

# Rats



This extract is from one of the most famous versions of the Pied Piper legend, which is set in the beautiful town of Hamelin in Germany. In this **legend**, the Pied Piper uses his music to free the town of rats – but when the residents refuse to pay him he lures away the children as well. Although no-one knows whether there is any truth behind the legend, it is still re-enacted in the town on Sunday mornings during the **summer**.

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,  
By famous Hanover city;  
The river Weser, deep and wide,  
Washes its wall on the southern side;

5 A pleasanter spot you never spied;  
But, when begins my ditty,  
Almost five hundred years ago,  
To see the townsfolk suffer so  
From vermin, was a pity.

10 Rats!  
They fought the dogs, and killed the cats,  
And bit the babies in the cradles,  
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,  
And licked the soup from the cook's own ladles,  
15 Split open the kegs of salted sprats,  
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,  
And even spoiled the women's chats,  
By drowning their speaking  
With shrieking and squeaking  
20 In fifty different sharps and flats.

At last the people in a body  
To the Town Hall came flocking:  
"Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy;  
And as for our Corporation – shocking  
25 To think we buy gowns lined with ermine  
For dolts that can't or won't determine  
What's best to rid us of our vermin!  
You hope, because you're old and obese,  
To find in the furry civic robe ease?  
30 Rouse up, Sirs! Give your brains a racking  
To find the remedy we're lacking,  
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"



From *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*  
Robert Browning (1812–1889)

## Glossary

kegs barrels  
sprats small fish  
vats tubs

1 Hamelin is a town near which big city?

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark

2 In relation to the river, Hamelin lies (ring **one**):

to the north    to the south    to the east    to the west.

1 mark

3 What word is used that refers to rats?

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark

4 What is a 'ditty' (line 6)?

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark

5 Which line makes the squeaking of the rats sound musical?

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark

6 Apart from soup, what other foods do the rats steal?

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark

7 In your own words, say what the citizens thought of their mayor and councillors. Explain the reasons for their views.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark

8 Give the meaning of the following words. Use a dictionary to check your answers.

a) dolt: \_\_\_\_\_

1 mark

b) ermine: \_\_\_\_\_

1 mark

9 Which phrase means 'we will get rid of you'?

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark