

Evolution of the Short-Legged Terriers

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Terriers functioned as indispensable members of Britain's working class for centuries. "There was no definite breed, but only dogs bred to go to earth, every person breeding for that purpose alone and not for definiteness of type." (The Dog Book) Terriers had no aspirations to climb the social ladder, but fate intervened. The admiration of society stars like Queen Victoria, Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Walter Scott triggered instant fame for Scotch terriers.

Celebrity status created an abrupt detour in terrier evolution, but the groundwork was already in place. As more of Britain's land was cleared for agriculture in the 1700s the demand for working terriers increased. Farmers needed to protect crops and wealthy landowners invested fortunes in domestically bred game. "The terrier is a valuable dog, in the house and the farm. The stoat, the pole-cat, and the weazel, commit great depredations in the fields, the barn, and granary [...] The mischief effected by rats is almost incredible. It has been said that these animals consume a quantity of food equal in value to the rent of the farm." (The Dog)

Ubiquitous to much of Scotland, terriers remained a mystery to most English fanciers, who knew virtually nothing about their origin or history. It was said that the best were found on the Isle of Skye but they were prevalent throughout the West Hebrides and the Highlands. The selection process for all strains was limited to gameness and working ability but variations evolved due to isolation and personal preference.

After Scotch terriers achieved popularity, assorted theories made the rounds explaining their ancient, noble, and most of all pure heritage. In reality, although there were some regional distinctions among them, there were just as many similarities. The reigning 19th-century expert was David James Thomson Gray, editor of *Scottish Fancier and Rural Gazette*, breeder of Dandies and Scotties, author and judge. He did not mince words on this point. "All the different types of so called Scotch terriers can be summed up in a nutshell. I need only to say that should you meet anyone on the street with a dog resembling a terrier, with rough hair, no matter how long the coat, whether hard or soft, long legs or short, any kind of ear, cut or uncut, weighing from 212 pounds to 25 pounds just ask the owner what breed it is and I feel positive he will say — Scotch terrier." (The Dogs of Scotland)

Early dog-show promoters came primarily from a background of sporting dogs, possessing limited awareness of the terrier's superstar potential. Therefore no terrier classes were offered at shows. By 1860 this oversight was amended to some degree. The first terrier classes offered at the Birmingham, Dec. 3-4, 1860, included:
Black and Tan Terriers

White and other English terriers

Scotch terriers (this class attracted 10 entries, including an imported Skye and a white Skye).

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