

A Feud between Ireland and England Caused a Dog Canard to Be Born

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The feeling that anything is "too good to be true" arouses a sort of demon in the human race. We passionately want to believe in "good" things, which strike fire to our imagination and are, in the best sense of the word, romantic; but we have been disappointed so often that in self-protection we sheathe our emotions in disbelief and become permanent inhabitants of Missouri.

Perhaps few other matters are better calculated to light the romantic, imaginative brand in us than visual – but even better, living and breathing – evidences of our links with the great and shadowy past. And so, when somewhat over-ardent proselytes have asked us to believe that this huge, shaggy, incredibly companionable and gentle Irish Wolfhound which we view with so much admiration today, stands before us hair for hair as he stood before the chieftains of Ireland's heroic age, the thought is too overwhelmingly "good to be true" to be believed. Therefore, the inevitable reaction.

Only an ardent sentimentalist would ask any reader to believe that – with the possible exceptions of such breeds as the Afghan hound and a few others – the modern dogs which bear names going far back into the past, are indeed living, identical pictures of their ancient representatives. The modern fashion for refining type towards an ideal of beauty has, within living memory, altered the appearance of practically every breed of dog. The beautiful modern Great Dane, for example, has progressed a long way from the old butcher's dog, or, to go much farther back, the ancient German boar dog.

Moreover, every student of canine history knows that in the distant past, there was never one purebred type of any one breed jealously guarded by a kennel club and with authentic and carefully recorded pedigrees. Dogs conformed in general to a certain broad type, but various rather wide differences according to modern standards could prevail within this one type, and there would be little care to guard purity of blood merely for its own sake.

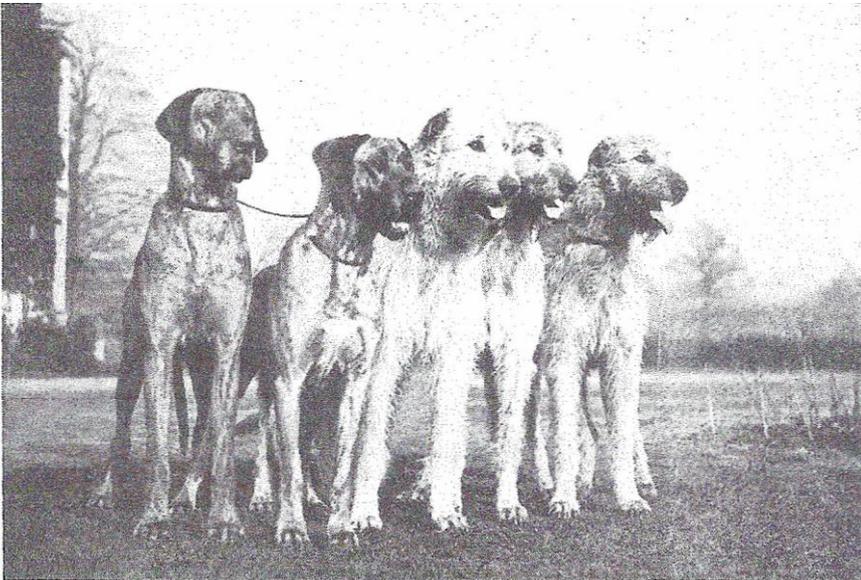
The Irish Wolfhound is a dog whose name echoes back to the dawn of the Christian era. There is a reference to him in an early Roman letter, the Irish sagas are full of him, and there are copious historical references to him in Ireland and England from the fifteenth century. His practical usefulness in Ireland as a hunter of big game and a destroyer of wolves was largely over by the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, but he was kept in various Irish families as a tradition.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, references begin as to his rarity. Individual specimens are cited, or the families owning the hounds, frequently

with the notation that such and such is almost the last of his race. These references continue throughout the nineteenth century, showing that the label "last of his race" was rather indiscriminately applied either through provinciality or through personal pride.

In the early 1880's, Captain Graham, previously a breeder of Scottish Deerhounds, began formally the attempt to revive the Irish Wolfhound; other breeders joined him, and the breed was accepted by the English Kennel Club as an authentic and a pure breed of dog.

This revival and the consequent fixing of the type of the modern Irish Wolfhound was attended with considerable acrimony and some severe criticism. Very briefly, the lines of attack on the breed, and the reasons behind the criticism were these.



Can we see any similarity between these Great Danes and Irish Wolfhounds?

There was the feeling that it was "too good to be true" that such a royal, ancient, and famous breed could be revived in its pristine form and purity of blood. Consequently, doubts were cast on the purity of the blood with which Graham worked, and the old canard was born that the Irish Wolfhound was an artificial, "made" breed formed by mating Great Danes with Scottish Deerhounds. This belief has lingered on in the popular mind, in spite of the fact that it has long since been exploded by competent critics.

The attacks also took other lines. The Irish had permitted the breed to degenerate, and when Graham went to Ireland, secured specimens which he considered to possess the true blood, and returned to breed them in England, the Irish vociferously clamored that no good could come out of England. The feud between England and Ireland is not easy for us Americans to understand, but it had a profound effect on obscuring the issue of the breeding of the Irish Wolfhound.

The Irish were led to depreciate the blood which Graham had secured all on account of the fact that Graham was an Englishman and was reviving the breed in England; unsympathetic English critics of the breed damned Graham's experiments because he was working with an Irish breed which had been the chief boast of the Celts. Any dig at the breed was a dig at Ireland; and few Englishmen can resist a joke at the Irish expense, unless it is to make one at the expense of the Scotch.

The Scotch also raised their voices, for the fundamental credo of Graham's breeding was that the Scottish Deerhound and the Irish Wolfhound had at one time been the same dog, and that when he used the Deerhound as a cross with his Irish stock he was not making a real outcross. The adherents of the Scottish Deerhound condemned the Wolfhound since it was supposed to be the ancestor of the Deerhound, and national pride in a national dog did not take kindly to the theory that the Scottish dog came originally from Ireland, or, if it had, that the Irish had not died leaving the Scottish unique.

Graham's considerable secrecy in his breeding operations – probably to avoid criticism for the considerable inbreeding he was forced to perform – did not help matters any. As a consequence, few critics or defenders of the Irish Wolfhound at that time could indulge in controversy without liberally beclouding the issue, and a modern historian who places much faith in any statement made then without checking and cross-checking it is sure to be misled.

In consideration for the interest of the general reader of this article, and for the limitations of space, I am not going to attempt any scientific survey of Irish Wolfhound breeding. Instead, I hope to give only a bird's-eye view of the whole matter on an entirely unsentimental basis in order to convey the essentials of this near detective story of how a noble breed was saved from extinction.

That there had existed in Ireland a dog, sometimes rough-coated and sometimes smooth, of essentially greyhound conformation and noted for his huge size is a fact buttressed by a number of old sculptures, tapestries, paintings, and verbal and written references. This dog had been the hunter and companion of the ancient Gaelic warriors, and in later times had specialized in killing wolves.

In 1654, Ware mentions the neglect of the hounds since the extinction of the wolves in Ireland. In 1680, Blount tells us that "the wolves are ill a manner all destroyed, by the diligence of the inhabitants and the assistance of Irish greyhounds, a wolf dog." but records of killing wolves exist as late as 1770.

In these days, it was only natural that the hounds fell into neglect when their work was done. They gradually became scarce and were kept by only a few families, "more for ornament than for use." Complaints begin that not only are the hounds scarce but also they are "reduced in size," or "bred up to a size beyond their nature," or they are "indolent," or "made coarse through being crossed with the Danish breed," or are "now so crossed that two are hardly seen alike."

But before complaining of this diversity of type, we must realize that in falling upon evil days the Irish Wolfhound is the rule and not the exception with most breeds and that the standards for purity of breed of modern fanciers scarcely coincide with those of our ancestors. Breeders, looking for fresh strains to keep their stock going, were sufficiently pleased to use any dog for breeding that possessed the qualities they desired, and complete standardization was never dreamed of. A parallel situation, at the present time, exists in the numberless strains of working hounds, most of which are not recognized by the Kennel Club but which are all variations for specific purposes of the general type of the Foxhound.

We come now to the period when naturalists are beginning their “scientific” descriptions of the dogs of various nations. The divergence between the pictures and the descriptions of the Irish hound in some of these writers with the modern Irish Wolfhounds has occasioned critics of the breed considerable mirth. One makes a great mistake, however, if one judges older scientific writers by modern standards. Accuracy is not their forte, and demonstrably many of their dogs of various breeds are drawn from imagination and gullible hearsay rather than from life; or, if from life, from a specimen which by no stretch of the imagination could be considered as typical. The situation is further complicated by the lack of really set standards in the breeds themselves which caused a very considerable divergence of types.

The most detailed authentic older picture known of the Irish Wolfhound which can be considered typical of that general shaggy type now revived is reproduced here, as drawn from life by Reinagle for Toplin’s “Sportsman’s Cabinet” of 1803. No one



Reinagle’s Irish Wolfhound of the rough-haired type now being revived. Drawn from life and reproduced in Toplin’s “Sportsman’s Cabinet” in 1803.

can truthfully say that this hound – or any other breed of dog in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – is pure bred according to modern standards, but its resemblance to a long line of very much older written and verbal descriptions plus various old sculptures and drawings is sufficient to account it a reasonable representative of the most prevailing type and blood of the ancient hound. As a matter of fact, barring the inevitable refinements from modern breeding, the present hound is the essential image of this Reinagle portrait.

In 1885, Captain Graham wrote very moderately in response to one of his severest critics: “Though I by no means assert that we still have a pure strain, yet I distinctly contend and affirm that more or less true and authentic blood does exist – quite sufficient, indeed, whereon to rebuild the old breed, with the aid of analogous crosses, in its correct form...”

“Excuse my so saying, but I hardly think the breed will be any more manufactured than has been the case with many that are now looked on as ‘pure.’ Recovered would strike me as a more appropriate term, and had it not been for this ‘recovery,’ many of our best national breeds would have disappeared altogether, and, believe me, Sir, it has not been accomplished without reverting freely to outside crosses.”

In commenting on this exchange, a particularly severe critic writes: “The question in dispute is whether the ‘recovered’ breed of Irish Wolfhound can be traced in any line to the original breed. We do not dispute that many other breeds have been crossed to arrive at their present form, but as far as we know, there has been a foundation of some kind to commence with, reputed to be of the particular breed. Can this be fairly said of the modern Irish Wolfhound?”

The lines of battle being drawn on this fundamental issue in 1885, we may hastily survey only a small portion of the evidence that hounds of the ancient breed were indeed preserved in Ireland through the nineteenth century and eventually came into Graham’s possession as the foundation of his breeding stock. Faced with this evidence of an actual foundation, critics of the Irish Wolfhound have found no better response than to call the men who owned what they considered true Irish Wolfhounds either ignoramuses or liars.

That they were not ignoramuses is sufficiently proved, in my opinion, by the fact that their separate descriptions of their animals, and the descriptions of them made by outsiders, coincide in an animal resembling the Reinagle portrait and the modern hound. To fling at them the name of liar is wantonly to call a score of men to account who were gentlemen and sometimes members of nobility, and who had no commercial or argumentative interest in the breed to color their testimony. As some of the finest gentry in Ireland, I see no reason why their words should not be accepted as their honest and accurate opinion. Particularly as there was no question of a controversy to inflame their judgments at the time they lived.

In 1789, Gough in his edition of *Camden* wrote: “The Earl of Altamont, at his seat at Westport, possesses a few of the true Irish Wolfdogs.” And in 1797, Altamont himself wrote:

“There were in Ireland two kinds of Wolfdogs – the greyhound and the mastiff. Till within these two years I was possessed of both kinds, perfectly distinct and easily known from each other. The heads were not sharp in the latter as in the former...

I have at present five Wolfdogs remaining, three males and two females; in these the two sorts appear to be mixed.”

The Marquis of Sligo, a descendant of Lord Altamont, informed Captain Graham that he had made inquiries about these Westport Wolfdogs from persons who had seen them, and that they were like powerful, shaggy greyhounds but a good deal larger.

The famous Hamilton Rowan, who lived from 1757 to 1834, was a fancier of Irish Wolfhounds. Sir W. Bethan, who knew Graham, told him that he had heard from his father who was a friend of Rowan’s, that when Rowan was in France during the first Revolution, he was given a dog and bitch that he was told were Danish. On going to Denmark, however, he was told they were not Danish, but Irish, and had been brought from Ireland. This seems to be the

origin of the story that Rowan's dogs, which he and all his Irish contemporaries believed to be Wolfdogs, were really Great Danes.

Perhaps they were. At this date, no one can ever know; but at any state Rowan saw enough truly native Irish Wolfhounds to decide for himself in the affirmative, because he procured them to mate with his dogs and with each other. There are records of gifts being made of various of these matings. In Rowan's old age he had a hound called Bran which was described as dark grey and shaggy and "the last of his race." The Ballytobin and Kilfane strains, with which Graham worked, are supposed to have come from this line of Rowan's Bran.



The O'Mahony of Kerry with his bitch Granua, 1930

Another strain coming down to the present day seems to have been the Altamont breed already mentioned. It would appear that his hounds became so few that Lord Altamont was reduced to crossing his two distinct varieties, but in spite of the cross, Altamont's evidence is clear that he possessed and recognized the original true blood.

Lord Derby, who died in 1851, was connected with the Altamont family and acquired some of Altamont's Wolfdogs. Major Garnier, who in turn procured the strain from Derby, described one of Derby's hounds as "dark brindle brown, the coat of long wiry hair, the build heavier and head more massive than that of a Deerhound; the hair on the head lying thicker and flatter, and the ears rather larger, though lying close to the head."

From this it would appear that the dogs were shaggy Irish Wolfhounds of the greyhound, or Deerhound, conformation just as at present. The reference to the Deerhound here indicates that except for the same precise differences still noted today, there seemed to

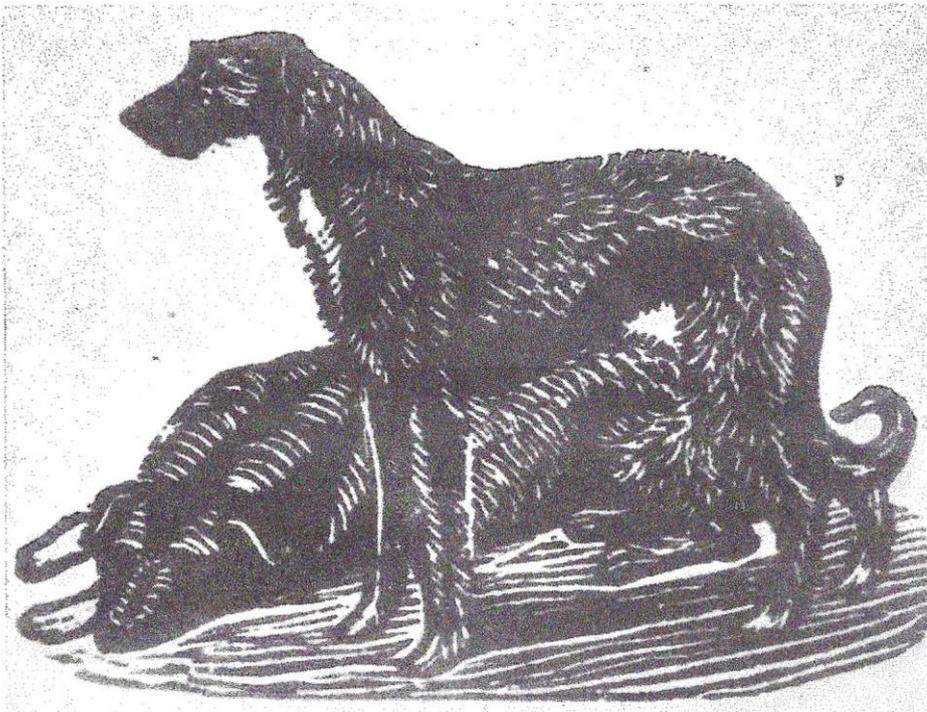
have been no other deviation in type between the two sufficiently marked to be worth notice.

I cite only one or two more indications of the preservation of the blood, although there are many more recorded. The O'Mahony of Kerry, who died about 1930 at an advanced age, told Miss Phyllis Gardner that he had kept up, for many years, a strain of Irish Wolfhounds uncrossed with other breeds, except for a cross of Scottish Deerhound introduced by his father. These hounds came originally from the Kilfane strain. I have seen a photograph of a bitch, Granua, of this almost completely pure line, and except for her size she was a true Irish Wolfhound of the present type. Some of her descendants are still living.

About 1840, H. D. Richardson, a Scotsman living in Dublin, became interested in the breed by recognizing its common characteristics and appearance with the Scottish Deerhound. He knew several Irish gentlemen who had preserved the breed, and he engaged in numerous breeding experiments with the purpose of saving the hound from extinction.

Some of the present day strains go back to his hounds directly, and some others indirectly, since owners of dwindling strains very probably went to him to replenish their blood.

Richardson, this early, seems to have introduced a Deerhound cross, and perhaps a Dane. It is not known whether he made a Pyrenean cross or no, or whether – if he did – the Pyrenean he used was of the present-day type or the old Spanish hound which probably goes back to early importations into Spain of the Irish Wolfhound.



The drawing of Nolan's Oscar, made in 1841 and reproduced here shows an Irish Wolfhound which Richardson described as the finest specimen he had ever seen, and which would be typical of the stock he acquired. In this picture, there is no possibility of any Dane or Pyrenean cross, and the dog is readily recognized as an Irish Wolfhound somewhat inclining to the Deerhound type.

Nolan's Oscar and companion are Irish Wolfhounds of 1841. They somewhat resemble the Deerhound, but are heavier boned and more substantial

at all, but it is possible to trace the pedigrees of present-day hounds bred from his stock to certain well-known Irish strains whose pedigrees had been kept for many years. These strains are the Kilfane and Ballytobin hounds. The Kilfane strain came from dogs bred by Richardson who got bitches from a heavy, dark-grey shaggy strain owned by Mr. Carter, of Loughlinstown, near Bray. In 1848, the height of one of these dogs was given as 32 inches. The Carter dogs were believed to descend from Rowan's Bran, which was bred from Irish blood in Ireland early in the century.

Captain Graham's enemies accused him of having failed to secure any authentic Irish blood

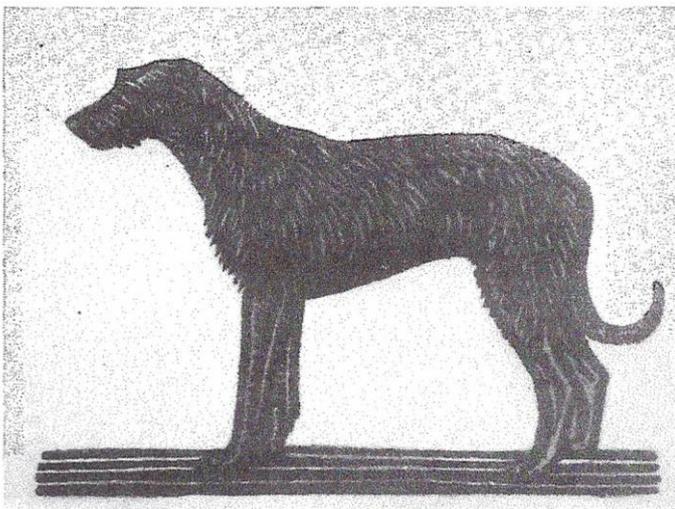
After Richardson, the Kilfane strain was bred from 1842 to 1873 by Power and Baker. The Ballytobin strain was bred by Mr. Baker of Ballytobin who did all he

could to restore the breed to its original form. He procured the best specimens from all over Ireland regardless of cost, and at his death in 1873 left a kennel of really fine dogs. The pick of these came into the hands of Captain Graham.

With about half a dozen specimens of this Kilfane and Ballytobin blood, Graham began the revival of the breed. It can be definitely and positively stated that he never used a Great Dane cross and he considered that the Dane blood gave an awkwardness which was out of place in a graceful breed. What Graham did was to use some crosses of Scottish Deerhound of the Glengarry strain which was larger and heavier than the usual Scottish Deerhound and which frequently threw back to a type almost indistinguishable from the Irish Wolfhound.

Some Dane blood does, however, appear in the later dogs from Graham's stock, some coming from a probable Dane strain introduced in earlier days in Ireland and some from crosses of other men made from a Great Dane bred with a hound of Irish blood. Graham never used in any of his breeding a manufactured dog from a cross of Dane and Deerhound, or the offspring of such a mating.

Graham did not consider that his Irish blood was of pristine purity; only that the records and the evidence of reliable men showed that the stock he used came from dogs which had been considered Irish Wolfhounds in Ireland for many years and which demonstrably tapped an authentic strain of legitimate blood as far back as the eighteenth century. By a complicated process of crossing, outcrossing, and inbreeding, he weeded out the alien strains, and produced a series of dogs which stood on their own merits as visual representatives of the old breed and of relatively pure blood.



Graham's Sheelah about 1890. Heavily inbred on pure Irish stock, and a strong factor in present pedigrees

As an example, we may take his bitch, Sheelah, whose picture is also reproduced here. Sheelah represented in blood and type the type Graham was striving to maintain, since he bred in to her extremely so that even now many pedigrees carry as much as a full quarter of Sheelah blood.

Sheelah's parents were Swaran II and Moira, which were brother and sister, their parents being Oscar and Dreumah. Dreumah seems to have been some, at present unidentified, Irish bitch, and Oscar is a Kilfane Irish Wolfhound whose pedigree goes back at least as far as 1841, and perhaps to Rowan's Bran.

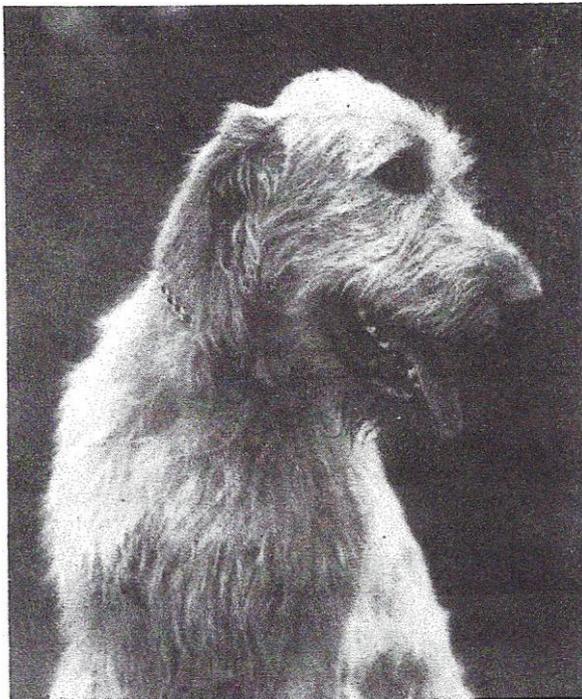
When it is reflected that it is possible by inbreeding to keep a strain mathematically seven-eighths pure after four generations, starting with only two

of the original breed and introducing two outcrosses, and that it is even possible by a system of matings between parents and offspring, to reach a similar percentage with only one of the original breed, it will be seen that judicious outcrossing need not have any heavy effect upon a strain.

Graham made no secret that he resorted to outcrossing, chiefly with Glengarry Deerhounds which are such a nearly allied type as hardly to constitute an outcross; later he introduced a small amount of heavy borzoi blood and one single cross of Tibetan. The fact that his strains bred true in remarkably few generations proves not only that he did his work cleverly, but that the type he was working with was a definite and potent one.

But we must stop before we go too technically into the matters of these complicated pedigrees. Suffice it to say, and I have examined and worked out many of them, the pedigrees of present-day hounds show such careful and thoughtful breeding that the very few outcrosses used have been thoroughly bred out.

The main lines, today, go back through many avenues to the original Kilfane and Ballytobin strains; and, indeed, in addition to various equally authentic but more obscure original Wolfhound blood. For the present hound is by no means the single product of Graham's breeding. From time to time, and even in Graham's own day, breeders discovered new specimens in Ireland of unrelated and related strains which had been preserved, and bred from them. Various of these dogs have no pedigrees, as is to be expected.



The typical head and expression of a young dog which is neither Dane nor Deerhound, nor a combination of the two, but all Irish Wolfhound

We can certainly say, however, that the breeders would never have operated under this handicap – for they could not register the offspring for three generations – unless they had felt sufficiently assured from the evidence that these dogs did represent the true blood of the Irish hound.

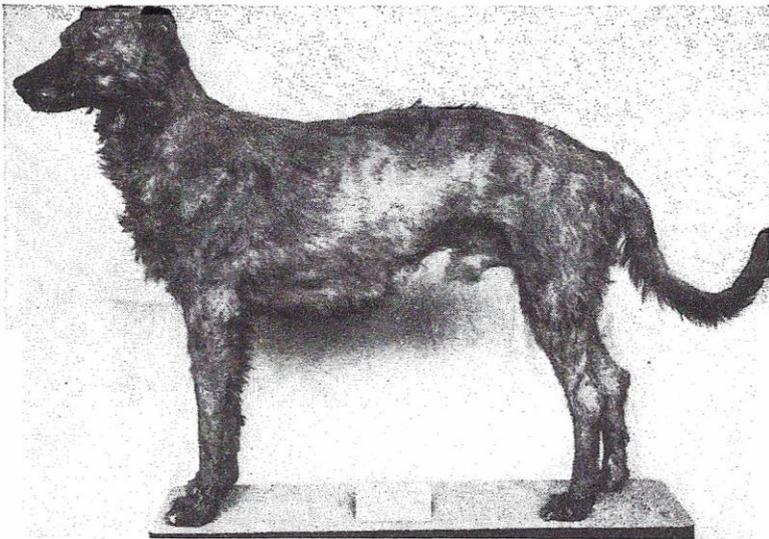
Less than a handful of breeders did endeavor to secure size at one leap by mating a Great Dane with a Scottish Deerhound. These few isolated attempts have given rise to the popular notion that the whole breed was revived by such methods. As I have shown throughout, this is by no means true. Only one or two progeny of such an artificial mating were at all successful; they appear in relatively few strains of present-day hounds; and at this late date, this cross is overwhelmed even in those pedigrees by breeding to the authentic strains.

To sum up, finally, the myth that the Irish Wolfhound is a manufactured breed is indeed a myth. There is more than sufficient evidence

that the ancient blood was preserved in reasonable purity in Ireland through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that several representative strains of that blood came into the hands of breeders when a scientific attempt was made after 1885 to restore the breed to its purity, size, and type. In this attempt, the foundation was Irish Wolfhound blood from Ireland. Some crosses were resorted to for specific purposes, and then these crosses were bred out.

The major cross was the mating of Glengarry Deerhounds with the Irish Wolfhounds, which was a mating of the Wolfhound with an atavistic strain of Deerhound close to the Wolfhound and one according to much evidence, now that tempers have cooled, which goes back to a common source.

Only one outcross of Tibetan was employed, and only several of borzoi. There are occasional crosses of Danes with Irish Wolfhounds, principally before the revival of the breed was begun by Graham. This Dane cross was valuable only for size, since it militated in such important matters as head, shoulders, back, and quartering against true Wolfhound type, and it was bred out as quickly as possible.



Ch. O'Leary, 1902. Now mounted in the London Natural History Museum. There is a small amount of Dane blood in his pedigree

If I may stray just once more into pedigrees as an example of this Dane blood – since it is so important in the public mind – let me ask you to look at the picture of O'Leary, a famous sire which died in 1902, made from his mounted skin in the Natural History Museum in London.

There is a small amount of Dane blood in O'Leary's pedigree some generations back, and some Glengarry Deerhound closer down, but his dam's pedigree is a complicated piece of inbreeding, in which Graham's Sheelah, herself the daughter of pure-blooded Irish Wolfhound brother

and sister, was mated to her own son, and this son to one of her daughters, there being a considerable amount also of this blood on the other side of O'Leary's breeding.

In all, a Dane cross appears about six or seven generations back of O'Leary in two places among his eight great-grandparents, Scottish Deerhound partly in four, and pure Irish Wolfhound in all eight, in two of these cases prepotent through inbreeding and absolutely uncontaminated.

Such inbreeding has been unnecessary for more than 40 years, and inbreeding in the average Irish Wolfhound pedigree is usually more distant than with many other breeds. What we have is a relatively pure blood, which has been

constantly replenished by previously unknown Irish strains and here by strains sent early into the United States of America.



Ch. Macushla of Ambleside, 1937. The author considers her his ideal for the present day Irish Wolfhound type and conformation.

In conclusion, I give you a picture of Ch. Macushla of Ambleside taken while just one month over a year, a bitch whom I consider to represent the best of any I have seen, the ideal of Irish Wolfhound conformation, substance, and type. In my personal opinion, she shows in refined form the essentials of the type as represented 136 years ago by Reinagle, before Graham started to collect the hounds.

If one compares the Reinagle portrait with the picture of poor stuffed O'Leary, and then Macushla, which all appear with this story, one can agree with Father Hogan, a learned historian of the breed, that if we have not got the ancient Irish Wolfhound we certainly have got his brother. And the facts bear him out.