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Harriet Ritvo

PRIDE AND PEDIGREE:
THE EVOLUTION OF
THE VICTORIAN DOG FANCY*

BY THE END OF THE VICTORIAN PERIOD, THE ENGLISH HAD BECOME FAMOUS, at least in their own estimation, for their love of dogs. This inclination had been carefully nurtured and publicized throughout the nineteenth century by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and earlier humane philanthropists.¹ But not all dogs were equally cherished, especially by the members of the urban middle classes who kept pet dogs rather than working animals. According to Charles Rotherham, the veterinarian who attended Queen Victoria's kennel, the striking rise in London's canine population between 1865 and 1887 reflected the snowballing demand for purebred dogs as domestic companions.² Any other kind of dog might compromise its owner's social status. Although the tender-hearted might also provide generously for unfortunate strays through the RSPCA or such institutions as the Battersea Dogs' Home, such animals were unlikely to be adopted into respectable families.³ As one breeder put it a decade later, "Nobody who is anybody can afford to be followed about by a mongrel dog."⁴

* An earlier version of this article was given as a lecture at the Yale Center for British Art. I am grateful to the Center for a Visiting Fellowship that supported its preparation.

¹ Brian Harrison, "Animals and the State in Nineteenth-Century England" in *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 102-103.

² "Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Rabies in Dogs," *Parliamentary Papers*, 1887 (322), XI, 451, p. 125.

³ The Battersea Home, which was the first animal shelter, opened in 1860 to a good deal of public derision. In short order, however, it attracted impressive donations, widespread popular support in its working-class neighborhood, and the admiration of Queen Victoria, who wished there were more such shelters (Edward G. Fairholme and Wellesley Pain, *A Century of Work for Animals: The History of the RSPCA* [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1924], p. 124; Coral Lansbury, *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Workers and Vivisection* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985], chap. 1; Christopher Hibbert, ed., *Queen Victoria in her Letters and Journals* [London: John Murray, 1984], p. 300).

⁴ Gordon Stables, "Breeding and Rearing for Pleasure, Prizes and Profit," *The Dog Owners' Annual for 1896* (London: Dean and Son, 1896), p. 166.

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Victorian recreation has recently become the focus of serious scholarly study. Most historians have concentrated on working-class leisure activities, both those which, like bullbaiting, illustrated the persistence of traditional pastimes into the period of industrialization and those which, like music halls, signalled the creation of a vital and distinctive urban culture.⁵ Through these shared activities Victorian working men and women maintained a sense of group solidarity; they symbolically articulated values often at odds with those that proselytizing members of the middle classes attempted to impose from above. Sometimes, as with cruel animal sports such as bullbaiting and dogfighting, practices that were most offensive to respectable sensibilities were most tenaciously adhered to. Despite vigorous attempts by authorities representing both the government and quasi-official agencies like the RSPCA to suppress these ancient diversions, they were furtively enjoyed by both the rural and urban working classes well into the middle of the nineteenth century, often with the connivance and support of aristocrats who shared the inclination to resist middle-class standards of morality and taste.⁶

The working classes were not, however, the only Victorians to develop and cherish distinctive recreational modes. The middle classes, too, used leisure as a way to define and consolidate their position in industrialized urban society; they were, according to Peter Bailey, the most creative segment of society in this respect. To some extent, they had to be. There was no well-developed tradition of bourgeois leisure, analogous to those possessed by both the working classes and the aristocracy and gentry. Indeed, some members of the middle classes viewed the very notion of leisure with suspicion, because it seemed to contradict deeply ingrained values of industry and thrift.⁷ Recreation was seldom, however, a simple frittering away of spare time and cash;

⁵ See, for example, Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-1885* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); James Walvin, *Leisure and Society 1830-1950* (London: Longman, 1978); and Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, c. 1789-c. 1880* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980). The essays collected in *Leisure in Britain 1780-1939*, ed. John K. Walton and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983) offer a representative range of topics; Keith A. P. Sandiford has surveyed opportunities for further research in "The Victorians at Play: Problems in Historiographical Methodology," *Journal of Social History*, 15 (1981), 271-288.

⁶ Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, pp. 45-47, 50, 124-136; James Turner, *Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 20-29; John K. Walton and Robert Poole, "The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century," pp. 105-106 and Douglas A. Reid, "Interpreting the Festival Calendar: Wakes and Fairs as Carnivals," pp. 133-135 in Robert D. Storch, ed., *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

⁷ Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, pp. 56, 64-65.

it was often quite functional, if not productive in the conventional sense. Carefully stratified leisure activities could provide a valuable index of social status.

For example, the sports that became increasingly popular in the second half of the nineteenth century were clearly segregated along economic lines. Bourgeois athletes avoided soccer as a proletarian game, while they were attracted by the country-house associations of cricket. To swell middle-class recreational options, some once-raffish popular pastimes, including rowing and theater-going, were appropriated, sanitized, and redefined as respectable.⁸ And in addition to dividing the genteel from the vulgar, leisure could offer an avenue from the bourgeoisie into the elite. Some middle-class leisure was devoted to pastimes, from concert music to fox hunting, that had previously been the preserve of the aristocracy. This was an avenue to be walked with some caution, since the upper classes could be as anxious as the bourgeoisie to distinguish themselves from their social inferiors. In some cases, the barrier was simply financial: it took a lot of money to play polo or outfit a yacht. But more often, exclusiveness was buttressed by ridicule, such as generations of so-called Cockney fox hunters (that is, sportsmen who did not belong to the landed gentry) endured both from novelists like R. S. Surtees and from their fellow sportsmen.⁹

In many ways, the development of the Victorian dog fancy in the second half of the nineteenth century epitomized middle-class leisure activities. It was derivative of earlier pastimes of both the aristocracy and the working classes, but these elements were combined in a new structure of which the primary purpose was to emphasize class distinctions. The focus of dog fancying — breeding and showing pedigreed animals — was a series of finely graded differentiations, which functioned both to establish the unique character of each breed and to assess the relative excellence of dogs of the same breed. Because the quality of the animal implicitly reflected the status and standards of its owner, it was essential that the hierarchy embodied in pedigrees and show awards be meaningful and secure. Thus the fact of careful discrimination became more important than what was being discriminated, as dog fancying allowed enthusiasts to express, in a partially

⁸ Sandiford, "Victorians at Play," p. 279; Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, p. 135.

⁹ Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 132-134; Walvin, *Leisure and Society*, pp. 16-17; for an extended portrayal of mid-century sporting society, see R. S. Surtees, *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour*, ed. Virginia Blain (1853; St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981). Near the end of the century *The Cost of Sport*, edited by F. G. Aflalo (London: John Murray, 1899), let would-be enthusiasts calculate exactly how much it would cost them to participate in a range of sporting activities from fox hunting and falconry to canoeing and curling.

concealed way, their opinions, hopes, and fears about issues like social and occupational status, and the need for distinctions between classes.¹⁰ It offers insight into the phenomenon of pet keeping, an old custom that became much more widespread and emotionally charged in the nineteenth century.

I

The idea of pedigree did not originate in the nineteenth century, nor was it first applied to dog breeding. It was not, on the other hand, a very ancient notion. Before the eighteenth century, domestic animals in England varied greatly within their respective species, but not according to the kind of consistent and intentionally produced distinctions represented by modern breeds. Instead, there were many regional strains, the results of fairly random inbreeding among semi-isolated populations of sheep, cattle, horses, pigs, and dogs. Such animals, as the late eighteenth-century Board of Agriculture noted in its county-by-county surveys of British husbandry, were likely to be hardy, but scraggly and inefficient.¹¹ Most farm animals continued to be produced in this rather haphazard fashion well into the nineteenth century.¹² Well before then, however, rich and aristocratic landowners who paid more attention to their own genealogies than did ordinary farmers, had begun to lead the way in developing animal pedigrees.¹³

¹⁰ The subjects of pet keeping and pet breeding have, as J. H. Plumb has recently pointed out, been "totally ignored" by scholars ("The Commercialization of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England" in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982], p. 274). There is a recent discussion of pet keeping before the nineteenth century in Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 100-120; John K. Walton refers to the rise of the dog fancy in "Mad Dogs and Englishmen: The Conflict over Rabies in Late Victorian England," *Journal of Social History*, 13 (1979), 221-225.

¹¹ For example, according to the Board's surveyors, the cattle of Cumberland were "not distinguished by any peculiar good qualities"; as for the sheep, there were "few places where they have been more neglected" (John Bailey and George Culley, *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cumberland* [London: n.p., 1794], pp. 14, 17). See Robert Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry: II, 1700-1900*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), for a systematic account of the development of British farm animals.

¹² The minutes of one of the first meetings of the Royal Agricultural Society of England (when it was still called the English Agricultural Society), held on 22 May 1839, earnestly hoped that "one direct effect of the Society's exertions will be to bring the best blood of the most improved breeds into districts where these are comparatively unknown" ("Minutes of Council, 1838-1840," Volume B.I.10 of the RASE Archive). See also Ernest Clarke, "The Foundation of the Royal Agricultural Society," *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 1, 3d series (1890), 13.

¹³ Lawrence Stone has suggested that the influence went in the other direction — that the example of livestock breeding "inevitably led men to choose their wives as they would choose a brood mare, with a great care for their personal genetic inheritance" (*The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* [New York: Harper and Row, 1979], pp. 160-161).

It was no accident that the first animal to be refined by careful selective breeding was the animal most closely associated with the upper classes and universally tagged with the epithet “noble” — the horse. Also predictably, the horses affected were those used for sport (racing and hunting) and for riding, rather than heavy workhorses. By the middle of the eighteenth century, similar techniques were being applied to domestic livestock. What was called high stockbreeding had become an expensive hobby for many wealthy landowners, who congregated at the annual sheep-shearings, which were both social and agricultural occasions, held on the estates of such improving magnates as the fifth and sixth Dukes of Bedford and Thomas Coke of Norfolk.¹⁴ Stockbreeding was also the foundation of the fortunes of a few shrewd professionals. For example, Robert Bakewell of Dishley, the most successful and acclaimed breeder of the eighteenth century, produced new strains of sheep and cattle of unsurpassed fatness. His objective was to maximize the expensive cuts of meat and minimize what had to be thrown away — so he developed barrel-shaped animals with thin bones and light innards.¹⁵

When individual breeds were being established, purity of descent and length of lineage were inevitably less important than the spectacular qualities of individual animals. No genealogy was available — at least to English-speaking foreigners — of the first Arabian horses, which were purchased or captured at the eastern end of the Mediterranean.¹⁶ Crafty innovators like Bakewell let their results speak for themselves.¹⁷ But pedigree quickly became important. Bovine and equine superstars were not the only animals for sale. The qualities of less obviously impressive animals might not be apparent on a single inspection, or they might not yet be fully developed in young animals.

¹⁴ Rowland E. Prothero, *English Farming Past and Present* (1912; rpt. ed., Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961), p. 221; Susanna Wade Martins, *A Great Estate at Work: The Holkham Estate and its Inhabitants in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 48-49.

¹⁵ John G. Gazley, *The Life of Arthur Young, 1741-1820* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1973), p. 14; David Low, *On the Domesticated Animals of the British Islands* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, n.d.), pp. 191-192, 372-373. For an admiring overview of Bakewell's career, see Henry Cecil Pawson, *Robert Bakewell: Pioneer Livestock Breeder* (London: Lockwood, 1957).

¹⁶ For a brief history of the development of the English thoroughbred horse, see Roger Longrigg, *The History of Horse Racing* (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 57-70. A more elaborate literature exists for the horse than for any other domestic animal, although, as Plumb points out, little of it is the work of professional historians (“The Commercialization of Leisure,” p. 280n). For a survey of this literature, see Anne Grimshaw, *The Horse: A Bibliography of British Books 1851-1976* (London: Library Association, 1982).

¹⁷ Bakewell was in any case not eager to share his genealogies with potential competitors. John Saunders Sebright typified several generations of agriculturists in grumbling about “the mystery with which he carried on every part of his business, and the means which he employed to mislead the public” (“The Art of Improving the Breeds of Domestic Animals” [London: n.p., 1809], p. 9).



(1) George Stubbs, *A Hound and a Bitch in a Landscape* (1792), courtesy of the Tate Gallery, London.

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And, in any case, purchasers of expensive animals wished to know exactly what they were getting, especially if they were interested in enhancing their own breeding stock.

So most breeders recorded the family histories of their animals for the information of prospective purchasers and fellow enthusiasts. In addition, throughout the eighteenth century, there were increasing numbers of public sources of information. Magazine articles about particularly distinguished animals often detailed their ancestry; the intermittently published racing calendars included the pedigrees of many horses.¹⁸ The first authoritative *Stud Book* for thoroughbreds, published in 1791, included the birth date, ancestors, color, sex, and breeder's name for each animal, as well as a list of the foals produced by each mare.¹⁹ Shorthorned cattle, the prestige beef animals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were the next to receive such treatment. Many of the cows and bulls listed in the first *Herd Book*, which appeared in 1822, could trace their ancestry back five or six generations.²⁰

By this time, the importance of purity of blood was widely accepted; indeed, in some cases pedigree actually replaced more tangible standards of quality. This was particularly noticeable among farm animals, for which there was not a single, universally acknowledged measure of excellence, such as racing provided for thoroughbred horses. Some agriculturists worried that breeders obsessed simply by ancestry would pay high prices for any offshoots of a glamorous family tree, a practice that could undermine the value of the most admired bloodlines. In order to maintain the vigor of a pedigree, it was necessary to remove animals that did not embody the highest potential of the strain from the breeding pool; selling inferior scions would eventually dilute the stock.²¹

¹⁸ The first Racing Calendar was published in 1727. See C. M. Prior, *Early Records of the Thoroughbred Horse* (London: "The Sportsman Office," 1925) and *The History of the Racing Calendar and the Stud Book* (London: "Sporting Life," 1926).

¹⁹ *An Introduction to a General Stud-Book; containing (with few exceptions) the pedigree of every horse, mare, &c. of note, that has appeared on the turf for the last fifty years, with many of an earlier date* (London: J. Weatherby, 1791).

²⁰ George Coates, *The General Short-Horned Herd-Book: Containing the Pedigrees of Short-Horned Bulls, Cows, &c. of the Improved Durham Breed, from the earliest Account, to the year 1822* (Otley: W. Walker, 1822).

²¹ For example, as early as 1826, Henry Berry warned beginning stockbreeders that by "the terms *high-blood and highly-bred*...the writer does not mean to attach unmerited value to mere pedigree, unsupported by solid pretensions to excellence" ("Whether the Breed of Live Stock, connected with Agriculture, be susceptible of the greatest Improvement from the qualities conspicuous in the Male, or from those conspicuous in the Female parent?" *British Farmer's Magazine*, 1 [1826], 35).

Although similar reservations about exaggerated concern for lineage were fairly widespread, the basic value of pedigree was never in doubt. Nor were those landowners who purchased pedigreed livestock, however sophisticated they were agriculturally, inclined to undervalue a venerable and well-documented family history. The *Herd Book* and the *Stud Book* (and the similar annals of other breeds and species, which multiplied rapidly in the nineteenth century), bore a striking resemblance to the tomes in which many of the owners and breeders had their own entries: Burke's and Debrett's catalogues of the peerage, baronetage, and gentry of Great Britain.²² And the resemblance was not simply formal. Most distinguished families tended their pedigrees carefully. Just as a spectacular showing at a national fair was not sufficient to ensconce a bull or ram in the most exclusive breeding ranks without the support of a pedigree guaranteeing the quality of his offspring, so at least some aristocrats seemed to feel that their titles and estates required genealogical support. According to Horace Round, an acerbic and reactionary late Victorian expert on genealogy and family law, many of the most distinguished lineages in Burke had been buttressed by clever fabrication.²³

II

Many members of the middle classes were equally concerned that their status be properly appreciated, but for such people — most often town dwellers — high stockbreeding was not an option. They lacked both the money and the land necessary to undertake this elaborate enterprise. And, in any case, its symbolism was inappropriate to their

²² See Charles S. Plumb, *Registry Books on Animals: A Comparative Study* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1930) for a chronicle of breed books. Genealogical catalogues of distinguished human beings appeared at about the same time as those of thoroughbred animals. The forerunner of *Debrett's Peerage and Baronetage* was founded in 1769 (it has been known as *Debrett's* since 1802). The first edition of *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage* appeared in 1826, and *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry* followed in 1833-35.

²³ Most of Horace Round's *Peerage and Pedigree: Studies in Peerage Law and Family History*, 2 vols. (London: James Nisbet and St. Catherine's Press, 1910) was devoted to "The rejection of fabulous pedigrees, the exposure of spurious records, and the substitution of fact for fiction in the realm of family history" (I, xiii). Victorians apparently longed for illustrious descent on a corporate as well as an individual or family basis. According to Asa Briggs, nineteenth-century antiquarians "discovered or invented historical pedigrees for new cities with the same enthusiasm that they discovered or invented historical pedigrees for *nouveaux riches*" (*Victorian Cities* [New York: Harper and Row, 1970], p. 379).

relatively modest prosperity and circumscribed social pretensions. But they turned in great numbers to smaller, less expensive animals, which allowed them to replicate the conventions of pedigreed livestock breeding on an appropriately reduced scale, while producing animal surrogates with equally distinguished genealogies. The dog is subject to much greater physical variation than any livestock species (or indeed, as it happens, than any other mammalian species); it therefore offered enormous opportunities for differentiating breeds and for ranking individuals of varying qualities within breeds. And the simultaneous rise of pet keeping — the tendency especially of comfortable urban households to cherish dogs that were not required to earn their keep — meant that dogs could be bred to standards unrelated to practical function. By the end of the nineteenth century, an elaborate structure had developed to enforce a set of profoundly artificial distinctions among dogs and to ratify the claims of superior individuals and pedigrees.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there had been few apparent foundations for such a structure. Pet keeping had, it was true, a long history. Pets first appeared in the middle ages, as the playthings of courtiers and members of privileged religious orders, and many Tudor and Stuart aristocrats kept favorite lapdogs.²⁴ Affection for useless pets did not become respectable among more ordinary people for several centuries, however, although sympathy for animals began to stir fairly widely in the second half of the eighteenth century. If the epitaph of Philip Shallcross, who died in 1787, praised him for his “inviolable attachment to dogs and cats,” the posthumous discretion of Humphrey Morice, a privy councillor, was more typical. Like many late eighteenth century pet owners, he concealed provisions for his dogs and horses in a secret codicil to his will, because he feared ridicule if he included them in the main body.²⁵

Dog breeding itself did not have a long history. Indeed, the very notion of breed as it was understood by Victorian dog fanciers (and as we understand it today) — a subspecies or race with definable physical characteristics that will be reliably reproduced in the offspring of in-trabreed matings — was of relatively recent origin. Before the nine-

²⁴ Dix Harwood, *Love for Animals and How It Developed in Great Britain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), p. 23; Carson I. A. Ritchie, *The British Dog, Its History from the Earliest Times* (London: Robert Hale, 1981), pp. 118-119. For a more general discussion of the human propensity to acquire pets, see Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

²⁵ Harwood, *Love for Animals*, pp. 215-216.



(2) "Dog Fashions for 1889." *Punch*, 26 January, p. 42.

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teenth century, only one English book was devoted exclusively to dogs — Johannes Caius's *Of Englishe Dogges*, which appeared in 1576.²⁶ (It was a translation of a Latin treatise originally published in 1570.) Dr. Caius's list of Tudor dog types was meant to be exhaustive — he compiled it as a favor to his contemporary Konrad Gesner, the Swiss author of the compendious *Historia animalium* — and it bears little resemblance to modern schemes of classification. Caius recognized only sixteen varieties, far fewer than existed in the nineteenth century: “Terrare, Harier, Bludhunde, Gasehunde, Setter, Water Spainel or Fynder, Spainel-gentle or Comforter, Shepherd's Dog, Mastive or Bande-Dog, Wappe, Turnspit, Dancer.”²⁷ Some of these names anticipated those of nineteenth-century breeds, but it is unlikely that they referred to identical, or even very similar animals.

Caius's classification was based on function rather than physical appearance. He grouped his types under three larger categories, all unmistakably utilitarian: hunting dogs, pet dogs (this category included only the spainel-gentle), and dogs that did menial work. Any large dog would have been called a mastive; any lapdog a spainel-gentle. A dog that chased hares was a harier; one that helped the cook was a turnspit. A farmer's manual of the late seventeenth century, which dealt with dogs and rabbits as an afterthought, echoed Caius's categories. The anonymous author identified only eleven different kinds of dogs — Grey-hound, Blood Hound, Rach, Sluth Hound, Tumbler, Tarier or Harier, Leviner, Beagle, Spannel, Ban-Dog, and Field-Dog or Shepherd's Mastiff — and also characterized them according to what they did, not how they looked. The Tumbler, for example, was “chiefly for *Coney-Warrens* and is a bold, desperate cur,” while the Ban-Dog was like “a Watch-Man to a House” and also was “used in Game, at the *Bear* and *Bull*, for pastime and recreation.”²⁸ An eighteenth-century sporting encyclopedia complicated these traditional functional categories (reduced in this case to water spaniel, lurcher, tumbler, setting-dog, greyhound, and terrier) with overlapping divisions based on coat color. Under this system, a dog with red spots

²⁶ Clifford L. B. Hubbard, *An Introduction to the Literature of the British Dog* (Ponterwyd: Hubbard, 1949), pp. 11-12.

²⁷ Johannes Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges, the diversities, the names, the natures, and the properties*, Abraham Fleming, trans. (1576; rpt. ed., London: A. Bradley, 1880).

²⁸ A. S., *The Husbandman, Farmer and Grasier's Compleat Instructor* (London: Henry Nelme, 1697), pp. 129-133.

was considered “fiery, and hard to be managed,” while a yellow one was “of a giddy nature, and impatient.”²⁹

Before this, however, breeds in the modern sense had begun to emerge. This evolution was connected with the development of foxhounds, which were the most carefully bred dogs by the end of the century, although among the most mongrelly at its outset. Their metamorphosis clearly reflected the eighteenth-century social history of the sport of fox hunting. At the beginning of the century, fox hunting was a rather slow pastime, in which country squires and their tenants plodded (sometimes on horseback and sometimes on foot) after a motley assortment of sniffing dogs, which only occasionally found a fox to follow. Socially it was overshadowed by stag hunting, although not for long, as stags were rapidly disappearing outside of private parks.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, fox hunting changed rapidly, at least in Leicestershire and the neighboring counties, for a number of convergent reasons. More than half a century of careful breeding — a secondary result of the late seventeenth-century importation of Arabians — had produced a stock of horses with great speed, endurance, and jumping ability. The fences around the newly enclosed pastures of the Midlands gave them something to jump. The quickened pace of the hunt required faster and stronger hounds. As hunting became more exciting and more dangerous, it also became more fashionable. In the season, the town of Melton Mowbray, the center of the country hunted by the style-setting Quorn hunt, was crowded with well-turned-out young sportsmen. Not to be outdone in elegance, hound packs were bred to be uniform in color (usually white with brown and black patches) and in coat (dense and smooth, rather than wiry). In addition to instilling speed and matching appearance in their animals, foxhound breeders sought to instill stamina and keen noses, and to eliminate riotous behavior and muteness — all for obviously pragmatic reasons.³⁰

There was little controversy about the desirability of the remodelled foxhounds, although some sportsmen preferred the version embodied in the Quorn pack, while others favored the Brocklesby strain developed by the first Lord Yarborough. In the early nineteenth

²⁹ Thomas Fairfax, *The New Complete Sportsman: or, The Town and Country Gentleman's Recreation* (London: Alexander Hogg, 1770 [?]), pp. 125-126.

³⁰ On the development of fox hunting, see Roger Longrigg, *The History of Foxhunting* (London: Macmillan, 1975); Raymond Carr, *English Fox Hunting: A History* (London: Weidenfeld, 1976); David C. Itzkowitz, *Peculiar Privilege: A Social History of English Foxhunting, 1735-1885* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1977); and Edward William Bovill, *The England of Nimrod and Surtees, 1815-1854* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

century, they were adopted by hunt after hunt. Nor was there apparently much dispute about which particular animals best exemplified the ideal type. Masters of foxhounds voted with their feet: all well-bred Victorian foxhounds claimed descent from one of five dogs born between 1748 and 1830.³¹

Although the Victorian notion of dog breeds was thus clearly established in eighteenth-century foxhounds, the conditions surrounding eighteenth-century foxhound breeding were quite different from those that characterized nineteenth-century fancy dog breeding. As with horse racing in the development of the thoroughbred, fox hunting provided strong external guidance about what an excellent dog should be like. Mere good looks could not compensate for poor performance in the field. In addition, foxhounds were working animals — and so recognized by later licensing laws — not pets.³² Indeed, they seem to have been less likely to have been even part-time pets than spaniels, retrievers, and other gun dogs. And finally they were country dogs and their owners were country gentlemen.

It is significant that eighteenth-century foxhound breeders needed no institution — no clubs, no shows — to inspire them to improve the breed or to ratify what they had done. Indeed, although breeders kept genealogical records of their dogs, masters of foxhounds were often not unduly concerned with formal pedigree. They trusted previously reliable sources instead. For example, when the 1795 records of the foxhound kennel at Beachborough classified individual dogs by breed, they meant the kennel from which the animals had been purchased and at which they had been bred.³³ This informal reliance on a trusted strain persisted among some upper-class dog fanciers well into the nineteenth century, after the new middle-class system of registered pedigrees had become firmly established; aristocratic pug owners, for example, preferred exclusive “private pedigrees” to the ordinary pedigrees ratified by the Kennel Club and advertised in the columns of fanciers’ periodicals. To

³¹ Bovill, *The England of Nimrod and Surtees*, pp. 68-69; Carr, *English Fox Hunting*, pp. 36-37.

³² For example, as late as 1897, foxhounds belonging to registered packs did not have to be licensed until they were a year old, as long as they had not been worked with any pack, as opposed to six months for all other dogs. This regulation gave masters of foxhounds extra time to observe the puppies and decide which ones to keep; it implied that no one would own a non-working foxhound (“Report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the Board of Agriculture to inquire into and report upon the working of the Laws relating to Dogs,” *Parliamentary Papers*, 1897 (c.8320, c.8378), XXXIV, p. 151).

³³ “Fox Hound Kennel at Beachborough,” Brockman Papers, CXXXV, 25b-24b (British Library Add. Mss. 45202).

members of the human elite, far from guaranteeing ancient lineage, some dog pedigrees might identify parvenues.³⁴

III

From the beginning, the dog fancy was characterized by tension between the divergent goals of aristocratic (usually rural) and middle-class (usually urban) owners and breeders. On the whole, middle-class pet owners were more anxious about the public standing of their dogs, and they wished to have their excellence proclaimed as loudly and as frequently as possible. Urban fanciers were apt to be more exclusively concerned with appearance than gentry whose dogs were at least supposed to participate in outdoor sports. And appearance was both more easily manipulable through breeding and a more reliable index of pedigree than behavior.

The first formal dog show held in England, which took place in Newcastle on 28 June 1859, was aimed at the sporting gentry. It was sponsored by Mr. Pape, a local gunmaker, who provided prizes from his inventory, and there were only two classes — one for pointers and one for setters. The success of this venture — it boasted sixty entries — encouraged an entrepreneur named Brailsford to organize a larger show of sporting dogs in Birmingham a few months later. This proved to be such a popular attraction that it was repeated the next year, with the addition of thirteen classes for non-sporting dogs, that is, dogs distinguished by qualities that could be appreciated indoors.³⁵ Opening up the dog fancy to pets triggered a phenomenal increase in public interest; clearly there was a pent-up demand for public competition and certification. The first really large show — with over one thousand entries — was held in Chelsea in March 1863. By 1890, the major London shows routinely attracted between 1,500 and 2,000 entries, and the provinces were not far behind. In that year shows at Manchester and Liverpool displayed over 1,400 competitors, and 1,000 dogs were entered in a show at Brighton.³⁶

³⁴ "Pillars of the Stud Book.—No. XVI.—Pugs," *Kennel Gazette*, 5 (1885), 213-214.

³⁵ Edward C. Ash, *Dogs: Their History and Development*, 2 vols. (London: Benn, 1927), I, 7-8; Hugh Dalziel, *British Dogs: Their Varieties, History, Characteristics, Breeding, Management and Exhibition* (London: "The Bazaar Office," 1879-80), pp. 174-175.

³⁶ "Dog Show Notes," *Dog Owners' Annual for 1891*, pp. 189-191.

Another index of the large latent interest in pedigreed dogs was the rapid rise in the prices commanded by highly certified animals and their offspring. This development was hailed by most fanciers as a validation of their efforts. In 1884, the *Kennel Gazette*, the journal of the Kennel Club and therefore the official voice of the respectable dog fancy, asserted that “the high prices paid nowadays for stud dogs, stud fees, and puppies . . . show the progress of the canine race. . . . The result is that better dogs are sold, better dogs are bought, and the public taste is improved.” Although an ordinary sheepdog might cost only a pound, a “first-class show Collie” might be worth up to £1,000. St. Bernards were in the same price range, while champion fox terriers and toy spaniels commanded hundreds of guineas.³⁷

Although fanciers were gratified by the financial corroboration of the prestige of their animals, they were disturbed by some of its side effects. The money flowing into dog showing and breeding, and the inexperience of many new recruits to the ranks of dog fanciers, attracted disreputable dealers who pawned off inferior animals on unsuspecting buyers. Even worse, since show rankings were the equivalent of cash — that is, the value of winners and their offspring was automatically enhanced — fraud in the show ring quickly became a serious problem. Tampering with animals’ coats, ears, and tails was common; and questions were also raised about the honesty and competence of some judges.³⁸ All of this threatened the security of the structure of certification that attracted fanciers.

To preserve the reputation of dog shows, a group of fanciers “who breed to win and to whom pecuniary questions are of no moment” formed the Kennel Club in 1873. Its main initial concern was to combat breeder fraud by establishing the identity and descent of pedigreed dogs. At the same time, it developed an interlocking system of shows and registration, designed to limit competition to a carefully screened segment of the canine and, implicitly, the human population. The first volume of its *Stud Book*, which listed dogs exhibited since the first show in 1859, appeared in 1874. Geared to the show circuit, the *Stud Book* concentrated on dogs that had won prizes. Its editor

³⁷ “Fancy Prizes,” *Kennel Gazette*, 5 (1884), 41; Hugh Dalziel, *The Collie: As a Show Dog, Companion, and Worker*, rev. ed. J. Maxtee (London: L. Upcott Gill, 1904), pp. 6-7; “High Prices of Dogs,” *The Dog Owners’ Annual for 1891*, p. 164.

³⁸ Vero Shaw, “Don’ts.” *Instructions. What to Avoid in Buying, Managing, Feeding and Exhibiting Dogs* (London: “The Stock-keeper,” 1898), p. 33; Theodore Marples, *Prize Dogs: Their Successful Housing, Management, and Preparation for Exhibition from Puppyhood to the Show Ring* (Manchester: “Our Dogs,” 1905), p. 87; Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald, *The Domestic Dog: An Introduction to its History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 147.

acknowledged that some “excellent and well-bred dogs” (presumably those with private pedigrees, whose owners had not deigned to enter them in competitions) might have been excluded as a result of this policy; but, he asserted, “The value of blood and pedigree is demonstrated on every page, as nine-tenths of the later prize winners trace back to prize blood.” Keyed to the *Stud Book* was a national registration system for pedigreed dogs. The *Stud Book* also included a code of rules for dog shows, one of which required that no unregistered dog could enter a show held under the auspices of the Kennel Club.³⁹ And to fill in any gaps left by the Kennel Club, a plethora of societies devoted to the promotion and defense of individual breeds sprang up. In 1890, there were forty-eight of them, ranging from the nationally based Basset-Hound Club to the Isle of Wight and New Forest Terrier Club.⁴⁰

The Kennel Club’s program of sanitation and rationalization was applauded by most serious fanciers, but some viewed it as a power grab. Those whose business interests were threatened — from the shady operators to the organizers of competing shows — were naturally inclined to protest. In addition, resistance to the newly institutionalized dog fancy — especially as it was embodied in the dog show — was strong among gentry owners of sporting dogs, who regretted their lost dominance of what was often called the “doggy world” or even “doggydom.” Cozily domesticated setters and terriers, like out-and-out lapdogs, represented the new urban class of fanciers, which was displacing the country squires. In expressing their resentment and contempt, these sports enthusiasts often focused on the idleness of pet dogs, symbolized by the fact that they could be owned as easily by women as by men. Non-sporting dogs, and by an easy metonymy their owners as well, were typically characterized as effeminate. As early as 1824, the anonymous but redblooded sportsman who wrote *The Complete Dog Fancier, or General History of Dogs* had announced that, despite the large pretensions of his title, “those [dogs] which some fond ladies make their daily pastime, have no business in these pages.”⁴¹

The sporting gentry for whom he was speaking had some concrete grounds for their apprehension and aversion. They feared that the arbitrary standards endorsed by show-oriented fanciers might spoil their favorite breeds for sporting purposes. In the late Victorian period, the

³⁹ Frank Pearce, “Preface,” *Kennel Club Stud Book*, 1 (1859-74), n.p.; Vesey-Fitzgerald, *Domestic Dog*, p. 147.

⁴⁰ *Dog Owners’ Annual for 1890*, pp. 66-68.

⁴¹ *The Complete Dog Fancier, or General History of Dogs* (London: T. Hughes, 1824), p. 4.

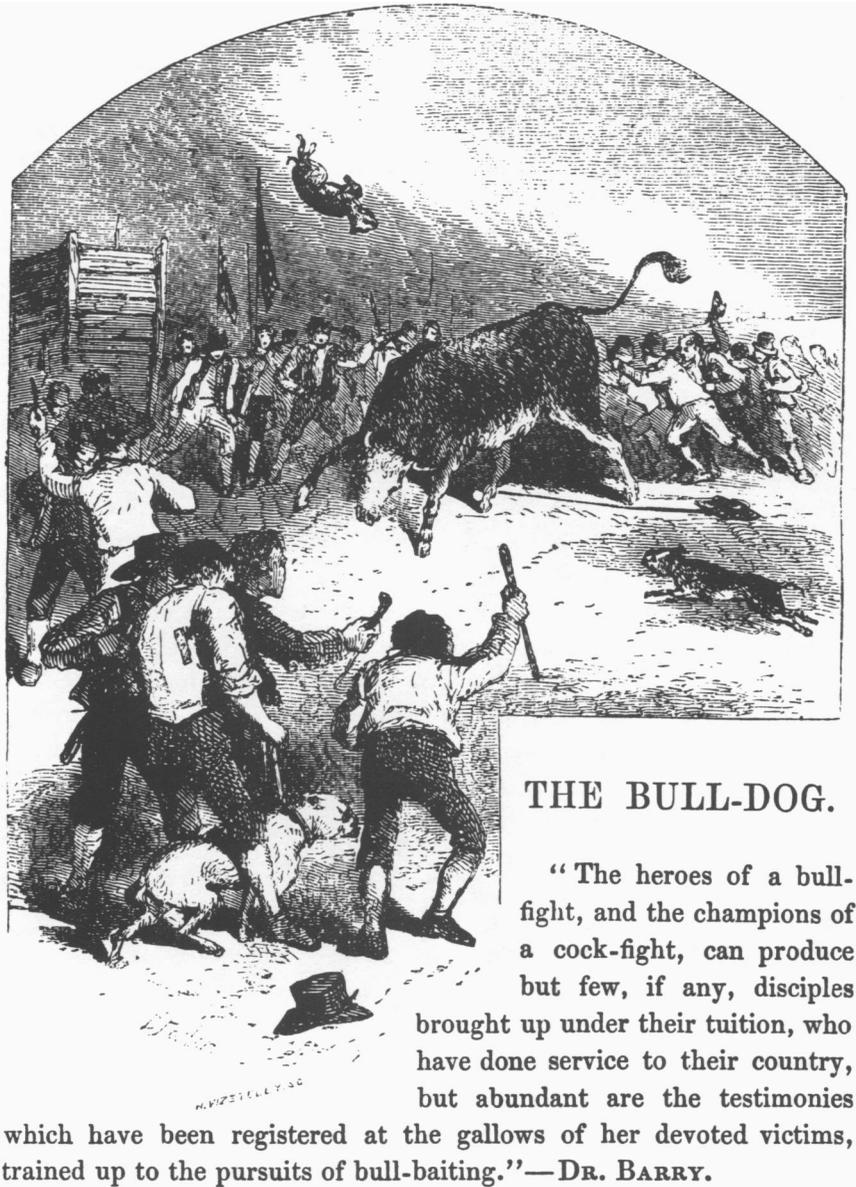
collie provided the most egregious example of how fashion could incapacitate a functional breed. Collies were originally not sporting dogs, but working sheepdogs, hardy and intelligent. Queen Victoria's predilection made them popular middle-class pets, and as a result they were bred for looks rather than character. The 1890s saw a craze for exaggerated heads with long pointed noses. In 1891 a *Kennel Gazette* reviewer complained that show judges had given all the prizes to "dogs of this greyhound type whose faces bore an inane, expressionless look." Such dogs could hardly display the intelligence originally characteristic of their breed; there was no room in their heads for brains.⁴²

Contrary to the protests of traditional sportsmen, no useful breed was irrevocably damaged as a result of arbitrary fashions among non-sporting fanciers. But in view of the small harm actually done, why were the wails of anguish so loud? The underlying concern of those who resisted the institutionalization of the dog fancy seems to have been the use to which the new middle-class fanciers were putting pedigree and the machinery that supported it. By divorcing quality from function, they were making differentiations of rank breathtakingly abstract.

Well-bred animals had always served a symbolic or metaphorical function, representing the position of their owners. But previously, most such representations had been concretely rooted and obviously appropriate: thoroughbred horses represented aristocrats, prize cattle represented wealthy landowners, foxhounds and gun dogs represented the rural gentry. The new fanciers seemed to choose breeds arbitrarily and to value them according to almost randomly assigned standards. It was impossible to predict, on the basis of past experience or common sense, what would make an animal good or better than another animal. Under the pen name of "Stonehenge," one of the most respected Victorian commentators on dogs, John Henry Walsh, observed that no rational principle could explain why, for example, "a small eye shall be a merit in one breed (toy terrier) and a defect in another (King Charles spaniel)."⁴³ Sometimes qualities were valued only because they were unusual or difficult to produce. The prize-winning pedigreed dogs of the late nineteenth century seemed to symbolize simply the power to

⁴² Rawdon B. Lee, *A History and Description of the Modern Dogs of Great Britain and Ireland (Non-Sporting Division)* (London: Horace Cox, 1899), pp. 111-116; "Queen Victoria's Dogs," *Ladies' Kennel Journal*, 1 (1895), 291; "Collies," *Kennel Gazette*, 7 (1891), 7-8.

⁴³ "Stonehenge" [John Henry Walsh], *The Dog: Its Varieties and Management in Health and Disease* (London: Frederick Warne, 1873), pp. 87-88.



(3) A Bullbaiting Scene. Edward Jesse, *Anecdotes of Dogs* (1867 edition [originally published in 1846], p. 454).

manipulate and the power to purchase — they were emblems of status and rank as pure commodities.

IV

The history of the bulldog and the bulldog fancy in the nineteenth century epitomized the way in which pedigreed dogs could represent the aspirations of their compulsively respectable owners. A fighting dog with the lowest social associations until mid-century, by 1880 it had become the darling of the refined and fashionable. Its new advocates not only equipped the bulldog with an improved character, but they remodeled its appearance and rewrote its history.

An 1894 advertisement for a champion named “Bully McKrankie” did not mention the aggressive qualities evoked by his name and traditionally associated with his breed. Instead, it emphasized that he had “always been kept in the house and is a great pet.” The same year, a weekly paper called *Dogs* made a similar point about bulldogs in general, praising them as “peaceable animals” with “a good deal of intelligence”; it even characterized their appearance as “benign.”⁴⁴ These gentle creatures appealed strongly to serious dog fanciers. In 1885, the number of bulldogs exhibited at dog shows was second only to the number of collies. And the aficionados of bulldogs were considered as admirable as the dogs themselves. The *Kennel Gazette* noted that an all-bulldog show sponsored by the Bulldog Club in 1893 attracted an unusually “fashionable” crowd for a dog show, including “a large number of ladies” — another testimonial, in the reporter’s opinion, to the breed’s “kindliness of disposition.”⁴⁵

All these attributes — popularity, good temper, fashion, and gentility — represented a radical transformation. The bulldog’s rise was an analogue of the rags-to-riches, or, better still, pluck-and-luck stories of Victorian mythologists like Samuel Smiles. In 1871, less than twenty years before bulldogs began to appear at shows in such large numbers, one admirer of the breed had feared that it was dying out. In 1864, the same fear had prompted a group of fanciers to start a Bulldog Club, in order to ensure perpetuation of the breed. Interest was so low that the attempt fizzled; the enduring Bulldog Club was not estab-

⁴⁴ *Ladies’ Kennel Journal*, 1 (1894), 57; “Dogs up to Date: The Bulldog,” *Dogs*, 1 n.s. (1894), 43.

⁴⁵ J. S. Pybus-Sellon, “Bulldogs,” *Kennel Gazette*, 6 (1885), 144; Arthur Cosby Jackson, “Bull Dog Club’s Show,” *Kennel Gazette*, 14 (1893), 165.

lished until a decade later.⁴⁶ The bulldog seemed endangered because, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a combination of rising public revulsion and rather belated legislative action had finally suppressed the ancient and ferocious British sport of bullbaiting. The close association between the bulldog and the bull ring was echoed in early nineteenth-century descriptions of the breed, which have little in common with those just cited. A manual of dog breeds for sportsmen, published in 1803, admired the courage of bulldogs, but acknowledged that they were seldom seen on the streets because “their natural ferocity, alarming appearance, and thirst for blood” made prudent owners lock them up. Several decades later, a zoologist dismissed the breed as “possessed of less sagacity and less attachment than any of the hound tribe”; he dismissed bulldog fanciers as “professed amateurs of sports and feelings little creditable to humanity.”⁴⁷

The first task of the late nineteenth-century resuscitators of the bulldog was to repair — or conceal — the defects of its origin. From the point of view of late Victorian respectability, the bulldog’s antecedents could not have been worse. In the first place, its traditional human associates were unsavory. One of the reasons the bulldog was said to be “at a discount” when the second Bulldog Club launched its rescue mission in 1874 was that, although it had occasionally kept distinguished company (Lady Castlereagh, the wife of the Regency foreign minister, was reputed to have taken her London airings with a bulldog on the seat beside her), its patrons were, as a rule, “not among the better class of fanciers.”⁴⁸ Some negative evidence of this is the fact that formal portraits of bulldogs are hard to come by, while those of hounds and gun dogs are plentiful.⁴⁹ The places where specimens were generally to be found earned the bulldog the nickname of “the pot-house dog,” and observers of the mid-century London scene identified people of the bulldog type by their heavy jaws, low foreheads, small

⁴⁶ Benjamin Clayton, *Dogs: How to Breed and Treat in Health and Disease* (London: Dean and Son, 1871), p. 12; Edgar Farman, “The Bulldog Club (Incorporated),” *Kennel Gazette*, 19 (1898), 200.

⁴⁷ William Taplin, *The Sportsman’s Cabinet*, 2 vols. (London: n.p., 1803), I, 82; Charles Hamilton Smith, *The Natural History of Dogs*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: W. H. Lizars, 1839-40), II, 220.

⁴⁸ Clayton, *Dogs: How to Breed and Treat in Health and Disease*, p. 12; Edgar Farman, “The Bulldog Club,” *Kennel Gazette*, 19 (1898), 199.

⁴⁹ The Computerized Index of British Art at the Photograph Archive of the Yale Center for British Art corroborates this impression. The works of art catalogued (mostly eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century portraits) include eighty-four dogs identified as foxhounds, thirty-three other hounds, fifty-three spaniels, twenty-one pointers, and sixteen setters — but no bulldogs and only one mastiff.

eyes, and bandy legs.⁵⁰ These vulgar associations survived the official suppression of bullbaiting. Indeed, the lamented “fondness of the lower orders in some districts for the fighting and baiting propensities” of bulldogs continued into the second half of the nineteenth century, when there were doubtless still opportunities for the dogs to show their stuff against each other, if not against bulls. Those dogs not kept for fighting were “principally bred by professional dog-fanciers,” who were considered by affluent amateurs to constitute the lowest echelon of doggy society.⁵¹

The bulldog’s other genealogical drawback was even more devastating: there was little basis on which to construct a family history. Although bullbaiting had been around for a long time, it was not at all clear what kind of dogs had baited the bulls — and bears and badgers and sometimes even lions and tigers. Caius did not mention the bulldog as one of his breeds or sub-breeds; he included the dogs that were taught, as he put it, “to baite the Beare, to baite the Bull and other such like cruell and bloody beastes” in the category of mastives or bandogs.⁵² Even in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the term “bulldog” had gained general currency, it was not clear what they were supposed to look like. Any dog that fought bulls was a bulldog. What was important was not breed, but the dog’s ability to meet the rather exacting requirements of bull-to-dog combat.

Enraged bulls charged with their heads down. In order to avoid the lethal horns, the dogs had to be low to the ground and relatively nimble. Because a bull was most vulnerable on its tender nose, the bulldog needed strong jaws as well as the dumb courage to jump at the bull’s face and the perseverance to hang on. The quality of the animals was tested regularly under fire, and prowess was much more important than appearance in determining rank. It is clear from pictorial evidence that there was no distinctive bulldog strain — and that bulldogs could not be easily differentiated from, for example, mastiffs, the large, general-purpose working dogs that became much less common after early humane legislation forbade the use of dogs as beasts of burden or draft animals. Late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-

⁵⁰ Mary C. Cowling, “The Artist as Anthropologist in Mid-Victorian England: Frith’s *Derby Day*, the *Railway Station* and the New Science of Mankind,” *Art History*, 6 (1983), 466.

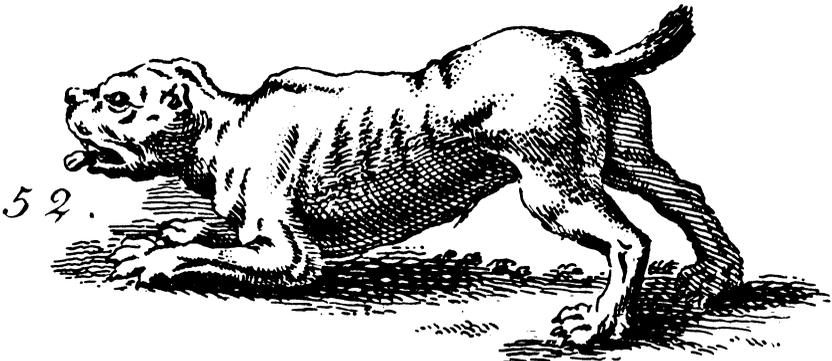
⁵¹ John Meyrick, *House Dogs and Sporting Dogs* (London: John Van Voorst, 1861), p. 65; “Stonehenge” [John Henry Walsh], *The Dog in Health and Disease* (London: n.p., 1859), p. 132; Henry Webb, ed., *Dogs: Their Points, Whims, Instincts and Peculiarities* (London: Dean and Son, 1876), p. 162.

⁵² Caius, *Of Englishe Dogges*, p. 25.

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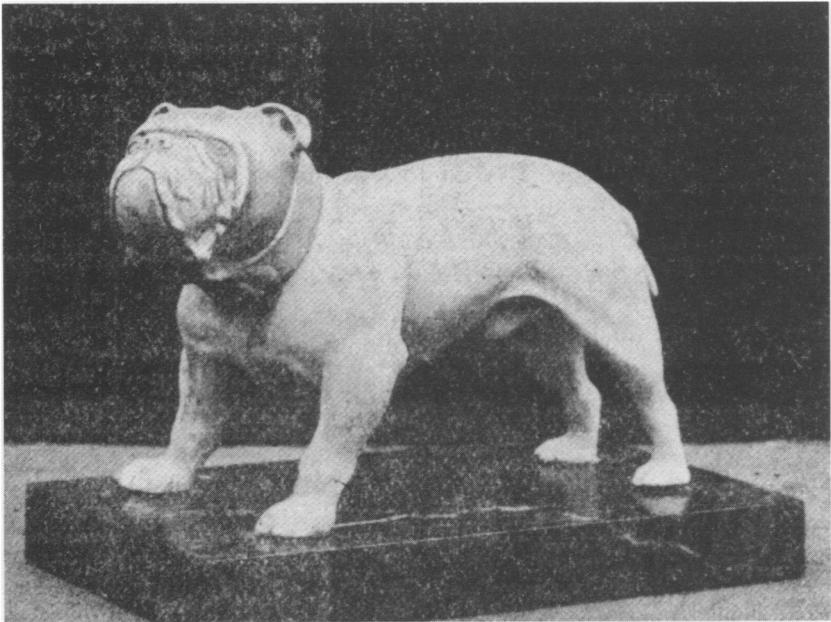


A MASTIFF .



A BULL-DOG .

(4) Mastiff and Bulldog. Thomas Boreman, *A Description of Three Hundred Animals* (1736 edition). This illustration shows that despite claims about the bulldog's ancient lineage, it did not have a traceable existence as a distinct breed.



(5) Illustration of the Bulldog Club statue of the new model bulldog (*Kennel Gazette*, 20 [January 1899], 8, courtesy of the Metropolitan Toronto Library).

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century representations of renowned bulldogs showed animals that varied widely in size and shape, even making allowance for the unequal skill of the artists. Some even lacked the characteristic bulldog countenance, in which the “broad, projecting underjaw ensures the terrible tenacity of grip; the wide nostrils, placed far back, enable the dog to draw unimpeded breath while keeping his teeth fixed on the yielding cartilage of the bull’s nose.”⁵³

At the same time that they addressed the bulldog’s image problems, fanciers had to address similar ones of their own, typified by the fact that, as the chronicler of the Bulldog Club pointed out, the breed had no “bevy of titled admirers” ready to “rush on its committee.” Although it was customary for breed associations of all kinds of animals to have at least a noble president, the founders of the Bulldog Club were unable to discover any aristocrat willing to serve. Their best bet, the Duke of Hamilton, resisted their importunity, and they had to be satisfied with plain Mr. Berry. Mr. Berry and his friends worked hard to make sure that they were not confused with those they termed the “ruffians” — the people from whose hands they were rescuing the bulldog. Some of this was accomplished by loud and frequent protestations of their own gentility and high motives.⁵⁴ But they also blamed vulgar people for the unpleasant qualities that had been attributed to the dog. While in the 1830s the veterinarian William Youatt had characterized the bulldog as “scarcely capable of any education, and . . . fitted for nothing but ferocity and combat,” later writers pointed to extenuating circumstances. According to a late Victorian fancier, the bulldog’s courage — its major virtue — had exposed it to perverse exploitation: it was “the only dog with sufficient endurance to serve the cruel purposes of depraved owners.”⁵⁵

Having dispensed with the unsavory aspects of the bulldog’s reputation, its new advocates could capitalize on its more appealing traditional qualities. The bulldog’s courage, for example, was held to make it peculiarly English. Breed manual after breed manual proclaimed it incontestably the national dog — and after several decades of such propaganda Britons even began to conflate it with the national symbol, John Bull, who was originally bovine. Not only did the brave bulldog exemplify a prized quality of the English character, one nur-

⁵³ Dalziel, *British Dogs*, p. 221; “The Bulldog,” *Ladies’ Kennel Journal*, 4 (1896), 13.

⁵⁴ Farman, “The Bulldog Club,” pp. 238, 199, 200; Webb, *Dogs*, p. 267.

⁵⁵ William Youatt, *The Dog* (New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1846), p. 150; Dalziel, *British Dogs*, p. 226.

tured in a traditional English pastime (already the veil of euphemism was dropping over the bloody reality of bullbaiting), but the breed was though to be peculiarly — almost mystically — attached to English soil.⁵⁶ Although Englishmen took their bulldogs along to the corners of the Empire, and although even foreigners were eager to import them, either to transplant the breed or to infuse some of its sturdy courage into their own strains, it was an insistently documented idea that good bulldogs could only be bred in the British Isles. Elsewhere, it was asserted, the breed inevitably degenerated. This claim to ancient and intrinsic Englishness gave bulldog fanciers an excuse to defend the racial purity of their animals with as much energy as if they had long and elegant pedigrees. A recurring threat was what was delicately called “the infusion of foreign blood.” This was feared, as one defender of the breed put it, on the grounds that it “must be inferior *because* it is foreign.”⁵⁷

As bulldogs took their place in the show ring, appearance replaced performance as the basis for competitive judgment of individual dogs. This shift meant that bulldogs almost automatically diminished in ferocity, bulk, and strength. As Charles Darwin suggested, “We may feel almost sure that . . . no man said to himself, I will now breed my dogs of smaller size, and thus create the present race.”⁵⁸ But most of the specific physical characteristics of the remodeled bulldogs of the late nineteenth century were determined by the Bulldog Club, which substituted a set of arbitrary specifications of quality for the old law of the survival of the fittest. Because they had no rational basis, these new standards at first caused a lot of confusion. In 1879, a correspondent who confessed that he had “only quite recently entered the Bulldog Fancy” implored the editors of *The Sportsman’s Journal and Fancier’s Guide* to favor “green fanciers” with a brief description of “the points, general make and shape . . . of the bulldog.” His independent research, he complained, had only compounded his confusion: “At present . . . after trying to collect some information, we are worse off than when we commenced.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ The bulldog could also exemplify less valiant aspects of the national character. Under the headline “Bulldogs Like Englishmen,” the *Daily Telegraph* of 13 October 1903 reported the following court testimony by one Mrs. Evans, a breeder of bulldogs (in support of a fellow fancier whose neighbors had complained that his dogs yelped all night): “Bulldogs . . . are like Englishmen; they feed and sleep and don’t make a noise.”

⁵⁷ “The Bulldog,” *Ladies’ Kennel Journal*, 4 (1896), 14.

⁵⁸ Charles Darwin, *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, 2 vols. (1868; rpt. ed., New York: Appleton, 1892), II, 197.

⁵⁹ *The Sportsman’s Journal and Fancier’s Guide: Stud + Stable + Kennel + Curtilage*, No. 12 (1879), 9.

Veteran aficionados offered contradictory opinions at every turn, and true to the bravura spirit of the bulldog fancy, which had apparently not yet been completely suppressed by creeping gentility, they offered them all with ringing confidence. Almost any feature of the animal was open to debate. The hotly argued Dudley nose question, for example, convulsed the Bulldog Club for over a decade. Dudley or flesh-colored noses occurred in some strains of fawn-colored bulldogs, usually in conjunction with light eyes and a yellowish countenance. In 1884, the Club voted to exclude dogs with Dudley noses from competition, defeating a counterproposal that they be considered essential in fawn bulldogs.⁶⁰

More functional features were also subject to arbitrary assessment, sometimes in defiance of such basic needs as locomotion. One *Kennel Gazette* reviewer claimed that to be “distingué” a bulldog should be “well out at the shoulder and with a good broken up face”; a dog lacking either was doomed to mediocrity. But another expert characterized this shoulder configuration as a crippling deformity. He cited the example of Dockleaf, a renowned champion of the early 1890s, who collapsed after walking a mere two miles.⁶¹

There were still a few unreconstructed fanciers of the old school around, mostly country gentlemen with sentimental yearnings for an “Olde England” of stalwart yeomen and other imaginary characters. They concurred with George Jesse in abhorring “the disgusting abortions exhibited at the shows,” which were “deformities from foot to muzzle . . . and totally incapable of coping with a veteran bull.”⁶² Most bulldog breeders, however, agreed with Stonehenge that “the modern bulldog” was “decidedly neater in shape” than its forebears, if less active and aggressive.⁶³ But these qualities were no longer necessary. There were no more bulls to cope with. The only influence on the make of the bulldog was the pleasure of its admirers. And they had created it in their own ideal image — tame and respectable, of pure and ancient English stock, dissociated from vulgar antecedents, and ready to take its place in the elaborately graduated hierarchy of

⁶⁰ Farman, “The Bulldog Club,” pp. 470-471.

⁶¹ “Review of the Past Year,” *Kennel Gazette*, 12 (1891), 5-6; Lee, *A History and Description of the Modern Dogs of Great Britain and Ireland (Non-Sporting Division)*, pp. 220-221, 243.

⁶² George R. Jesse, *Researches into the History of the British Dog*, 2 vols. (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1866), II, 390.

⁶³ Stonehenge, *The Dog in Health and Disease*, p. 133.

refinement that regulated canine society. That society, in turn, exemplified the subtle and rigid discriminations that dominated relations between humans in Victorian England.

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