



Augustus Elliot Fuller

Augustus Elliot Fuller and the Sussex Spaniel

Most dogs were developed after hundreds of years of evolution and lengthy selection by breeders. However, some breeds owe their existence to just one person.

Augustus Elliot (also Eliot, Elliott and Eliott) Fuller (1777-1857) was an extremely rich British landowner who lived in Sussex, Wales and London, and owned property in Jamaica. Around 1795 he began to develop a line of working spaniels, bred for hunting in the heavy cover and clay soil of Sussex – heavily built dogs for a heavy job.

Business with pleasure

The Fuller family had its roots in Uckfield and Waldron (east Sussex). In 1776, John Trayton Fuller married Anne Elliot, daughter of George Augustus Elliot (1st Baron Heathfield) and Anne Pollexon Drake. Their oldest son, Augustus Elliott, was born on May 7, 1777, and the young family settled in Brayley Park, later renamed Heathfield Park. When he was 14, the family moved to Ashdown House in East Grinstead. Augustus and his 10 brothers and sisters were raised as members of the privileged class of aristocratic, well-to-do 18th- and 19th-century families that combined business with pleasure, where pleasure meant hunting with dogs.

Setting, cocking, springing and water

Spaniels existed in England long before Augustus Fuller was born: setting spaniels for net hunting, cocking spaniels for hunting woodcock, springing spaniels for springing the game, and water spaniels for retrieving waterfowl. At that time, spaniels were a mixture of types, colours and sizes; however, they shared one thing: their centuries-old history.

The word “spaniel” (spanyel, spanyelles) is written in old laws of Ireland and Wales, in the 14th-century *Canterbury Tales* and in books from the 15th century. The 14th-century French count Gaston III, Comte de Foix (called Phoebus), and Dr. Johannes Caius (16th century) mentioned spaniels in their books. Dog writers in the following centuries described spaniels as “medium sized, round bodies, long ears and dark eyes.”

Type or bloodline

An illustration in Sydenham Edwards’ *Cynographia Britannica* (1799-1805) shows four spaniels coloured liver and white, black and white, sandy liver, and lemon and white. Edwards



The spaniels from Sydenham Edwards' *Cynographia Britannica*



Sussex Spaniel ca. 1800



'George' and 'Romp,' drawn in 1850, published in *The Dog* (1859).

wrote: "... the land spaniel may be divided into two kinds, the Springing, Hawking Spaniel or Starter and the Cocking or Cocker Spaniel." Shortly after Fuller began breeding his spaniels, several dog writers mentioned his dogs in their books.

In *The Sportsman's Repository* (1820), John Scott wrote about the colours of the various spaniels: "yellow, liver coloured, red, brown, white and black-and-tan with tan on the legs and the muzzle."

In Gen. Hutchinson's *Dog Breaking* (1856) we read: "One of the fine yeomen of whom England had such cause to feel proud was shooting with an old, short-legged, strong-joined Sussex Spaniel." And two years after Fuller's death, Stonehenge (J.H. Walsh) wrote in *The Field* in 1859: "The Sussex differs from the Clumber in shape as well as in his 'questing,' his note being full and bell-like, though sharp. The whole body is also of a decided liver colour, but with rather a golden shade, not so deep as that of the Welsh or Devon Cockers or the Irish Water Spaniel."

Stonehenge was the first writer to mention Augustus Fuller as the breeder of 'George' and 'Romp,' depicted in 1859.

Although there was not yet a national stud book, many breeders – especially those with their own type or bloodline – kept pedigrees and studbooks in which they recorded matings, the colours of the dogs, litters, and sometimes the purchased and sold dogs. In the 18th and 19th centuries, inbreeding and strong line breeding over several generations was not uncommon. A brother/sister or father/daughter mating was the shortest way to set the desired type.

Breeders also commissioned artists to make drawings and paintings of their dogs. Unfortunately, only one drawing of two of Augustus Fuller's spaniels has survived the centuries.

Wales

Augustus Fuller's father-in-law, Owen Putland Meyrick, was born in Anglesey (Wales) into a family with a history dating back to before Roman times. In 1801, the Meyrick family lived at Bodorgan Estate in Llangadwaladr. When his father-in-law died in 1824, Augustus's oldest son, Owen John Augustus, inherited Bodorgan Estate and moved to Wales.

Augustus and Clara travelled frequently to Wales, where Owen had kennels built "to house several pack of hounds for his father to hunt." It's known from several sources that Augustus was a passionate hunter of hare.

The Rose Hill connection

A distant and unmarried family member named Rose Fuller died in the same year Augustus was born (1777). For 22 years, Rose Fuller (the name suggests a woman, but Rose was a man) was squire of Rose Hill, situated close to the village of Brightling in Sussex.

After his death in 1777, his properties were inherited by his nephew John Fuller, known as “Mad Jack.” When Mad Jack died in 1834, Rose Hill was inherited by another nephew, Augustus Elliot Fuller.

By that time, Augustus was an immensely rich man. In 1811 he inherited Ashdown House from his father, and in 1834 Rose Hill, Waldron Estate and Bodiam Castle (then already a ruin) from Mad Jack. Augustus also owned the estates Catsfield and Hooe, a house in London and Rose Fuller’s “sugar works, lands and hereditaments in the island of Jamaica.”

The spaniels of Rose Hill

We know a lot about Augustus Fuller and his family, but not much about the spaniels he bred at Rose Hill. When Fuller began breeding around 1795, it is assumed that his spaniels had long backs and shorter legs than the usual cocking or springing spaniels. His dogs’ coats were thick, dense, glossy and waterproof. Contemporaries swore by a liver-coloured coat of a “golden shade,” with or without white markings.

Fuller bred heavy spaniels able to hunt in the heavy cover and clay soil in Sussex, and we can take it for granted that he bred dogs for his own use, although he might have sold or swapped a dog with other landowners now and then. Unfortunately, at some point the Rose Hill kennel was struck by an illness described as “dumb madness.”

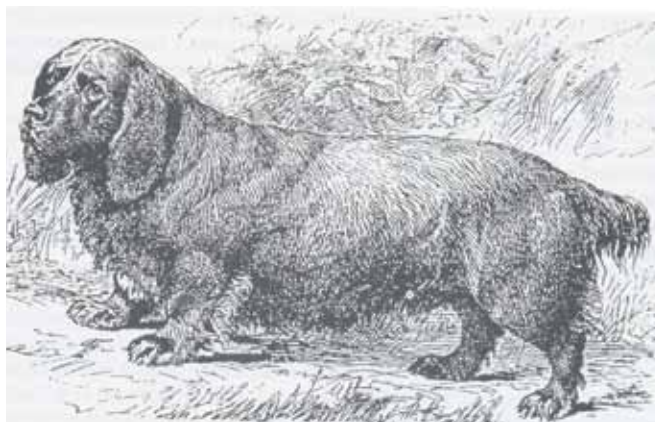
Recognition

We read in *The Sportsman’s Cabinet* (published in 1803, about eight years after Fuller began breeding): “... the largest and strongest are common in most parts of Sussex and are called Sussex Spaniels.”

In 1845, Youatt wrote in *The Dog* under the heading The Springer (“A general term for all Spaniel breeds that sprung the game, such as the Norfolk, Clumber and Sussex, and not to be confused with the modern springer breeds.” Peggy Grayson, *The Sussex Spaniel*. 1989): “This dog is slower to range than the cocker, but it is a much safer dog for the



Field spaniels from Cassell’s *The Book of the Dog* (1881).



Ch. Bridford Giddie, born in 1888, bred by Moses Woolland



Sussex Spaniels from *Modern Dogs* (1893) by Rawdon B. Lee.



Sussex Spaniel by Maud Earl (ca.1895)



Sussex Spaniels by Arthur Wardle (from R.B. Lee, *Modern Dogs*, 1906)



Field Spaniels of the 20th Century (1906) by Arthur Wardle

shooter and can better stand a hard day's work. The largest and best breed of springers is said to be in Sussex, and is much esteemed in the wealds of that county."

The first dog shows were organized in the mid-19th century. Sussex Spaniels were entered in the first Kennel Club stud book (covering registrations from 1859-74) under the heading "Spaniels (Field, Sussex, Cocker)."

Fuller's inheritance

Fuller was not only a wealthy landowner but – according to tradition in aristocratic families – a Member of Parliament for Sussex, from 1841-57.

After a marriage of nearly 55 years, his wife, Clara, died in their London house on Clifford St. Fuller died a year later, on August 5, 1857. In his inheritance were 10 Beagles, three Pointers, two retrievers and six spaniels, described as "Fuller's strain from Rose Hill." The small number of spaniels could have been caused by disease in his kennel.

The kennels were auctioned in 1857, the year of Fuller's death. His kennel manager and gamekeeper, Albert Relf, asked for a male and female. It is said that he got 'George' and 'Romp.' In his *Modern Dogs* (1893), Rawdon B. Lee enthusiastically told the story of 'George' and 'Romp,' but others have their doubts and even question the existence of Albert Relf. The fact is that George and Romp were depicted in Stonehenge's book *The Dog*, published in 1859, two years after Fuller's death. The dogs then belonged to "E. Soames, Esq., of London."

In 1879 (20 years after his death), Fuller was mentioned in Idstone's publication: "Mr. Fuller was a celebrated breeder." However, the greatest compliment was from Rawdon B. Lee, in 1893: "He was a good sportsman of the old school."

Large spaniels

What happened to the spaniels Augustus Fuller bred? Did some go to Wales? Perhaps some went to his children. At Bodorgan, there is a grave with an oval stone inscribed: "Trim. The favourite spaniel of Lucy Anne Fuller. Died May 7th, 1840, aged 17 years." Lucy Ann was Augustus's daughter, and 'Trim' might have been one of the Rose Hill spaniels. Fuller's oldest son, Owen John Augustus, is mentioned in the 1876 Kennel Club stud book: "Rag, bred by Mr. O.J.A. Fuller Meyrick of Brightling, Sussex."

The influence of the old field spaniels on the Sussex

Spaniel was substantial as demonstrated by the story of Phineas Bullock, who in the 1870s, entered a Sussex Spaniel at a show in Staffordshire. The dog – by chance named ‘George’ – was described by Idstone as a “typical Sussex Spaniel.” In 1874, George appeared again at a show and Vero Shaw (author of *The Illustrated Book of the Dog*) complained to the organization that George’s sire and dam were both black. The complaint was unsustainable and in 1875, George appeared again, in Birmingham, under the same judges, but this time not as a Sussex Spaniel, and there was not the slightest obstacle.

At the beginning of the 20th century, spaniels were shown as Sussex Spaniels even when they had one or two black parents. There were not always separate classes for Sussex Spaniels and the breed was entered as “Spaniels other than Clumbers” or simply as “Large Spaniels.”

Of pure Rosehill blood

By the 1870s, Sussex Spaniels were facing extinction, despite crossings with field spaniels, cocker spaniels and even water spaniels. Vero Shaw wrote that purebred Rose Hill spaniels were rare, and if anyone owned one it was proudly mentioned, as in “Buckingham and Maud of pure Rosehill blood.”

The name Rose Hill became a source of confusion when Campbell Newington adopted the prefix “Rosehill.” In 1989, Peggy Grayson wrote that Mr. Fuller’s working Spaniels were known simply as “... Fuller’s strain of Rosehill. For over a century, two bloodlines named Rosehill confused writers and readers.” Whether or not Newington owned spaniels with pure Rose Hill blood is still the question.

Augustus Fuller may not have been the creator of the Sussex Spaniel, but he was certainly the one who set the type and developed the breed we recognize today.

The Sussex Spaniel Association was founded in 1924. Despite all efforts, the Sussex Spaniel is still a numerically small breed – only 60 were registered in the U.K. in 2009 – with about a thousand dogs worldwide. In 2004, the Sussex Spaniel was identified by The Kennel Club as a Vulnerable Native Breed. In 2009, Sussex Spaniel Ch. Clussexx Three D Grinchy Glee won Best in Show at Westminster.

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