

# Planking

The 'hood' produced at the forming stage of hat manufacture is about 75cm (30 inches) long and has the fragile texture of wet kitchen roll (see the information sheet *A Hood is Born*). It must now be shrunk to less than a third of that length.

## **By Hand:** Basoning and Hardening

The hatter would wrap the fragile cone of fur - the hood - in a bit of cloth or leather and put it onto a 'bason'. This was a wooden bench with a heated iron plate in the centre. The hatter would sprinkle water onto the hood, and work it with his hands. Combined with heat, this would be enough

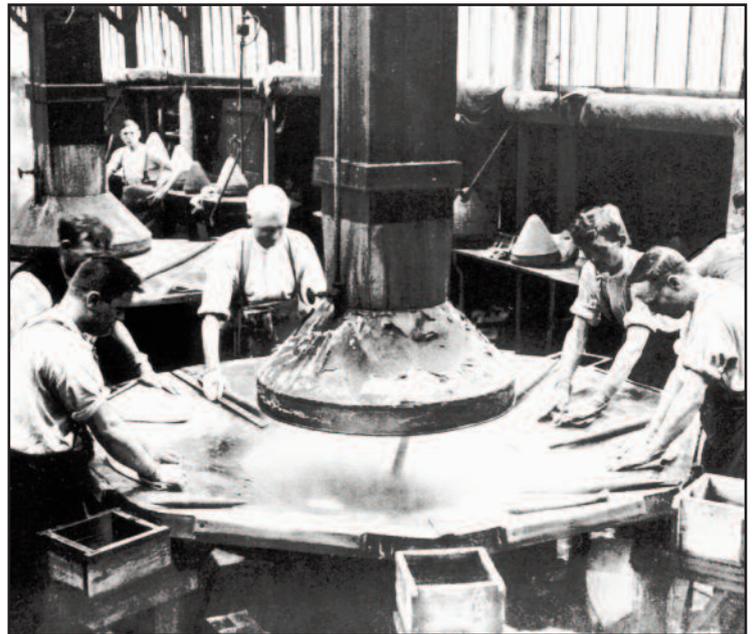


Hardening (Leech's hat factory)

to shrink and strengthen the hood ready for the planking kettle.

## **The Planking Kettle**

The planking kettle was a large cauldron with a fire underneath. The hatters added sulphuric acid to the near-boiling water in the cauldron until it was about the acidity of lemonade (they would test this by sucking the edge of a hood!).



Hand planking hoods, about 1910

Around the cauldron were sloping hardwood planks. The hatters would dip the hoods into the bubbling cauldron, then pull them out to roll them on the planks. They used 'planking pins', which were wooden rolling pins with pointed ends.

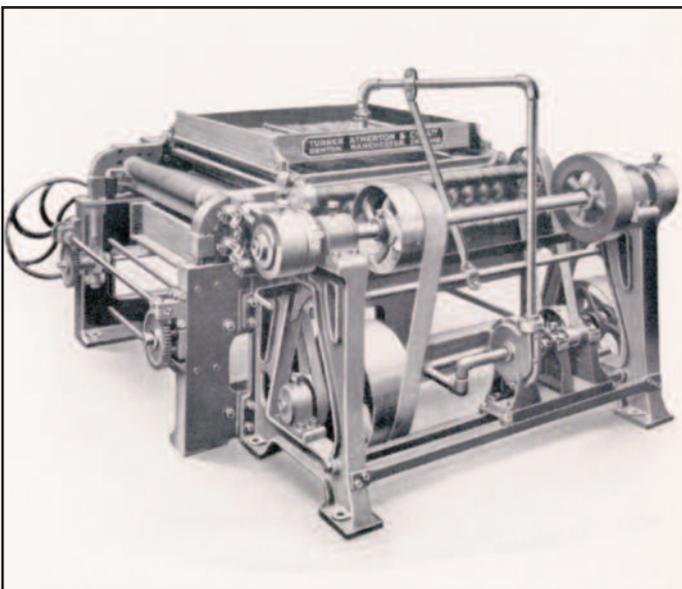
After four or five hours of dipping, rolling and turning, they reduced the conical hood from 30 inches long to about 12 inches (30cm). It was strong, seamless felt, ready to be made into a hat.



Machine planking: the Multi-roller

### **By Machine: the Multi-Roller**

The multi-roller machines, or 'multis', took a while to take over from the planking kettle. Even in the 1950s, Battersby's hat works in Stockport still had a couple of planking kettles, probably for training apprentices and for special orders.



Multi-roller planking machine manufactured by Turner Atherton of Denton and Stockport

A multi-roller is exactly what it sounds like – lots of big, heavy rollers, that the hood is passed through, again and again. What is harder to imagine is the working conditions of the men and women who operated these machines. They had to stand all day, wearing clogs to keep their feet out of the water that was sometimes ankle-deep on the floor. Their hands were wet with acidic near-boiling water all the time, which ate away at their skin. The machines were noisy, making it difficult to talk to fellow-workers. And they were surrounded by steam, which came off the hoods smelling like wet dog!