

SHORT CONTRIBUTION

Useful small dogs

Peta Sadler, 6, Fairacres, Prestwood, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire HP16 0LD, U.K.

Few of us these days have contact with working dogs, most of which are large, and it is easy to forget that small dogs also have their uses.

The *Animals' home doctor—Encyclopedia of Domestic Pets*, published in 1934 in 27 weekly parts (at 7d per week), contains articles on a variety of animals and their diseases. Perusal of the entries on dogs provides interesting information on the characteristics of some of the small breeds kept as pets, but also of those used for hunting and herding. The following are some of the notes I made from the encyclopedia.

Cairn terrier: small dog used to hunt otter, well-equipped with sporting proclivities.

Dachshund: kept largely by the landed gentry in Germany for sporting. (*Dachs* = badger). Have good noses and are used, not only for badger hunting, but also to track wounded game and for worrying wild boar in the forests. They keep the boar from bolting so that the sportsman can get a shot in. For this work, they are better adapted than larger dogs as, being so low to the ground, they can get about in undergrowth more easily when escaping the charges of the formidable antagonist.

Dandie dinmot: used for fox hunting and will fight to the death when provoked. 8-11" at shoulder, weight 14-24 lbs.

Blenheim spaniel: classed as a toy, but is a lively, diligent fellow in a light covert and is excited to great perseverance by a most enthusiastic enjoyment of the scent.

Sealyham: 'made' about 1860 as a sporting dog. The pluck to tackle a polecat was the test and any that failed were put under. Dog's weight not to exceed 20 lbs, bitches 18 lbs Height not to exceed 12" at the shoulder.

Welsh corgi: his duty in Wales is to drive the cattle and guard the homestead. His short legs enable him to nip the heels of the cattle and so to skulk that the retaliatory kick misses him. Height at shoulder 12-14". Dog 18-30 lbs, bitch 16-24 lbs.

West Highland terrier: kept for the destruction of vermin such as foxes (which kill small lambs), otters (because they prey on salmon and sea trout) and badgers. In 1901 as many as 150 foxes were killed by them in one year on the estate of Colonel Malcolm of Poltalloch in Argyllshire and that of his brother. Weight of dogs 14-18 lbs, bitches 12-16 lbs and height at shoulder 8-12".

It is, of course, not suggested that these specific breeds existed in the past, but that dogs with similar characteristics may have been employed in carrying out similar tasks. As O'Connor (1992, 110) points out, the variability in size and morphology of dog bones from Roman town sites in Britain implies that some deliberate selection of traits was already being practised. It is possible that some of the advantages of small size were being bred for, to produce animals suitable for certain hunting and herding activities, and we should at least consider these uses when interpreting the remains of small dogs.

Reference

O'Connor, T. P. (1992). Pets and pests in Roman and medieval Britain. *Mammal Review* 22, 107-13.