

# Technology

## History | 1820s–1990s

### *Introduction*

Timber has been readily recognised by all cultures throughout history as one of the earth's richest resources. Before timber production was an industry in its own right, humans felled trees in their immediate vicinity for use as fuel, construction of shelters, means of conveyance, tools, implements and weapons and to clear places in which to plant crops. As villages and cities emerged, the getting of wood and timber supplies became more difficult – groups of men would work in nearby forests harvesting logs that would then be brought to the community for use. It may sound simple, but without any power source except that supplied by men and beasts, without any tools except the simplest of axes, and without any roads or tracks or railways, it was an excruciatingly slow and difficult task.

Today, when we go into a hardware store and buy a piece of timber we tend to think of it as 'raw' material. Something for us to build, carve or turn into something else. We rarely think about what a complex series of processes a piece of timber undergoes in its transformation from a tree to a product on a hardware store shelf or a woodworker's bench.

The role of technology in the processes of timber production has been evident throughout the history of the industry. Developments in timber harvesting, milling and transport have followed technological developments in metallurgy and



Splitting palings in the Esperance Valley  
Forestry Tasmania photographic collection



Modern harvesting machinery  
National Forests and Timber

power production as they have evolved. Before the middle of the twentieth century, improvements to basic harvesting, milling and transport methods occurred with only slight changes to the underlying principles in operation. However, since the middle of this century, rapid, radical and dramatic changes have occurred in technology and, as a result, in the timber industry. The tools and methods of today's industry now bear little resemblance to those of nearly 200 years ago.