

Jack Russell (1795-1883) in riding costume. The photograph dates from the last quarter of the 19th century.



PART 2:

Parson Jack Russell and his terriers

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

Thanks to his diaries, we know a lot about the life of John (Jack) Russell compared to the information we have about his activities as a breeder. Parson Jack Russell must have been a striking figure in the County of Devon during the 19th century. Although his parishioners adored him, he was not the type of parson to be occupied only with the spiritual welfare of his flock. On the contrary, during his whole life, the parson hunted three or more days a week. Jack Russell owned horses, he had his own pack of Otterhounds and was able to call himself “Master of Otter Hounds.” Last but not least, the parson bred working terriers. Eventually, those terriers would bear his name... as would the pub in his hometown, Swimbridge: the Jack Russell. The way Parson Russell spent his leisure time is clearly shown in the painting by J. Loder from



Jack Russell on his horse, accompanied by seven Foxhounds and one of his terriers. The 1841 painting by J. Loder was donated by F.W.B. Smythe to Blundell's School in Tiverton.

1841. Russell is seated on his horse, dressed immaculately and accompanied by seven Foxhounds and one terrier – the picture of a ‘Sporting Parson.’

An easy-going childhood

Russell was born in December 1795 in Dartmouth, in the County of Devon. His family had lived in



ILLUSTRATION: COURTESY RIA HÖRTER

The ancestors of our present terriers, drawn in the time of Jack Russell's youth. (From Sydenham Edwards, *Cynographia Britannica*, 1799-1805)

this county since the 16th century. Thanks to the investigations of his biographer Charles Noon, we now know a lot about this son and grandson of Anglican parsons. Russell was the second son of John Russell Sr. and Honor Terrell. The family eventually consisted of one daughter and three sons. John Sr. had married well and although the family was not really well-to-do, Jack had an easy-going childhood – and that was quite something in early-19th-century England.

Russell's education was typical for the son of a parson. He attended Plympton Grammar School until he was 14, when he became a student of Blundell's School in Tiverton. Blundell's School advocated a Spartan upbringing: the students had to be present at their school desks at 7 a.m.; in winter, the ink froze in the inkpots. On the timetable were Greek and Latin, exact sciences and – for an extra charge – dancing lessons. To earn a little extra money, students, including Jack and his friend Hunter, kept rabbits. When Headmaster Richards forbade the hobby and Hunter tried to hide his rabbits, young Russell set his ferrets on them! As a result, Hunter's rabbits were confiscated. Russell was obviously a student of enterprise, but the school management had another opinion of the parson's son.

After school hours, there was little supervision of the students, so Russell and his friend Robert Bovey had the opportunity to hunt rabbits and rats

together with the local farmers. When the farmers gave the boys the idea of keeping Foxhounds, Russell found accommodation for the dogs in the shed of the local blacksmith. The farmers were delighted because they wanted to be rid of the vermin that was destroying their fields. Russell turned out to be a talented dog trainer, but unfortunately the boys were betrayed by a fellow student. Bovey was expelled from school; Russell escaped this measure, but he got a severe beating. The story doesn't reveal what happened to the Foxhounds.

In 1814, Russell began his studies at Exeter College in Oxford. Like many of his fellow students, he left Oxford (December 1818) with the lowest degree, but by that time he had some useful friends and connections. Most of his fellow students were sons of wealthy landowners and were more interested in hunting and fishing than in Greek and Latin. Russell does not seem to have been a diligent student; his biographer writes about "a minimum of study."

Sport = hunting

Jack Russell lived at a time when "sport" really meant "hunting" and from the time he was a young boy, he showed a natural talent for dealing with dogs and horses.

In the 19th century, terriers were not yet separated into distinct breeds as they are today, although there was some distinction of types. In

Cynographia Britannica (published around 1800), Sydenham Edwards wrote about two types of terrier: crook-legged and straight-legged. In general, their colour was black with tan markings on the muzzle and the legs and some tan above the eyes. Red, yellow-brown and spotted terriers were mentioned as well. White was the favourite colour of hunters (to distinguish the dogs from the prey) and usually the tail was docked and the ears cropped. Edwards also described the temperament of those terriers: “grumbling, grumpy, irritable and alert,” but also “brave and intelligent.” He went on: “He tracks with the Foxhounds, hunts with the Beagle and finds the game for the Greyhound.” We must think of this type of terrier when we read about young Jack Russell meeting ‘Trump,’ the terrier bitch he bought from a milkman in Oxford. Seeing her just once, Russell knew she was the type he was looking for.

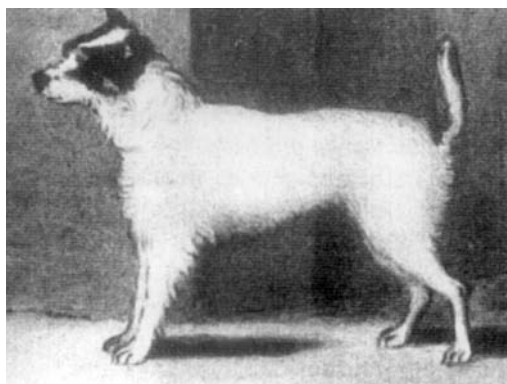
We know what Trump looked like: white with dark tan markings above her eyes and a tan spot close to the tail-set. Her coat was thick and wavy, her frame built for endurance and heavy work. She was the size of a fully grown vixen. Trump became the ancestress of all the terriers bred by Russell. They were built to be able to chase a fox effortlessly, even underground, and follow the horses up to 20 miles a day.

Russell’s interest in terriers originated in his love for fox hunting. During his stay in Oxford, he had hunted with the Duke of Beaufort’s Foxhounds and the packs of Bicester and Old Berkshire. He closely watched the methods and tactics of the older Masters of Hounds and learned a lot about hunting, horses and packs. Sometimes he was short of money and couldn’t join a hunting party, in which case he used the excuse, “I am not feeling very well.”

Hunter/parson or parson/hunter?

Russell’s father was not very pleased with the behaviour of his son. In his view, young Jack was wasting his time with hunting parties. He tried to find a job for him and in 1820, 27-year-old Russell was consecrated by the bishop of Exeter, Mr. George Pelham, in the Chapel Royal in London.

Young Parson Russell wouldn’t have a busy life; for an Anglican parson in the English countryside



Top: *A Stranger in Their Midst* by John Emms (1895). The real separation between working terriers and the Fox Terrier took place at the end of the 19th century. The terrier in the foreground can easily be distinguished from the short-coated Fox Terriers. (Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Hans Ursch)

Left: ‘Trump,’ Russell’s first terrier, bought from a milkman in Oxford.

in the 19th century, working pressure was minimal. Russell had about 10 marriage and funeral services to conduct a month and had to preach only twice a month. There was a lot of time left for his pleasures and in his diary, he wrote almost daily about his hobby: “Tuesday: Killed an otter in the marsh above Allen’s lime pits... Thursday: Domi in the morning (a funeral). Killed an otter under White House below Pilcock Wood in the afternoon... Saturday: Found a stag in Head Wood.... Thursday: killed four hares... Monday: Found a fox with Mr. Fellowes at Irishcombe Plantation... Saturday: Found a fox in Stone Wood, killed in Nott’s Wood.” The diary goes on and on, year in, year out. A funeral in the morning, fox hunting in the afternoon, chasing hares in the morning, a baptism in the afternoon. The question seems to be was Jack Russell a hunter who became a parson by coincidence or a parson who in fact should have been a hunter?

Although Russell’s father was not very pleased with his son’s behaviour, the apple never falls far from the tree. Russell Sr. was also known for the fact that he rather liked to go fox hunting instead of preaching. Not infrequently, churchgoers could see his hunting boots sticking out from under his gown!

Jack Russell used his terriers to chase the fox to its hole. Contemporaries of Russell also used this type of terrier to hunt hares, rabbits and polecats. This painting by Robert Hugh Buxton dates from the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century.



“Master of Otter Hounds”

Russell’s superiors must have wondered how somebody who rode through the county at dead of night, accompanied by a team of dogs, could pay sufficient attention to his parishioners.

In 1820, Russell’s salary amounted to £100 a year, but he inherited £800 from his grandfather. It is assumed that he bought his first pack of Otterhounds with his grandfather’s money. In the summer of 1820, Russell killed 25 otters and he was mentioned in hunting magazines. Being a “Master of Otter Hounds,” Russell was now a man of distinction and reading his diary one has to come to the conclusion that his parishioners received less attention than the hunt, the horses and the dogs. Between November 1823 and February 1824, Parson Russell hunted hares 38 times and in the same period he went fox hunting as well. To put it briefly, Russell hunted 75 days out of 90; his diary mentions dozens of names of other hunters and different packs of dogs.

His energy seems to have been inexhaustible in becoming acquainted with almost every well-to-do landowner in the county. Russell also traded in horses. He felt at home at every race-course and still he had energy left. His diary mentions visits to theatres, balls, school reunions and other places “where the girls are present.”

On the cheap

On March 30, 1826, Russell married 26-year-old Penelope Inledon Bury, an admiral’s daughter from an old Devonshire family. Two sons were born: John Bury and Richard Bury. It seems that Penelope’s mother was not enthusiastic about her daughter’s choice. Although Russell was not poor, mother had something else in mind for her youngest daughter, and that certainly was not a parson without family possessions and whose name had become a byword for hunting parties. Although

Russell’s marriage lasted almost 49 years, my impression is that he didn’t behave like a concerned family man. He was often away from home and not infrequently Penelope stayed elsewhere. It is obvious that his wife never came between Russell and his favourite sport.

After the marriage, Russell was still worried about having sufficient money for his expensive hobby. According to his biographer Charles Noon, he hunted “on the cheap,” as economically as possible. He never owned more than six horses at a time and his assistant was a young boy, called Sam, who was taught how to train dogs by Russell himself. Sam would remain a loyal ‘whipper-in’ until his death in 1839.

Two years after his marriage, Russell had already spent a considerable amount of Penelope’s money. After 1850, he was forced to sell their big house, Colleton Barton, in the neighbourhood of Cumleigh, to satisfy his creditors. In order to have sufficient dogs in his pack, Russell co-owned dogs to keep down expenses. And he had good advice for the farmers: do not kill the foxes yourself, but leave that to a professional – i.e., Jack Russell.

Two hundred ladies

In 1833, Russell moved from Iddesleigh to the village of Swimbridge and this occasion was marked with a big party. Even the *North Devon Journal* wrote about it. It seems that Parson Russell had become a real star, because about 200 ladies attended his tea party! Russell enjoyed social life: dinners, meetings, collecting money for schools and hospitals and conducting himself as a prominent Freemason. From time to time the question cropped up if this parson still had time for his parishioners. On one occasion, even the local press



Ridley Robber of Belmorr, a top stud dog in Great Britain 1991-1996.

ILLUSTRATION: COURTESY RIA HORTER

PHOTO: SHEILA ATTER

addressed the subject, calling Russell “the futile Parson Jack Russell,” but it did not damage his popularity. On the contrary, most parishioners adored him and he continued to receive lots of invitations for hunting parties.

Without a pedigree

It is remarkable that the breed that made Jack Russell immortal played a relatively minor role in his life. Although he was one of the founders of The Kennel Club, Russell was not interested in dog shows. He needed good working dogs and how they looked was not really important to him. That’s probably one of the reasons he never docked the tails or cropped the ears of his terriers, contrary to the usual practice of the time.

Nearly every terrier Russell used for his breeding originated from the West Country, where he usually hunted. He also used the well-known Fox Terriers Old Jock and Old Tartar. ‘Tartar’ was shown at Birmingham in 1863. In the catalogue, he’s described as “without a pedigree, weight 18 pounds and almost white with a light tan marking above the eyes.” Russell was aware of proper registration and in his own stud books mentioned all necessary details.

Although many hunters used Russell’s terriers to hunt rabbits, rats, etc., Russell used them exclusively for fox hunting. Not infrequently, beat-up foxes hid themselves in badger holes and the terriers were able to follow them underground.

Jack Russell bred a type of terrier that was perfectly suited to the area in which he lived: rough, rolling fields. His terriers could work with the fast Foxhounds, they had great stamina and were intelligent. Sometimes a wounded or tired terrier would be seated in front of Russell in the saddle; otherwise, Parson Russell was unrelenting. Young dogs that did not fulfil his expectations were disposed of without mercy.

During Russell’s lifetime, his terriers were already considered a bit “old-fashioned,” but still some of his dogs were used to lay the foundation of new lines elsewhere. The year 1874 set the seal on his work when Russell was invited to judge Fox Terriers at the Crystal Palace show in London.

Prince of Wales

Russell’s wife died in 1875 and he was immediately in financial difficulties again. Well-to-do friends helped him out and in 1880, many paid tribute to Russell at a massive party at the Duke of Bedford’s mansion. An old friend, Lord Poltimore, provided for a small job that doubled Rus-



PHOTO: SHEILA ATTER

sell’s salary! In spite of his uncertain financial position, Russell received an invitation from the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) to spend Christmas at Sandringham Castle. On New Year’s Eve, 1873, 78-year-old Parson Russell was on the dance floor holding Queen Alexandra in his arms.

In the fall of 1882, Russell was present at a stag hunt; on April 28, 1883, his life ended at the age of 88.

A true sportsman

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