



**Figure 1: 1900s**  
Men's Blucher clogs from the early 1900s with soles and heels shod with iron rims. Laced up the front, they have a flap buckled over the top to provide extra protection.



**Figure 3: 1940s**  
Men's black grained leather heavy Derby work boot with external steel cap and heel protector from the 1940s.

1900

1910

1920

1930

1940

1950

1960

1970



**Figure 2: 1930s**  
Men's black leather Derby tannery boots with wooden soles from the 1930s.



**Figure 4: 1940s**  
Quarryman's leather and wood Blucher clog from the 1940s.



**Figure 5: 1960s**  
Men's black leather Chukka safety boot of 1965.

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# Early safety boots

**P**rior to the turn of the 20th Century, the concept of safety footwear in the work place scarcely existed and it was cheaper for an employer to replace the worker concerned than to introduce any safety measures. In any case, it was probably his own fault for not being more careful in the first place and he should have known better. Such was the attitude of the times. Of course individuals had often taken precautions themselves but their options were limited.

Wooden boots or sabots (Dutch clogs) were frequently worn by farmers to protect their feet against sharp objects lying in the ground or in case a horse or cow trod on them. They also had other uses, and in the early days of the industrial revolution, workers fearful of losing work through mechanisation are said to have used clogs to jam and damage machinery, leading to the expression 'sabotage'.

By 1900, however, industrial safety increasingly became an issue and

compensation laws began to come into effect so that purpose made protective footwear started to appear. Early examples were frequently based on the clogs worn by mill workers in the textile industry (Figure 1).

The use of wooden soles and the clog construction continued for some years more as is demonstrated by the boots shown in Figure 2. The design of these boots is something of a hybrid as the upper design is that of a conventional Derby boot while still

retaining a wooden sole. There is also an attempt to offer some extra protection by the addition of a metal toe plate.

By the 1940s, steel safety caps had appeared. Due to the construction used for working boots at that time (riveted, screwed and stitched), steel caps had to be attached externally after the upper was tack lasted and before a through sole was riveted on. The outsole was then stitched through and the whole assembly screwed to the insole with threaded brass wire. The result was a very solid and secure boot (Figure 3). This image, also shows that the soles were

shod with iron segs to provide extra grip and prolong the life of the sole. They also added to the overall weight to make this type of boot extremely heavy and tiring to wear.

Although safety boots were by this time mass-produced, this boot was likely to have been made by a local clog maker and it certainly appears rather out-of-date (Figure 4). Although the upper is made from stout leather, the clog construction made it impossible to add a steel toecap which one might have thought would be essential for someone working in an environment where crushing injuries were an everyday hazard and

where a boot of the type shown in Figure 3 would have been far more appropriate.

By this time, safety footwear was made using the direct moulded vulcanised rubber method. The steel cap could be lasted in between the upper and lining, while the whole boot or shoe was much lighter in weight thus making it less fatiguing to wear (Figure 5). It was soon after this that polyurethane soling became available which offered a further reduction in weight and, together with a more style conscious approach to overall design, led to the modern safety footwear we know today. 🚫