
Dogs from DOWN UNDER

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Anyone who has read Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore* will retain a lifelong admiration for those who went to Australia in its earliest years of development by Europeans. This admiration must be extended to the dogs that accompanied the earliest settlers.

On the long arduous journey out there, dogs would have suffered as much as any human, if not more. It is worth remembering when considering the surviving breeds of Australian and New Zealand dogs. It is hardly surprising that breeds like the Australian Cattle Dog, the Kelpie, and the Huntaway of New Zealand, are among the toughest in the world.

It is hardly likely that ornamental dogs would have accompanied the early transport ships to Australia and New Zealand; dogs valuable enough to have merited passage in this way would be workers: herding dogs, hounds or terriers. Dogs in these three latter categories would have gone on this long hazardous voyage because they would bring benefits at the far end to their owners. It is not good sense, however, to link them with contemporary breeds, because breeds were not valued in the 18th and early-19th centuries; function ruled. It is of value, however, to link them with the common dogs of England at that time.

Sheep and cattle being taken to the Antipodes would have

been accompanied by herding dogs. Terriers and hounds would have been valued as vermin-controllers and pot-fillers. Big strapping mastiff-type dogs would have been valued as guard dogs and seizing dogs. Later on, sportsmen would take gun dogs and pack hounds. This, I believe, is the background for considering the development of breeds from down under.

Faulty logic

The Australian Cattle Dog is said to have come from a mixture of smooth merle collies, dingo, Dalmatian and black-and-tan Kelpie. The dingo blood is stated in one Australian publication to have introduced silent working, the red coat colour and the heeling instinct, the latter being covered by these words: "A dingo trait is to silently creep up behind an animal and bite, and these cross pups followed this style of heeling."

A reasonable response to this, to me incredible statement, would be: British working sheepdogs work silently; red merle is in the collie gene pool – it doesn't need an infusion of dingo blood; and the heeling instinct was present in British herding dogs before any Europeans reached Australia. Ask any Corgi or Lancashire Heeler breed historian. As for the infusion of Dalmatian blood, can you truly imagine any hard-bitten weather-beaten cattle farmer introducing the blood of a spotted coach-dog to, as the Australian publication puts it, "give the progeny a love of horses and a sense of responsibility for guarding their master's possessions." My working sheepdogs