

History of the Pug

Trace the origins of the fascinating Pug from the 11th century BC to the current day.

By Juliette Cunliffe

The Pug Goes to England

The grandson of William the Silent was William of Orange who went to England with his wife, Mary, in 1688 to take the throne. With the couple came many Pugs, each wearing an orange ribbon around its neck to denote its connection to the Royal House of Orange. The breed quickly found favor in England, where it soon became known as the Dutch Pug, although later Pug or Pug-dog was the name used.

In 18th-century Britain, the Pug became highly fashionable, not only at court but also among people of "quality." Indeed when ladies ventured outdoors, it was quite "the done thing" for them to be accompanied by a turbaned servant and a Pug. Charlotte, wife of George III (1760–1820), was also inordinately fond of the breed and had many, one of which is depicted in a painting hanging in Hampton Court. However, by the end of the reign of George IV in 1830, the Pug was no longer fashionable and by the middle of the 19th century had fallen into decline.

The decline of the Pug was by no means averted by the author Taplin, who wrote of the Pug, "...applicable to no sport, appropriated to no useful purpose, susceptible of no predominant passion..." Such comments could surely not have served to enhance the popularity of the breed that all too quickly became known, rather contemptuously, as an "old lady's pet."

TOP HAT

China's Emperor Ling Ti (168–190 AD) was so fond of his little dog that it was honored with the official hat and belt of the Chin Hsien grade. This poor little dog must have looked most extraordinary wearing this enormous hat. It measured over 8 inches high at front, nearly 4 inches high behind and 10 inches wide! But the Pug did not remain out of favor for long, thanks in part to Queen Victoria, who was such an ardent dog lover and who owned Pugs among several other breeds. It is likely that her earliest Pugs were given to her by royal relations on the Continent. Her dogs appear to have been kept as nursery dogs, most appropriate for this breed that gets along so well with children.

The Prince of Wales gave a Pug named Bully to his wife, Queen Alexandra, before leaving for an Indian tour. Of course, Queen Alexandra, too, was famous for her devotion to dogs and took an active interest in dog shows, an increasingly popular activity, particularly among Pug owners.

There were two main strains in Britain in the early decades of the 19th century. A publican by the name of Mr. Morrison bred pale fawn Pugs in Waltham Green, and Lord and Lady Willoughby d'Eresby used imported blood to improve type. There is some conjecture as to whether the d'Eresbys actually obtained two Pugs from a Russian tightrope walker, or whether they got a dog from a Hungarian countess who lived in Vienna. Nevertheless, the Willoughby Pugs, and indeed the Morrison Pugs, played a very important part in the breed's early development in Britain. It has been suggested that dogs of the Willoughby kennel came directly from the Royal kennels of Queen Charlotte. In time the two strains came together and so, to a certain extent, lost their individuality, though even today the distinctive bloodlines show through occasionally.

NURSING PUGS

According to Hester Lynch Piozzi, friend of Dr. Johnson, Pug puppies were often weaned on the breasts of their owners' servants. The writer seems not to have liked this idea at all! Although their story does not necessarily have foundation, the apricot-fawn-colored Pugs, Lamb and Moss, also feature prominently in breed history. Their parents apparently were captured during the siege of the Summer Palace in China in the 1860s and supposedly were brought to England by the Marquis of Wellesley, where they were given to a lady named Mrs. St. John. This may not be exactly true, as various facts do not quite agree with history, but these two dogs were certainly the parents of Click, one of the most important Pugs in the breed's history. He was an invaluable stud, producing some very good bitches, and he also had a great bearing on the breed in the USA.

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Black Pugs

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