

The Finishing Touches

In the present time of mass car ownership and informal fashions, it is difficult to imagine the power and popularity of hat wearing. A hat could always transform you into an elegant and fashionable figure. This became even more true when the film industry presented glamorous role models to imitate. Putting on a trilby hat to take your girlfriend to the cinema transformed the factory lad into a film star – well, almost!

The appeal of the felt hat was due to a combination of shape, colour and texture: a good ‘finish’ was essential.

Pouncing

A finisher would ‘pounce’ a nearly completed hat. This meant to sandpaper the outer

surface of the hat all over. It was a skillful job, and had to be done evenly or the hat was ruined.

Luring

Pouncing evened out the surface of the hat but deadened its colour. So the finisher would next ‘lure’ the hat to ‘strike the colour back’. For a smooth finish on a hard hat he would rub a soft pad dipped in animal fat over the surface to make it shine. For a furry-looking hat he used a pad spiked with wires, like a brush, to bring up a ‘nap’, as the surface hairs were called. He used a piece of sharkskin to give a soft ‘peach bloom’ to the hat. And he employed a variety of different-shaped irons to smooth and shine the curved and flat surfaces of the hat.



Machine pouncing, about 1950

continues



The Finishing shop, Associated British Hat Manufacturers, about 1970

Hand Tools

A 'hatter's goose' was one tool used in luring. This was an iron into which a slug of hot iron could be inserted. A 'flooster' was used to iron the inside of the brim. Another name for this tool was the 'weasel', said to be referred to in the nursery rhyme 'Pop goes the Weasel'. A hatter faced with poverty might be reduced to having to pawn, or 'pop' their tools to put food on the table. Then they could buy 'Half a pound of tuppenny rice, Half a pound of treacle'.

Machines

The finishing touches on a hat were almost always done by hand. But there were machines that helped: pouncing machines rotated an oval-shaped hat evenly against a sanding-pad. The pouncing machines at Hat Works are 'Dorans', imported from the United States. Luring was also done with the help of a lathe-like machine.