



A History of Bowlers

Derbies, Bowlers, and "Coke" Hats. Oh My!

Does a "derby" differ from a "bowler"? And would you only wear your "Coke" hat when drinking a soda? Here's a brief history of the development of this particular style of headgear.

In 1850 William Coke, a progressive farmer from Holkam in Norfolk, went to James Lock & Co., a London-based hatter founded in 1676. He asked them to design a new type of hat to protect the heads of his gamekeepers. The current fashion for top hats was a hindrance as they were constantly being knocked off the wearer's head by overhanging branches.

When William Coke returned to the St. James Street shop he was presented with a domed hat that had been hardened by shellac. Legend has it that the hat was placed on the floor and Coke jumped on it. Impressed by how well it withstood the shock, he bought it and placed an order for his gamekeepers.

The staff at Locks have always called the hat a "Coke" but when the hat went into mass production the work was sent to two brothers, Thomas and William Bowler who were based in Southwark and the hat took on their name.

In America it became known as a "derby" from its association with the famous horse race held in Kentucky.

And now you know the rest of the hat story.