

THE IRISH WOLFHOUND

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The Irish wolfhound by G. A. Graham

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G. A. GRAHAM

**THE IRISH
WOLFHOUND**



“Colin.”


*The property of CAPTAIN G. A. GRAHAM, of Rednock.
Born 1865.*



"Scot."

*The property of CAPTAIN G. A. GRAHAM, of Rednock.
Born 1877.*

THE IRISH WOLFHOUND.

T is with a certain amount of diffidence that this essay is entered upon, as there is a widely-spread impression that the breed to be treated of is extinct. That we are in possession of the breed in its original integrity is not pretended; at the same time it is confidently believed that there are strains now existing tracing back, more or less clearly, to the original breed; and it also appears to be tolerably certain that our modern Deerhound is descended from that noble animal, and gives us a very fair idea of what he was, though undoubtedly considerably his inferior in size and power. Had it not been for these facts, the courage to write this article might have been wanting; but they appear to be so clear to the writer, that he can proceed, with the feeling that most of his readers will perceive that he is amply justified in undertaking a history and description of this very magnificent example of the canine race—that, indeed, may be said to have been its *king*.

There have been several very interesting and clever essays written on this subject. Two of the ablest and most valuable were written by Mr. A. McNeill, of Colonsay, in 1838, and Mr. H. D. Richardson, in 1841. These treat exclusively of the Irish Wolfhound, though in Mr. McNeill's case it is more to show the identity of the breed with the

modern Deerhound that he writes. Richardson, on the other hand, proceeds to show us that, though undeniably of the same stamp, the Irish dog was far superior in size and power, and that from him is descended, in these later days, the modern Deerhound. Both these authors have shown considerable ability and ingenuity in their arguments, and no one can deny that they are worthy of every consideration. Richardson would appear to be in error on some points, but in the main his ideas would certainly appear to be reasonable and correct. That Richardson was highly qualified to offer a sound and most valuable opinion on the subject is proved by the very admirable manner in which he has treated of and described almost every known breed of dog, whether British or foreign. As yet, his book is by far the best published on the dog—none excepted—though it is a modest and unpretending production. That we have in the Deerhound the modern representative of the old Irish Wolf-dog is patent, of less stature, less robust, and of slimmer form; the main characteristics of the breed remain, and in very exceptional instances specimens occur which throw back to and resemble in a marked manner the old stock from which they have sprung. It is not probable that our remote ancestors arrived at any very high standard as to quality or looks. Strength, stature, and fleetness were the points most carefully cultivated—at any rate, as regards those breeds used in the capture of large and fierce game. It is somewhat remarkable that whilst we have accounts of all the noticeable breeds from a remote period, including the Irish Wolfdog, we do not find any allusion to the Deerhound, save in writings of a comparatively recent date, which would in a measure justify us in supposing that the Deerhound is the modern representative of that superb animal.

It is a matter of history that this dog was well known to and highly prized by the Romans, who, we are led to understand, frequently used him in their combats in the arena, for which his great size, strength, and activity eminently

fitted him. It has always been a mooted point whether the Irish Wolfdog was, strictly speaking, a Greyhound, or was of a more robust form, approaching the Mastiff. Let us, then, proceed to investigate the question.

Richardson tells us that "Pliny relates a combat in which the dogs of Epirus have a part. He describes them as much bigger than Mastiffs, and of Greyhound form, detailing an account of their contests with a lion and an elephant." This, he thinks, suffices to establish the identity of the Irish Wolfdog with the far-famed dogs of Epirus!

Strabo describes a large and powerful Greyhound as having been in use among the Celtic and Pictish nations, and as being held in such high estimation by them as to have been imported into Gaul for the purposes of the chase.

Silius describes a large and powerful Greyhound as having been imported into Ireland by the Belgæ, thus identifying the Irish Wolfdog with the celebrated Belgic dog of antiquity, which we read of in so many places as having been brought to Rome for the combats of the amphitheatre.

Sir James Warr, in his "Antiquities of Ireland," thus writes, regarding the Irish Wolfdog, about 1630 (?):—"I must here take notice of those hounds which, from their hunting of wolves, are commonly called Wolfdogs—being creatures of great size and strength, and of a fine shape. I cannot but think that these are the dogs which Symmachus mentions in an epistle to his brother Flavonius. 'I thank you,' says he, 'for the present you have made me of some *Canes Scotici*, which were shewn at the Cirensian Games, to the great astonishment of the people, who could not judge it possible to bring them to Rome otherwise than in iron cages.' I am sensible Mr. Burton (Itinery of Anton, 220), treading the footsteps of Justus Lipsius (epist. ad. Belg. Cant. i. p. 44), makes no scruple to say that dogs intended by Symmachus were British Mastives. But with submission to great names, how could the British Mastive get the appellation of Scotious in the age Symmachus lived? For

he was consul of Rome in the later end of the fourth century, at which time—and for some time before, and for many centuries after—Ireland was well known by the name of Scotia, as I have shewn before (chap. i). Besides, the English Mastive was no way comparable to the Irish Wolfdog in size or elegant shape, nor would it make an *astonishing* figure in the spectacles exhibited in the Circus. On the other hand, the Irish Wolfdog has been thought a valuable present to the greatest monarch, and is sought after and is sent abroad to all the quarters of the world; and this has been one cause why that noble creature has grown so scarce amongst us, as another is the neglect of the species since the extinction of wolves in Ireland; and even of what remain, the size seems to have dwindled from its ancient stateliness.”

Warr also gives as a frontispiece to his book, an allegorical representation of a passage from the Venerable Bede, in which two dogs are introduced, bearing a very strong resemblance to the Irish Wolfdog, or Scottish Deerdog, in those days doubtless the same animal. The Venerable Bede was born 672, died 735.

It may be as well here to quote the following interesting extract from Richardson; culled by him from the *Irish Penny Journal*:—“The Scoti who were in possession of the Island (Ireland) at the time of the introduction of Christianity, appear to have been to a great extent the successors of a people whose name and monuments indicate a close affinity with the Belgæ (a Teutonic tribe) of Southern Britain. A people also called Cruithore, by the Irish annalists, who are identifiable with the Picts of Northern Britain, continued to inhabit a portion of the Island distinct from the Scoti, until after the Christian Mission; and it is observable that the names of mountains and remarkable places in that district still strikingly resemble the topographical nomenclature of those parts of North Britain which have not been affected by the Scotic conquest. The monuments and relics which attest the presence of the people considerably