

The Irish Wolfhound

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It is now some thirty years since an important controversy was carried on in the columns of *The Live Stock Journal* on the nature and history of the great Irish Wolfhound. The chief disputants in the discussion were Captain G. A. Graham, of Dursley, Mr. G. W. Hickman, Mr. F. Adcock, and the Rev. M. B. Wynn, and the main point at issue was whether the dog then imperfectly known as the Irish Wolfdog was a true descendant of the ancient *Canis graius Hibernicus*, or whether it was a mere manufactured mongrel, owing its origin to an admixture of the Great Dane and the dog of the Pyrenees, modified and brought to type by a cross with the Highland Deerhound. It was not doubted--indeed, history and tradition clearly attested--that there had existed in early times in Ireland a very large and rugged hound of Greyhound form, whose vocation it was to hunt the wolf, the red deer, and the fox. It was assuredly known to the Romans, and there can be little doubt that the huge dog Samr, which Jarl Gunnar got from the Irish king Myrkiarton in the tenth century and took back with him to Norway, was one of this breed. But it was supposed by many to have become extinct soon after the disappearance of the last wolf in Ireland, and it was the endeavour of Captain Graham to demonstrate that specimens, although admittedly degenerate, were still to be found, and that they were capable of being restored to a semblance of the original type.

At the time when he entered into the controversy, Captain Graham had been actively interesting himself for something like a score of years in the resuscitation of the breed, and his patience had been well

rewarded. By the year 1881 the Irish Wolfhound had been practically restored, although it has taken close upon a quarter of a century to produce the magnificent champions Cotswold and Cotswold Patricia, those brilliant examples of the modern breed--a brace of Wolfhounds who bear testimony to the vast amount of energy and perseverance which Captain Graham and his enthusiastic colleague Major Garnier displayed in evolving from rough material the majestic breed that holds so prominent a position to-day.

There is little to be gathered from ancient writings concerning the size and appearance of the Irish Wolfhounds in early times. Exaggerated figures are given as to height and weight; but all authorities agree that they were impressively large and imposing dogs, and that they were regarded as the giants of the canine race.

It seems extraordinary that so little should have been accurately known and recorded of a dog which at one time must have been a familiar figure in the halls of the Irish kings. It was no mere mythical animal like the heraldic griffin, but an actual sporting dog which was accepted as a national emblem of the Emerald Isle, associated with the harp and the shamrock.

As regards the origin of the Irish Wolfhound, more than one theory is advanced. By some authorities it is suggested that it was the dog which we now know as the Great Dane. Others hold that as there were rough-coated Greyhounds in Ireland, it is this dog, under another name, which is now accepted. But probably the late Captain Graham was nearer the truth when he gave the opinion that the Irish hound that was kept to hunt wolves has never become extinct at all, but is now represented in the Scottish Deerhound, only altered a little in size and strength to suit the easier work required of it--that of hunting the deer. This is the more probable, as the fact remains that the chief factor in the resuscitation of the Irish Wolfhound

has been the Scottish Deerhound.

The result of Captain Graham's investigations when seeking for animals bearing some relationship to the original Irish "Wolfe Dogge" was that three strains were to be found in Ireland, but none of the representatives at that time was anything like so large as those mentioned in early writings, and they all appeared to have deteriorated in bone and substance. Sir J. Power, of Kilfane, was responsible for one line, Mr. Baker, of Ballytobin, for another, and Mr. Mahoney, of Dromore, for the remaining strain. From bitches obtained from two of these kennels, Captain Graham, by crossing them with the Great Dane and Scottish Deerhound, achieved the first step towards producing the animal that he desired. Later on the Russian Wolfhound, better known as the Borzoi, an exceedingly large hound, was introduced, as also were one or two other large breeds of dogs.

The intermixture of these canine giants, however, was not at first very satisfactory, as although plenty of bone was obtained, many were most ungainly in appearance and ill-shaped animals that had very little about them to attract attention. Captain Graham, however, stuck to his work, and very soon the specimens that he brought forward began to show a fixity of type both in head and in general outline. Brian was one of his best dogs, but he was not very large, as he only stood just over thirty inches at the shoulder. Banshee and Fintragh were others, but probably the best of Captain Graham's kennel was the bitch Sheelah. It was not, however, until towards the end of the last century that the most perfect dogs were bred. These included O'Leary, the property of Mr. Crisp, of Playford Hall. O'Leary is responsible for many of the best dogs of the present day, and was the sire of Mrs. Percy Shewell's Ch. Cotswold, who is undoubtedly the grandest Irish Wolfhound ever bred. In height Cotswold stands 34-1/2 inches and is therefore perhaps the largest dog of any breed now alive.

In 1900 Mr. Crisp bred Kilcullen from O'Leary, this dog winning the championship at the Kennel Club Show at the Crystal Palace in 1902 under Captain Graham. This was the year the Irish Wolfhound Club presented the hound Rajah of Kidnal as a regimental pet to the newly formed Irish Guards.

Rajah of Kidnal, who was bred and exhibited by Mrs. A. Gerard, of Malpas, was the selection of Captain Graham and two other judges. This dog, which has been renamed Brian Boru, is still hearty and well, and was at his post on St. Patrick's Day, 1909, when the shamrock that had been sent by Her Majesty Queen Alexandra was handed to the men.

Mrs. Gerard owned one of the largest kennels of Irish Wolfhounds in England, and amongst her many good dogs and bitches was Cheevra, who was a wonderful brood bitch, and included amongst her stock were several that worked their way up to championship honours; she was the dam of Rajah of Kidnal.

Besides Ballyhooley, Mr. W. Williams owned a good dog in Finn by Brian II. Finn produced Miss Packe's Wickham Lavengro, a black and tan dog that has won several prizes. Some judges are opposed to giving prizes to Irish Wolfhounds of this colour, but Captain Graham did not object to it. Finn was a very heavy dog, and weighed 148 lbs.

A hound that has been of great benefit to the breed in Ireland is Ch. Marquis of Donegal, the property of Mr. Martin.

Amongst the bitches that have been instrumental in building up the breed to its present high state of excellence is Princess Patricia of Connaught who is by Dermot Astore out of Cheevra, and is the dam of Ch. Cotswold Patricia. She is one of the tallest of her race, her

height being 33 inches; another bitch that measures the same number of inches at the shoulder being Dr. Pitts-Tucker's Juno of the Fen, a daughter of Ch. Wargrave.

Mr. Everett, of Felixstowe, is now one of the most successful breeders. He exhibited at the 1908 Kennel Club show a most promising young dog in Felixstowe Kilronan, with which he was second to Mrs. Shewell's Ch. Cotswold, of whom he is now kennel companion. At the same show Miss Clifford, of Ryde, exhibited a good hound in Wildcroft, another of Dermot Astore's sons, and other supporters of the breed are Lady Kathleen Pilkington, Mr. T. Hamilton Adams, Mr. G. H. Thurston, Mr. Bailey, Mrs. F. Marshall, Mr. J. L. T. Dobbin, and Miss Ethel McCheane.

The following is the description of the variety as drawn up by the Club:--

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GENERAL APPEARANCE--The Irish Wolfhound should not be quite so heavy or massive as the Great Dane, but more so than the Deerhound, which in general type he should otherwise resemble. Of great size and commanding appearance, very muscular, strongly though gracefully built; movements easy and active; head and neck carried high; the tail carried with an upward sweep, with a slight curve towards the extremity. The minimum height and weight of dogs should be 31 inches and 120 pounds, of bitches 28 inches and 90 pounds. Anything below this should be debarred from competition. Great size, including height at shoulder and proportionate length of body, is the desideratum to be aimed at, and it is desired firmly to establish a race that shall average from 32 inches to 34 inches in dogs, showing the requisite power, activity, courage, and symmetry. HEAD--Long, the frontal bones

of the forehead very slightly raised and very little indentation between the eyes. Skull not too broad; muzzle long and moderately pointed; ears small and Greyhound-like in carriage. NECK--Rather long, very strong and muscular, well arched, without dewlap and loose skin about the throat. CHEST--Very deep, breast wide. BACK--Rather long than short. Loins arched. TAIL--Long and slightly curved, of moderate thickness, and well covered with hair. BELLY--Well drawn up. FORE-QUARTERS--Shoulders muscular, giving breadth of chest, set sloping, elbows well under, neither turned inwards nor outwards. Leg--Forearm muscular and the whole leg strong and quite straight. HIND-QUARTERS--Muscular thighs, and second thigh long and strong as in the Greyhound, and hocks well let down and turning neither in nor out. FEET--Moderately large and round, neither turned inwards nor outwards; toes well arched and closed, nails very strong and curved. HAIR--Rough and hard on body, legs, and head; especially wiry and long over eyes and under jaw. COLOUR AND MARKINGS--The recognised colours are grey, brindle, red, black, pure white, fawn, or any colour that appears in the Deerhound. FAULTS--Too light or heavy in head, too highly arched frontal bone, large ears and hanging flat to the face; short neck; full dewlap; too narrow or too broad a chest; sunken and hollow or quite level back; bent fore-legs; over-bent fetlocks; twisted feet; spreading toes; too curly a tail; weak hind-quarters, cow hocks, and a general want of muscle; too short in body.