On The Trail Of Lost Breeds...

Although many breeds in the history of dogs no longer exist, their blood still runs in the veins of some of today’s breeds. We follow the trail of…

Old English Working Spaniels

Bird Dog – Land Spaniel – (English) Water Spaniel – Tweed Spaniel or Ladykirk Spaniel
Norfolk and Shropshire Spaniel – Devonshire Cocker and Welsh Cocker

When talking about a breed, fanciers usually have a purebred dog in mind. However, most of our modern breeds share their history with other breeds of the same type. In the past, they belonged to a general group of dogs – like terriers or spaniels – with more or less the same characteristics. It was not until the 19th century that people became more interested in dogs as purebreds and the different types were separated and named, and their appearances recorded in breed standards. Unfortunately, some types disappeared, either because their number was too small, or through human selection.

Without a Trace

The disappearance of some members of a group with the same characteristics does not happen overnight. If there is no human intervention, the process happens gradually, but the day will eventually come when the number of animals is too small to carry on.

There are many examples of vanished or extinct breeds in the history of dogs. Some simply disappeared; others lived on as the foundation of one or more breeds of today. Good examples of those in English working spaniels are the Tweed Spaniel and Norfolk Spaniel.

The Tweed Spaniel is extinct, but is at the foundation of the Golden Retriever, and the Norfolk Spaniel is just an early edition of today’s English Springer Spaniel. The only spaniel that really has disappeared, apparently without a trace, is the English Water Spaniel.

To understand the history of old English working spaniels, we have to go back in time.

Bird Dogs Named Spaniels

In 15th-century Europe, a spaniel type of dog was used in conjunction with nets or falcons to hunt birds. These dogs were depicted on miniatures in Le Livre de Chasse (ca. 1387) by Gaston, Count de Foix (‘Phoebus’): “…bird dogs named Spaniels.” Gaston de Foix described them as “…dogs with a large body, a sturdy head and a nice white spotted coat.”

A bird dog is depicted on the 15th-century Devonshire Hunting Tapestry, and they also appear on old engravings illustrating net hunting.

Where and when bird dogs evolved into some of today’s breeds is difficult to say, but it was certainly a long process in which humans played an important role. They named the various types and, as early as the beginning of the 19th century, became interested in developing purebred dogs.

“... all the Alpine Mastiffs at St. Bernard, except one, had been destroyed by disease. The monks had no alternative but to cross the lone survivor with the “Spanish Pyrenean Wolf-dog” (Great Pyrenees). Hence arose the race of dogs ordinarily known as St. Bernards.”
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Of Englishe Dogges

Manuscripts about dogs had been written before the Renaissance, but Dr. Johannes Caius (a.k.a. John Keyes or Keys; 1510-73) was the first to try dividing English dogs into types. His De Canibus Britannicis is the earliest printed book exclusively about dogs. To make this book in Latin more accessible, it was translated into English by Abraham Fleming in 1576: Of Englishe Dogges, the diversities, the names, the natures, and the properties.

Caius divided dogs into four categories: Venatici (hunting dogs: bloodhounds, greyhounds, terriers); Aucupatorii (bird dogs: land spaniels, setters, water spaniels); Delicatus (pet dogs, Toy dogs); and Rustici (working dogs: mastiffs, herding dogs, butchers’ dogs).

Caius was to the point about spaniels: “The common sorte of people call them by one general word, namely Spaniells. As though these kinde of Dogges came originally and first of all out of Spaine.” In the original Latin text: “Post Venaticos sequuntur Aucupatorii; inter quos primus est Hispaniolus, quem ab Hispania voce nomen accepisse prius diximus…” (“After such as serve for hunting do follow such as serve for hawking and fowling, Among which the principall and chiefest is the Spaniell, called in Latine Hispaniolus, borrowing his name from Hispania Spaine…”) Whether spaniels really originated from Spain is another discussion.

Setting, Springing and Water

Caius kept it simple: “There be two sortes. The first findeth game on the land. The other findeth game on the water.” Dog writers after Caius further divided spaniels according to their jobs: setting, springing and water.

Various descriptions of spaniels in the 17th and 18th centuries were never in detail “... medium size, round bodies, long ears, short noses, dark eyes.” Drawings of a land spaniel and a water spaniel, dating from 1607, are not very helpful; one dog resembles a lion and the other any other small dog.

In the 18th century, the term “springing spaniel” was frequently used as a collective term for several land spaniels; by the end of the 19th century, the land spaniels had been developed into a number of types with other names. The Clumber Spaniel, Cocker Spaniel, English Springer Spaniel, Field Spaniel, Sussex Spaniel and Welsh Springer Spaniel are all descendants of the old land spaniel.

Irish Water Spaniel

The collective term “water spaniel” was in use later than “land spaniel,” maybe because until the 1850s, the term referred to the Irish Water Spaniel as well. Since this breed developed entirely in Ireland, it is not included here as an English working spaniel.

A standard work published in 1607 mentioned the Water Spagnel, and every dog writer from the 18th and 19th centuries described water spaniels or water dogs. Their descriptions rarely match the appearance of the present-day Irish Water Spaniel. According to Nick Waters, an authority on Irish Water Spaniels, all present Irish Water Spaniels go back to just one dog, ‘Boatswain.’ To date, there is no proven connection between the old English Water Spaniel and the Irish Water Spaniel.

Local Varieties

In the 1850s ‘Stonehenge’ (J.R. Walsh) wrote about spaniels in general in his book Manual of British Rural Sports. His definition of a spaniel was quite simple: dogs that find the game and leave the killing of it to their masters. Like many authors before and after him, Walsh divided the spaniels into field (i.e. land) spaniels and water spaniels. Water spaniels were the English Water Spaniel and the Irish Water Spaniel. Field spaniels (land spaniels) were divided into cocker (cocking) spaniels and springer (springing) spaniels.

“Cocking” referred to the smaller field spaniel’s prey, the woodcock; “springing” referred to the dog’s manner of flushing game.

Finally, Walsh divided springing spaniels into Clumber Spaniels, Sussex Spaniels and Norfolk Spaniels. Local varieties such as the Welsh Cocker and Devonshire Cocker were considered cocking spaniels.

First, bird dogs were divided, followed by the old land spaniels. Some cocking, springing and water spaniels survived, others became extinct.

Water Spaniel or Fynder

Dr. Caius wrote about the Water Spaniel or Fynder: “That kinde of dogge whose service is required in fowling upon the water... This sort is somewhat bigge... having long, rough and curled heare.” In the first half of the 18th century, they were used especially for duck hunting in East Anglia.

If you compare them, the old English Water Spaniel resembled the present-day Welsh Springer Spaniel, but with a wavy or curly coat and pointed muzzle. In Sportman’s Cabinet (1802), the English Water Spaniel is described as having “the...
hair long and naturally curled, not loose and shaggy.”

**Ducks or Other Waterfowl**

A clear description of the English Water Spaniel can be found in John Lawrence’s *The Sportsman’s Repository* (1820): “If you want to hunt ducks or other waterfowl, you had better use an English Water Spaniel,” the author advises. “It has a curly coat like a Poodle, and swims and dives as well as the ducks. This dog will not be tempted when the ducks try to lure him and his master on the wrong track, far away from the nesting places.”

Several paragraphs are dedicated to the English Water Spaniel’s appearance: “… his head should be round, with curled hair, his ears broad and hanging, his eyes full and lively, his nose short, his lips like unto a hound’s, his neck thick and short, his shoulders broad, his legs straight…. The size of the Water Spaniel should be a medium between the Springer and Cocker, but perhaps with more general length than the latter, as we have observed that dogs with a reasonable length, swim with greater speed.”

About temperament: “The Water Spaniel is endowed with a full share of the sagacity of his species, and in obedience and attachment to his master he equals his fellow of the land, although he does not testify it by that caressing and endearing softness for which the latter is so much distinguished and admired.”

The English Water Spaniel resembled the land spaniel, but was higher on leg and not as heavy. The best ones, according to Lawrence, were the dogs with long ears, whose coat was white under the belly and around the neck, but brown on the back.

**Large Water Dog**

In 1845, William Youatt stated in *The Dog*: “The Water Spaniel was originally from Spain, but the pure breed has been lost, and the present dog is probably descended from the large water dog and the English Setter, but whilst all seem to agree that the whole Spaniel family came originally from Spain, no one has ever contended that they exist today as first imported, without alteration by selection, or co-mixture with allied varieties.”

Youatt was writing about the English Water Spaniel, but we don’t know what “the large water dog” is. Could it be the “Water-dog” Buffon depicted in 1792, in his book *Natural History*? Maybe the “Large Rough Water Dog” depicted in Thomas Bewick’s book *A General History of Quadrupeds* (1790)? In this book, Bewick also depicted a “Large Water-Spaniel” and a “Small Water-Spaniel,” so at the end of the 18th century, the Water Dog is absolutely a separate type of dog.

We know that the English Setter is descended from the setting spaniels, so Youatt’s assumption about the large water dog and English Setter doesn’t sound at all bad.

**Nothing But Chaos**

Hugh Dalziel wrote in *British Dogs* (1897): “In the Kennel Club Stud Book will be found a list of about two dozen spaniels, classed as ‘Water Spaniels other than Irish.’” He was probably referring to the stud book of 1875-85, containing dogs born between 1874 and 1884.

Dalziel was annoyed: “The Kennel Club at their shows have, as has been already said, a class for ‘Water Spaniels other than Irish,’ and the title of the class is well deserved, for a more heterogeneous collection than generally composes it could scarcely be found outside the Dogs’ Home, and in the judging the description of the old English Water Spaniel as given by all our writers on the subject is utterly ignored. Had The Kennel Club set up a standard of their own, which sportsmen and exhibitors could read and understand, there would be at least something tangible to deal with, something to agree with or condemn; but they ignore the only description we have of the breed, and give us nothing but chaos instead, for dogs have won in this class of every variety of spaniel character, except the right one.”

The author does agree with Youatt (1845) that “…the pure breed has been lost, and the present dog is probably descended from the large water dog and the English Setter.”

**Collie**

Another description of the English Water Spaniel was given by
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Edward Ash in *Dogs, Their History and Development*, published in 1927. According to Ash, the English Water Spaniel would have looked more or less like a Collie, probably a cross between a rough-haired water dog or Poodle and the springer spaniel or setter. Just go ahead and try picturing that!

Again, a rough-haired water dog and setter are mentioned. It might be possible that the influence of springer spaniels on these crosses was such that their descendants kept the spaniel type but with the typical curly and dense coat of the water dogs.

The English Water Spaniel’s height at the shoulder was about 20 inches; it had a liver or tan coat. In paintings, English Water Spaniels were also depicted as brown-and-white, and orange-and-white.

In 1967, John F. Gordon wrote: "After two centuries of breeding it is now extinct. None have been seen for over thirty years. Descendant breeds of the English Water Spaniel are thought to include the American Water Spaniel which was also developed using additional stock from the Irish Water Spaniel and the Flat-Coated Retriever breeds."

The English Water Spaniel, described by dog writers and sportsmen and depicted by famous painters, became extinct. More information and illustrations of the English Water Spaniel can be found on David Hancock’s website: davidhancockondogs.com/archives/archive_587_670/601.html

**Tweed Spaniel**

In reading about the origin and history of the Golden Retriever, you can’t miss the Tweed (Water) Spaniel. At the end of the 19th century, Sir Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks (1820-94) was breeding yellow retrievers on the Scottish estate Guisachan in the county of Invernesshire. The color is important because, at that time, black retrievers were generally known, but the yellows of Sir Dudley were uncommon.

In 1868, Sir Dudley – who gained the title Lord Tweedmouth in 1861 – bred a litter, using his yellow male ‘Nous’ on the bitch ‘Belle.’ Four yellow puppies were born, all of them bitches. In later years, this litter was acknowledged worldwide as the basis of the Golden Retriever breed.

Although the male Nous may be of great importance for Golden Retriever fanciers, we are more interested in the bitch Belle, a Ladykirk or Tweed Spaniel. (Ladykirk is a small town on the River Tweed.) The only thing we know about Belle is that she had been given to Lord Tweedmouth as a present by a relative, David Robertson, a Member of Parliament. Apart from Belle, there was another Tweed Spaniel in Sir Dudley’s kennels (since 1863), named ‘Tweed.’ This dog was never used for breeding, but evidence shows that he was succeeded by a namesake, who was mentioned in 1873. The second Tweed was bred to a retriever bitch called ‘Cowslip.’

From 1835 to 1890, Lord Tweedmouth kept a stud book in which he recorded not only the names of his dogs, but also their origins. There is another document, dating after 1884 and written in his lordship’s own hand, in which Sir Dudley had noted down the litters of Belle and Tweed.

**A Small Type of Retriever**

What did a Tweed Spaniel look like? More or less the same as the old English Water Spaniel depicted in paintings? Or was the Ladykirk or Tweed Spaniel a local variety of water spaniel? It is supposed that these spaniels lived almost exclusively in the border region between England and Scotland, the Tweed basin.
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The coat of the Tweed Spaniel was liver-colored and curly, but “liver-colored” should be interpreted widely. In those days sandy, fawn and brownish were also used to describe liver-colored dogs. A painting by John Charlton (1849-1917) shows a dog of a spaniel/retriever type, curly coated, long tailed and carrying a duck.

According to tradition, Charlton had depicted a Tweed Spaniel. There is some resemblance to the Irish Water Spaniel. Both ‘Stonehenge’ in his book The Dog (1864) and H. de la Blanchère in Les Chiennes de Chasse (1875), described the Tweed Spaniel as a small type of retriever. Others maintained that it was just a variety of the Irish Water Spaniel. A third version is that the Tweed Spaniel descended from water spaniels living along England’s east coast, in the area around Yarmouth. As for the relation with the Irish Water Spaniel: the Tweed Spaniel had a conical (slightly poony) head and its muzzle was heavier.

There was a reason to breed the Tweed Spaniel to Sir Dudley’s yellow retrievers. The aim was to breed a dog that could find and retrieve game from great distances and out of water. The Tweed Spaniel and yellow retrievers were crossedbed only two or three times. Historians agree that the Tweed Spaniel is now extinct.

Norfolk Spaniel or Shropshire Spaniel

In 1867, well-known dog writer J.R. Walsh wrote in the magazine The Dog: “The Norfolk Spaniel resembles a thickly made English Setter in shape and general proportions, but is a smaller size. This is a very useful breed, and is now generally spread throughout England, where, however, it is not kept very pure.”

In 1872, his colleague Thomas Pearce (‘Idstone’) wrote: “Almost any liver-coloured-and-white moderately large dog is called a Norfolk, more Norfolk Spaniels being used than any other.” He continued: “Most gamekeepers keep a liver-and-white one, and it goes by the name of the Norfolk dog.”

In 1880, Vero Shaw stated: “The last variety of the Springer family which we shall treat is the Norfolk Spaniel... this dog is, when found pure, most usually a liver-and-white, the white spots being heavily flecked with liver... A blaze of white up the forehead adds a great deal to his beauty.”

Finally, Rawdon B. Lee wrote in Modern Dogs (1893): “Far more likely the so-called Norfolk spaniel was produced originally by a cross between a curly-coated water spaniel and one of the ordinary Sussex or other breed.” Lee wrote quite indifferently about these liver-and-white spaniels: “Now, liver-and-white spaniels, almost infinite in shape and size, may be seen running about the streets in any country place.”

Another name for the Norfolk Spaniel is Shropshire Spaniel. The county of Norfolk lies in eastern England, while Shropshire is on the other side of the country, so “in any country place” rings true.

From the various descriptions we have a splendid picture of the Norfolk Spaniel: a thickly made English Setter in shape, moderately large, liver-and-white, with a white blaze on the forehead.

It seems that King Edward VII, when still Prince of Wales, used Norfolk Spaniels when hunting in the fields of Sandringham Castle in the 1860s. Unlike other working spaniels, the Norfolk Spaniel was said to give tongue when working, and was not easy to train.

Thanks to old dog books we can determine that Norfolk Spaniels belonged to the group of spaniels measuring 17 to 18 inches. They were a bit high on leg, ears were heavily feathered and the color was liver-and-white or black-and-white. This description immediately reminds one of the present-day English Springer Spaniel.

Dash II

The Norfolk Spaniel is considered an ancestor, or early edition, of the English Springer Spaniel. In 1857, Sir Hugo Fitzherbert’s dog Tissington Flush was shown under the category “Norfolk Spaniel of Springer.” According to A. Croxton Smith’s book The Power of the Dog (1910), Tissington Flush was the subject (40 years later) of the well-known English Springer painting by Maud Earl (reproduced in his book, and in Hutchinson’s Dog Encyclopedia, 1935). However, in an article by Freeman Lloyd in the December 1, 1931, issue of AKC Gazette, Maud Earl stated that she had “much to do with the revival of the interest in the old breed of springer spaniels” when she made the painting under the direction of William Arkwright, Sir Hugo Fitzherbert and Charles Cockburn, to be used as a standard for the breed. “We consulted the old sporting prints and a composite picture was the result.”

Even in the United States, the Norfolk was known. In 1886, ‘Dash II,’ bred by E.M. Oldham of England, appeared at the dog show in Madison.
Square Garden in New York. He won first prize in “a class for larger spaniels.” His photograph shows him to be a low-legged spaniel, broad in skull, and with a short neck – not exactly a beauty.

The Norfolk Spaniel and Sussex Spaniel were similar in type. In the 1870s, ‘Sam’ and ‘Flora,’ owned by John Hopcroft, entered at a show in Birmingham, were both liver colored with white markings. “Not surprisingly,” according to Sussex specialist Peggy Grayson, as “Mr. Hopcroft was a breeder of Norfolk Spaniels, although he claimed that Sam and Flora were both descended from an old Sussex breed. Both dogs were shown and won at a number of shows and their appearance and origin caused long discussion in the canine press of the day.” Even if Mr. Hopcroft had a strain of pure Sussex, some cross had been introduced; hence, the liver Sam and Flora with their white markings.

In 1885, the Sporting Spaniel Club was founded in England and from that time, the name “Norfolk Spaniel” lost ground, and it did not survive the classification of spaniels in 1902.

What remains is the lovely engraving in Cassell’s The Book of the Dog (1881), showing two Norfolk Spaniels, one retrieving game, the other – not docked – watching on the shore.

**Devonshire Cocker and Welsh Cocker**

The Devonshire Cocker was a local variety of the English Cocker that existed before the Cocker Spaniel was classified in the first Kennel Club Stud Book.

Some authors wrote: “There were Welsh Cocks and Devonshire Cockers”; others: “There were Welsh Cocks or Devonshire Cockers.” Mark the difference! In my opinion, it must be “and” for two reasons.

In 1776, Rev. B. Symonds from Suffolk published A Treatise on Field Diversions in which he stated that there was some disagreement about the true spaniel. Welshmen claimed that theirs was the real spaniel.

More than a century later, Mr. A.T. Williams of Ynis-Y-Gerwyn (Wales), fighting for recognition of the red-and-white spaniel, stated that 100 years earlier (around 1800), his grandfather had worked with the red-and-white variety. The Welshmen and Mr. Williams were absolutely not talking about the Devonshire Cocker, but about their own red-and-white spaniel.

In the 1850s, there was still some talk of the Devonshire Cocker, but the end of this spaniel variety is most likely the same as for the Norfolk Spaniel: it merged into another breed. The (English) Cocker Spaniel and the Welsh Cocker (since 1902 officially Welsh Springer Spaniel) survived the classification at the beginning of the 20th century.

**Heritage**

Today, they have all disappeared: the “small retriever,” the “small heavily built English Setter” type, and the spaniel that supposedly looked like a Collie. They nevertheless played an important role in yesterday’s dog world. According to British dog historian David Hancock, we can see their heritage in the modern Golden Retriever, Flat-Coated Retriever, Chesapeake Bay Retriever, Curly-Coated Retriever and, of course, in the English Springer Spaniel.

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