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# The Old Working Terrier

Contributed by Admin  
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There can hardly have been a time since the period of the Norman Conquest when the small earth dogs which we now call terriers were not known in these islands and used by sporting men as assistants in the chase, and by husbandmen for the killing of obnoxious vermin. The two little dogs shown in the Bayeux tapestry running with the hounds in advance of King Harold's hawking party were probably meant for terriers. Dame Juliana Berners in the fifteenth century did not neglect to include the "Teroures" in her catalogue of sporting dogs, and a hundred years later Dr. Caius gave pointed recognition to their value in unearthing the fox and drawing the badger.

"Another sorte, there is," wrote the doctor's translator in 1576, "which hunteth the Fox and the Badger or Greye onely, whom we call Terrars, because they (after the manner and custome of ferrets in searching for Connyes) creep into the grounde, and by that meanes make afrayde, nyppe and bite the Foxe and the Badger in such sorte that eyther they teare them in pieces with theyr teeth, beying in the bosome of the earth, or else hayle and pull them perforce out of theyr lurking angles, darke dongeons, and close caues; or at the least through cocened feare drive them out of theire hollow harbours, in so much that they are compelled to prepare speedie flyte, and, being desirous of the next (albeit not the safest) refuge, are otherwise taken and intrapped with snayres and nettes layde over holes to the same purpose. But these be the least in that kynde called Sagax."

The colour, size, and shape of the original terriers are not indicated by the early writers, and art supplies but vague and uncertain evidence. Nicholas Cox, who wrote of sporting dogs in *\_The Gentleman's Recreation\_* (1667), seems to suggest that the type of working terrier was already fixed sufficiently to be divided into two kinds, the one having shaggy coats and straight limbs, the other smooth coats and short bent legs. Yet some years later another authority--Blome--in the same publication was more guarded in his statements as to the terrier type when he wrote: "Everybody that is a fox hunter is of opinion that he hath a good breed, and some will say that the terrier is a peculiar species of itself. I will not say anything to the affirmative or negative of the point."

Searching for evidence on the subject, one finds that perhaps the earliest references to the colours of terriers were made by Daniel in his *\_Field Sports\_* at the end of the eighteenth century, when he described two sorts, the one rough, short-legged, and long-backed, very strong, and "most commonly of a black or yellowish colour, mixed with white"--evidently a hound-marked dog; and another smooth-coated and beautifully formed, with a shorter body and more sprightly appearance, "generally of a reddish brown colour, or black with tanned legs."

Gilpin's portrait of Colonel Thornton's celebrated Pitch, painted in 1790, presents a terrier having a smooth white coat with a black patch at the set-on of the undocked tail, and black markings on the face and ears. The dog's head is badly drawn and small in proportion; but the body and legs and colouring would hardly disgrace the Totteridge Kennels of to-day. Fox-terriers of a noted strain were depicted from life by Reinagle in *\_The Sportsman's Cabinet\_*, published over a hundred years ago; and in the text accompanying the engraving a minute account is given of the peculiarities and working capacities of the terrier. We are told that there were two breeds: the one

wire-haired, larger, more powerful, and harder bitten; the other smooth-haired and smaller, with more style. The wire-hairs were white with spots, the smooths were black and tan, the tan apparently predominating over the black. The same writer states that it was customary to take out a brace of terriers with a pack of hounds, a larger and a smaller one, the smaller dog being used in emergency when the earth proved to be too narrow to admit his bigger companion. It is well known that many of the old fox hunters have kept their special breeds of terrier, and the Belvoir, the Grove, and Lord Middleton's are among the packs to which particular terrier strains have been attached.

That even a hundred years ago terriers were bred with care, and that certain strains were held in especial value, is shown by the recorded fact that a litter of seven puppies was sold for twenty-one guineas--a good price even in these days--and that on one occasion so high a sum as twenty guineas was paid for a full-grown dog. At that time there was no definite and well-established breed recognised throughout the islands by a specific name; the embracing title of "Terrier" included all the varieties which have since been carefully differentiated. But very many of the breeds existed in their respective localities awaiting national recognition. Here and there some squire or huntsman nurtured a particular strain and developed a type which he kept pure, and at many a manor-house and farmstead in Devonshire and Cumberland, on many a Highland estate and Irish riverside where there were foxes to be hunted or otters to be killed, terriers of definite strain were religiously cherished. Several of these still survive, and are as respectable in descent and quite as important historically as some of the favoured and fashionable champions of our time. They do not perhaps possess the outward beauty and distinction of type which would justify their being brought into general notice, but as workers they retain all the fire and verve

that are required in dogs that are expected to encounter such vicious vermin as the badger and the fox.

Some of the breeds of terriers seen nowadays in every dog show were equally obscure and unknown a few years back. Thirty-seven years ago the now popular Irish Terrier was practically unknown in England, and the Scottish Terrier was only beginning to be recognised as a distinct breed. The Welsh Terrier is quite a new introduction that a dozen or so years ago was seldom seen outside the Principality; and so recently as 1881 the Airedale was merely a local dog known in Yorkshire as the Waterside or the Bingley Terrier. Yet the breeds just mentioned are all of unimpeachable ancestry, and the circumstance that they were formerly bred within limited neighbourhoods is in itself an argument in favour of their purity. We have seen the process of a sudden leap into recognition enacted during the past few years in connection with the white terrier of the Western Highlands--a dog which was familiarly known in Argyllshire centuries ago, yet which has only lately emerged from the heathery hillsides around Poltalloch to become an attraction on the benches at the Crystal Palace and on the lawns of the Botanical Gardens; and the example suggests the possibility that in another decade or so the neglected Sealyham Terrier, the ignored terrier of the Borders, and the almost forgotten Jack Russell strain, may have claimed a due recompense for their long neglect.

There are lovers of the hard-bitten working "earth dogs" who still keep these strains inviolate, and who greatly prefer them to the better-known terriers whose natural activities have been too often atrophied by a system of artificial breeding to show points. Few of these old unregistered breeds would attract the eye of the fancier accustomed to judge a dog parading before him in the show ring. To know their value and to appreciate their sterling good qualities, one needs to watch them at work on badger or when they hit upon the

line of an otter. It is then that they display the alertness and the dare-devil courage which have won for the English terriers their name and fame.

An excellent working terrier was the white, rough-haired strain kept by the Rev. John Russell in Devonshire and distributed among privileged sportsmen about Somersetshire and Gloucestershire. The working attributes of these energetic terriers have long been understood, and the smart, plucky little dogs have been constantly coveted by breeders all over the country, but they have never won the popularity they deserve.

Those who have kept both varieties prefer the Russell to the Sealyham Terrier, which is nevertheless an excellent worker. It is on record that one of these, a bitch of only 9 lb. weight, fought and killed, single-handed, a full-grown dog-fox. The Sealyham derives its breed name from the seat of the Edwardes family, near Haverfordwest, in Pembrokeshire, where the strain has been carefully preserved for well over a century. It is a long-bodied, short-legged terrier, with a hard, wiry coat, frequently whole white, but also white with black or brown markings or brown with black. They may be as heavy as 17 lb., but 12 lb. is the average weight. Some years ago the breed seemed to be on the down grade, requiring fresh blood from a well-chosen outcross. One hears very little concerning them nowadays, but it is certain that when in their prime they possessed all the grit, determination, and endurance that are looked for in a good working terrier.

A wire-haired black and tan terrier was once common in Suffolk and Norfolk, where it was much used for rabbiting, but it may now be extinct, or, if not extinct, probably identified with the Welsh Terrier, which it closely resembled in size and colouring. There was

also in Shropshire a well-known breed of wire-hair terriers, black and tan, on very short legs, and weighing about 10 lb. or 12 lb., with long punishing heads and extraordinary working powers. So, too, in Lancashire and Cheshire one used to meet with sandy-coloured terriers of no very well authenticated strain, but closely resembling the present breed of Irish Terrier; and Squire Thornton, at his place near Pickering, in Yorkshire, had a breed of wire-hairs tan in colour with a black stripe down the back. Then there is the Cowley strain, kept by the Cowleys of Callipers, near King's Langley. These are white wire-haired dogs marked like the Fox-terrier, and exceedingly game. Possibly the Elterwater Terrier is no longer to be found, but some few of them still existed a dozen years or so ago in the Lake District, where they were used in conjunction with the West Cumberland Otterhounds. They were not easily distinguishable from the better-known Border Terriers of which there are still many strains, ranging from Northumberland, where Mr. T. Robson, of Bellingham, has kept them for many years, to Galloway and Ayrshire and the Lothians, where their coats become longer and less crisp.

There are many more local varieties of the working terrier as, for example, the Roseneath, which is often confused with the Poltalloch, or White West Highlander, to whom it is possibly related. And the Pittenweem, with which the Poltalloch Terriers are now being crossed; while Mrs. Alastair Campbell, of Ardrishaig, has a pack of Cairn Terriers which seem to represent the original type of the improved Scottie. Considering the great number of strains that have been preserved by sporting families and maintained in more or less purity to type, it is easy to understand how a "new" breed may become fashionable, and still claim the honour of long descent. They may not in all cases have the beauty of shape which is desired on the show bench; but it is well to remember that while our show terriers have been bred to the highest perfection we still possess in Great Britain a separate order of "earth dogs" that for pluckily following

the fox and the badger into their lairs or bolting an otter from his  
holt cannot be excelled all the world over.