

COMMENT

HOW SHORT IS TOO SHORT?

By Marjorie Bunting

(reprint from an old NTCNews contributed by Frank Rogers)

When we saw the brief but salty comments of Mrs. Bunting, the eminent English Norwich/Norfolk breeder, in the February 11 Dog World regarding the "On Breeding" article which appeared in the Fall 1976 NTNews, we hastened to solicit expanded remarks from her for this issue of the News. Not only did she oblige - it was ESP! An unsolicited article from her "crossed" our letter of request, and we were delighted to find that she had addressed herself to precisely the questions we asked her to cover. Many thanks, Mrs. Bunting, for an extremely thought-provoking article. We can only hope that it will draw further comment from our Norwich readers on this side of the tossing waves.

We in England have heard rumours drifting across the Atlantic during the last 12 months about the too short-backed Norwich (and Norfolk?) which, it is said, we have sold to the American continent, so I was pleased to see that the Editor of the Norwich News has brought it out into the open - which is where all rumours should be. This is not in any way intended to defend either English-bred Norwich sold abroad or English breeders - I don't consider there is the slightest need to do this as their records over the years speak for themselves - many American exhibitors do not know that the English breed standard differs from the American and also have no knowledge of either the original purpose of terriers bred in the county of Norfolk, England or of conditions as they pertain to terrier breeding in this present day and age.

First the standards. Your standard says, "Body moderately short," not, you will notice, body of moderate length, but with the word "short" added. An interesting point when reading Mrs. Randolph's words: "They should have a longish back in my opinion."

The original standard in England was drawn up in 1933 from a draft by R.J. Read of the Horstead prefix, a man who had bred little red terriers to work in the Norfolk countryside since before the first world war. His draft said, "Short to medium length of back." The 1933 standard mentioned neither length of body or back but gave as a fault a long weak back. The revision of the standard in 1938 added: "Body, short compact". We are still with the early breeders at this time, breeders who worked them before official recognition, and the standard continued with this description for three decades or so. Now both the Norwich and Norfolk standards ask for a short back, which to my mind is likely to give a sounder dog than asking for a body even moderately short.

When I first came into the breed in the 1940's, the two experts for the two types were Mrs. Hardy (Quartzhill prick-ears) and Miss Macfie (Colonsay drop-ears). Both these ladies described the breed to me as "cobby" and it was from R.J. Read, whom I knew personally, that I first heard it described as a "stuffy" little terrier. Incidentally, Miss Macfie's drop-ears gave a valuable contribution to the war effort at that time by helping to destroy the rat population of Suffolk and thus save the essential food supplies grown by the Suffolk farmers.

I mentioned that the original English standard made a long weak back a fault. Quotations were given in your *Norwich News* to show that working terrier people do not like a too short back. I am a native of Norfolk and was raised in a farming community which included working terrier men. They did not like a too long back either, as they said this made for a weak backbone and could make maneuverability as difficult as a too short back.

The quotes and article in the *News* gave an impression - as common in this country as it is in your own - that terriers for work should all come from the same mould. If you believe this to be true, stop to consider why, in that case, we have such diversingly different terrier breeds as the Bull terrier, Fox terrier, Airedale, Dandie Dinmont and Norwich.

In the second half of the last century there was a trend all over the British Isles to produce local strains of terriers which were suited for work in the particular type of countryside in which they lived and it was this trend which brought into being the different breeds. Thus the border country between England and Scotland, with its craggy, rocky, mountainous countryside and conditions where much hunting was done on foot, produced a narrow terrier to get into narrow places in the crags and rocks, with long legs so that it could run all day with horse or man. Terriers in this countryside were needed to help sheep farmers and huntsmen keep down the predators of the flocks.

In the shires, the midlands of England, fox hunting was a sport more than work and a terrier would either run all day with the hounds or be carried in a terrier bag. These terriers were not needed to kill their fox, but to bolt it or sometimes to stay with it underground to guide the "diggers." This countryside is mainly grass, and hunting was one of the major interests.

The Norfolk countryside is different again, mainly light-soiled, flattish, arable land, cropped with corn (wheat, barley, oats) and root vegetables, shooting country rather than hunting country, a country where farming takes precedence. And the biggest menace to the farmers were the rats and rabbit which destroyed the crops. So terriers were evolved here to keep down these pests and destroyers.

I knew a terrier man, who kept a pack of about a dozen terriers, who used to be asked to spend a few days at a time on farms and estates just to reduce the rat population. The terriers had to work in, out and under farm buildings, drains and hedgerows and so a different type of terrier again was needed. You practically never heard the word "fox" used amongst terrier workers in Norfolks. A typical example is Mrs. Panks of Foxybrook Norwich, a Norfolk farmer's wife and daughter of Horace Cole, one of the breeders of little red terriers early in the century. She will tell you of her Norwich killing mainly rats, but also moles, hedgehogs, occasionally a stoat and rabbits - in fact, all the smaller vermin which menace the Norfolk farmer.

From all this I'm sure you will understand that I can't go along completely with the comments by Garth Gillan as to the points needed for a Norwich to work, and his statement that the Norwich was bred to run with hounds is not true in its original habitat. Neither do I agree that the Norwich is a pack terrier. Anything but - it is very much an individual and very capable of making its own decisions. It is certainly not temperamentally a pack terrier either, being far too fond of people;

and in over 30 years with the breed I have found that they have a definite need to live with and be with people.

Fifty years ago it was reasonably easy to work a terrier in my country if you wanted to do so and most people who kept terriers wanted to. Today it is far from easy and for terrier owners in our suburban areas, impossible. In fifty years' time I would predict that it will be against the law except in rare cases.

Today the vast majority of Norwich terriers bred go as pets and practically all the rest as show dogs. I make no comment as to whether this is a good or bad thing, that would take an article in itself.

The comments about neck and shoulders I go along with completely. Thick shoulders with a broad chest and elbows sticking out are bad whether a terrier is needed to go to ground, follow hounds and horses or for the show ring. At work it makes it valueless; in the ring it is ugly. But I don't agree that this is caused by a short back. I have seen a short back combined with good neck and shoulders too many times in many breeds to accept this and I have also seen many in our own breed with these bad shoulders and LONG back. It is much more difficult to breed a short back with good front, neck and shoulders on a short-legged breed, but it is possible, as many Norwich and Norfolk over the years have proved. This fault has become far too common in the breed, over here in recent years, in Norwich in particular, but Norfolks, where it used to be rife, have improved in this point in many cases. Bad neck and shoulders were nearly the rule rather than the exception, particularly in drop-ears, in the days when our standard asked for a short neck (which I believe your standard still requires) as many breeders achieved a short neck by breeding upright shoulders.

The majority of Norwich and Norfolk bought by Americans from England are for show. In the years I have known the breed, if one was ever bought purely as a worker, I didn't hear about it. It seems to me your biggest problem is the rapid increase in popularity of the breed as a show dog and that you have people coming into the breed who have little understanding of it. Could I suggest that when buying a Norwich from England, whether it be a show potential or an established English winner, that you make sure it is the type required in your country? It is obvious that some of those imported do not suit established American breeders, which doesn't surprise me as the American winners often seem "odd" to our eyes.