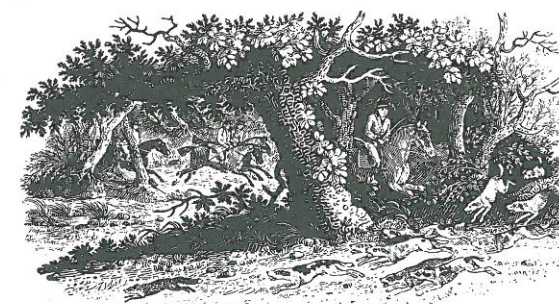




15 Terriers



Before going on to the subject of digging, I would like to talk about terriers, their choice and training.

The name that immediately springs to mind when terriers are mentioned is that of Parson John ('Jack') Russell, the westcountry sporting clergyman of the last century whose name is used so loosely nowadays to describe almost any sort of terrier. There is, in fact, no such thing as a 'Jack Russell Terrier': it is a type. Russell himself bred to all shapes and sizes according to his particular needs, and used any stock that met his own high standards, good working qualities being his main criterion.

The late Lord Poltimore, who was a great friend of mine, said that if Parson Russell saw a likely dog he would acquire him, having no special strain of his own. If he found his new acquisition suited to his work, he would breed from him. When the parson died, he left all his terriers to Nicholas Snow, Master of the Exmoor Foxhounds which were then – and still are – known as the Stars of the West. Nicholas Snow in turn left his kennel to Arthur Heinemann, who was in fact noted for never breeding from anything but his own strain, and was also a close friend of Lord Poltimore. It is therefore possible in occasional cases to trace a terrier's pedigree back to the sporting parson's breeding – indeed I have such a dog, Ajax, whose pedigree goes back to the 1860s, and whose grandfather was given to me by Miss Theodora Guest, another friend of Arthur Heinemann.

(above left) There is no need to extol the delights of hunting in Ireland! Here are the Kilkenny hounds in full cry (J. Meads)

(below left) The Meet at Brokenborough, February 1972. I think Peter Farquhar and David Harrison-Allen are talking behind me

I have heard it said that Russell used a bull terrier for breeding purposes, but the following extract from *A Memoir of the Rev. John Russell of Tordown* written by his contemporary, E. W. L. Davies, should help to refute this assertion:

I seldom or ever see a real fox-terrier nowadays, said Russell recently to a friend who was inspecting a dog show containing a hundred and fifty entries under that denomination; they have so intermingled strange blood with the real article that, if he were not informed, it would puzzle Professor Bell himself to discover what race the so-called fox-terrier belongs to. And pray, how is it managed? inquired the friend, eager to profit by Russell's long experience in such matters.

The process, replied Russell, is simply as follows: they begin with a smooth bitch terrier; then, to obtain a finer skin, an Italian greyhound is selected for her mate. But as the ears of the produce are an eyesore to the connoisseur, a beagle is resorted to, and then little is seen of that unsightly defect in the next generation. Lastly, to complete the mixture, the bulldog is now called on to give the necessary courage; and the composite animals, thus elaborated, become, after due selection, the sires and dams of the modern fox-terriers.

The bulldog blood thus infused imparts courage, it is true, to the so-called terrier; he is matchless at killing any number of rats in a given time; will fight any dog of his weight in a Westminster pit; draw a badger heavier than himself out of his long box; and turn up a tom-cat possessed even of ten lives, before poor pussy can utter a wail. But the ferocity of that blood is in reality ill suited – nay, is fatal – to fox-hunting purposes; for a terrier that goes to ground and fastens on his fox, as one so bred will do, is far more likely to spoil sport than promote it; he goes in to kill, not to bolt, the object of his attack.

My own idea of a terrier is that his head should be of medium length, allowing plenty of room for brains. His jaw should be strong and square with good level teeth; and I prefer my terriers to have dark eyes with plenty of fire and intelligence in them; a broadish, deep chest with sloping shoulders and strong quarters. He should be well ribbed-up and should carry his stern up, but not so high that it bends over; nor should it be cut so short that there is not enough left to grab hold of. He should have strong, short straight legs in comparison with the size of his body, with plenty of bone; compact feet with a good hard pad, and shortish toes with very strong nails.



Terriers really enjoy their work. Mr Charles Parker of the Heythrop (John Tarlton)

When fit, he should not carry too much weight and, of course, he must be well muscled up. I do not think that a leggy dog is any good underground in my country for, although he may get into an earth or drain easily enough, once there he will be so cramped for space that he is not much use. I know there are plenty of people who would disagree with me, their argument being that dogs tuck their legs up.

His coat should be thick, hard and dense so that the water will run off him without penetrating, rather like a door-mat. Undoubtedly, in country where there is much plough and an abundance of wet drains, a smooth-coated dog is going to keep cleaner and will get dry much more quickly than his rough-coated fellow. He should be straight in the back, bright and lively.

One must not generalise too much, as it is impossible that any one type of terrier that is to work with foxhounds can be found equally good for every type of country. That is why Jack Russell bred them all shapes and sizes. Opinions vary, and everyone who has aspirations to being a terrier man naturally has his own particular favourite, depending on the sort of country in which the animal is going to be



expected to work. For instance with the Fell packs, when the terriers go with the Huntsman and Whipper-in on foot they need to be longer in the leg, not only for that reason, but because hill foxes tend to 'den' in rocky cairns. Thus when the terrier reaches his quarry, he often finds the fox perched on a ledge far above his head. In those circumstances, a short-legged terrier is going to find himself at a severe disadvantage, for in trying to scramble up to get to grips he is going to be badly punished as the fox holds the commanding position. It is also important that terriers used in that sort of country should be narrow in the shoulder, for they need to squeeze between rocky clefts. One with broad shoulders would be unable to get in, and therefore totally unsuitable for that kind of work.

Lord Poltimore, when he was Master of the Dulverton Foxhounds, used the small type of Devonshire working terrier and, in common with Russell, considered that the only pedigree of any value was a working one. He liked his terriers as light as possible, consistent with stamina, with good neck and shoulders; but he always used to say that a chesty type of terrier was useless in his Exmoor hill country, for much the same reasons as I have already described.

In defining exactly what a good working terrier should be, it is obvious that he must be one that will go to ground to fox or badger, and not merely be a dog that will kill rats or hunt out rabbits.

It is a fallacy to say that a terrier cannot be too hard, for what use is a dog that goes boldly into a great earth, gets up to his fox and then takes hold? He will become silent, unable to throw his tongue, so you have no idea where to dig and by the time you have eventually found him, he will probably either have killed the fox (and who wants to dig down to a dead fox at the end of a run?) or sustained bad injuries himself; and heaven help him if he meets a badger.

I think it is both fair and true to say that no one can really tell a game terrier just by looking at him, though a prominent dark eye is a good pointer. A trial to ground is the only acid test. It does not follow that just because a dog is bad-tempered and quarrelsome he will readily go to ground, and once there be of use. Very frequently such dogs do not prove to be game, and indeed are just as likely to be cowards.

Undoubtedly the terrier is an indispensable adjunct to the Hunt establishment, though I do not expect the galloping and jumping contingency to agree with me. I think it is true to say that ninety per cent of the people who hunt in the Shires for instance, are there

A nice collection of Border Terriers belonging to Mr Harold Watson of the Lunesdale Hunt (Frank H. Meads)

to gallop and jump, though undoubtedly they get a thrill from the sound of the horn and the cry of the hounds. It is the remaining ten per cent who are what I would class as hound men – and a real hound man is more likely to go to less fashionable packs for his sport. This leaves very few to enjoy the undoubted pleasures of terrier work.

If you want a terrier and your intention is to work him in the future, the best place to go for him is a Hunt kennel. Failing this, you should go to a known breeder of good working terriers, and preferably one who enters his terriers himself. It is not wise policy to buy a full-grown or entered animal, for you will nearly always find that there is something wrong with him – otherwise why would the owner be either willing or wishing to part with his animal?

The choice of a puppy is up to you, but I like to watch a litter playing and then pick one that seems to be full of character and confidence. There is an old-fashioned method which, in fact, applies to the choice of all puppies; and that is to remove the pups from their dam and see which one she fetches back first. Her favourite is likely to be the best of the litter from the point of view of general gameness and character, though not necessarily for looks.

I personally like my terriers to be with me as much as possible and see no reason why they should not be kept in the house as members of the family, though I agree with the school of thought that asserts, that because the terrier is the perfect companion in both house and in the field, and full of charm and versatility, people have done their best to spoil it for work. When he degenerates into a mere household pet, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that he is basically a working dog.

It is necessary to train a working terrier as carefully as any other dog, in order to develop his natural ability for his work. Exactly the same fundamental rules apply to the training of terriers as to any other young animal, and should be based on a foundation of quiet kindly firmness. If you do find it necessary to punish your pupil, then do it properly: administer the beating with a cane and make him yelp. You will find that you have taught him a salutary lesson that he will probably remember all his life. Ever after, a certain scolding note in your voice will be enough – but you must never overlook any act of disobedience.

It is the greatest mistake to enter your terrier to rabbits. There are some terriers that are intelligent enough to know when they are being entered to fox and will then ignore rabbits, but it is a great bore to have to spend an hour or two moving a ton or so of earth



Good hunt terriers come in all shapes and sizes! (D. Doble)



Gone to ground! Hunting with the East Devon (Sport & General)

when digging up your terrier, and then find it lying up to a rabbit.

A dog should never be permitted to chase cats, for sooner or later he will kill one, and then the trouble will begin. Ten to one it will be the pride and joy of one of your closest neighbours – and erstwhile friends – and a feud will have been started that, like Tennyson's brook, could go on for ever.

The best age to enter your terrier to fox is when it is just over a year old, which means that if you have a summer puppy you can take it cub-hunting the following year. Each Hunt has its own regular terrier man, and as you can only in any case be out by courtesy of the Master, it is important that you should wait in the wings so to speak. First of all make friends with the terrier man, and then you must hope that you will be invited to enter your puppy. In the meantime, let him watch experienced terriers at several digs before he has a go himself. When the time comes, wait until they have dug right down to the fox, then pull out the Hunt terrier and quickly substitute your own puppy. Be quiet and non-committal about the whole business – in other words, neither encourage nor force him. You will find that it is all in the breeding and, if that is right, in he will go, and a moment later your ears will be rejoiced by the sound of him baying.

If he dashes in too quickly, you must get him out as fast as you can, because it is not worth risking his being punished at this early stage. If all goes well, let him lie baying for a minute or two before you haul him out and make a great fuss of him. When the fox is dead and out, he can be allowed to join in the worry and fight for his share of the quarry. A word of warning here – you must be very careful at first if he is a coloured terrier for until hounds have got used to him, they could easily mistake him for a fox in the general mêlée. You must not run the slightest risk of a sudden pounce and a scrunch, for that would spell the end of your terrier.

If he proves slow to enter do not worry overmuch, for this is where patience brings its own reward. A dog that takes his time very often proves to be one of the best in the end.

Another word of warning is never to forget the cardinal rule that only one terrier should go to ground at a time. If two meet face to face, they may mistake one another for a fox and fight to the death. Also a second terrier will very likely get behind the first, and push the unfortunate creature on to the fox, and it will be savagely punished.

Digging



To dig or not to dig, that is the question! And a very burning one it is. At all times it is a decision that has to be made by the Master, and by him alone. During the cub-hunting time he can please himself, but as soon as the hunting season proper starts he will find that his decisions have to be governed by quite different factors from those he had to consider during the autumn months, and he may well find himself being criticised, and reasonably so, if he insists on too many digs, and ones that go on too long.

During the cub-hunting season digging out a cub is a matter of policy in the education of the young entry, and the cub should by and large always be dug out and eaten by the hounds unless very good reasons can be put forward for not so doing. If a cub is marked to ground early in the morning in an impossible place that will take two hours and preferably a bulldozer or a gang of Irish navvies to break into, then it is obvious that it would be better for hounds to go on and find another cub than to hang around waiting indefinitely. But that earth must, of course, be stopped before hounds draw again.

If the Master decides to leave a digging party behind to deal with the cub, firstly it is most important that he puts somebody who knows what he is about in charge of the operation. I will be talking about that later. Secondly, he must give direct orders as to what is ultimately to be done with the cub – whether he is to be shot, or allowed to escape if there is no chance of hounds returning to eat him.

If, on the other hand, hounds mark a cub to ground after a good morning's work, then the Master must be prepared for a good long dig, at the end of which not only will he be able to blood his hounds, but they will also have learned a lesson on how to mark their foxes to ground.