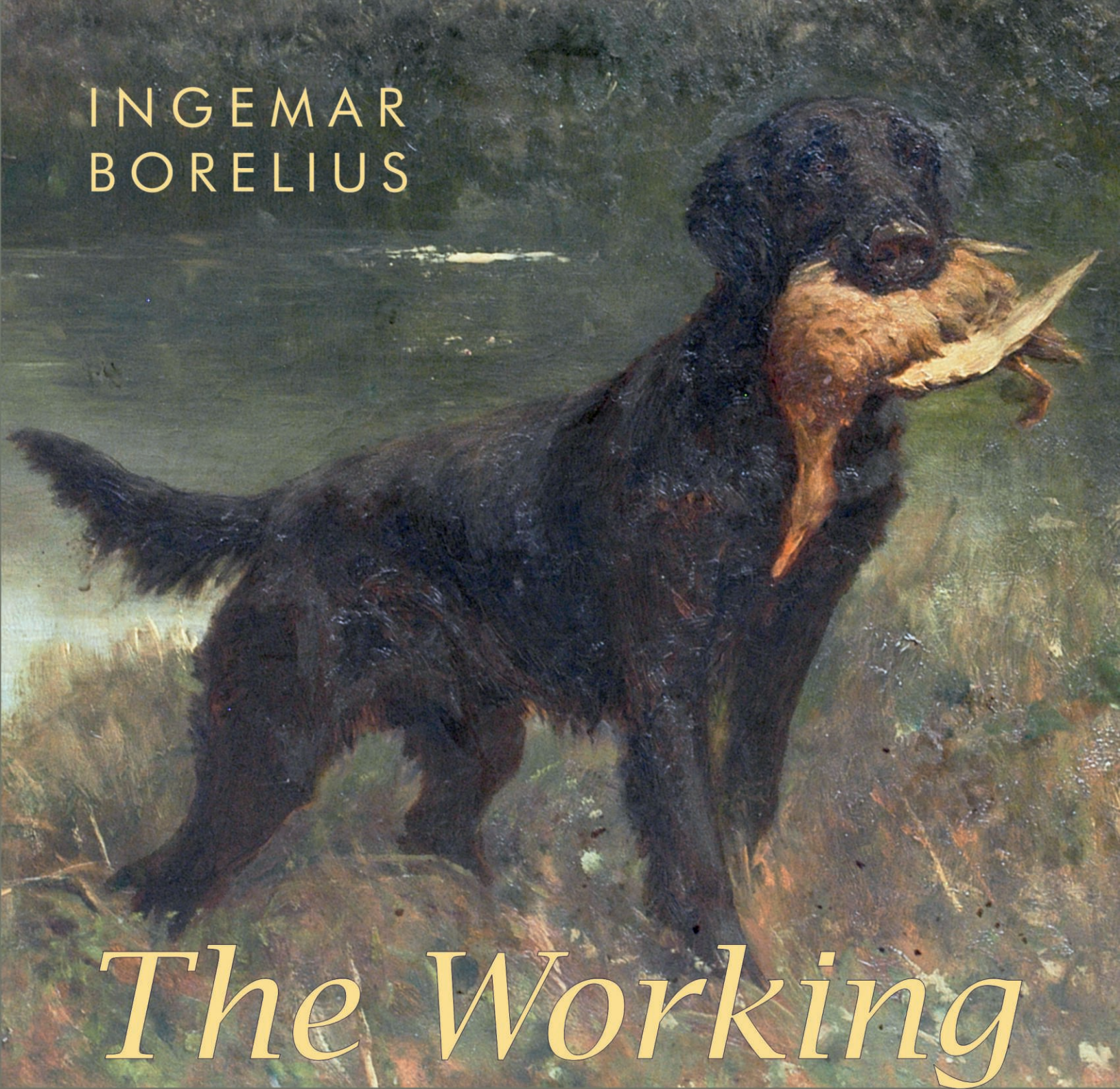




INGEMAR
BORELIUS

The Working
FLATCOATED
RETRIEVER

BOBERGA BOOKS

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STOCKHOLM | SWEDEN

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The dog on the front cover, Dual Ch Grouse of Riverside, was one of the two Riverside dogs, one of the two Flatcoats ever and the very first retriever, winning the exceptional Dual Ch title. This informal title combines champion titles from the bench and the field. The image is a lightly trimmed painting seemingly depicting Grouse as a young dog made by Maud Earl around 1904.

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The Birth of the Retriever

When the term retriever dog appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was mainly a renaming of a type of dog that had been around since ancient times. The development of changing shooting conditions and modifications to traditional gundogs led to the creation and application of a custom-made retriever.



Marquis Carmarthen's retriever Turk was bought in Ireland in 1824. It was described in "The Sportsman" (May 1832) as a cross between the small Newfoundland and the land spaniel, but it shows an unmistakable setter influence.

The early retriever story began with the big battue shots on British estates during the first decades of the nineteenth century. According to Wikipedia, the introduction of a "fully functional hinged breech-loading shotgun" in the 1830s, along with the development of modern cartridges, marked the birth of the modern shotgun. Thus, quicker shots on walked-up or driven game were enabled, and game shooting became the highest fashion.

Big estates all around the British Isles and on the continent reared game birds and offered shooting on driven game. A line of noblemen and

sometimes women, supported by their personal servants, rapidly loading a pair of shotguns, were waiting for the beaters to raise the game.

The Canadian water dog, crossed with pointers and setters, proved to be a tailor-made gundog for these shooting conditions. It was easy to make steady to shot game and to focus on the retrieving work.

The classical gundogs (setters, pointers, spaniels) with their stronger inclination to hunt live game were not ideal, even though these dogs are also used as retrievers.

LONDON.
WINDSOR, Nov. 7.—His Majesty rode out on horseback this day in Windsor Great Park.
 His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex left Holkham, after enjoying the hospitality of Mr. Coke for a month, on Monday last. On that day the battues commenced for the season; there will be three in a week. Lord Suffield's battues, two in a week, begin on the 17th. The attraction of the fine shooting at both these seats, will be the occasion of their being visited by large parties of the friends of Mr. Coke and Lord Suffield till the end of the season.

"Battue at Holkham" – In "The Sussex Advertiser", 1823, there was a short note about Holkham saying that "battues" took place regularly, being frequented by the Royal Family. The text shows the intense focus on the manners of the royals and the nobility at that time.

It is a relevant question why contemporary pointing and setting dogs could not be maintained as "jacks of all trades" like the French and the German gundogs. Early pointers and setters, likely of Spanish descent, were substantial dogs that moved at a moderate speed. Their work pace was adjusted for the search and netting of game birds. The strong competitive spirit among British shooting men led to a lighter composition, a gradual increase in speed among the dogs, more excitement, and probably a wider quartering pattern.

A writer, known by the pseudonym "Quar-togenarian", described the continuous crossings in the Sporting Magazine of 1832. Setters, foxhounds, large land spaniels, black and tan collies, Newfoundland dogs, Russian dogs, and pointers were used to boost speed and other essential characteristics. But even if they were not ideal for the task, there is no doubt that pointers and setters were continuously trained for retrieving purposes. These breeds remained multipurpose dogs in the US much longer than in Britain, which delayed the introduction of the retriever as a commonly used gundog.

Battue shooting, where a line of beaters and dogs drives game towards a line of guns, had old traditions, but it became increasingly popular at that time. The debate was fierce about the ethical aspects of "the massacres" of game that were reported by the press. The wildfowlers and sportsmen, who preferred to shoot over a pointer, setter, or spaniel, sharply questioned the sporting character of the new sport. But the shooting manner had come to stay. According to author David Hancock, the first battue shoot occurred at Knows-

ley Hall, arranged by the Earl of Derby in 1825. However, there were likely others before that, and one of the first was possibly organised by Thomas Coke (also known as Coke of Norfolk and later Earl of Leicester) at his Holkham Hall in 1815.

The Kentish Weekly Post reported that 272 pheasants, 186 hares, etc., were killed. It continued, saying that "the storming party of this destructive battue consisted only of eight guns, but all these were double-barrelled." Coke was renowned worldwide for launching radically new farming methods as well as for breeding sheep and cattle. He was an excellent shot and a dog man. Except for the "new" shooting manners, it is not unlikely that he also took an active part in the transformation of the gundogs.

Even if battue shooting was not a radically new shooting habit, it rapidly became popular at that time. The introduction of the modern shotgun and the large-scale rearing of game birds on leading estates radically transformed country life throughout England. The development of the first specialised retrievers occurred around the same time. Given that there are images of typical wavy-coated retrievers from the early years, it is evident that the formation of this breed began at that time.

Articles about game shooting and gundogs had a prominent place in sporting magazines and the daily press. Most larger shooting events were described in detail during the season, and extensive lists of individual guns were presented, along with the number of game killed by each gun. In a long shooting report published in "The Sporting Life", 1859, the following is also noted:

"A good, well-broken retriever will be of great assistance. When the turnips are thick, a small, stout spaniel best answers the purpose. But for the general purpose of retrieving, a cross between the setter and the small Newfoundland dog is the most serviceable dog."

Game shooting was sharply restricted, being an amusement reserved only for the landed gentry, a practice established throughout Europe. If a farmer or ordinary person was found poaching, they could be severely punished by the landowner or imprisoned, and game birds were not sold to the public.

There was an ongoing debate about game laws in Britain that began at the start of the eighteenth century. Many leading politicians opposed chang-

es. But there were liberal voices within the leading aristocracy arguing for a reformed rule. In a debate in the House of Lords (1828), the Earl of Suffield stated:

“There were three great desiderata required by the public. First, every man who can buy food should have the power to buy game. Secondly, every man who had game on the land of his possession should have the power to kill and sell that game. Thirdly, he should have the power to appoint any other person to kill the game for him.”

Saying that he declared what is evident to anyone today. But at that time, shooting was a sport for the Royals and for the landed gentry, and the selling of dead game was severely restricted to counteract poaching. The Earl of Suffield stated that the current rules were a disgrace to any civilised nation. He referred to France and the experiences of the French Revolution at the end of the previous century. It illustrates what could happen when laws are not in line with common sense among ordinary people.

An intense and long-standing debate on contemporary game law arose in Parliament, and some voices in the House of Lords called for restrictions on the methods of battue shooting. Poaching was a significant and rapidly growing problem at that time. Lord Malmesbury, a name well known in early gundog circles, stated that the rearing of large volumes of pheasants and the increasingly popular method of shooting driven game did not lead to an increase in poaching. The primary causes were starvation, poverty, and rising unemployment among farmworkers. He agreed with the view that many members of parliament shared.

The new game law, passed in 1831, opened opportunities for ordinary men to shoot on their own grounds and to trade game. Although battue shooting at the estates was never aimed at the ordinary man, it gave new shooting options for significant numbers of men and women, and it required a new type of dog, a retriever. Furthermore, when shooting became more common on smaller farms, the same dog became ideal, along with the spaniel.

The need to find useful retrieving dogs, supporting the new shooting manners, was strong. It was pretty evident that many available dogs

were evaluated. A test bench was established at the shooting estates, where different crosses were examined. Most dog owners are aware that dogs typically run after and pick up a stick thrown to them. But the requirements for a useful retriever were much more complex than that, and most crosses were probably abandoned or diluted after a few generations.

An article in “Bell’s Weekly Messenger,” 1847, talks about the death of the famous retriever Wolfe at Beacon Lodge:



Considering the shape of its head seemingly a black retriever with a strong setter influence and a yellow retriever showing its Newfoundland dog ancestry. The painting “Waiting for their master” by the British painter John Thomas Peele, 1859, is presented at the American Kennel Club Museum.

“His father was of the old deer greyhound breed, and his mother, a Newfoundland. He was a dog of immense size and power, smooth in his coat and perfectly white, except for the head, which was of a deep, rich mahogany colour. It was a beautiful thing to see him on the lawn lying in the sun with the young game, reared under hens, running all around him. If a rat came among the hen coops, Woolf would destroy it immediately. He was a splendid water dog. A few days before



A Border Collie depicted by Thomas Sidney Cooper, 1838. This breed was one of the forefathers of the retriever. According to Wikipedia there has been a persistent population of sheep on Newfoundland since the sixteenth century. There are good reasons to believe that the collie is a part of the Newfoundland water dog's ancestry as well, transforming the curly- or shaggy coat of the European water dog to the wavy- or smooth coat typical for the Canadian variety.

his death, at eleven years of age, he was in the sea in pursuit of a wounded goose."

Another article from the year before discussed the death of his grandfather, the retrieving deerhound Smoker, at the age of 18. "His retrieving of game was equal to any of the retrieving I ever saw in any other dog."

John Henry Walsh was one of the early writers on the subject. He was the editor of "The Field," the oldest and leading sports and country magazine, between 1857 and 1888. During this time, he compiled a series of articles and several dog books under the pseudonym "Stonehenge".

In his book "The Dogs of the British Isles," first published in 1867, Walsh states that "many well-known sportsmen possess their own breed of dogs. They are used for retrieving from land and in water, but there is no established breed". He talks about a head-keeper running a bloodhound and mastiff cross as a retriever. Someone is using a bulldog and smooth terrier cross for retrieving. He refers to a sportsman recommending a foxhound cross to achieve the best retriever.

But such crosses were exceptions, and the gamekeeper and writer John Mayer talks about shooting dogs in his "Sportsman's Directory," (1815), "being pointers, setters, spaniels (great and small for land or water), Newfoundland dogs, and poodles".

Thomas Pearce (Idstone), a renowned dog book writer and columnist for "The Field," discusses the origin of the black retriever in his book

"The Dog: With Directions for His Treatment," published in 1872.

"I have little doubt that the black retriever was a black setter originally, and in some old retriever families, there is a decided setter form. He was thickened, strengthened, and improved by the Labrador dog."

The Canadian water dog was often multi-coloured. So, there are good reasons to presume that the solid raven black colour in the retriever, along with other capabilities, was derived from black setters and probably a few pointers.

The smaller Newfoundland dog, no doubt, was looked upon as the outstanding water retriever at an early stage, although the term "retriever" was not fully established. Peter Hawker, who published his monumental work "Instructions to young sportsmen in all that relates to guns and shooting" in 1814, talks about the breed or more relevant to the family of dogs. He notes that many black and white dogs are called Newfoundlands and says that.

"Every canine brute that is nearly as big as a jackass and hairy as a bear is denominated a fine Newfoundland dog. Quite different, however, are the proper Labrador and St John's breeds of these animals; at least many characteristic points are required to distinguish them. The Labrador is a large, strong breed with robust limbs, a rough coat, a small head, and a tail that is carried high. He is kept in that country for drawing sledges full of wood, from inland to the seashore.

He is also useful, due to his immense strength and sagacity, particularly among wrecks and other disasters during boisterous weather."

"The other, the St. John's dog or the smaller Newfoundland dog, by far the best for shooting, is often blacker than any other colour and scarcely bigger than a pointer. He is made rather long in the head and nose, pretty deep in the chest, and very fine in the legs. He has short or smooth hair, does not carry his tail as curled as the other and is extremely quick and active in running, swimming or fighting."

The fact that other writers described the Newfoundland dog slightly differently and gave it a bear-like head is easily explained, as it was a mongrel, although it was purpose-bred. But still, you could easily identify a Labrador as well as a Flat-coat in the small Newfoundland dog, being the ancestor of all retriever breeds.

It sounds surprising that these dogs were "so expert and savage when fighting that they generally contrived to seize some vital part and often cause serious injury to their antagonist." However, it explains how these dogs were adapted to the challenging conditions in Newfoundland, transforming them into the civilised and gentle retriever by the British breeders.

An article in "Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle", 1847, under the headline "Natural history of dogs," gave a similar picture:

"The Newfoundland dog has been classed by some writers among the spaniels, and from his rough coat, love of water, and general appearance, he, without doubt, merits his canine station. There are two distinct breeds of Newfoundlands, one a large, shaggy-coated animal, which, as Peter Hawker expresses it, is as big as a donkey. This dog is a native of the coast of Labrador. The other is a much smaller and smother dog and is found in St. John's, Newfoundland."

"The retriever is a crossbred dog, either between the Newfoundland and the spaniel or between that and the setter or between the spaniel and the setter. The retriever is also occasionally bred from a cross between the rough-coated shepherd dog and the Newfoundland, or the setter. They are exceedingly valuable for the sportsman in recovering wounded game, especially wildfowl. When other dogs are taken into the field with them, such as a team of spaniels or

pointers, they on no account ought to be suffered to hunt or leave their masters' heels until bid to seek for a wounded bird or hare."

John Meyrick describes the Newfoundland dog varieties in detail in his book "House Dogs and Sporting Dogs," 1861. He says:

"The Newfoundland dog is of little or no use in the field, as he tires very soon and is not remarkable for a good nose. But his faculty of learning to fetch and carry is strong, and many of these dogs took to it from their hereditary instinct. He is also an excellent water dog, swimming fast and strongly, and many anecdotes-some of them, doubtless, not very much exaggerated-are told of extraordinary escapes from drowning with Newfoundland dogs."

"There are two varieties of this animal, the Labrador or larger Newfoundland dog, and the real Newfoundland, a much smaller dog. The smaller Newfoundland has shorter and less curly hair. His body is much more compact than that of the larger dog. The best colour is black, though I am told that the liver colour is not uncommon in its native country. His legs are shorter and often feathered. The height should not be over 24 inches [61 cm]."

Meyrick refers to another writer, Justice Haliburton, providing a very graphic description of the dog in one of his works. Haliburton is described:

"A connoisseur of the breed, possessing some very fine specimens. After calling attention to the dog's broad and intellectual-looking foreface and its small, delicate, mouse-like ears, he describes its tail, which serves as its rudder when swimming. It is different from the tails of other dogs. See how his chest is formed for diving; it is shaped internally like a seal's. Furthermore, observe the power of those paddles."

Haliburton states that

"There are two kinds of Newfoundland dogs, the short and long-haired, but I think those shaggy ones are the most handsome."

John Meyrick says about "the retriever" that:

"This term is applied exclusively to the cross between the Newfoundland and the setter or the water spaniel, which has generally been employed for retrieving game."

The column writing pseudonym "Leatherhead" talks surprisingly about "retrievers being pointers, setters, spaniels, or the fashionable blacks" in



The Duke of York and his Russian retriever Neptune in 1827 at a shooting party near Belvoir castle. This breed was probably a renaming of the Russian water dog and it is one of several retriever varieties being extinct today.

Painted by Abraham Bruiningh van Worrell.

his column in "Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle", 1875, indicating that the term "retriever" was still a descriptive term for a large variety of gundogs at that time.

But even if all the different gundog breeds, to some extent, were used for retrieving, it is evident that the proper retriever was initially shaped during the first decades of the nineteenth century. When Walsh published his book in 1867, there was a well-distributed retriever. He states:

"An English retriever, whether smooth or curly coated, should be black or black and tan or black with tabby or brindle legs, the brindle legs being indicative of the Labrador origin. We give preference, from experience, to the short-coated or flat-coated small St. John's or Labrador breed. These breeds, we believe, are identical. The small St. John's has marvellous intelligence, a great aptitude for learning to carry, a soft mouth, great strength, and he is a great swimmer."

Walsh states that the distinction between the different varieties is simply one of the coat textures. He concludes that:

"It is a mistake to go for large dogs as retrievers. The smaller they are, the better, and the merits of the two varieties are pretty evenly balanced. We have seen first-class dogs, smooth-coated, wavy-coated, and curly-coated."

Hutchinson states that

"the best land retrievers are bred from a cross between the setter and the Newfoundland, or the strong spaniel and the Newfoundland".

The curly-coated dog was primarily seen as a water retriever. The virtues of its coat were promoted in a letter to the editor in "The Field", 1863, saying that "when he comes out of the water, he has only to give himself a shake and dry immediately".

A writer in "The Field" argues for the cross between the setter and the Newfoundland, saying:

"He should expect great energy, courage and nose, regard being had to these qualities in the parents. On the side of defects, I should expect possibly an indifference to retrieve, hardness of mouth, and wilfulness of temper - vices that might be eradicated with further crossings to the high-bred retriever."

He admits that the setter and Newfoundland cross is not anything new, but he argues for further crossings back to the original breeds to perfect the capabilities of the retriever. Although there has been an established retriever breed since the beginning of the century, continued breeding was probably made with the original races along the way.

Walsh states contradictorily:

"If there is any cross at all in this breed, it should be the setter cross. But it certainly diminishes the liking for water, and in some instances, the

produce has a marked disinclination to quest in thick or tangled woodland.”

Hutchinson talks about retrieving setters, stating:

“I say setter rather than pointer, not on account of his more affectionate and docile disposition but because, thanks to his long coat, he would be able to work in any cover. And from nature, he ‘roads’ quicker [meaning catching the scent of a running wounded bird].”

He admits:

“My predilection for setters, a partiality because I have shot more over wild, uncertain ground than over well-stocked preserves. Doubtless, pointers are preferable, far preferable, in a very enclosed country where game is abundant. But for severe and fast work, and as a servant of all work, there is nothing like the setter. He may be, and generally is, more difficult to break, but when success has crowned your efforts, what a noble, enduring, sociable, attached animal you possess. I greatly admire the animated waving of his stern, so strongly indicative of high breeding.”

As it appears, we are facing a primary explanation for the differences between the retriever breeds. Even if setters, as well as pointers, fre-

quently occur in the melting pot that shaped all retrievers, the setter influence behind the Flatcoat seems more prominent. The Labrador seems more strongly influenced by the pointer crosses, making it a more easily trained dog. It was also, at least initially, more inclined to work in areas with an abundance of game.

Although the different breeds were frequently crossed for a considerable period, it is apparent that these early influences have remained visible to this day.

However, they should not be exaggerated. The capacities of modern breeds are primarily due to targeted breeding for specific skills, rather than remnants of dogs in use one hundred and fifty years ago.

We know that these early retrievers were crossed with setters and pointers. Or, you could say vice versa that the “pointing breeds” were crossed with Canadian water dogs to produce a tailor-made retriever. The “pointing breeds” did not possess all the necessary qualities that were required of a working retriever. But they induced a more athletic constitution and more drive, raciness, stamina, and biddability into the somewhat lumbering disposition of the Canadian water dog.



There have probably always been retrievers at the royal estates. The Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII, owned Duck, a Newfoundland retriever, painted in 1852 by Frederick William Keyl.

The Working FLATCOATED RETRIEVER

by

INGEMAR BORELIUS

A Must-Read for All Retriever Owners

Discover the fascinating story of the working Flatcoated Retriever and the shared origins of all retriever breeds. Born in early nineteenth-century Britain and shaped alongside the emergence of the modern shotgun, these once nondescript retrievers gave rise to the Flatcoat, Labrador, Golden and Curlycoated Retriever.

This comprehensive book goes beyond a single breed, charting the evolution of all retrievers and the development of field trials in Britain and the United States. Some 450 pages and around 300 illustrations – paintings, drawings and photographs in both colour and black and white – bring the history vividly to life.

Extensive appendices present historical field trial results from Britain, North America and the Nordic countries. Clear guidance on Flatcoat conformation, sustainable breeding and working ability makes this essential reading for retriever owners, breeders and gundog enthusiasts alike.

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