

## Rare Breed Spotlight: Olde English Bulldogge

**Created in the United States, this newer breed is reminiscent of the old bull-baiting dogs of the past.**

*Alice Bixler*

Despite its name, the Olde English Bulldogge is a relatively new breed developed in the United States, but its origins harken back to the dark days of British history when blood sports were popular.

The concept of bull baiting started around the time of the Middle Ages when a nobleman watched some butchers' dogs chasing a bull and thought it would make a great sport. In the gruesome pastime, a bull was tethered to a stake in the ground while dogs were sent into the ring to attack the bull's nose or head. The bull would do his best to catch the dogs on his horns and catapult them high into the air. In 1835, Parliament passed the Cruelty to Animals Act, a law banning blood sports. The Bulldog was out of a job.

The Bulldog we see in show rings today is much different than those once used for bull baiting. Those early dogs were larger, lighter in body, longer of leg, more agile, faster and more aggressive. They are the predecessors of many of today's bully breeds. As conformation shows became more common in the latter part of the 1800s, breeders proceeded to change the old unemployed bull-baiting dog into the modern Bulldog of show rings by defusing the aggressive nature, reducing the length of leg, breeding for larger heads with extremely short muzzles and creating a stockier body.

### A Bulldog breed apart

Although legions of fans adore today's Bulldog as it is, the changes made to its appearance have resulted in a number of health concerns, including breathing and whelping issues. In 1971, David Leavitt, disenchanted with the modern Bulldog's health problems, decided to create a hardier breed similar to the 18th-century bull baiters.

Leavitt admired the perseverance and fearlessness of the early dogs, but he wanted to steer clear of their belligerent nature. He thought the safest route was to breed for a loving and friendly temperament. The new breed's fierce look would be intimidating enough to ward off threats.

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