

*“This article is the first in a series to be published in **The Stafford** on breed history to mark the 60th anniversary of Kennel Club recognition in 1995. It mainly concentrates on the modern era, but not exclusively. The article first appeared in the Kennel Gazette in October 1987 and was part of a history of Southern Counties SBT Society.”*

The Stafford Knot has made every reasonable effort to contact the copyright holder of this article. The author, A.W.A. Cairns is deceased. We have been unable to contact next of kin.

Although in the context of Kennel Club recognition the Staffordshire Bull Terrier is a relatively 'new breed', on the basis of the many drawings available, a Stafford-like animal existed at the turn of the 19th Century. A classic example is "Crib and Rosa", a painting by Abraham Cooper, circa 1816. For almost seventy years "Rosa" was taken as the model bulldog, but the modern bulldog bears little resemblance to her.

Allowing for a slight prejudice, the only modern dog of this type is the Staffordshire Bull Terrier. An engraving of "Crib and Rosa" by Scott bears the



caption - "Engraved by John Scott. Published in 1817". "Rosa" was by the Honourable Berkeley-Cravens "Old Bowler" out of Bowlems tulip-eared bitch, by Paddington Jones' "Hoppy" out of the famous Staffordshire bitch. "Crib" was got by Mrs Halls "Nimble" out of "Rosa". It is not suggested That the 'famous Staffordshire bitch' was a Staffordshire Bull Terrier, but it could be concluded that animals of that type, existed in that county

before 1816. Her fame probably arose from her prowess in the bullring.

Bull baiting was abolished by law in 1835 and coincidentally the Staffordshire Bull Terrier was officially recognised in 1935.

What happened during those one hundred years in the wilderness? Prior to the abolition, the professional bull-baiters, or 'hunkers' as they were called, took their teams of bull-dogs around the countryside. After abolition their livelihood was in jeopardy and it is thought that they then turned their attention to dog-fighting. They had teams of battle-hardened dogs whose bravery was unquestionable. When it came to using them for dogfighting their immediate problem was the dogs instinct of biting and holding, which while essential in the bull-ring failed to provide a spectacle in the 'pit'.

A popular view held is that Terrier blood was introduced to provide faster

animals, but this seems inconclusive, as the bull-baiting dog gambled its life on the speed of seizing such a small target as a moving nose which was protected by fearsome horns. This doubt, cast upon a bull-baiting bulldog's speed is influenced by the conformation of the modern bulldog, although it has to be said that the modern bulldog can move considerably faster than his appearance would suggest.

If it was unnecessary to improve the speed of the bull-baiting bulldog, improvement had to be made in the direction of reducing its instinct to bite and hold. This was achieved by a reduction of jaw strength, which could have been helped by the introduction of 'foreign' blood e.g. the Terrier. It could also have been accomplished by selective breeding. Previously, dogs with strong underjaws were selected for the team, a practice which might well have been reversed. There would have been a reluctance to endanger the essentials of courage and tenacity, and an incentive to preserve these traits by the minimal use of 'outside' blood.

There exist, copies of dog-fighting rules which are as comprehensive as the Marquis of Queensbury rules on boxing. These show that dog-fights became well organised events, but more importantly, a study of them shows that they placed the emphasis on courage, tenacity and endurance. Under these rules, no dog was allowed to be encouraged to fight and by the same token he could choose to stop fighting whenever he wanted.

While the money depended on owning a winning dog, it was also necessary to provide a spectacle to attract an audience. Dog-fighting was a 'blood' sport and blood had to be provided. On the evidence of the modern day bulldog, the bull-baiting dog probably had small teeth which, while capable of hanging on, were not as efficient as large teeth at drawing blood from an opponent, so 'foreign' blood may have been a useful adjunct to selective breeding.

As a 'blood' sport, in dog-fighting 'blood' had to be seen, which is why so many of the dogs engaged in this practice carried a lot of white. Not only was it necessary to draw blood, but it was just as necessary for the spectators to see the blood which had been drawn. Dogs with weaker jaws would be more likely to change their grip for a better one and thus more action would follow. Dogs with larger teeth would draw more blood. Dogs with white coats would better display their wounds.

However, even today a Stafford will do more damage to subcutaneous tissue than to the hide. Relatively unmarked dogs have been unable to move the next day through deep capillary bleeding. The author was reminded of a brief skirmish between a Staffordshire and a German Pointer, and although

the dogs were quickly parted and checked for damage (which there was apparently little or none), they were not surprised to learn that the Pointer was unable to put his foot on the ground next morning.

When eventually dog-fighting was outlawed, the bull-baiting, dog-fighting dogs continued to exist in pockets mainly in the Black Country, where bull-baiting was continued for some years after it was prohibited, as no doubt did dog-fighting, when that in turn was made illegal. They had never been members of large kennels and their transition to 'house' dogs was a natural progression. Staffords came in all shapes and sizes, the one constant being their mental make-up. Affection for his friends and children in particular, his off-duty quietness and trustworthy stability, made him the foremost all-purpose dog, which enabled him to become an acceptable member of the family. As a nursemaid to the children, while providing a little sport for the master by way of a little rapping or badger-baiting, with his workmanlike appearance to discourage intruders. These were some of the characteristic traits that made a contribution to his meteoric rise in popularity.

Unhappily to the authors mind, the Kennel Club has dropped this 'characteristics' clause from the 1987 Breed Standard. This seemed ill-advised at a time when they are discouraging mental defects in dogs generally.

Kennel Club recognition of the breed is shrouded in mystery. Recognition was announced in the April 1935 Kennel Gazette in the name of Staffordshire Bull Terrier. There was no explanation as to how this came about. No Breed Club or Breed Standard existed.

One possible explanation suggests itself. At that time 'Bull Terriers' could be registered 'Sire, Dam and date of birth unknown', so in effect any dog could be registered as a 'Bull Terrier'. In consequence, many of the dogs registered were found to be, what became known as Staffordshire Bull Terriers. Those of you fortunate enough to possess pre-war Kennel Gazettes can see Sir Richard Glyns coloured Bull Terriers, and will note their distinct similarity with Staffordshire Bull Terriers. The fact that 'downface' in Bull Terriers did not exist at that time added to the similarity.

The Bull Terrier fancy has always had strong representation in the Kennel Club. Its first secretary, Mr. Shirley was a prominent fancier of the lightweight Bull Terrier, and at the time of the Staffordshire Bull Terrier recognition, there was Sir Richard Glyn. Possibly this accounts for the recognition of the Stafford in somewhat unseemly haste, to prevent purchasers of Bull Terriers ending up with Staffordshire Bull Terriers.

In early June, following recognition in April 1935, the Kennel Club gave permission for Staffords to be included in the classification of the Hatfield Show. This excellent start was marred however, when the Best in Breed Stafford bit the ear off a Scottie that was passing its bench. Jimmy Pye, the Show manager, who was at that time something of an impresario in the Dog Show world, managing all sorts of shows, barred Staffords from being classified at any show run by him. It was a penalty that extended for over ten years.

At the Hatfield Show, Mr. Sam Crabtree judged the Staffords and did a very good job, in spite of the fact that at the time no breed standard existed. No doubt, the fact that he and his family had been Bulldog fanciers for many years, helped in his decision, which were very much in line with the subsequent Breed Standard and his critique would serve as a model today.

Later that month, June 1935, a club was formed and a Breed Standard drawn up under the title of 'A Description of the Staffordshire Bull Terrier'. This document was adopted on the 15th June 1935

***“The future must not destroy its past, for a breed with no past, has no future.” – Ed Reid***