Mice and rats first started living in coal mines when they were taken down in bedding and food for ponies and horses stabled underground. Straw and hay provided good material for mice and rats to make their homes. Although very little food would be stored underground because it was too damp, there would be enough to support many rats and mice.

Miners know that rats and mice would never be found in the same coal mine. When rats move into a mine where mice live, the mouse population can be wiped out within two years and replaced by rats.

Because of their association with food and bedding for horses and ponies, most rats and mice were found in the stables. As pit ponies were used less often, mice and rats survived on scraps and crumbs left behind by miners. Underground engine rooms supported populations of mice and rats, because they were usually warm and dry, and miners might eat their snap (lunch) there.
Because they are seen as pests, mine owners would try and control rats and mice in coal mines. Some pits might keep a cat in the stables.

In some areas a rat-catcher might be employed, whose job it was to keep coal mines clear of mice and rats. Poisons and traps were used, but mines would very rarely be completely rat or mouse free. The only time that populations were known to drop dramatically, was when mines were closed for long periods due to strikes or lock-outs.
FURTHER READING

FACt


National Coal Board (Public Relations) 1956. *Pit Ponies*

FICTION


MUSEUM LINKS

Find out more about ponies, horses and the ways that they were kept on site at the Museum, in the Coal Interface Gallery, at the stables and on the underground tour.