

The Heseltines also hunted rough-coated bassets, and Queen Alexandra was noted for exhibiting this breed

# The Heseltines

by Linda Skerritt

There was an excellent turnout in May 1910 for the polo competition at Hurlingham, England. Six teams took part, including the Bath Club headed by Captain Godfrey Heseltine. Polo was but one of Godfrey's passions. Riding to hounds was another, though taking a tumble were hazards of both these outdoor activities. As Master of the Essex Union Hunt, he met with a bad spill at one hunt where his horse apparently crossed its legs and fell, rolling on Godfrey, who was badly shaken and bruised. Luckily no bones were broken. The local newspaper reported that he remounted his horse, "but was finally persuaded, much against his inclination, to give up hunting for the day and return home, which he did in an automobile with his father."

With his brother, Christopher, Godfrey started hunting badger in the New Forest, Hampshire, in the early 1890s. They soon became attracted to the hunting skills of Bassets. Their few couple grew and soon became the Walhampton pack, so named after Walhampton House, their grand mansion set in magnificent grounds in Lymington.

Godfrey's military service abroad interrupted these hunting activities in the balmy, English countryside and the brothers had to out-house their hounds at several places, including with the Marquis Conyngham, where at Slane Castle, County Meath, Ireland, they became known as the Slane Basset Hounds.

Undeterred at the temporary loss of his beloved Bassets, from 1906-09, Godfrey seized the opportunity to join the Ootacamund Hunt in South India. He was soon Master, a position he returned to after World War I. In their report for the period November 1906-October 1907, the committee expressed its thanks to the Captain "for his untiring labors and energy in the cause of sport, and for his care and attention to the pack in kennel and in the field." It also seems that Godfrey had persuaded everyone that scarlet was a better color for them to wear than green!

At the end of 1909, the Marquis wrote to Godfrey saying that he was giving up the Bassets. He asked "Would you like to have them back, as well as the foxhounds (Essex Union) you are taking over next season?" Godfrey gladly accepted and his hounds found their way to the Essex kennels.

The Heseltine brothers' interest in Bassets was not restricted to the hunting scene. They also took a deep interest in showing. During Godfrey's absence Christopher judged at the 1907 Crystal Palace Kennel Club show. He reported that the Basset Hound classes were not well filled, so his task of judging was an easy one. "The breed seems to have gone out of favor, which is a great pity." In the Open Class he placed Loo Loo Loo first. A typical Basset (by one of the best hounds ever bred, Louis le Beau) and one so well known that he considered it "useless to repeat all that has already been said of him." However, like many judges of that era, he was more

forthcoming in his opinion of the inferior specimens entered. He withheld 3<sup>rd</sup> in Limit Bitch as "Mr. White sent Country Girl, one of the worst specimens of a pig-jawed hound I have ever seen, and I considered it almost an insult to me to send such a hound into the ring. No judge could have felt otherwise, and it certainly should have been knocked on the head when young."

Basset Hound entries at Kennel Club shows saw an even greater decline. Despite this, Walhampton Bassets were invariably winning top honors, especially Mohican, who was shown in hard-working condition. However

the Heseltines felt showing was having a detrimental effect on soundness of the breed. Godfrey was anxious to maintain genuine type and capability for hunting. Because of this, the brothers resigned from the Basset Hound Club.

A great rift between the showing and hunting fraternity ensued and, in 1912, the Heseltines were instrumental in forming a Master of Basset Hounds Association, with the aim of promoting the breeding of correct type. An early MBHA show took place at Rugby that year, with entry restricted to members.

Only Queen Alexandra who, with King Edward VII, was a strong supporter of the Basset during this low ebb, was allowed to exhibit at MBHA shows.

With the Walhampton pack kennelled at Billericay, east of London, the hounds met regularly in the Essex countryside, where we know Godfrey had come close to mother nature when falling off his horse! In February 1913 the hounds met at Horndon-on-the-Hill. "It was 1.15pm before hounds roused a hare on a small wheatfield west of Little Milgroves and, owing to the fog, there did not appear at first to be a very good scent, although it subsequently proved to be first rate. Hounds hunted across the Bulphan road to Lower Dunton Hall, and, warming to their work with an improving scent, described two circles before they were at fault close to the Hall." Things did not go too well from then on. Despite raising a hare, they ran straight to the Tilbury railway line west of Dunton railway arch and crossed the line just in front of a passing train, which doubtless gave the Master a few anxious moments.

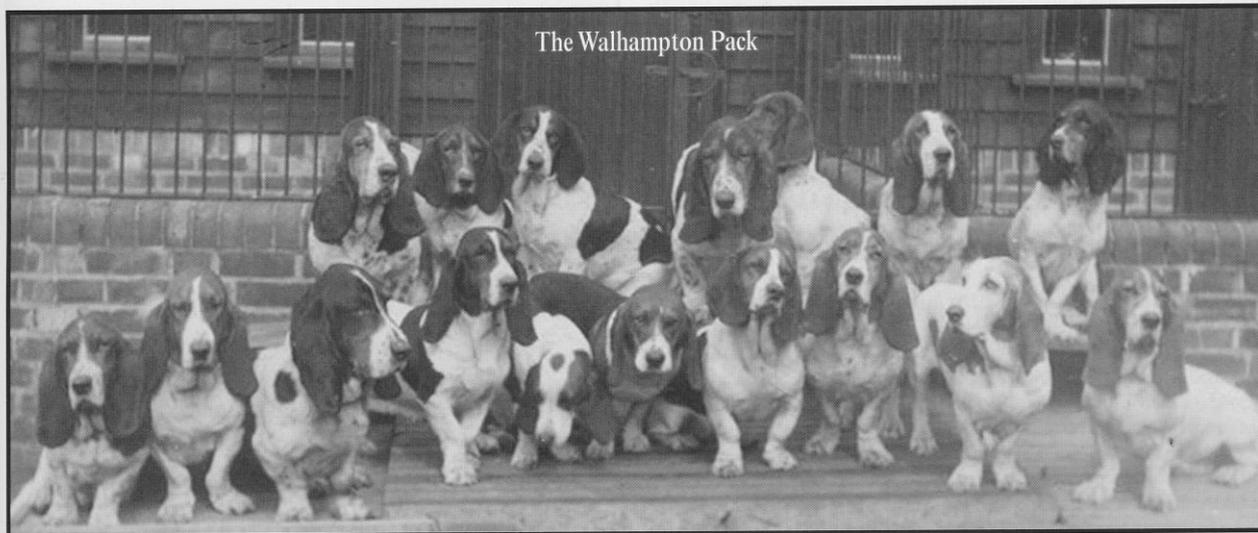
In October later that year, the hounds met at the old market town of Rochford. "A hare ran a circle towards the sewage works, then bore towards the field, where hounds found, but she was relieved by two other hares jumping up. However, the pack fastened on to the line of one, which led over the Stambridge road, and ran on through some mangold towards Potash cottages, where hounds checked." It seems the hare's undoing was in entering a nearby orchard, where the hounds caught up with her.



In 1914 noted authority A. Croxton Smith gave a retrospect on the "Basset" year, finding that Queen Alexandra was breeding consistent medium-sized hounds on sound legs and feet. The third show of working Bassetts at Banbury, Oxfordshire, in the summer saw "the very leggy hounds having practically disappeared." Captain Heseltine's Bassetts took most of the prizes with his "most typical and level pack. These are all hounds of great size, bone and substance, with the true Bloodhound head. Those who like the big hounds cannot get way from their character, and one cannot fail to admire the general uniformity of Captain Heseltine's pack."

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Soon after, Lieutenant-Colonel Morrison, who had been a whipper-in for Godfrey Heseltine for many years, reformed the depleted Walhampton pack and changed its name to Westerby, to differentiate it from the Walhampton show-prefix. The Westerby too became a noted Basset pack in England.



The years passed and at Crufts 1925 Godfrey Heseltine, by now a Major, "secured both certificates with members of his Walhampton pack, Andrew and Arrow of that prefix being the respective winners." These two had been out hunting with Walhampton Diana the day before Crufts, and from all accounts had a great run in a gale of wind. With the Basset once again finding favor, there was every prospect of them "coming back to at least the minor popularity which they enjoyed in Mr. Everett Millais' time. The Basset's scenting powers are marvellous, and as the breed possesses the attraction of the bizarre as well as being an efficient sportsman, it should, with the keen demand for it now so prevalent in America, find its new progress sure-footed here."

The end of the Heseltine era came on August 4, 1932 when, aged 61, Godfrey committed suicide at his residence in Lutterworth, near Rugby. The verdict was "Suicide while of unsound mind". Some, including brother Christopher, thought that the falls in the polo and hunting field had affected his mind. Others said it was no secret that he was worried that taxation and the cost of maintaining his estate with its staff of household servants, grooms and gardeners was a burden on his resources. The cause of death was gunshot wounds to the head.

His gardener said he noticed the Major's legs protruding from the summer house. "I heard a bubbling sound and saw the Major's leg moving. I passed by and took no notice as I thought the Major might be doing some little job." Nearly two hours later, he returned to the summer house. He

How do I know all this? My researches for the book *Petit Basset Griffon Vendéen* led me into the wonderful world of my very first breed, as many Basset owners/breeders of a century or more ago were instrumental in introducing the rough-coated Basset to UK shores.



Ethel Wright, who used to breed and kennel the Walhamptons for Major Heseltine. The three dogs are Faithful, Mimi and Fresia. Date - 1916.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROS ACKLAND

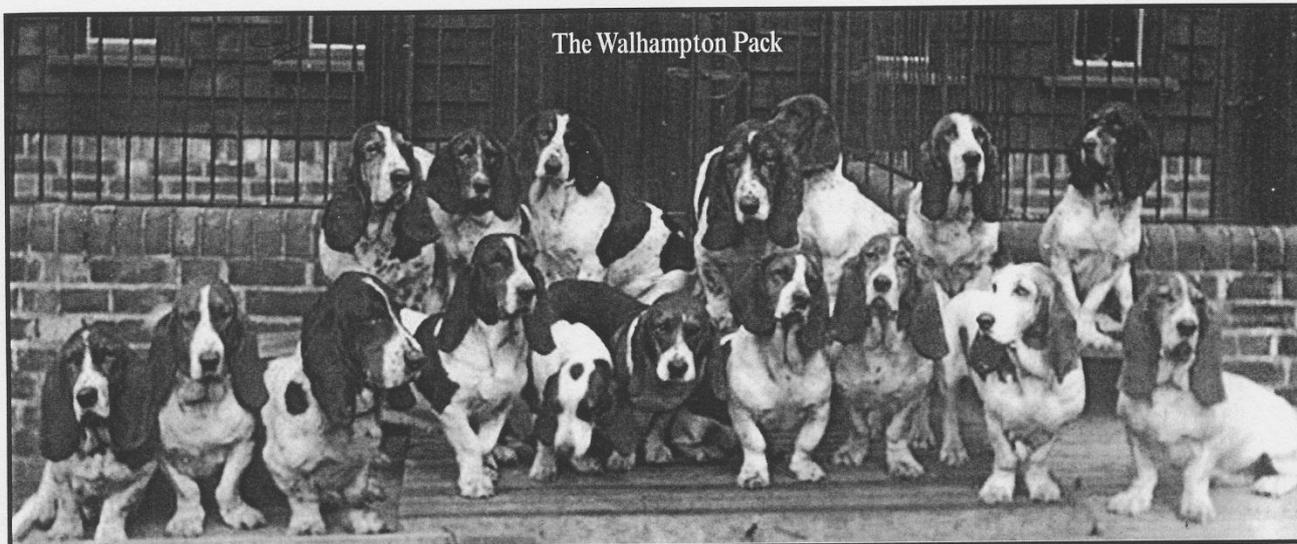
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Lee W. Stockfelt established this fund in 1995 with a \$2500 donation in memory of his wife, Beverly. The annual interest from this fund is used to purchase a trophy which is presented to the breeder of the winner of Best of Breed at the Nationals. All donations become a permanent part of the principle. Donors may contribute in memory of loved ones who were either human or animal. Donations in any amount are acknowledged in the Nationals catalog.

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