



## Bob-tailed survivors in the cur-dog tradition

*On the Welsh border with Herefordshire a group of farms employ their own variety of shepherd dog, descended from the tailless dogs of the old drovers and renowned for their fierce and resolute nature.*

*David Hancock visited the farms and met some of the dogs and their owners*

**O**N the border of Gwent and Herefordshire just north of Ewyas Harold some farmers, dealing mainly in sheep and cattle, have preserved their own variety of shepherd dog, or what they call the bob-tailed dog. Unlike the Old English bob-tailed sheepdog these are not big, square, sturdy and hairy but more like the stars of Phil Drabble's television programme *One Man and his Dog* - except that they are tailless. This is initiated genetically, not as a result of veterinary amputation as sometimes occurs in the Pembrokeshire Welsh corgi. Their appearance is reminiscent of the old crossbred drovers' dogs and cur-dogs depicted and described more than a hundred years ago. Like them these bob-tailed dogs are alert, aggressive, fiercely protective and suspicious of strangers.



plagiarising Thomas Bewick, described cur-dogs as 'fiercer than the shepherd's dog; and their hair is smoother and shorter. They are mostly of a black and white colour; their ears are half-pricked; and many of them with short tails which seem as if they had been cut. These are called self-tailed dogs.' This is an apt description of the dogs of Pauline Smith, John Pritchard, Stan Gore, Ted Powell and Cliff Francis who farm in the valleys of the

*Above: Nell, owned by Stan Gore, rounds up sheep in the valleys of the Welsh borders.*

*Left: Nell again. The tailless characteristic of these sheepdogs is initiated genetically, not through veterinary amputation.*

to the north-west of Pontri

It is sheep and cattle coun not far from Offa's Dyke, hi rocky, bleak in winter and a tou test for any herding breed. W place-names like Arcadia, Paradi the Golden Valley and a fa called The Vision (after the lege of a divine apparition there) t area is full of character a characters. Ted Powell, who li at The Vision, says that both his father a grandfather had these naturally tailless do and their original dogs came from a dro' working in South Wales.

Stan Gore's Nell, her daughter Gw owned by Pauline Smith, and h granddaughter Meg, owned by John Pritcha are just like the dog portrayed in *A Smith's Drover* from W. H. Pyne's *The Costumes Great Britain* (1808). The old drovers' rou