



From Innovative Beginnings to World Leader - 100 Years of Rentokil

Rentokil invented modern pest control, and celebrates its 100th anniversary as the world's largest and best known pest controller. A £4.3 billion operation (2023) within the wider Rentokil Initial group, and with tens of thousands of dedicated pest control experts across 90 countries, the business protects public health and private livelihoods from rodents, cockroaches, moths, bed bugs, termites and more. Each year, the company conducts more than 25 million pest control service visits to customer premises.

It all started with a talented scientist, an insidious beetle and the mother of all roof jobs.

Our founder was Harold Maxwell-Lefroy, a distinguished scientist born in 1877, whose enthusiasm for insects took him first to the Caribbean and later to India, where he revolutionised the study and treatment of agricultural pests.

In 1914, the UK government's Office of Works approached him as the first Professor of Entomology at Imperial College, London, to help save Westminster Hall, the oldest surviving section of the Houses of Parliament. Its 1,500m² hammer-beam roof, commissioned in 1393 by King Richard II, had a deathwatch beetle infestation that would surely have destroyed the beams, as there was no known treatment.

Drawing on his hands-on expertise and after much experimentation, Maxwell-Lefroy formulated the first chemical fluid specifically engineered to eliminate wood-boring insects, saving a cherished part of Britain's heritage. He then employed an intrepid young entrepreneur called Bessie Eades to market the product.

The pair initially wanted to call their brand 'Entokil', after the Greek word for insect, *entomon*. Trademark application objections sent them looking for close alternatives. 'Rentokil' tripped off the tongue nicely, so they added the R and the brand first appeared in 1925.

While today's Rentokil operates on an entirely different scale from 100 years ago, its DNA remains unchanged: relentless innovation; highly trained, professional, expert teams; and a healthy dose of entrepreneurialism.

From thermal imaging surveys and intelligent bait stations to AI-driven sensing technology that can monitor and track individual mice, Rentokil's cutting-edge innovations are reinventing pest control for a digital, sustainable era.

For example, PestConnect, our digital, connected, pest management system, enables instant, 24/7 alerts, rapid responses and proactive pest management. Units around the world generate over 1,000 messages every minute.

Our BirdAlert bird-scaring digital devices can recognise rooks, gulls, geese and starlings by their unique calls from up to 250 metres, producing varied deterrent predator sounds to prevent the birds getting used to them. Our mobile heat treatment Entotherm pods kill insects without chemicals, while our RADAR traps use CO₂ to humanely and hygienically control mice.

These innovations are rooted in a deep understanding of customers' needs, which in turn comes from our greatest asset, our people.

Rentokil technicians exemplify professionalism, expertise and the ingenuity to solve unexpected problems. Whether it is our colleague in Barbados tracing a termite infestation to the cork around an air conditioning unit – when it was previously unknown to science that termites could colonise cork – or our colleagues in Indonesia figuring out how to safely remove a roaming troop of 180 monkeys from an industrial facility, this work requires thinking on your feet. Rentokil people are pest detectives – not just placing traps but tracing the root cause behind infestations.

No wonder our colleagues have always felt deep pride in what they do. Indeed, Rentokil was the first pest controller to put its name on its vans, declaring that pest problems weren't shameful if you hired the best to sort them out.

Entrepreneurialism has always been part of Rentokil's DNA – with local teams, and local branches. The company's first longstanding leader, Bessie Eades – who stands out as a rare female Managing

Director in a mid-20th century business – was notoriously canny. There are tales of travelling salesmen visiting her offices, thinking women an easy target, only to leave with no sale and several cans of Rentokil's latest insecticide fluid.

Her postwar successors, Teddy Buchan and Bob Westphal, grew the brand with prodigious enthusiasm, turning it into the first truly multinational pest control company. One notable coup occurred in 1965 when Westphal saw the sign for the medieval town of Hamelin – of Pied Piper fame – while driving to the company's new West German subsidiary. He won a 10-year contract to rid the town of rodents, making headlines as far away as Hong Kong.

Rentokil's pedigree at winning high-profile contracts has continued. Among other notable assignments, we've been entrusted with protecting the Sydney Opera House, Norway's Urnes stave church, Turkey's Ottoman-era Dolmabahçe palace, and the Beijing and Rio Olympics.

Ever since Rentokil joined forces with rodent control company British Ratin in 1957, forming a powerful combination that boosted the Rentokil name and floated on the London Stock Exchange in 1969, it has also shown an aptitude for M&A, making nearly 400 targeted acquisitions between 2014 and 2023.

Two major acquisitions stand out for their scale and their own proud heritage: our sister brand Initial, which covers hygiene services and joined the group in the 1990s, and America's Terminix, which joined in 2022, making Rentokil the largest pest control company in the US (the world's largest single market) and globally.

This relentless march to number one has taken Rentokil Pest Control from £100,000 in sales in the 1950s, to £773 million in 2012 and £4.3 billion in 2023. We now cover every conceivable pest control need, operating at a global scale, but with a local ethos and a single point of contact.

Despite working in nearly half the countries on earth, we are still looking to expand geographically too, growing apace for example in the great, rising cities of Asia, Africa and Latin America, as we protect customers from burgeoning pest threats.

Bad news for the cockroaches, termites and rats of the world then, but don't think that Rentokil's pest controllers have anything against the creatures. Like our founder, we are fascinated by the species, researching their behaviour extensively at our state-of-the-art innovation centres.

On many occasions, we made scientific discoveries that have gone on to help protect people from the public health risks associated with pests. For example, it was previously thought LEDs wouldn't attract flies as effectively as fluorescent tubes; but after Rentokil scientists studied exactly how light attracted flies, they realised that LEDs could work *better*, leading to our pioneering Lumnia LED light traps.

Would Maxwell-Lefroy or Bessie Eades see the same company, if they looked at Rentokil in 2025? We're sure they would. We're the best service you can get, the experts who get the job done, the innovators who find another, better way.

That's why we're not resting on our laurels, a hundred years in. As leaders in innovation, we're excited about the potential of AI, digital and sustainable pest control to reduce the risks to customers. We know of course that pests aren't going anywhere. This job will never be done – it is an essential, public health service – but we believe we can protect more people, more often, more effectively, as time goes by.

After 100 years, the Rentokil brand has never been stronger. We're confident that in another 100 years, our future colleagues will say the same as we do now: Rentokil isn't just a pest control company. It *is* pest control.

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