

History of the Greyhound

6000-1000BC



ANCIENT HISTORY

The origin of the greyhound breed is deeply rooted in ancient history. Images of dogs similar to today's greyhound have been discovered from a site in Turkey dating back to 6,000 BC.



THE EGYPTIANS

Greyhounds were revered by the ancient Egyptians and the tombs of several Pharaohs are decorated with images of their favourite dogs or contain their mummified remains.



THE GREEKS AND ROMANS

The ancient Greeks and Romans kept greyhounds for hunting and as pets and they are often depicted in their art and mythology.

500-1000



THE FOREST LAWS

In the early sixth century, the first "forest laws" were recorded in Germany and similar laws were soon common throughout Europe. The laws forbade trespassing or hunting on noble's land without permission and the penalties were severe. These were in effect the first game laws.



KING HYWEL DDA (C. 880-950)

In the 10th century, a Welsh King named Hywel Dda (Howel the Good) made a law that declared the punishment for killing a greyhound the same as for killing a person - execution!

An old Welsh proverb: "You may know a gentleman by his horse, his hawk and his greyhound".

1000-1200



KING CANUTE (C. 985-1035)

King Canute who ruled England from 1016 to 1035 enacted the first laws that limited the ownership of greyhounds to the aristocracy. This law lasted nearly 400 years! He initiated the barbaric practice of crippling other breeds of dog so they couldn't compete with the King's greyhounds.



KING CANUTE'S FOREST LAWS

Approximate translation - "Peasants may not own greyhounds only the nobility. Court officers will be sent out to the villages to ensure the laws are adhered to and will sever the tendons of peasant's dogs if they live less than 10 miles from the forest. Anyone found hunting with their dog inside the forest will be fined and their dog confiscated."

KING WILLIAM I - WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR (C. 1025-1087)

William the Conqueror upheld the ban on commoners keeping greyhounds and even went as far as to order all non-greyhounds to have three toes amputated (called expedition) to reduce their speed. King Henry II continued the practice and the law was still active until 1334. As unfair as the forest laws were, the reduced hunting was actually the very first steps of forest and game conservation.

1200-1500



KING HENRY VII (1457-1509)

King Henry VII, the first Tudor King of England introduced greyhounds to the royal bestiary, a book containing both real and imaginary animals. The Tudor coat of arms has a greyhound supporter. It is called the White greyhound of Richmond and is depicted in many sculptures throughout England.



KINGS AND QUEENS MESSENGERS

The Corps of Queen's Messengers are couriers employed by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and still play a role in modern times. The first recorded King's Messenger was John Norman, who was appointed in 1485 by King Richard III to hand-deliver secret documents. The exiled, Charles II appointed four trusted men to convey messages to Royalist forces in England. As a sign of their authority, the King broke four silver greyhounds from a bowl familiar to royal courtiers, and gave one to each man. The symbol of the Service therefore became a silver greyhound. On formal occasions the Queen's Messengers wear this badge on a ribbon and on less formal occasions wear ties with a discreet greyhound pattern while working.

1500-1600



GREYHOUNDS IN THE NEW WORLD (1493)

Greyhounds were among the 20 dogs that accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the Americas.



KING HENRY VIII (1491-1547)

King Henry VIII adopted the greyhound as his personal standard and it remains the symbol of the House of York today. He owned many greyhounds and was a great lover of hunting and coursing and was the first person to wager on the sport.



HERALDIC GREYHOUNDS

Greyhounds were such a large part of the lives of the aristocracy throughout history that many families chose them as a symbol on their coat of arms. This included English and French Royalty. Greyhounds appear on the shields of more than 400 French families. Greyhounds represented courage, vigilance and loyalty. Some towns also have greyhounds included in their shields.

1500-1600



QUEEN ELIZABETH I (1533-1603)

Whilst horse racing is known as the sport of Kings, greyhound racing is the sport of Queens. Queen Elizabeth I was a great lover of greyhound coursing (the pursuit of game) which is the precursor of today's racing. She was concerned about the unfair advantage the dogs had over the game so in 1561 she ordered "The Laws of the Leash" to be drawn up. They included that the prey was to be given a head start before the dogs were released or "slipped".



GREYHOUNDS IN THE STARS

Greyhounds have their place in a constellation located just south of the Big Dipper called Canes Venatici. It was conceived by Johannes Fevelius in 1687. The dogs names are Asterion and Chara and are held on a leash by Bootes as he hunts for the bears Ursa Major and Ursa Minor.

1700's



GREYHOUNDS ARRIVE IN AUSTRALIA 1770

The botanist Joseph Banks who sailed to Australia with Captain Cook on The Endeavour brought a male and female greyhound with him on the voyage. Banks was a keen hunter and his diary entries often referred to the dog's regular pursuit of the native animals.



In 1788 when the First Fleet sailed into Botany Bay, on board were Captain Arthur Phillip (who was to become the first Governor of NSW) and his greyhounds and "assorted puppies". The dogs were used to hunt game, particularly the kangaroos that were damaging the early settlers' crops. The dogs were often crossed with other large dogs such as Scottish Deerhounds and were referred to as "Kangaroo Dogs".

By the time the 19th century had arrived, it became necessary to control the dog population in the new colony. Mongrel dogs were starting to become a problem, attacking stock, horses and people. In 1801 Governor Philip King ordered that nuisance dogs were to be destroyed (except for greyhounds or terriers) as a tax was to be laid on all "cur" dogs.

1776-1926



GREYHOUND COURSING

Coursing has been practiced throughout history as a means of hunting food and eliminating predators. Later it became a form of entertainment and usually consisted of two or more sighthounds pursuing a live hare. In 1776 Lord Orford organised the first public coursing club in England. It was a popular pastime during the 1800's throughout Europe and America.

The first sporting use of greyhounds in Australia is recorded as coursing in the 1860's. The first club coursing event was held in SA in 1867. It was a popular pastime through the turn of the century but began to decline with the increasing popularity of racing in the 1920's.



GREYHOUND RACING

Modern greyhound racing has its origins in coursing. The first recorded attempt at racing greyhounds on a straight track was in England in 1876 but it didn't take off with coursing enthusiasts. Racing as we know it on circular or oval tracks first started in America in 1912 when Owen Patrick Smith invented the mechanical hare. The popularity and profitability of greyhound racing was soon noted by the English who built a track and held their first race in 1926.

1927-1960



MODERN GREYHOUND RACING COMMENCES IN AUSTRALIA 1927

In Australia racing with a mechanical lure, often called the "tin hare" began in 1927 when the Lang Labour government amended the Gaming and Betting Act to allow legal wagering. The greyhound Coursing Association was formed and the first race took place at Epping (later known as Harold Park) on 18 May.

While horse racing was generally a pastime for the wealthy, greyhound racing attracted the working class man due to the low admission charges, ability to place small bets and the timings of races which were often at night and suited their leisure hours. It created much opposition from the conservative and religious elements of the population against public gambling.



GREYHOUND JOCKEYS

A very strange fad developed in America in 1930 which was practiced in Australia up until the 1950's. Capuchin monkeys were trained to ride racing dogs for sport over a short course that sometimes included hurdles and water jumps. They used specially designed saddle harness and wore miniature jockey silks. This photograph shows monkey jockeys at Shepherds Bush, Mascot, Sydney in 1930.

Today



GREYHOUNDS RACING TODAY

In Australia today there are over 45,000 races held annually. Over \$100 million in stake money was paid in 2014 and there are over 30,000 licenced owners and trainers in Australia.

In the past 50 years many regulations have been introduced and today animal welfare is seen as a top priority in the racing industry. Greyhounds Australasia Limited (GA) is the governing body responsible for the oversight and welfare of all racing greyhounds in Australasia.



GREYHOUND ADOPTION PROGRAM

Greyhounds are becoming increasingly popular as pets. In addition to privately run programs, each state has a Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP) which works to rehome retired racing greyhounds.