

Most dogs were developed after hundreds of years of evolution and lengthy selection by breeders. However, one breed owes its existence today to just one person...

Masterminds

Capt. George Augustus Graham and the Irish Wolfhound

text and illustrations by RIA HÖRTER

Capt. George Augustus Graham (1833-1909) is the man who saved a centuries-old sighthound breed from extinction. Like a phoenix, the Irish Wolfhound rose from the ashes.

Irish wolf-dogs were mentioned in old songs, poems, myths and sagas. Truth and fantasy mingle. Quite often, Greek and Roman authors are quoted in histories of the Irish Wolfhound. In their texts, they could have been referring to ancestors of the breed; but, because dog writers have different opinions when it comes to the breed's early history, I am limiting myself to the most important facts, concrete data and recent sources.

LAMBS AT HOME

Between 1934 and 1936, archaeologists working at excavations in Dunshaughlin, a small town in County Meath, on the east coast of the Republic of Ireland, found numerous dog bones, including skulls, dating from the 7th or 8th century BC. It cannot be proven whether or not the long bones and narrow skulls belonged to the ancestors of today's Irish Wolfhound, but it seems clear that long before the Celts were recorded on the island – around 500 years BC – there were large dogs of a wolfhound/greyhound type in Ireland.

The coat of arms of ancient Irish monarchs includes depictions of a large hound, a shamrock and a harp, and the motto "Gentle when stroked, Fierce when provoked." Another folk saying –



Capt. George Augustus Graham (1833-1909)
recreated the Irish Wolfhound.

"Lambs at home, lions in the chase" – is the Behavior and Temperament description in the Irish Kennel Club and FCI breed standard.

CAIUS GRAIUS HIBERNICUS

Over the centuries, the wolf-dog was written about many times. It is not always clear if the dog referred to is a wolf hunter, a greyhound or a combination of the two. The names Irish alaunt (large, strong dog), Irish greyhound, (Irish) wolfdog, *canis graius Hibernicus* and wolfhound are all used.

This type of dog was mentioned so often because these imposing wolf hunters were presented as gifts among kings and nobility. These gifts were documented as early as the middle ages. In 1652, Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland, banned their export because their number had decreased dramatically.

In 1680, Thomas Blount wrote, "The wolves in Ireland of late years are, in a manner, all destroyed by the diligence of the inhabitants, and the assistance of Irish Greyhound."

More sources are available from the 17th and 18th centuries – books with descriptions of the breed written by its owners. For example Sir James Ware wrote in *Antiquities and History of Ireland* (1705), "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."

... to the effect that the old Irish hound in its purity was extinct, but it might be possible to revive the type from the largest deerhounds.

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MAJESTIC IN APPEARANCE

Oliver Goldsmith's late-18th-century (1760-74) eight-volume *A History of the Earth and Animated Nature* contains a beautiful description of the wolf-dog: "The last variety, and the most wonderful of all that I shall mention, is the Great Irish Wolf Dog, that may be considered as the first of the canine species.... bred up in the houses of the great.... he is extremely beautiful and majestic in appearance, being the greatest of the dog kind to be seen in the world... they are now almost quite worn away, and are very rarely to be met with, even in Ireland."

Majestic, but already rare in the last quarter of the 18th century.

There were wolves in abundance in early Ireland. The dogs that hunted wolves were described as, "of the make of a Greyhound." Wolf hunts took place in County Cork (1710), County Wexford (ca. 1730) and in the Wicklow Mountains (1770). By the end of the 18th century, wolves had almost vanished.

In her book *The Dogs of Ireland* (1981), Anna Redlich states that the pack of Mr. Watson from Ballydarton killed the last wolf at Myshall in 1786 or '87. Watson's dogs were "coarse, powerful animals, no way resembling the grand old giant rough greyhound, commonly known as the Irish Wolfhound."

Whatever type of dogs he used to hunt wolves, Mr. Watson sealed the fate of most Irish Wolfhounds; no work meant no future.

EXTREMELY RARE

Following Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Smith wrote in *The Ancient and Present State of the County and City of Waterford* (1774) that Irish "wolf-dogs" were "extremely scarce," as did Thomas Bewick in *A General History of Quadrupeds* (1792). In the chapter 'The Irish Greyhound,' Bewick wrote, "It is only to be found in Ireland, where it was formerly of great use in clearing the country from Wolves. It is now extremely rare, and is kept rather for show than use, being equally unserviceable for hunting either the Stag, the Fox, or the Hare." These extremely rare examples were owned by mem-



Rednock House, home of the Graham Clan, in Port of Menteith, Perthshire, Scotland.

bers of noble families, such as Lord Althamont and Lord Derby.

The dogs of Archibald Hamilton Rowan (1757-1834) from Dublin are considered to have been the last purebred Irish Wolfhounds. Rowan's breeding went back to Oisian, an Irish Wolfhound depicted by Philip Reinagle, R.A., in 1803 and published in William Taplin's dog book *The Sportman's Cabinet* (1803-04). A well-known Irish Wolfhound bitch in those days was Bran, afterwards donated by Rowan to Lord Nugent.

In the history of the breed, 1841 is seen as a milestone because the Scottish Major H.D. Richardson published an illustrated

article in an Irish newspaper in which he stated that he had proof there were still Irish Wolfhounds in Ireland. This, despite all reports to the contrary.

Twenty years later, the pure Irish Wolfhound had passed beyond the realm of "extremely rare"; in 1861, John Meyrick wrote briefly and to the point in *House Dogs and Sporting Dogs*: "This animal is entirely extinct."

JUDICIOUS CROSSINGS

Twenty years later, in 1881, Vero Shaw published his well-known work *The Illustrated Book of the Dog*. George A. Graham's chapter on the Irish Wolfhound begins as follows: "It 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."

Graham quoted numerous people before him – from the Romans to the 19th century – who wrote about the Irish wolf-dog, or dogs of a wolfhound type. In older dog books, greyhounds, boarhounds and deerhounds were mixed up, in breeding and in literature. Graham wrote, "The Foxhound, the Pointer, the Shorthorn, and many breeds of sheep and pigs, have been brought to their present excellence by judicious crossings; why should not the same principle be applied to the perfecting of the Irish Wolfhound?"

Capt. Graham was right: judicious crossings created beautiful dog breeds.

INDIA

George Augustus Graham was born on August 6, 1833, in Batwick, a district of the city of Bath (Somerset) in Southern England. His parents were Col. Charles Graham (1788-1858) and Mary Ann Taylor (1799-1869). At seven years, George went to Cheltenham College, as his older brother Frederick William (1830) had done. In those days, Cheltenham College was open only to "gentlemen." The family lived at 25 Promenade in Cheltenham, "the most prestigious street in town." Apart from Frederick William, George had another three brothers and one sister: Alexander Harry (1827), Charles Thomas (1828), Emma Flora (1831) and Otway Mayne (1835). Until he was 18, George was educated at school; turning 18, in 1851, he was accepted as a cadet in the Honorable East India Company's Bengal Infantry. His brothers Frederick William and Otway Mayne had military careers as well, like their father Charles



Capt. George Augustus Graham and two of his Irish Wolfhounds in front of Rednock House.

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Photo from the 1906 wedding of Graham's daughter Constance Alice. Standing, left to right: Graham's daughter Violet (1866); unknown; his wife Lydia Caroline; Capt. Graham; their daughter Edith Flora (1864); unknown; their daughter Caroline St. Clair (1869). Seated, left to right: Graham's son Alex George (1872); the bride, Constance Alice (1868); the groom, Spencer Drummond Cox.

Thomas, all four Grahams serving in the Bengal Army.

Shortly after entering the army, George was dispatched to India; his active service started in 1852 with the 11th Native Infantry in Barrackpore, north of Calcutta. In October 1854, he was promoted to lieutenant, and in March 1857 took part in the Bozdar Expedition, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Neville Bowles Chamberlain, against the Baloch tribe, which was making plundering raids in the Punjab. After this punitive expedition, Lt. George Graham was awarded the India General Service Medal.

Young Graham played an important role in the so-called Indian Rebellion or Mutiny in 1857. The uprising began with the mutiny of Indian soldiers in the city of Meerut and spread to other parts of India until the British army restored order. That same year, 1857, Graham was promoted to captain.

In May 1858, his father died, but George stayed in India until 1862. When he returned to Europe, Capt. George Graham was only 29 years old and possessed the Certificate of Proficiency in Hundustani.

GRAHAM CLAN

On June 18, 1863, George married Lydia Caroline Potter (1841-1908) in St. Mary's Church in Charlton Kings near Cheltenham. She was the youngest daughter of the late

Thomas Smalley Potter, Esq. The groom's profession was recorded as "Captain 107th Bengal Infantry." The couple's first child, Edith Flora, was born in 1864 and the second one, Violet Beatrice, in 1866.

Then the Grahams moved to the estate Oakland in Dursley, a small market town in Gloucestershire. George did not like the name of the estate, so he changed it to Rednock after the Grahams' ancestral home, Rednock House in Port of Menteith, Perthshire, Scotland.

In Gloucestershire, the family grew to include Constance Alice (1868), Caroline St. Clair (1869), twins Malcolm George Alec and Alec George Malcolm (1872), and Alison Mildred (1875).

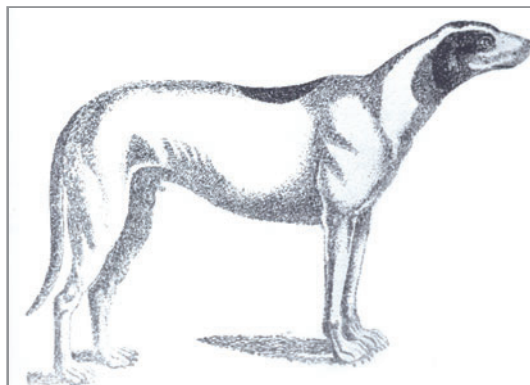
SCRAPBOOK

In India, Capt. Graham had been introduced to "rough Greyhounds" that he could not get out of his mind. At first he started breeding Deerhounds, but he also got to work with the (almost?) extinct Irish Wolfhound.

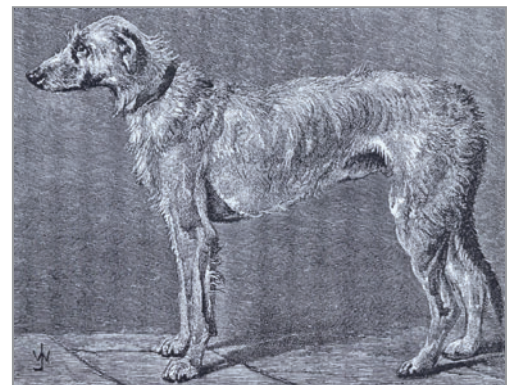
In 1876, he wrote in *The County*: "... to the effect that the old Irish hound in its purity was extinct, but it might be possible to revive the type from the largest deerhounds."

We have to assume that the rest of the history is reliable; Graham himself wrote the Irish Wolfhound chapter in *The Illustrated Book of the Dog* (1881). From 1863, he searched for dogs that were left from earlier stock; in 1879 he set forth the origin and development of the breed in *The Irish Wolfhound*.

From 1886, Capt. Graham kept a scrapbook of Irish Wolfhound show results, as published in *The Fancier's Gazette*, *The Illustrated London News*, *The Stock-Keeper*, *The Shooting Times* and the *Live-stock Journal*. The material on the outstanding resource irish-wolfhoundarchives.ie includes this scrapbook of show reports, as well as Capt. Graham's studbooks.



The Irish Wolfhound at the end of the 18th century. This dog was owned by Lord Altamont.



Capt. Graham's male Scot, born in 1877, in *Vero Shaw's The Illustrated Book of the Dog*. (1881)

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Capt. Graham had decided to breathe new life into the Irish Wolfhound but at first his work was unsuccessful. Infertility was a problem and some dogs died of distemper. He sometimes doubted whether there were any pure Wolfhounds around, let alone if he could use them to recreate the breed.

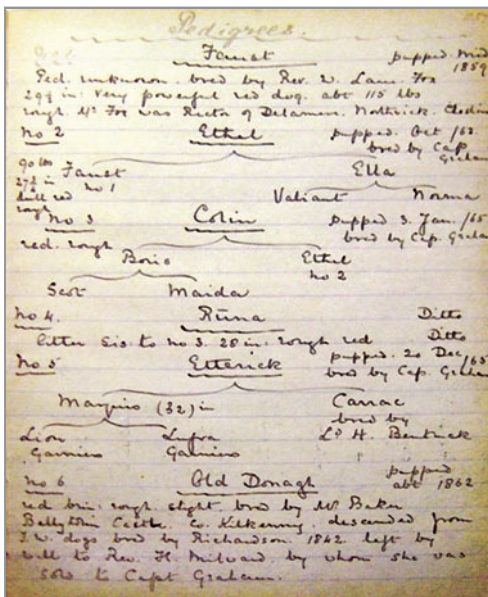
Apart from these setbacks, articles published in dog papers and dog magazines criticized Graham's work. There was serious doubt whether the breed, considered extinct for decades could be recreated. The comment "We are sadly afraid the hobby of the promoters of the Club will scarcely be ridden to a successful issue" speaks for itself.

BREEDING PROGRAM

Eventually Capt. Graham listed more than 600 hounds in his records, some of them dating as far back as 1815. They were published as *Irish Wolfhound Pedigrees 1859-1906*. Graham's collection of Scottish Deerhound pedigrees was also published: *Pedigrees of Scottish Deerhounds 1864-1894*. It was a titanic job at a time when keeping pedigrees was not common practice.

Well-known breeders, such as Sir J. Power from Kilfane, Mr. Baker from Ballytobin and Mr. Mahoney from Dromore, were no longer alive, their kennels were discontinued and the dogs were spread out over Ireland.

Still, Capt. Graham managed to find some dogs from Kilfane and Ballytobin stock that were suitable for his breeding program. The first Irish Wolfhound entered in his numerical catalogue was 'Faust,' born in 1859, ancestry unknown.



Capt. Graham's handwritten Pedigree Notebook, now owned by The Kennel Club. At the top, his first Irish Wolfhound, Faust, born in 1859, "pedigree unknown."

other breeds. It did not work. Graham changed course and out-crossed to Deerhounds from Glengarry stock, hoping that these large, powerful dogs would contribute to the height he wanted.

After he bought the Ballytobin bitch Old Donagh, "the only true-bred bitch available to Graham," he seemed to reach his goals. Of a well-known male he owned, Scot (Oscar of Kilfane x Juno), born in 1877, it was said that "he combined both Kilfane and Ballytobin strains." He came up to Graham's expectations, but his height was only 29-1/2 inches. Graham wanted a male to be at least 33 inches, but in general, Scott satisfied the appearance of an Irish Wolfhound.

Graham's bitch Banshee was bred to a Borzoi named Korotai belonging to Kathleen Pelham-Clinton, the Duchess of Newcastle (1872-1955), a judge and exhibitor who bred several breeds, including Borzoi, Fox Terriers, Whippets, Scottish Deerhounds and Clumber Spaniels. Korotai had experience hunting wolves in Russia.

Graham's brood bitch Ch. Sheelah (Swaran II x Moina), born in 1882 from a brother-sister mating, is considered a significant ancestress of the breed.

In 1892, Graham used a male Tibetan Mastiff named Wolf on an inbred bitch named Tara. An inheritance from the Tibetan Mastiff was slightly heavier coats. Two bitches

AVAILABLE ONLINE

Graham's Irish Wolfhound chapter in *The Illustrated Book of the Dog*: archive.org/details/illustratedbook00shawrich

The Irish Wolfhound (1879; revised 1885):
irishwolfhoundarchives.ie/graham1879.htm
irishwolfhoundarchives.ie/graham1885.htm
archive.org/details/irishwolfhoundr00grahgoog

from the litter – Nookoo and Vandal – are ancestors of modern Wolfhounds.

GERMAN MASTIFFS

Col. J.R. Garnier (Royal Engineers) was breeding Irish Wolfhounds at the same time as Graham. To increase size in his Wolfhounds, Garnier crossbred them with "German Mastiffs" (Great Danes), Borzoi and Deerhounds. Graham deliberately did not use Great Danes; in 1885 he wrote, "I fail to perceive his claims to elegance of form and beauty."



Graham began his breeding program with six more-or-less related dogs. He tried to get the right type without introducing other breeds.

Still, the re-creation of the Irish Wolfhound was not going like clockwork; in *The Illustrated Book of the Dog*, Graham wrote, "The writer has not only studied the subject carefully, but has bred extensively, with more or less success, though death and disease have hitherto robbed him of the finest specimens." He ended his contribution: "... the writer would express his astonishment that so noble

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and attractive a breed of dog should have found so few supporters.”

BONE AND SUBSTANCE

The Canine Association was founded in Dublin in 1872, followed by the Irish Kennel Association in 1877. They merged under the name Irish Kennel Club.

In April 1879, Scot was entered at a dog show in the “Nearest Approach to the Old Irish Wolfhound” class. At this show, Graham, who was a judge as well as an exhibitor, was disappointed by the quality of the dogs entered. He awarded Brian a first prize and wrote in his judging report, “a Deerhound of unusual size and... needed nothing more than bone and substance to be our ideal of an Irish Wolfhound.” In his breeding, Graham always looked for bone and substance; he wanted to breed an Irish Wolfhound “...that shall have the stature and the power of a Great Dane, combined with the looks and beauty of the Deerhound.”

The Irish Wolfhound Club was founded in 1885 with Capt. Graham its first president (1885-1908). That same year, Graham and Col. Garnier wrote the breed standard and List of Points in Order of Merit; in 1886, these were ratified by The Kennel Club.

In the 19th century, there was a growing feeling of national identity connected to the Celtic past. The re-creation of the Irish Wolfhound must be seen in the light of Ireland’s cultural distinction.

IRISH GUARDS

In 1887, the Irish Kennel Association opened two classes for Irish Wolfhounds, an Open class and a Puppy class. Of the 10 dogs entered, Capt. Graham’s male Dhurlart of Hydra Sheela was best male; Sheela of Swaran, also owned by Graham, won first in Open Bitches.

In order to promote the breed, it was decided that an Irish Wolfhound would be presented to the regiment of the Irish Guards. The ceremony took place in 1902, at the Irish Kennel Association show. The male Rajah of Kidmal, born in 1900, bred in England and owned by Mrs. A. Gerard, had been chosen at the Crystal Palace show in London. After he was handed over to the regiment, the dog was renamed Brian Boru.

Perhaps the re-creation and saving of an Irish breed by a man of Scottish ancestry, living in England, was a bit hard on Irishmen; a hint of that was heard in a text from the Irish Kennel Club: “...he eventually achieved a type of dog that bred true in every generation. The results were ultimately accepted as a legitimate revival of the breed.” Ultimately accepted... The Irish Wolfhound was recognized by The Kennel Club only in 1925.

Mr. Everett, who founded his Felixstowe kennel in 1893, can be considered Capt. Graham’s successor. His hounds became

known worldwide for type and soundness.

SCOTTISH PIPER

Capt. Graham dedicated 34 years of his life to the Irish Wolfhound as breeder, exhibitor, writer and judge. According to Dr. Hans Räber in the *Enzyklopaedie der Rassehunde (Encyclopaedia of Dog Breeds, 1995 and 2001)*, Graham spent more than £20,000 on the breed’s re-creation.

In addition, Graham was active in Dursley social life, as the first chairman of the Dursley Parish Council (1884-96), chairman of the Highways Board, chairman of the Dursley Bench of Magistrates, and Justice of the Peace.

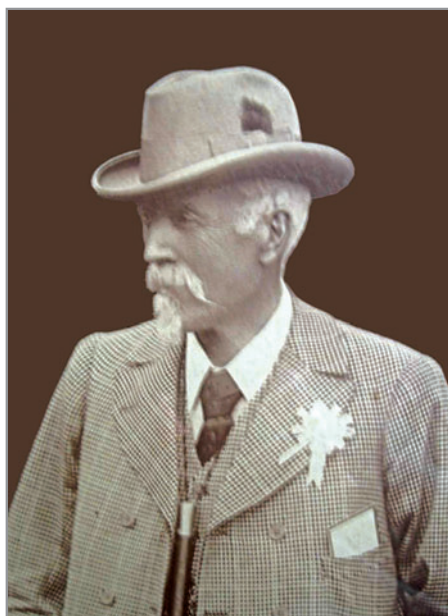
Graham’s wife died on April 6, 1908. A year and a half later, Capt. George Augustus Graham died on October 21, 1909, at the age of 76. They are buried next to each other in the graveyard of St. Mark’s Church in Dursley. On October 23, 1909, the *Dursley Gazette* published an extensive memorial, remembering Graham



Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, presents the mascot with shamrocks, the symbol of Ireland at the 1st battalion Irish Guards in Aldershot as part of the traditional St. Patrick’s Day parade on March 17, 2012. (Photographer unknown)

“Captain Graham of Rednock has worked hard to formulate a club for the recovery, in its ancient form, of that most grand, and essentially national dog, the Irish Wolfdog.”

The Kennel Chronicle, March 1885



Capt. Graham, well on in years.

as “...a prominent figure in the life of Dursley... one of the town’s most useful and influential public men.”

His home, Rednock House, no longer exists; Rednock School and Dursley Sports Center were built on the site.

On October 23, 2009 – 100 years after Capt. Graham’s death – a group of about 100 people accompanied by 10 Irish Wolfhounds came together from Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales and Norway to remember and celebrate his work. After a service in the church, they visited the gravesite that had been restored by local stone masons, thanks to donations from the international Irish Wolfhound community. Wreaths and flowers were laid as a Scottish piper played. As a special concession, the dogs were allowed to enter the church and graveyard. Capt. Graham’s great-grandson Rory Webster, who keeps the memory of his great-grandfather alive to this day, was a special guest.

We have tried to find the names of all photographers. Unfortunately, we do not always succeed. Please send a message to the author if you think you are the owner of a copyright.