

A Short History of the Otterhound

The sources of the Otterhound are well known, if not entirely familiar. The following breeds of hounds – both living and extinct – have played some role in its development: St. Hubert hound; Talbot/Norman hound; Alaunt/Mastiff; Gascon hound; Southern Hound; Welsh hound, Bloodhound; Foxhound (English and French); Griffon de Bresse; Griffon fauve de Bretagne; Griffon Vendeen; and Griffon Nivernais. A few proposed out-crosses of the Otterhound are non-hound (terrier and waterdog), conjectural, and not well supported. What may be surprising is that all of the accepted ancestors of the modern Otterhound – with the possible exception of the mastiff – evolved from a common source, four types of hunting hound in Europe during the Middle Ages: black (*chien noir*); white (*chien blanc*); fallow/fawn (*chien fauve*); and dun/gray (*chien gris*). Hounds at this time were distinguished primarily on the basis of color. For centuries afterwards there was no real standard and little attempt at selective breeding. Only in recent times has the standard for the modern Otterhound evolved to its present state.

The first mention of otter hunting is attributed to King John of England in 1212, although his father, King Henry II, probably hunted otter as early as 1170. The type of these royal pack hounds is not known, but the Norman ancestry of the Plantagenets leads us to speculate that they were smooth-coated Norman hounds and/or Talbots, and possibly at least one strain of the black and tan St. Hubert hound. The original St. Hubert was supposedly coal black (some authors claim a white strain as well), but by the time of the Norman invasion in 1066, the black and tan strain was the most prominent hound in the St. Hubert Monastery in Belgium. Also about this time, black and tan St. Huberts were reportedly gifted to the Margam Abbey Monastery in Carmarthen, Wales. Descendants of these hounds eventually formed one strain of the Welsh hound called the Gelly (or Gelli) hound.



King Henry II

The existence of a rough otter hound at the beginning of the millenium is far from certain. Rough hounds referred to as Irish hounds were presented to Henry II by the Earl of Gloucester in the 12th century. It is not known whether these were the ancestors of the Irish Wolfhound, or something more akin to the ancient rough Welsh hound. On the other hand, the early *chien gris de St. Louis*, a grayish rough hound with reddish undertones, was the main hunting hound in the French royal kennels from 1250 to 1470. Some of these hounds may have found their way into the royal kennels in England. Both of these hounds may have been related to the ancestor of the modern Welsh hound, the Celtic hound (*Segusia*). The Welsh hound ancestor at the time of the Norman Conquest was probably a blend of lemon-and-white and tawny red, having derived from crosses of the *chien blanc* and *chien fauve* on the Continent. Evidently, this mixture of piebald lemon-and-white with whole fawn or red occurred at a very early date. Whether any of these early rough hounds were used to hunt otter is not clear.



Chien gris Relais

A great deal of confusion surrounds the nature of the St. Hubert and its relationship to the Talbot and the Norman Hound. The St. Hubert originally consisted of a black variety and a white variety, according to legend. The black strain supposedly came from the south of France (earlier from the Middle East), while the white strain came directly from Constantinople. If more than mere legend, this account suggests that both types were

most likely different breeds and not simply different strains of the same breed. The Talbot undoubtedly derived from Norman sources in France. The question is whether it originated in France and was then introduced into England after the Conquest, or whether it was first bred in England from Norman imports, purportedly by one John Talbot, the Earl of Shrewsbury. The Talbot was essentially white, according to legend, but may have consisted of a number of different colors owing to various crosses. The white strain of Talbot, if in fact a distinct type, may have had something in common with the white strain of the St. Hubert, a possible source. As for the Norman Hound, it may



Five breeds of French hounds

simply be another name for the white strain of Talbot. Then again, it may have been a distinct breed, a cross perhaps between the mastiff-like *alaunt* of the Middle Ages and one or more hunting hounds. The *alaunt* itself consisted of three different strains: a classic black and white, and two others that may have been developed from one or more “mastiff” breeds and the hound called the “running hound” (*rache*/*brache*). The classic *alaunt* mentioned in Chaucer was white or white with black spots, possibly very similar to the modern Harlequin Great Dane. The tracking variety of the *alaunt* may have been more of a mastiff color (see photo right).

The Norman Hound and/or Talbot became the classic “*limier*,” or tracking hound, of the Middle Ages, used by royalty to track stag and possibly the otter as well. The Norman Hound, in conjunction with a perhaps distinct breed of tracking hound called the Sleuthound, became the forerunner of the modern Bloodhound, with a possible out-cross from one of the strains of *alaunts*. Centuries later, the Bloodhound was one of the breeds introduced into the developing Otterhound of the 1800’s.



Limier and raches



The Talbot hound developed eventually into the classic English staghound, but was also probably crossed with the Gascon hound of France, giving rise to one of the strains of the so-called Southern Hound (Old English Hound, left). This was the black and white strain, with the characteristic blue ticking of the Gascon. Another version of the Southern Hound developed out of the black and tan strain of the St. Hubert hound, also probably crossed with the Gascon (right). The Southern Hound thus seems to have been two different hybrids produced from crosses of similar ancestors that somehow became associated under the same name.

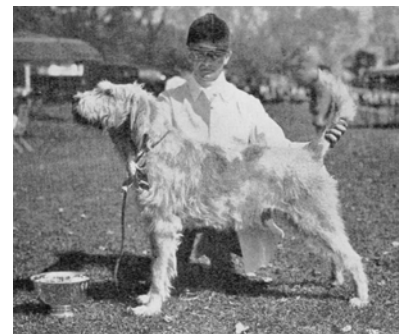


Until the mid 1800’s the hounds used to hunt otter in England were various white, black, black and white, and black and tan smooth hounds. The classic smooth otter hound at this time was undoubtedly the Southern Hound, either the black-and-white or black-and-tan strain, or both. The reason for its popularity was essentially its superior tracking ability and its deep, sonorous voice, both highly prized by early otter hunters. If there was indeed a rough-coated otter hound at this time, it was probably the rough Welsh hound or crosses from it and the Southern Hound and/or black and tan Gelly hound. The first suggestion of a rough tracking hound used on otter was by Gervase Markham in 1611, a “grizzl’d...shag-haired” hound.



Southern Hound

The Welsh hound had perhaps been used to hunt otter in Wales from time immemorial. Four different strains of the early Welsh hound probably existed at the time of the Norman Conquest, corresponding more or less to the four breeds of hunting hound on the Continent: lemon and white; tawny red; gray and white, and black and tan. The rough Welsh hound was the *de facto* otterhound in Wales until the advent of foxhunting in the 1700’s, at which time it was switched over to that quarry. The Welsh hound was later crossed with the Southern Hound, complicating the color schemes of the Welsh hound and the later Otterhounds derived from both of these breeds.



Rough Welsh Hound

The earliest mention of a pack of otter hounds in private hands was the pack associated with Ralph Sadler of Hertfordshire in Issac Walton’s *The Compleat Angler* of 1653. The hounds were probably smooth hounds, perhaps Southern Hounds.

After the first dog show in England in 1859, the Otterhound quickly became well known, itself first shown in 1861. Also about this time, certain French hounds found their way to England and were used as crosses with the various Otterhound strains.

The first of these was perhaps the Griffon fauve de Bretagne, or Fawn Breton. Sir Walter Gilbey, in his *Hounds in Old Days* of 1913, informs us that “two rough-coated French hounds of the red Brittany breed” were purchased in 1869 at the National Dog Show, Islington, by a Master of Otterhounds, presumably for use in cross-breeding. This reference is the only evidence supporting a modern direct connection between the Fawn Breton and the Otterhound.



Chien fauve de Bretagne



The second of these was the Griffon de Bresse, which had direct ties to the *chien gris de St. Louis* of the 1200's. At some point in the late 1800's in France, Comte Le Cousteulx de Canteleu crossed a Bresse hound with a tame gray wolf, resulting in offspring that were 1/8th wolf. Several of these offspring were sent to Waldron Hill in East Lothian, Scotland, and it was noted that, apart from their color, these hounds were identical to Hill's own Otterhounds. Aside from their ferocity, they were

Griffon de Bresse Brizo recognized as some of the finest Otterhounds of this era.

A third French hound was the rough-coated Griffon Vendéen, originally a cross between the smooth Vendéen hound, the Griffon fauve de Bretagne, and the Griffon de Bresse. The smooth Vendéen hound had developed from crosses of earlier French staghounds, in particular the *chien blanc* and lemon-and-white Poitou hounds. These hounds may have been introduced into Otterhound packs in the period 1861-1870, but there is no direct evidence.



Griffon Vendéen Stentor



Griffon Vendéen-Nivernais

The rough Griffon Vendéen was then crossed with a new breed of griffon, the Griffon Nivernais, bred from the Griffon de Bresse and descendants of the *chien gris* in the region of the French city of Nièvre. The resulting hybrid was referred to as the Griffon Vendéen-Nivernais and became a rather mixed breed owing to crosses with other French hounds (such as the smooth Auvergne hound and the French foxhound). There may also have been some crossing with Bloodhounds imported from England.

What is important to remember is that, despite the disparity, all of the French hounds involved in these crosses developed out of the original four breeds of medieval hound: *chien noir*, *chien blanc*, *chien gris*, and *chien fauve*.

By the 1870's, the classic rough Otterhound being hunted and shown at dog shows in England had switched from the Welsh hound- and Southern Hound-influenced Otterhounds to ones that looked more and more like the French rough hound breeds described above. The classic Otterhound at this time was the strain of hounds bred by J. C. Carrick of Carlisle: the black and tan grizzle. Practically every prize winner at all of the top dog shows between 1867 and 1873 was either a Carlisle Otterhound, a former Carlisle Otterhound, or bred from Carlisle Otterhounds.



J. C. Carrick & hounds

In 1889, the Dumfriesshire pack was formed near Lockerbie, Scotland, with foundation hounds assembled from all the best packs in England, Scotland, and Wales. A major milestone in the development of this pack – and the history of the Otterhound in general – was a cross between a Bloodhound, “Baxter,” and a piebald Griffon Vendéen-Nivernais, “Frivole.”



Frivole

This cross produced a black and tan hound named “Boatman,” who reputedly became a prominent hound in the modern line of Dumfriesshire Otterhounds (DOH). The DOH soon developed into the finest rough hound pack of Otterhounds in the kingdom, a distinction held almost continuously until the ban on otter hunting in 1978. Since this pack was a working pack, breeding was driven by hunting priorities, not those of the show ring. Therefore, other breeds were crossed with the standard black and tan grizzle to improve hunting abilities: the Dumfriesshire Foxhound (a rather huge foxhound with lots of Bloodhound influence); English Foxhound; Cumberland Foxhound (some with fresh infusions of French Black and White); and the Griffon



Boatman



Dumfriesshire Otterhounds

Nivernais. However, other famous Otterhound packs – such as the Kendal and District – contained hounds with color schemes that reflected the Otterhound’s mixed heritage of Welsh hound and Southern Hound. These hounds often showed more piebald spotting than the Dumfriesshire Otterhounds. All British packs continued to cross their Otterhounds with other hound sources well into the 1980’s, when a British standard was finally implemented and the Otterhound was accepted as a pure breed by the British Kennel Club.

The history of the Otterhound in America began in the early 1900’s, when Otterhounds were imported into the US for the purpose of improving the scenting ability of American foxhounds. The type of these Otterhounds is unknown, but many of the early imports may have come from the Dumfriesshire. In 1934 or thereabouts, a New York breeder acquired a couple of black and tan grizzle Otterhounds that were bred from some of the original imports. Their veterinarian was Dr. Hugh Mouat, who had graduated from Cornell Veterinary School in 1929. Dr. Mouat became very interested in the breed and shortly afterwards acquired half



Bessie's Countess

interest in these Otterhounds. He eventually acquired full interest in two of them and began his own breeding program. One of his early crosses was with an Otterhound imported by a hunter from Massachusetts. This Otterhound was a classic piebald, judging from the only known photo, which reinforced piebald spotting in the American line. After many difficult years of breeding leading up to



Bessie's Courageous

WWII – complicated by the appearance of a bleeding disorder that severely limited the size of early litters – Dr. Mouat produced the first Otterhound champions in 1941 and established his famous kennel, Adriucha, a Mohawk name meaning ‘valiant warrior.’ Dr. Mouat gradually began selling his hounds to prospective breeders all over the country. Periodic infusions of Otterhounds from the Dumfriesshire and Kendal and District reinforced the classic lines of the British Otterhound. But for the entire history of the Otterhound in the US there was no crossing of American Otterhounds with anything other than purebred rough Otterhound.

As a result of this complex history, the modern rough Otterhound in America shows the following heritage: Southern Hound (two strains), Bloodhound; Griffon Vendeen; Griffon Nivernais; Foxhound (English and French), Wolf, and Welsh hound (and by extension, Griffon fauve de Bretagne). The Bloodhound and its ancestors contributed the classic black and tan coat. The black and tan Southern Hound was a combination of Bloodhound and Gascon hound, which introduced blue roan or ticking. The black-and-white or tricolor Southern Hound introduced these coat colors in the piebald spotted strain. But the rough Welsh hound also contributed much of the piebald spotting: lemon and white, gray (badger pied), sable (hair pied), and black and tan (possibly tricolor). The Griffon Vendeen reinforced the lemon and white already present in the breed from the Welsh hound. The Griffon fauve de Bretagne contributed fawn, tawny, and wheaten indirectly through crosses with the Griffon Vendeen. The Griffon Nivernais reinforced darker colors in the coat, approaching the black and tan saddle but with lots of gray and black and some reddish tinge. However, because of the extent

and degree of crossing over the years, each of these types contains much variation today. In addition, features may show up periodically that hark back to the Otterhound's varied past, for example the blue ticking characteristic of the Gascon hound by way of the Southern Hound.