

WHEN THE Kennel Club was formed over 100 years ago, the Jockey Club was its inspiration, and a number of real gundog men featured among its founders – men like S.E. Shirley, the flat-coated retriever devotee. The KC arose out of a need to regularise exhibitions of pure-bred dogs, to authenticate the breeding of such dogs and to promote pedigree dogs. Much is made by historians of the so-called first recorded dog shows held at Newcastle and Birmingham in 1859, both restricted to “sporting dogs” but featuring only gundogs. The original exhibiting of sporting dogs such as hounds came out of the early livestock shows or district fairs of the 1770s, with Masters of Hounds, such as John Warde at his seat at Squerries in Kent, having a private hound show every summer.

There is some significance in this hound show heritage, for the foxhound is almost certainly the soundest-bred pure-bred dog in Britain, yet it is not registered as a breed with the Kennel Club; nor are hound shows licensed by the Kennel Club. One conclusion from this and the fact that our gundog breeds are now regrettably divided into working and show strains, beset by congenital diseases and bred to a cosmetic design unrelated to real field needs, is that working dogs are better kept out of the clutches of the Kennel Club. It is ironic that the lifesize bronze statue of a foxhound of the Old Berkeley pack should stand proudly outside the Piccadilly headquarters of the Kennel Club when the breed itself isn't allowed in!

I think it's fair to say also that although the Jockey Club may have provided the inspiration for the founding of the Kennel Club, there is a world of difference between the achievements of the two clubs nowadays. Foreigners sometimes say we are masters at setting up institutions, but far from masterly at adapting them to changing needs.

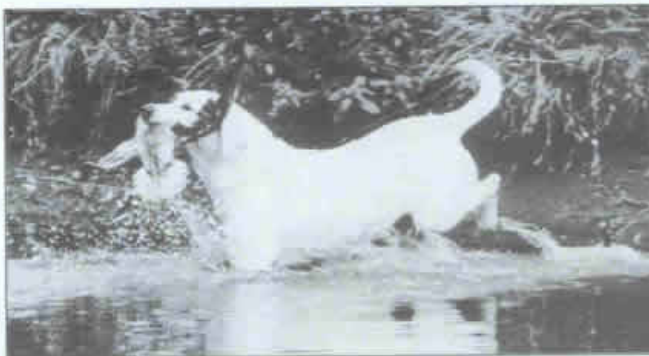
Nine years ago, the *Daily Express* was reporting: “The Kennel Club, which for years has kept the canine world on a tight leash, is facing a dog lover's revolution. Thousands of owners and breeders of working gundogs now want to form a breakaway association... The powerful gundog fraternity says that the Kennel Club is inefficient with the registration of new dogs, expensive and biased towards the showdog world and shows scant regard for working dogs.” The so-called “powerful gundog fraternity” has done precious little in the ensuing years to protect the best interests of our world-famous gundog breeds.

Is the gundog fraternity frightened of a fight, totally leaderless or just pathetic? Non-gundog organisations, such as some of those supporting the German shepherd dog, may well shame what used to be the major voice in the canine world –

GUNDOGS

MAKING THE BREAK

The Kennel Club has been the bane of the gundog community for too long. David Hancock says it's time for things to change



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that of the shooting men – and lead the way to a breakaway club.

One consistently critical gundog man, Bill Rasbridge, who did so much to eradicate PRA in Irish setters, often stood alone in urging change on the KC. He argued for several decades on the need for the social club to be separated from the official department of the KC and

persists in opposing a desperately needed national dog registration scheme to help combat the growing problems of dogs in society, on the purely selfish grounds that it would siphon off the revenue income from their own scheme.

Last year I wrote an article for *Shooting Times* pointing out that in Canada, the rigid monopoly of the

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for what he termed “cash-crop” breeders of doubtful pedigree stock to be curbed. But, of course, a social club dependent on registration fees is hardly likely to warm to his view.

So we now have a finance-led, show-dominated social club telling working gundog men how to breed their functional animals to a purely cosmetic design, how to run their field trials, appointing judges and regularly increasing their fees for the same registration service – to subsidise their social life in an expensive part of London. This is a club which will register breeds that have killed children, does nothing to de-register breeding stock that is riddled with congenital diseases and

Kennel Club has now been broken – by law. Sadly, in this country, the Home Office, the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture – none of them noted for their vision – seem to dabble in the welfare of the domestic dog, unlike the Canadian situation. But the welfare of our gundogs – the control of psychopathic dogs, the eradication of inheritable diseases, the restriction of back-street breeders and the promotion of well-bred, physically-sound, functional, working dogs to support us in the field is the business of *all* those who work such dogs. Master breeders of the last century passed these revered sporting breeds into our hands in the

belief that we, too, would carry their torch and then perpetuate these splendid animals for the benefit of those who come after us. We are betraying that trust.

Several gundog society secretaries wrote to me expressing support for a gundog breakaway from the KC. I asked them to write to the BASC; perhaps I was wrong. But all who admire field prowess in gundogs have to accept the crisis to be faced. The destiny of our gundog breeds must be recaptured by those who use them as functional animals. Let the show fraternity, under the patronage (and the high costs this brings) of the Kennel Club, carry on with their high-stepping pointers, waddling labradors, over-furnished golden retrievers, basset-eared cockers and setter-like springers.

Each to his own – and with it the freedom to proceed according to separate need. If we did have a separate working gundog studbook, perhaps then we could work to eliminate entropion in Clumbers, inherited canine cataracts in labradors, hip dysplasia in golden retrievers, central progressive atrophy in Chesapeakes and PRA in all too many gundog breeds.

The studbook can play a leading role in such work – if we are determined to work towards the reduction rather than the lame acceptance of such flawed stock. We would no longer need 44 words to describe the tail of the Labrador and could work to restore true type and the correct temperament in our gundog breeds.

The secretary of the Kennel Club has, with loathsome complacency, likened his registration department's role with that of DeBretts'; in other words, to record statements of fact not evidence of quality.

We now have to raise our level of thinking, act responsibly towards dependent creatures which exist to serve us, keep faith with breed-creators like Llewellyn, Laverack, Boughey, Phillips, Tweedmouth, Lloyd and McCarthy and obey our consciences. Can any caring person sleep well when 600 unwanted pedigree gundogs end up in Battersea Dogs Home alone each year? But more dogs means more money coming into the registration department of the KC to be passed on to support its social activities – and working gundog men go on paying up!

Look at the early photographs of our gundog breeds and then ask yourself: Have our gundogs gained anything at all from KC patronage? Then think of how easy it would be with a desktop computer to record, register and co-relate the statistics we feed into it.

A working gundog register/studbook could be established quite easily by any enterprising gundog society secretary, but how much better it would be if BASC or the BFSS took on the task – with the fees being used for the benefit of our country sports as a whole.