

When British settlers arrived in Australia in large numbers during the mid-19th century, they brought not only their personal effects, many of them brought their pets. Among these animals were small Terriers – the ancestors of the Australian Terrier.

#### A Dog Bred for the Land

The gamest and fittest of these Terriers survived and their owners bred the very toughness of the land back into them. They wanted a dog that was lithely-built and speedy enough to outrun a rabbit. He had to be small and compact yet capable of herding sheep or cattle. His coat had to stand up to the heat and the wet, to the harshness of the bush and the retaliations of his quarry. Equally important, he had to be keen and alert to warn of approaching danger. We evolved our own national breed – the Australian Terrier. A low-set, wiry, little dog with an agility that ensured him local popularity. A dog that can kill a rat or rabbit in seconds was very welcome about the farms and mining camps, and the welcome became even greater when these little dogs took to killing snakes.

#### The "Down Under" Terrier

Because the Aussie was bred to work and "earn his keep", no records were kept of his breeding. But it is reasonable to assume that the Australian Terrier is a direct descendant of crosses made over a hundred years ago between the Dandie Dinmont, Skye and Scotch (not to be confused with Scottish) Terriers. This opinion was shared by the leading Queensland judge, the late Mr Fred David who was an authority on Australian Terriers and who described the old Scotch Terrier as "A rough-coated varmint of a dog, black and tan or even ginger red in colour". It seems likely that the "Aussie" gets his top-knot of profuse silky hair from the Dandie Dinmont and his length of body from the Skye. We must also remember that a century ago these latter two breeds looked quite different from their modern-day counterparts. By the early 1870s, the Aussie was pretty well fixed in type, and although some breeders tried to improve on him with other Terrier crosses, they do not appear to have made much impact on the breed. The root-stock of Dandie Dinmont, Scotch and Skye produced not only a Terrier quite different from all the others but also the only true Terrier, accepted quite different from all the others, but also the only true Terrier, accepted world wide, which did not originate in the British Isles. NR/RL editor's note: 1974, some others such as the JRT (as developed in Australia) and the Cesky are now also accepted).

#### The Rough-Coated Terrier

The Australian Terrier was known at first as the Rough-Coated Terrier and the earliest show reference to him is in 1868 at a show held at The Duke of Edinburgh Theatre, Melbourne. Included among the 232 dogs

## The Australian Terrier - a true Aussie



shown was the entry: 1 Rough Terrier (over 7lbs). He was also known as "Broken-Haired" and "Wire-Haired" but by the 1890s he was being called "Australian" as well. Records show that in 1873, blue and tan dogs of the Broken-Haired Terrier type were exhibited at the Sydney Metropolitan Exhibition. In 1899 the first class for "Australian Terriers, Rough-Coated" was held at the Intercolonial Exhibition held in Sydney and dogs previously classed as "Terriers, Broken-Haired" were now shown in this category. During these early years of showing, the breed met with a lot of opposition as the following extracts show:

"As one who has very carefully watched this little animal ever since it was first shown, I am in a position to write from my own personal observation, and I have not the slightest hesitation in pronouncing these dogs arrant nondescripts."

About the middle of 1889, a very heated controversy about these dogs took place in the kennel columns of The Australasian and The Leader. In one of them, the writer referred to the Rough Terrier as an unmitigated mongrel, and only fit to use where snakes were too numerous to risk a dog of any value. The writer went on to say that they were what would be called in Scotland "Tinkers Messen", and he finished up by remarking that "we must be thankful that the Victorian Poultry and Dog Society has not allowed the name Australian to be prostituted to such vile uses and hung round the neck of a wretched mongrel. If whimsical or faddish people want an Australian breed, let them take up the dingo

and try what they can make of improving him." -Walter Beilby, "The Dog in Australasia" (1897).

And in the defence of the Australian Terrier:

"Rough-Coated Terriers, or, as they are now generally called, Australian Terriers, were in evidence in great numbers, and in spite of all the ridicule that has from time to time been cast at them, there is no doubt they have come to stay. The sooner the Victorian Poultry and Kennel Club acknowledge the fact and, as is the case at most shows, give them their right name the better. A breed that can weather the storm and sarcasm and ridicule these dogs were subjected to when first the Club was formed,



and can support their Club which many other breeds have failed to do so, surely merits consideration and may now be said to have fairly won for itself a place in our stud books under its proper title." - Show Report published in "The Feathered and Kennel World," October, 1905.

The same Journal carried a reply from the New South Wales Australian Terrier Club in its 15 November issue:

"Dear Sir, On behalf of the members of the above Club, I desire to express our best thanks for publishing the small paragraph –page 355 in your issue of the World of 16th ultimo, urging that Australian Terriers should be properly classed by the Victorian Poultry and Kennel Club. Indeed, this is a matter which I have on several occasions referred to and I fully intended at the next meeting of our club to again introduce the subject with a view of prevailing upon the Victorian Poultry and Kennel Club to have the proper designation published in the Schedules and catalogues at the shows held in that State. Considering, the first Standard for Australian Terriers was published in Melbourne in 1887 – 18 years ago – the same year a large exhibition of these little dogs was also held, I cannot understand why this so much desired alteration has been so long delayed. It is beyond all doubt that the Australian Terrier has come to stay. He is now being bred more true to type, and his excellent qualities as house dog and vermin killer, are being better known. The large entry (91) at the recent Sydney Kennel Club Show, clearly points that our little favourite will in the near future head the list of entries of all breeds. I

trust the Victorian Poultry and Kennel Club will give the favourite terrier of the Commonwealth their proper title in accordance with the standard by which they are now judged. The principal shows of the States must keep pace with the times and when the alteration is made it will be a matter for wonderment that such was not done long before. - I I Moss, Hon Secretary."

An "Australian Rough-Coated Terrier Club" had been founded in 1889 and an entry in the "Australian Poultry and Kennel World" outlines its brief life-span:

"The objects as set forth, were to improve the breed by drawing up and working to a standard, and to hold shows at given periods to allow those interested and the public generally to see the progress made. The first club show was held in the Fitzroy Town Hall, Melbourne in 1889 and some fine dogs were shown by Messrs Lowrie, Morris, Harkness, Brown and other gentlemen. In 1890 and 1891, shows were again held but through various reasons interest at that time flagged somewhat, and amid regret, the Club was allowed to lapse."

In 1904 the New South Wales Australian Terrier Club, the first Australian Terrier Club in New South Wales, was founded and flourished until just before the First World War. The President was Mr J L Hughes who was succeeded two years later by Mr George Johnson. Other club offices were Messrs W Dyson, J B Matterson, I I Moss and W Flockhart. One can assume that these were the men who initially fought for the Aussie's cause and championed his recognition. The club's distinguished Patron was Sir Henry Rawson, Governor of New South Wales between 1902 and 1909. His wife Lady Rawson was a Life Member of the Club and an active exhibitor of Australian Terriers at shows. Their daughter was also an enthusiastic fancier. There is no doubt that the club was an active force in the dog world as these Club Notes show:

"A meeting of the above Club was held at the Lord Jersey Hotel (Sydney) on Thursday, March 4th at 8.00 pm. The delegates to the recent (Sydney) Kennel Club Conference reported the result of same, and general regret was felt at the unsatisfaction of the outcome. It was generally agreed that as this Club had been instrumental with the SSC (Sydney Silky Club) in bringing the Conference about, and there were apparently no means of arriving at a settlement in other ways, the endeavour to reorganise the Kennel Club would have to be abandoned, as far as the Australian Terrier Club was concerned.

"The Secretary reported that, acting under instructions from last meeting, he had written to Sir Harry and Miss Rawson thanking them for their patronage and support during the time they had been in the State. A letter in reply was read expressing the satisfaction the Governor and Miss Rawson felt if anything they had done had been beneficial to the Club and thanking the latter for the good wishes expressed in their letter"

"The Secretary produced a specimen of the Club's medal in silver which is a massive and decidedly handsome trophy, and general satisfaction was expressed at the happy outcome of the expenditure of time and money which this matter had entailed. We understand that four of these medals are to be forwarded to England for competition at the next Crystal Palace Show, going respectively to the best dog and bitch in the Australian Terrier classes were making great headway in England, and it is expected that this action would help stimulate interest in the breed." - "Australian Den and Fanciers' Friends," March, 1909.

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