

CLARA BOWRING

› LARKBEARE KENNEL ›

Influential Aristocrat



I chose Clara Bowring of Larkbeare Afghan Hounds (UK) as my topic for this *Canine Chronicle* "Hounds Special" because Ms. Bowring is very important in the founding and establishment of The Afghan Hound breed. I had no idea when I started researching what an interesting and important family she belonged to, and I had no idea of her importance in the founding and establishment of at least two other breeds.

Ms. Bowring, is very typical of the aristocracy that established numerous dog breeds in England in the early twentieth century. Clara Mary Aloysia Bowring (1893-1980), was a daughter of Lewin Bowring (1824-1910) who was Private Secretary to Lord Canning, Governor-General of India 1858, Chief Commissioner of Mysore and Coorg 1862. Ms. Bowring was the granddaugh-



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**Sir John Bowring, (1792-1872)
Governor of Hong Kong 1854-1859**

ter of Sir John Bowring, (1792-1872) Governor of Hong Kong 1854-1859. Ms. Bowring is descended from two generations of diplomats, who on behalf of the UK Government ruled entire countries or provinces thereof.

Other early Afghan Hound pioneers included various military notables such as Major Mackenzie, importer of Afghan Hound "Shahzada" in 1888, a hound reputedly owned by the Shah Of Persia (and available to view in the British Museum along with Moroo, another Afghan Hound imported by Major Mackenzie), Capt. Cary-Baynard, importer of "Afghan Bob" in 1902, Capt. John Banff, importer of "Zardin" in 1907, the Afghan Hound upon which the breed standard is based, Major Bell Murray and Ms. Jean Manson importers of the "Bell Murray" line of Afghan Hounds in 1921, Capt. Carpentier, importer of Ms. Bowring's Larkbeare Afghan Hounds in 1924, and Major and Mary Amps, importers of the "Ghazni" line of Afghan Hounds in 1925. Most of these military officers were deployed in India or the North West frontier between India and Afghanistan (this is pre partitioning of India into India and Pakistan) and they had firsthand experience of native hounds.

In that era and with the English class system of the early twentieth century, military officers had a high social standing, and usually came from "good families", with the "right breeding", and went to the "right

**Mrs. Lumsden and Clara Bowring
with some of their favorite Shelties**



school". Their overseas exploits captured the imagination of the public and when they returned to England they brought with them various exotic things, including dogs. Such military people were deemed "experts" on foreign dog breeds, largely because nobody else in England had any firsthand experience of these dogs or knowledge of their native lands.

Ms. Bowring was born into such a legacy. In her case an exceptional legacy, particularly that of her grandfather Sir John Bowring. Undoubtedly Ms. Bowring would have been an established figure amongst the higher social classes of the day.

One only has to look at the "Patrons" of The Kennel Club at the beginning of the twentieth century to see a list that is full of the nobility and military officers. The Kennel Club was itself founded by a "group of gentlemen". Many breeds emerged and became established by virtue of "gentlemen's activities" such as Fox Hunting (eg; Foxhound), Game Shooting (eg; Gundogs/ Retrievers).

Ms. Bowring was a founding member of the first Afghan Hound breed club – "The Afghan Hound Club" (1925) which also drew up the first breed standard. The UK Kennel Club gave the Afghan Hound formal recognition and individual classification in 1925. The AKC first registered Afghan Hounds in 1926.

For a National Kennel Club to recognize a new breed, several essentials are required to be in place which includes: sufficient number of registrations and entries at shows to justify a separate and individual breed classification, consistency of type so that the breed is instantly recognizable, the existence of a breed standard, etc. For sure in 1925 there was no consistency of type in Afghan Hounds in the UK.

This author is thus puzzled how/why The Afghan Hound achieved such early recognition by the UK Kennel Club. For a fuller discussion on this topic and photos of early Afghan Hounds please visit - <http://afghanhound-times.com/recog.htm>. Suffice to say, and within the lim-

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itations of space herein that limits a fuller discussion, that this author suspects that it was the influence of important people of the day, rather than the fundamentals of the breed that resulted in The Kennel Club's recognition of The Afghan Hound as early as 1925. By contrast, the Americans didn't see their first Afghan Hounds until the early 1920s but recognized the breed shortly thereafter-in 1926 (probably aided by the fact that the breed was already recognized in the UK?).

As mentioned earlier, Ms. Bowring imported two Afghan Hounds which she selected during a visit to India in 1924 - Shahjehan Of Larkbeare, bred by Capt Carpentier in India and Jahanara Of Larkbeare (breeder, pedigree unknown). Shahjehan was eventually exported to the USA but he does not figure in the American pedigree history. Records indicate that Ms. Bowring only bred one litter of Afghan Hounds from the above two imports. All other Larkebeare Afghan Hounds appear as breeder, pedigree unknown. On hindsight, perhaps Ms. Bowring had become more interested in other breeds, or her housing situation inhibited her managing the larger breed of the Afghan Hound and encouraged her to be attracted to the smaller coated breeds.

I mention housing above because a feature of Ms. Bowring's life was that she did not appear to have a long-term or permanent personal residence. In 1925/1927, she lived in Ascot (on the edge of West London, not far from Windsor Castle) or in the county of Hampshire, just south of London. Through the 1930s she lived in a variety of hotels, typically close to Westminster, London (remembering her family connections to Westminster, the seat of the UK Government, was this place of residence significant?) or Chelsea, still in London but a little further west. My ESSC research contact pointed out that fact that Ms. Bowring always seemed to give her address as a hotel. She was a wealthy woman and could have afforded to purchase her own residence, and the fact that she spent so many years living in hotels may well have been the reason she did not breed extensively, or partnered with others who had breeding and kennel facilities.

Whilst on residences, let us consider the name "Larkbeare" which is a small town in Exeter in the west of England. The Bowring family originated in the town of Larkbeare and named their house "Little Larkbeare". Inter-



British Museum



Photo taken at the British Museum of Shahzada an Afghan Hound, typical of the 1880 era imports to England.

estingly, in the two homes that Ms. Bowring lived (Ascot and Hampshire) she named her houses "Little Larkbeare". Clearly she had great affection for the name and adopted the name of Larkbeare for her Kennel.

It would appear that Ms. Bowring's first breed was actually the Shetland Sheepdog (Sheltie). The first Sheltie Champion was made up in 1915. Ms. Bowring was owner of the 4th Sheltie Champion of record - Larkbeare Rusk in 1924 (the same year she acquired her first Afghan Hounds).

Whilst we don't know what, if any, influence Ms. Bowring had in the process of the Afghan Hounds recognition by The Kennel Club, other than her being a founding member of the AHC which drew up the first breed standard in 1925, we do know what influence she had in getting the AKC to register Shelties imported from the UK.

Shelties were first registered in March 1909 by The Kennel Club as "Shetland Collies" but following protests from Collie people, the breeds name was changed to "Shetland Sheepdog" in October 1909. Shelties first arrived in the USA in 1908 and were recognized by the AKC in 1911. Because English breeders had introduced a Collie cross into the breed and KC export pedigrees included the word Collie in the name of the dogs in the pedigree, the AKC would not register imported Shelties from the UK with the word Collie in the pedigree. The AKC view was that the UK breed was a Collie cross and not purebred. At this time there were only two breedable Shetland Sheepdogs in the USA!

Catherine Coleman Moore (Sheltieland Kennels, USA) visited England, and joined forces with Miss Clara Bowring. They discussed the situation with the Kennel

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A montage of all the early Afghan Hounds mentioned in the article (you can see how much they varied in type)

Club who agreed to remove the word Collie from Shetland Sheepdog export pedigrees and thus enabled the AKC to thereafter recognize UK Sheltie imports.

Ms. Bowring's Sheltie bitch Larkbeare Apricot Flan was exported to Sweden in 1931 and was mated with another UK import - S Ch. Connis of Redbraes. The resultant litter produced the first homebred Swedish Sheltie champion - S & DK Ch. Shepherd's Butterfly. A tangible legacy of Ms. Bowring's Larkbeare kennels in Europe.

Ms. Bowring was Secretary of the English Shetland Sheepdog Club from 1929 through 1948, after which she became Chairman. Catherine Coleman Moore was founding member of the American Shetland Sheepdog Club, its first secretary, and she registered the first litter of Shelties recorded by the AKC.

Ms. Bowring was exhibiting her Afghans mid-1920s and exhibiting Shelties throughout the decade into the 1930s. By commencement of the 1930s Ms. Bowring was also exhibiting Miniature Poodles. In 1934 she was exhibiting her home-bred Miniature Poodle Larkbeare Blue Spark.

We need to return to Shelties because we need to return to "the aristocracy". Ms. Bowring's cousin, Mrs. Lumsden, was an important and successful Sheltie breeder from the earliest days. I don't think the Lumsdens matched the Bowrings in terms of service achievements for HM Government, but they probably exceeded the Bowrings in terms of wealth. Clova is a small village in the highlands of Aberdeenshire in Scotland. Dare I suggest again that such a family pedigree would have been

helpful in pursuit of getting things done in the world of dogs?

Ms. Bowring and Mrs. Lumsden were partners and shared the Larkbeare affix. Mr. Lumsden was one of the first people to bring Shetland Sheepdogs from the Island to the mainland. We include a photograph of Ms. Bowring and Mrs. Lumsden at Clova. The Lumsden family tree traces back to the year 1098 in Scotland.

Ms. Bowring also became involved in Miniature Poodles and was part of the group that drew up the initial "definition" for the breed. Ms. Bowring bred and exhibited poodles from the early 1930s. She wrote or co-authored a total of 6 books about the Poodle.

As well as all the achievements above, Ms. Bowring has some other achievements we should mention. Ms. Bowring was Sheltie Breed Columnist for the UK weekly canine newspaper *Our Dogs*. She was Chairman of the Ladies Division of The Kennel Club for several years. She judged Afghan Hounds at Crufts 5 times between 1929-1955. She judged Shelties at Crufts at least 3 times between 1929-1950. That judging record is itself astonishing. Few Breed Judges get to judge their breed(s) at Crufts more than once.

I'm going to close with an anecdote from Ms. Rogers of Riverhill Shelties who wrote the memorial for the ESSC magazine following Ms. Bowring's death in 1980 - "Clara had a great interest in a Boys Club in the East End Of London. It was while she was working there that she told us a

story that made us laugh. One Monday morning one of the 'cleaning ladies' appeared with the most dreadful black eye. Clara remarked on this and asked how she had got it and was told that the woman's husband had given her one on Saturday night. Clara said, 'Well, I think perhaps I am better off not having a husband'. 'Perhaps you are,' replied the cleaner, 'if you can ever get over the dreadful shame of it!'"



Mrs. Lumsden at Clova, Auchindoir, Scotland with some of the dogs (Shelties). Old Champion Ch Larkbeare Rusk standing by her feet



Photo taken at 1952 EESC Championship Show. (Left) Mr. Joy (Center) Ms. Bowring and (Right) Ms. Rogers (Riverhill Shelties) Dog on left is Vennards Benedictine, Dog on right is Riverhill Rescuer (Ms. Rogers breeding)

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