

Swansong at Bradford

By NICK MAYS, Rat Section Manager

THE DANUM HOTEL, Doncaster, may never recover from the day the southerners arrived... rat Fancy southerners at that.

At the grim, dark hour of 6.30 am I crawled out of my nice warm bed to get ready for the long trek to Doncaster, on Friday January 16.

Getting myself and my stock ready was easy, but I had to travel from suburbia to Central London, a mere few miles, but the hardest part of the journey! Ever seen commuters travelling to London? They are a very sober, easily agitated crowd of people who just won't tolerate a stranger sitting in one of their seats, in their carriage, with a big box on the floor. I mean, it breaks their routine and spoils their day, doesn't it?

Consequently, when I boarded the 7.37 am to London Waterloo at Mortlake, and plonked my stock box on the floor, I was immediately the focus of much displeasure. Oh well, I can put up with being stared at for 20 minutes, and I did.

I arrived at Waterloo at 8 am and hurried off to the taxi rank to meet my friends, battling my way through the 'brolly brigade'. Some lady commuters are quite nice though.

I met Ann Storey and her fiance Martyn and two fellow fanciers, Chriss Lown and her fiance Ziggy, at the taxi rank. I thought I was loaded up with one box and a small travelling bag—they had commandeered two trolleys, loaded up with suitcases as well as numerous rat boxes! However, two very interested and amicable cabbies drove us to King's Cross Station, saying how they'd like to go on 'Mastermind' and so on!

Eventually, we were on our Inter-city 125 train, all the luggage neatly packed away for the second time as we didn't like the first coach. The train departed, treating us to a view of rural Yorkshire in those strange lands north of Watford.

Of course, it was snowing in Doncaster when we arrived and tramped through the town to the wide-eyed amazement of the locals to the Danum Hotel, where we were staying. The young ladies in reception liked our rats... at a distance.

We thawed out over a drink or two in the bar, then Will & Sara Handley, all the way from Wiltshire, arrived, to complete our distinctly southern crew. At 1 pm we arrived at Doncaster Racecourse to set up our section and stage a ratty display in preparation for the show on Saturday. The Friday is always a golden opportunity to look up old friends and 'rabbit' for hours. I collected all our rosettes etc from Brian Emmett, who looked suitably harassed, so all was now set for the show.

The display attracted quite a bit of interest right up until the time we had to tuck the rats up for the night and leave.

At the disco/social gathering that night I met Brian Doyle and John Lister of FUR & FEATHER to console them on the only genuinely bad news of the whole show, the demise of FUR & FEATHER in its present form. So Brian, John and I looked a really happy bunch at the bar!

I had a very peaceful night's sleep in my room, apart from getting up five times in an hour to silence a pair of Russian hamsters in a cage as they chewed their bars—a warning to other fanciers—DON'T sleep in the same room as Russian hamsters—acute insomnia can result!

After an excellent breakfast—yes, I was able to eat safely—we all set off to the show which was getting into full swing with fanciers arriving from all directions. Soon Joan Pearce, our judge, arrived from London and judging was under way. The rest of the day went very smoothly—no shortage of helpful fanciers, no snow and not enough chairs in the cafeteria!

As usual, I did the ritual 'tour' around and watched the thronging masses crowd out the aisles for judging best rabbit in show—and what a rabbit it was, too!

It was also very pleasant to make the acquaintance of new rat fanciers: Janet Gregory and her daughter Wendy, and especially Sue Brown from Somerset, who bought a very pretty Mink rat—a possible

future champ!

Then came the presentation of prizes. The final results were: best in show Genesis Stud's enormous friendly Agouti buck, 'Ronald', who carried off two silver cups and numerous rosettes; BOA was Rivendell Stud's Silver Fawn doe kitten, awarded almost as many honours as bis; best Rex was won by a Himalayan Rex buck, owned by some fellow named Mays, showing under Trinovantum Stud; and, finally, best pet was won by Sue Love's Black Berkshire buck, Otto.

The final presentation was of a beautiful rat portrait by co-founder of the NFRS, Joan Pearce, by virtue of the fact that the society was five years young that very week, and boasted a membership approaching 200. Joan was truly pleased and posed for several photographs of this happy event. These photographs should be in the January/February edition of the NFRS journal. A similar presentation had been made to co-founder Geoff Izzard previously, as he couldn't make it to Bradford.

And so we hastily returned to our homelands after the most successful Bradford yet, in terms of not only finance, but genuine happiness—and that's what it's all about!

My thanks to: Will, Sara, Ann, Martyn, Chriss, Ziggy, Malcolm, Joan and all who exhibited and, of course, to Brian Emmett, Kevin Yates, and the BSLs.

And to all my loyal readers (pay attention both of you!) thank you for following my ratty features in FUR & FEATHER. If I do take up rabbit fancying as well as rat fancying, perhaps I'll see you in RABBITS. Until then—stay happy!

NICK MAYS



Above: Judge Mrs Joan Pearce presenting the Dew's Cup for best in show, Genesis Stud. Left: Mrs Sara Handley presenting the Best Pet Trophy to Sue Love. Below: Judge Mrs Joan Pearce during judging.

