

100 Years of Kerry Blue Terriers

Part I

Miss Hermione Henry with Ben-Edars (Bonaccord, Bride, Ch Burlesque, Ch Bagatell, Bohereen, Blue Bonnet and Iying Bawn.

Photo: Thos. Fall.

The first twenty-five years of the Breed

Text by Tiina Hallsten

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The native Irish dogs were all working dogs and have developed during the centuries in the countryside of Ireland. One of them, the Irish Blue had existed in Southern Ireland for centuries, but by 1920 the ones with soft blue coat were mainly from County Kerry. Irish peasants kept these brave blue dogs as rat catchers and all-round farm dogs in their farms. Because their humble origins there are hardly any references to the breed before the 20th century.

The first probable literary references to the Kerry Blue dates from 1847 as the author describes a bluish slate coloured dog, marked with darker blotches and patches, and often with the tan about the legs and muzzle. After the Kerry Blue Terrier was recognized as a breed in the early 1920's, they begun the conquest of the world. By 1928 this impressive balanced terrier with its beautiful soft blue coat became popular worldwide and its reputation as an excellent working and companion dog agreed with the breed assessment as "well nigh perfect".



Ch Night Owl (owned by Henry B. Fottrell) in a Hunting Test in the Bank of the Mill Stream, Castleisland, County Kerry.

Recognition of the Breed

For the first time the Kerry Blue Terrier was shown as a breed at Killarney Show in September 1916. The judge was Mr Frank Butler who had over twenty entries of Blue Terriers (working). Later he wrote: "It certainly was a sight I had never seen before and I do not suppose I shall see the like again. The exhibits were all sizes, from a small Fox Terrier to an Old English Sheepdog, and some certainly resembled the latter breed very much, most of them being blue in colour. I was told that the majority of these dogs were kept for fighting purposes, so you can imagine that there was a great deal of difficulty in keeping them in anything like order, and some of the owners were nearly bad as the dogs."



"Terri" at the Killarney Show in 1916



Ch Nofa Jacobin (born 1921) alongside with Brian King of Munster were the major stud dogs of their time.
Photo: Thos. Fall.

The Irish War of Independence that resulted in the establishment of the independent Irish Free State yet within the British Empire. At that time Irish dog fanciers wanted to form an independent Kennel Club as Irish kennel world was still under the rule of English Kennel Club that refused to recognise the standards, champions or the "bona fides" of their well kept pedigree records. The Sinn Fein movement started and within patriots of all classes the popularity of this breed grew as famous Irish patriot Michael Collins became an owner of the Kerry Blue. Fanciers of the Blue gathered together in a meeting in Dublin at the Dolphin Hotel on August 3rd and The Dublin Blue Terrier club of 1920 was formed. The club held the first breed show without the permission of the English KC in Dublin on 16th Oct. 1920.

The Kerry Blue owners played an important role also in the foundation of the new Irish Kennel Club in January 1922 as they put a newspaper advertisement suggesting the formation of the new Kennel Club. And die-hard loyalists as well as patriots responded and the new independent Kennel Club was formed by the various breed clubs. At the same year the Irish Kennel Club recognised the breed and there were 649 Kerry Blue Terriers registered – more than any other breed! Mr Fottrell's Kerry "Fuamnach" was the first dog registered in the new IKC. In the beginning dogs had simple names and they were even changed along the way. The use of prefix or kennel names became more common but they were used more to state the owner than the breeder.



Ch Slievh Corrig (born 1924) followed the footsteps of his grandsire Ch Nofa Jacobin and left his name in history. Photo: Fall.

For a short period there were four active breed clubs for the Kerry Blue Terriers and from 1922 to 1924 they held six shows and six field trials. Since 1926 a Kerry Blue had to qualify in two hunting tests (Teastas Mor and Teastas Beag) in order to gain the Championship. The Irish KC required the hunting tests until the 1960's.

Within the first clubs there was controversy over the name of the breed. Some fanciers objected to the name Kerry Blue – as the breed had been developed in other counties as well. Known as the Irish Blue for a short time, but eventually it was the Kerry Blue Terrier – mainly as English Kennel Club continued to use it.

Pioneers of the Breed

In Ireland one of the oldest pioneers of Kerries was Mr Henry B Fottrell with the original Tailteann prefix. He was a knowledgeable advocate for the breed and had Kerries until late 1950's. He was also a founder member of the Dublin Irish Blue Terrier Club and the second President of IKC from 1936 till 1978.

Another and maybe the most experienced Kerry Blue enthusiast of the early days was Dr G J Pierce of the Bushmount kennels. He had three of the first Irish Champions as well as was the breeder of the famous Eng Ch Bushmont Helter Skelter (1929) who was later exported to the United States and named Blue Leader's Helter Skelter.



Ch Blue Leader's Helter Skelter (born 1929)

First Green Stars (Irish CC) were awarded at the Dublin show on 17th March 1922 and won by Midland Beauty (1920) and Shelbourne Rose (1920). Midland Beauty was later bought by Mrs & Ms Green (kennel Martells) and named Martells



Ch Leysfield Bluebeard (born 1922) owned by Breezehurst kennels. He is one of the names found in the pedigrees all over the world. Photo: Fall.

Sapphire Beauty. He became the first dog to gain CC in England and he was also the first English Champion. Shelbourne Rose was later bought by Capt. Watts Williams (kennel Leysfield) and became known as Ch Rose of Leysfield.

The breed was also recognized by the English Kennel Club in 1922 and in the same year first Kerry Blue Terriers were shown at the Crufts Show in England. After the show English fanciers formed the Kerry Blue Terrier Club of England. At the Crufts Show in 1922 almost all of the ten Kerry exhibits were either bred or owned by an Irishwoman Mrs Casey-Hewitt. Her kennel was known as Munster in Ireland and Muchia in England. She had bought Brian King of Munster (bred by Mr Phil McDonagh of Tralee) who



Brian King of Munster was one of the first great sires in the beginning of the breed history.

became one of the great studs of his time and left his stamp on succeeding descendants. He was also the sire of Brendon of Bantry (1920) who went Best of Breed at Crufts in 1922. Brendon was later known as Ch Brachill of Bailey. Another son of Brian King, Am Ch Brian of Muchia (1921) was sold to the United States and was the first Kerry Blue Terrier to gain the title of American Champion. Mrs Hewitt must be given all credit for her work in breeding and effort in showing the Kerries and making the breed more known.

As you might have been reading between the lines, many of the best Kerries were sold to England and to the United States. At the end of the 1950's it was said that there was only little breeding anymore and only about fifty Kerries were left in Ireland.



Tim of the Chevin (born 1925) Photo: Fall.

In England there were some very skillful breeders at that time. One of them was Miss Hope Toft of the Chevin kennels. According to Miss Phyllis Parry (kennel Lisdhu), Miss Toft's brother bought her a Kerry bitch as a pet when he was stationed with the army in Ireland. Tasha of the Chevin became the foundation bitch of her famous Chevin type.

Eng Am Ch Black Prince of the Chevin (1927) was the first Kerry ever to win Best In Show at all breed Championship show in England. The progeny by Black Prince established the famous Chevin type with long lean head and reachy neck, coal black eyes and light gray colour. Also Black Prince was sold to the United States where he continued to gather victories by gaining his Am Ch title and winning several Best In Shows.



Ch Brachill of Bailey (born 1920) Photo: Fall.

Eng Ch Another Prince of the Chevin (1930) made the breed history by winning Terrier Group and ending up Reserv Best In Show at the Crufts Show in 1931. He was also the Top Winning of all breeds in 1933 and 1934. He was sold to France and his brothers Eng Am Ch Watteau Prince Blues and Eng Am Ch Watteau Prince Padriac were sold to the United States.

In Ireland Kerries were shown in rough untrimmed coat, but fanciers in England thought that Kerries should be trimmed as Terriers to add more style. As they began to trim the Kerries, the breed gained more popularity. Mrs Violet Handy



Ch Black Prince of the Chevin (born 1927) Photo: Fall.

(kennel Princeton) was the pioneer in trimming of Kerries. Mrs Handy was owner of several English Champions but she never bred one herself. She purchased a grandson of Eng Ch Slievh Corrig (1924) and he was registered as Eng Ch Princeton Hell-of-a-Fellow (1931). Hell-of-a-Fellow was very successful and became the record holder of 42 CC's. Kerries of the Chevin breeding provided the strongest competition to Hell-of-a-Fellow.



Ch Princeton Hell-of-a-Fellow (born 1931)
Photo: M Nicholson

Other famous Kerries that influenced the breed history came from the Misses Henrys' Ben-Edar kennels. Their kennel name originates from the Irish Edar Mountains (Ben Edar) where their family used to spend the summers. Misses Henrys bought Brian of Boyne, the litter brother of Ch Brachill of Bailey. He was named Ben-Edar Brian and was the start of this kennel. They combined the bloodlines of the Chevin with their strain and produced Kerries whose names are yet to be found in the pedigrees of Kerry Blue Terriers of today.

(1927) and Beetle's daughter Eng Ch Ben-Edar Beth (1930) and Beth's daughter Eng Ch Ben-Edar Bagatelle (1933) are dams of the above mentioned males.

The brothers, Am Ch Ben-Edar Blaise (1931) and Am Ch Muircroft Victa, along with brothers Am Ch Ben-Edar Bawcock (1933), Am Ch Ben-Edar Beau and Can Ch Ben-Edar Birkie as well as Am Ch Ben-Edar Bonaccord (1937) were all exported overseas. The outstanding bitches from this kennel, such as Eng Ch Ben-Edar Blithe (1925), her daughter Eng Ch Ben-Edar Beetle

As mentioned before, much stock was sent to the United States and specially so when the war was threatening. Unfortunately these English breeders disposed their kennels for World War II and never started up again. But their dedicated work should never be forgotten.

The best of Irish and English bloodlines formed the basis for the Kerry Blue Terrier breeding. England and the United States have had the greatest influence in developing the breed for the modern Kerry Blue Terrier.



Ben-Edar Ballerina (born 1933) Photo: Thos. Fall.

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