authorities should be obsessed by a dread of fire, while similar authorities in America and Canada have no such dread. And the case is more remarkable when it is remembered that the hardwoods of Australia are much less inflammable than the softwoods of the American continent. In the country districts of Western Australia the wooden shingle, either sawn or split, has been within the last year or two used quite freely. It is cooler in summer than iron and it is warmer in winter, and the wooden covering can be put in position at something like half the cost of iron at its present price.