Full revelations of a professional rat-catcher, after 25 years' experience

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FULL REVELATIONS
OF A
Professional Rat-catcher,
After 25 Years' Experience.

BY
IKE MATTHEWS.

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INTRODUCTION.

IN placing before my readers in the following pages the results of my twenty-five years' experience of Rat-catching, Ferreting, &c., I may say that I have always done my best to accomplish every task that I have undertaken, and I have in consequence received excellent testimonials from many corporations, railway companies, and merchants. I have not only made it my study to discover the different and the best methods of catching Rats, but I have also taken great interest in watching their ways and habits, and I come to the conclusion that there is no sure way of completely exterminating the Rodents, especially in large towns. If I have in this work referred more particularly to Rat-catching in Manchester that is only because my experience, although extending over a much wider area, has been chiefly in that city, but the methods I describe are equally applicable to all large towns.

Yours truly,
IKE MATTHEWS.

PROFESSIONAL RAT-CATCHER,
PENDLETON,
MANCHESTER.
The Revelations of a Rat-catcher.

PART I.

HOW TO CLEAR RATS FROM WAREHOUSES, OFFICES, STOREROOMS, &c.

In the first place my advice is—never poison Rats in any enclosed buildings whatever. Why? Simply because the Rats that you poison are Drain Rats, or what you call Black Rats, and you can depend upon it that the Rats that you poison will not get back into the drains, but die under the floor between the laths and plaster, and the consequence is that in a few days the stench that will arise will be most obnoxious. And there is nothing more injurious than the smell of a decomposed Rat.

Having had a long experience in Manchester I am quite sure of this. As an instance, I remember a private house where I was engaged catching Rats under a floor with ferrets. I went as far as possible on my belly under the floor with two candles in my hands, and I saw
the ferret kill a large bitch Rat, about six yards from me against a wall, where neither the dog nor myself could get at it. I finished the job and made out my bill for my services, but in about two or three weeks after they again sent for me, declaring they could not stay in the sitting-room on account of the smell that arose from beneath the flooring boards. They had in consequence to send for a joiner; and as I knew the exact spot where the Rat was killed I ordered him to take up the floor boards just where the dead Rat lay, and the stench that arose from the decomposed Rodent was bad in the extreme. I disinfected the place, and I was never sent for again. This was under a cold floor, and it is much worse where there is any heat.

Now to deal with the different methods of catching Rats. The best way, in my opinion, is Trapping them with Steel Spring Traps. Whenever you are trapping, never on any consideration put bait on the traps; always put traps in their runs, but you will find Rats are so cunning that in time, after a few have been caught, they will jump over the traps, and then you must try another way. A good one is the following, viz.:—Get a bag of fine, clean sawdust, and mix with it about one-sixth its weight of oatmeal. Obtain the sawdust
fresh from under the saw, without bits of stick in, as these would be liable to get into the teeth of the trap and stop them from closing. Where you see the runs put a handful in say about 30 different places, every night, just dropping the sawdust and meal out of your hands in little heaps. That means 30 different heaps. Do this for four nights, and you will see each morning that the sawdust is all spread about. Now for four more nights you must bury a set trap under every heap of sawdust. Thus you will have 30 traps, on each of which there is a square centre plate; you must level the sawdust over the plate with a bit of stick, and set each trap as fine as you can on the catch spring, so that the weight of a mouse would set it off. They will play in the sawdust as usual, and you will have Rats in almost every trap. You will find that this plan will capture a great many of the Rodents. I have trapped as many as 114 in one night in this way.

In time, however, the Rats will cease to go near sawdust. Then you must procure a bag of fine soot from any chimney sweep, and you will find that they will go at the soot just as keen as they did in the first instance at the sawdust. When they get tired of soot (which
they will in time) you must procure some soft tissue paper and cut it fine, and use that in the same way as the sawdust and the soot. You can also use light chaff or hay seeds with the like result.

I must not omit to tell my readers to always trap Rats in the night, and to go very quietly about it, for if you make much noise they will give over feeding. You must not go about with too big a light whilst trapping. You should stay at the building from dark until midnight, and every time a Rat is caught in the trap you should go with a bull’s eye lamp, take it out of the trap or kill it, and then set the trap again, as you have the chance of another Rat in the same trap. From experience I can say that you need not stay in any place after 12 o’clock at night, as I think that the first feed is the best, and that the first three hours are worth all the other part of the night. You can go home at 12 o’clock, and be sure to be in the place by 6 or 7 a.m., for many a Rat caught in the trap by the front leg will, if it gets time, eat off its leg and get away again, and they are very cunning to catch afterwards.

**Never have your Traps Set in the Daytime.**

Handle them as little as possible. Always catch as many Rats as you can in your
buildings in January and February, as they begin to breed in March, and every bitch Rat means, on the average, eight more. Also get as much ferreting done as possible before breeding time, for a young Rat can get into the ends of the joisting under a floor, where a ferret cannot get near it, and the consequence is that a ferret is unable to cope with its task. The best thing I can advise for clearing young Rats is a good cat, one that must not be handled nor made a pet of, but allowed to live in almost a wild state. A good cat can do as much, in my opinion, in one night, when Rats are breeding, as two ferrets can do in a day, especially in a building where there are cavity walls, as it is impossible for a ferret to follow a Rat in such walls.

This is all the information I am able to give on the trapping of Rats—a method I have proved by 25 years’ experience to excel all others. Still another way of clearing the pests is as follows:—The majority of Rats are Black, or what we call Drain Rats; if they are in a building they will in most cases come from a water-closet. Sometimes you will see from the drain pipes in the water-closet, say, a six-inch pipe fitted into a nine-inch pipe, and the joint covered round with clay, through which the Rats eat and scratch and get into
the building in great numbers in the night, but most of them return into the drains during the day. Now, if it is the breeding season (about eight months out of the twelve) they will do much damage to silk, cotton, leather, lace, and, in fact, all other light goods. And one would be surprised to see the quantity of cloth, paper, &c., they will procure for their nests whilst breeding.

The way to get clear of these is to go in the day with two or three ferrets and leave the drain pipe open. Ferret them all back into the drain; don't put a net over the drain for fear you might miss one or two. If they got back into the building they would be hard to catch, as they would not face the net again. Then, after ferreting, make the drain good, and if there be an odd Rat or two left in the building you will get them in a few nights by baiting the trap.

There is another way of catching the Brown Rat which breeds under the floor in large buildings where there are no drains. They are very awkward to catch. Always have a trap or two set, but do not set them where they feed; place them in their runs. But there are other methods for other Rat-infested places. For instance, take a restaurant, where they feed in the cooking
kitchen; we will suppose they have eaten four holes through either floor or skirting boards. The best way to catch these—however many holes they have leading into the kitchen—is to block up (with tin or similar material) all the holes with the exception of one, and let them use that one for two nights. Then put a plateful of good food, such as oatmeal and oil of aniseed, as far from the hole as you can in the same kitchen; then run a small train of meal and aniseed from the hole to the plate. Next drive two six-inch nails in the wall, with a long piece of string tied to the nail heads. Put on these nails a brick or piece of board right above the hole 2in. up the wall. Be sure the nails are quite loose in the wall over the hole, and leave in that position for two nights, so that the Rats will get used to it. On the night that you are going to catch them, before leaving the place carry the string from the nail heads to the door or window; let the door or window be closed within an inch, with the end of the string outside. After the place has been quiet for thirty minutes return to the door or window very quietly, and you will hear the Rats feeding. Pull the string, the loose nails come out of the wall and the brick or board drops over the hole. You can then go in, close the door, turn up the gas and
catch or kill them at your leisure, as they cannot get back again.

By this method I may mention that I have caught a great number of Rats, and it is quite possible to clear a place in this manner: that is, if they do not come out of the drains. I have caught upwards of 103 in six nights in this way. The best time to catch Rats in any building is always at night, and always about half-an-hour after the place has been closed, as Rats are generally more adventurous to come for their first feed. Always go about as quietly as possible.

In some of the very old Manchester buildings that were built in the days before drain plans had to be submitted to the corporation, one finds under the cellar floors old-fashioned brick and flag drains (better known as "spit" drains), that were left in when the place was built. Once the Rats get in these disused drains all the professional Rat-catchers in England could not clear them without pulling the building down. The Rats have, by some means, got out of the main sewer, probably by the bursting of a sewer into one of these disused dry brick drains. It is then impossible to get underground to see where they have got into the dry drain, and the only thing that can be done in a case of this sort is to engage a