

**A**lthough dogs have been our companions for millennia, we have to guess at what prehistoric dogs looked like exactly. One thing we do know for sure, though, is the work they did. They followed the prey, drove the flocks and herds, guarded livestock and defended their owners' property.

# The Golden Retriever

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

**W**ithout any doubt, the Golden Retriever is one of the most popular dog breeds in the world. It has been in the Top 10 AKC dog registrations every year since 1976.

The history of this breed can be found in many books and documents, but still there are different versions of its origins. For example, there's the one in the *Book of the Golden Retriever* (1932) by Mrs. Winnifred M. Charlesworth. Her theory was that a Scottish nobleman,

Sir Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks (1820-94), since 1880 the 1st Baron Tweedmouth, saw eight Caucasian sheepdogs performing in a circus in Brighton (East Sussex), their colors ranging from crème to light biscuit. Sir Dudley bought these eight dogs and took them to his estate Guisachan in Inverness-shire (Scotland).

The correct story, however, is that Marjoribanks and his son were walking near Brighton where they met "a handsome young yellow retriever," owned by a local shoemaker who



*The Col. William le Poer Trench retrievers were entered in the Kennel Club stud books as Russian Retrievers. Clockwise: St. Hubert's Czar, St. Hubert's Prince and St. Hubert's Peter.*

had acquired the dog from Obed Miles, a gamekeeper at Lord Chichester's estate, to settle an unpaid invoice. Most dog writers eventually came to disbelieve the story of Russian circus dogs. In 1952, *Country Life* published the origin of the Golden Retriever by Giles Fox Strangways, the 6th Earl of Ilchester (1874-1959). As a nephew of Sir Dudley, Strangways had been able to study the Marjoribanks stud books and papers. Only Nous, a yellow Wavy-coated Retriever born in 1864, had been

purchased in Brighton. Both his parents were black Wavy-coated Retrievers; Nous was the only yellow puppy in the litter. The coat color was remarkable because yellow retrievers were almost unknown in Scotland at the time. In the Marjoribanks stud book, started in 1835, Sir Dudley wrote about Nous, "Lord Chichester's breed. June 1864, purchased at Brighton." Not a word about circus dogs let alone Caucasian sheepdogs.

*...a superb dog that could retrieve game from the rough waters and rugged fields of Scotland and northern England.*

## Like typical Golden Retrievers

In 1868, Nous was mated to Belle. Sir Dudley's studbook states, "Belle – Ladykirk breed 1863 – bred at Ladykirk. From D. Robertson." Robertson was a nephew of Sir Dudley, and a Member of Parliament. In literature Belle is identified as a Tweed Spaniel, Tweed Water Spaniel or Ladykirk Spaniel (The River Tweed flows east across the Border region in Scotland and northern England. Ladykirk is a village in the Scottish Borders area of Scotland.).

Depictions of the Tweed (Water) Spaniel are rare. From written descriptions we know they looked like a small retriever, so the Nous x Belle mating seems logical and explains why the puppies of the first generation already looked like typical Golden Retrievers. The first Nous x Belle litter included three yellow puppies: Cowslip, Crocus, and Primrose. Sir Dudley's son, Edward Marjoribanks, was given Crocus; Cowslip, and Primrose and stayed with their breeder.

Ada, a yellow bitch from a Nous x Belle litter four years later, in 1872, became the foundation bitch for the Earl of Ilchester at Melbury Hall in Dorset.

Henry Edward Fox-Strangways, the 5th Earl of Ilchester, was the father of Giles Stephan Holland Fox-Strangways researched the Marjoribanks stud books and wrote the 1952 Country Life article. Later, the retrievers from the Ilchester line got the prefix Melbury.

The quality of photos showing Nous is too poor for publication



Gamekeeper Simon Fraser on the steps of Guisachan, Scotland. Lying at his feet is Nous, the yellow retriever from Brighton and founding father of the breed. In Gaelic, "Nous" means wisdom.

## Golden Retriever

- Country of origin: Scotland
- Use: Retrieving waterfowl. Now (particularly outside Spain): Companion dog, suitable for various dog sports, and retrieving.
- First shown: 1908 in Britain
- AKC breed standard: [www.akc.org/pdf/breeds/standards/Golden\\_Retriever.pdf](http://www.akc.org/pdf/breeds/standards/Golden_Retriever.pdf)
- AKC Sporting Group
- Golden Retriever Club in England: [www.thegoldenretrieverclub.co.uk](http://www.thegoldenretrieverclub.co.uk)
- The Kennel Club: [www.thekennelclub.org.uk](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk)
- Average lifespan: 10 to 12 years

here, except one: a photo of gamekeeper Simon Fraser with Nous – a sturdy Golden with a heavy head – lying at his feet. Another important picture is an oil painting (1873) of the 5th Earl of Ilchester by Henry Graves. Next to the Earl sits Ada (Nous x Belle, 1872), her forelegs on her owner's knees. The painting is in a private collection and was exhibited only in 2009, when The Kennel Club held an exhibition at its gallery in London.

## Tweed Spaniel

In 1873, Sir Dudley's Cowslip was mated to Tweed, another

Tweed Spaniel. The bitch Topsy was a result. Two years later, Cowslip was mated again, this time to an Irish Setter named Sampson. Their offspring were Jack and Jill. In 1877, Topsy, from Cowslip's first litter was mated to Sambo, a black Wavy-coated Retriever. From this litter, the bitch Zoë stayed with the breeder and was bred to her dam's half-brother Jack. In this 1884 litter were Nous II and Gill II. Like her dam, Gill II was bred to a black Wavy-coated Retriever. This 1887 mating to Tracer was an outcross. Obviously, inbreeding and line breeding were necessary in the first years. Cowslip and Tweed, for example, appear three times in four generations. It was (and is) the way to establish type in a couple of generations.

The first Lord Tweedmouth, Sir Dudley Marjoribanks, kept a stud book from 1835 until 1890, recording the names of his dogs and their origins. In another document, dated after 1884, he recorded the litters of Belle and Tweed.

Apart from retrievers, there were Beagles, Red Setters, Pointers, Greyhounds, Deerhounds, and Irish Spaniels present at Guisachan. To get an impression of Lord Tweedmouth's estate, a photograph of the hunting staff at Guisachan shows eight people with dogs and guns.

## Borderland

Was the now-extinct Tweed Spaniel the same dog as the old English Water Spaniel we know from paintings? Or was it a local variety of the original water dog, described by Caius, mentioned

by Shakespeare (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act III Scene 1, "She hath more qualities than a water-spaniel"), and described by Dalziel who owned one. It seems that the Tweed Spaniel was a water-dog variety in the borderland between England and Scotland, in the region of the village of Ladykirk and the River Tweed. Their coats were liver-colored and curly. In those days "liver-colored" was used to describe shades from brown to sandy.

An 1864 painting by John Charlton depicts a dog of a spaniel/retriever type, curly coated, with a long tail and a duck in

its mouth. Tradition has it that this could be a Tweed Spaniel. There is a certain similarity to an Irish Water Spaniel. 'Stonehenge' in *The Dog* (1859), and H. de la Blanchère (1875), described the Tweed Water Spaniel as a small type of retriever. Others asserted that the Tweed Spaniel was a variety of water spaniel living along England's east coast, in the neighborhood of Yarmouth. As far as a possible relation with the Irish Water Spaniel, the Tweed Spaniel had a conical rather than "large" (AKC) and "good size" (FCI) skull.

Sir Dudley crossed a Tweed Spaniel with a yellow Wavy-



*The first Golden documented in America and Canada was Lady, owned by Archie Marjoribanks, son of Sir Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks, the creator of the breed in England.*

coated Retriever to create a superb dog that could retrieve game from the rough waters and rugged fields of Scotland and northern England.

### **Bloodhound**

In his breeding, Sir Dudley regularly used black Wavy-coated Retrievers. For more than 20 years he linebred on the yellow bitch Cowslip with the intention of breeding "a sound hunting yellow retriever."

In 1890, a sandy-colored Bloodhound was tried in order to increase scenting ability, but without success. Some offspring were far too big and others appeared to be aggressive. Rachel Elliot disputes this breeding in Early Ancestors of the Golden Retriever ([grca.org](http://grca.org)). The third Lord Tweedmouth had assured her that there was never a trace of Bloodhound in the dogs – "they were absolutely purebred retrievers."

Sir Dudley, the 1st Lord Tweedmouth, died in 1894. The 1st Viscount d'Harcourt acquired two dogs from the Tweedmouth kennel and started breeding and showing under the Culham prefix. It could well be that "Golden" in the breed name was his invention. Other kennels in the period were Ingestre and Normandy.



1903 Guisachan gamekeeper Simon Fraser with Comet, Conan and Ginger



Col. William le Poer Trench must be mentioned in the history of the Golden Retriever as he also owned dogs bred at Guisachan. His obsession with the story of Caucasian sheepdogs had him travel to the Caucasus, looking for retrievers. There, he was promised a Caucasian sheepdog and le Poer Trench left some money, but such a dog was never sent to England.

Dog painter Maud Earl (1864-1943) painted St. Hubert's Peter, one of the le Poer

Trench dogs. According to le Poer Trench it was a Russian yellow retriever.

### **Recognition**

Yellow retrievers were first exhibited in Britain as a variety of Wavy-coated Retriever, at Crufts and Crystal Palace in 1908. The Golden Retriever Club in England was founded in 1911 and The Kennel Club recognized the breed as a separate variety – Retrievers, Yellow or Golden – in 1912. The first breed champion was Noranby Campfire, born in 1912.

The first World War (1914-18) caused a tremendous setback with no field trials or dog shows organized. Fortunately, the implications of the Second World War were not as far-reaching. In May 2018, the Golden Retriever Club in Britain celebrated the 150th anniversary of the breed.

### **Something about the Golden Retriever in America**

Some Golden Retrievers were already present in America and Canada as early as 1890, brought by Sir Dudley's son Archie, and possibly by Archie's sister Ishbel and her husband Lord Aberdeen, who would become Governor-General of Canada in 1893. The first Golden documented in the U.S. was Lady, photographed in Texas with her owner Archie Marjoribanks at the family's Rocking Chair Ranch around 1891. Lady accompanied Archie to British Columbia when he became Lord Aberdeen's aide-de-camp in 1895. But it was not until 1925 that the first Golden – Lomerdale Blondin, imported from England – was registered in the AKC stud book. Interest in the breed was generated and the American Golden Retriever Club (GRCA) was founded in 1938. The club's president was Col. Samuel S. Magoffin of North Vancouver, B.C., who owned the import Ch. (Am. & Can.) Speedwell Pluto (Ch. Michael of Moreton x Speedwell Emerald), the first Golden to win a North American Sporting Group and Best in Show (in 1933 at the Puget Sound Kennel Club show in Washington State). The GRCA has been holding national specialty shows and field trials since 1940.

*We have tried to find the names of all photographers. Unfortunately, we do not always succeed. Please send a message to the author if you think you are the owner of a copyright.*

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