



# Citizens Against Greyhound Racing

CAGR offices are located at:

63 E. State Street  
Doylestown, PA 18901  
Phone: 215-340-7658  
Fax: 215-340-9566  
E-mail:  
[cagr@nogreyhoundracing.com](mailto:cagr@nogreyhoundracing.com)

## Breed History

### The Greyhound: Past and Present

#### In the Beginning

Sometime around 6000 BC, an anonymous artist captured the beauty and grace of a long-legged, slender hound on the walls of a tomb in present-day Turkey. Today, the greyhound captures our hearts with that same beauty and grace, along with a nobility of spirit. Greyhounds trace their roots back to the time of the ancient Pharaohs, and perhaps even farther. The early Romans believed that the greyhound came from the land of the Celts. The Celts, on the other hand, believed that the greyhound came from Greece and called it Greek Hound (which is one possible source of the name greyhound). Whether or not this is, indeed, the case, what we do know is that greyhounds were kept by the royal families of Egypt as hunters and companions. From there, the greyhound made its way to Greece, Rome, and Gaul and eventually into England. Once there, it again became the favored dog of the nobility, who prized its keen sight and swift legs for hunting and coursing. Kings and Queens of England and Scotland kept greyhounds and the breed made its way to the Colonies. Greyhounds are the first breed of dog mentioned in literature, the only breed of dog mentioned by name in the Bible, and a favorite reference of William Shakespeare in his plays. The name greyhound is thought by some to be derived from the Saxon word "grei", which means beautiful. In the late sixteenth century, Gervase Markham wrote that of all dogs, greyhounds were the most noble and princely and, truly, the master of all other dogs whatsoever. Anyone who has ever been lucky enough to own one of these beautiful animals will surely agree.

#### The Land of the Pharaohs

Dogs were a vital part of the culture of ancient Egypt. One of the most prominent of ancient Egyptian gods was Anubis, who is depicted as a beautiful animal with the head and ears of a jackal, the body of a greyhound and the tail of a wolf. Another god who took the form of a dog was Set, represented by a greyhound with a forked tail. Not only did the ancient Egyptians allow their hounds to participate in almost every family relationship, they decorated their tombs with images of greyhounds and favorite dogs were mummified and buried with their owners, so the bond between them would continue into the next life. The vast number of dog mummies, as well as canine cemeteries, stand as a testament to the deep and lasting bond between the Egyptians and their dogs. Built for speed and possessing keen eyesight, greyhounds were prized as hunters. They were held in such high esteem that only members of the royal family were allowed to own them. Among the pharaohs known to keep greyhounds were Tutankhamen, Amenhotep II, Queen Hatshepsut and Cleopatra VII. In fact, in 1493 BC, Queen Hatshepsut traded four of her greyhounds to the land of Punt for, among other things, panther skins, huge piles of myrrh twice a man's height, 31 myrrh trees, over 3000 small cattle and rings of commercial

gold weighed in balances ten feet high. As the Egyptians continued to trade with other countries along the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, the greyhound's popularity spread.

## **Greeks, Romans, and Greyhounds**

The greyhound probably arrived in Greece sometime before 1000 BC. In 800 BC, the greyhound became the first dog mentioned in literature, in Homer's Odyssey. In 325 BC, a hound named Peritas reportedly accompanied Alexander the Great on his military campaigns. Coins and art from ancient Greece depict shorthaired hounds that are remarkably similar to the greyhounds of today. This lack of change in the greyhounds appearance is most likely due to the fact that, until modern times, the function of the greyhound remained the same: to use its speed, agility and intelligence in the hunt. The Greek gods (Artemis, Hecate and Pollux to name a few) were often portrayed with greyhounds, as were many Roman gods. It is generally believed that the Romans obtained their greyhounds from either the Greeks or the Celts of Gaul (modern-day France). As the Roman Empire expanded throughout Europe and into Great Britain, the greyhound became more widespread. The Romans began to use their hounds for coursing, testing the dogs' speed and agility against their prey, the hare. In the early first century AD, Ovid describes how the impatient greyhound is held back to give the hare a head start. In 124 AD, the Roman Flavius Arrianus wrote that the purpose of coursing is not to catch the hare, but to enjoy the chase itself. The seeds of the greyhound as a sporting dog were sown.

## **On to England and the Middle Ages**

The greyhound was introduced in England just prior to the ninth century as a result of the crusades, wars, and conquest with Middle Eastern tribes. During this time, greyhounds nearly became extinct, but were saved by clergymen and monks who bred them for the nobility. Greyhounds once again became the favored dog of the nobility. In 1014, King Canute established Forest Laws that prohibited slaves and serfs from owning and hunting with greyhounds. Commoners who hunted with greyhounds in defiance of these laws favored dogs whose coloring allowed them to blend in with the forest, such as black, fawn, red, and brindle. The nobility favored white and spotted dogs that could be more easily seen, making it easier to recover a dog lost in the woods. Among the English aristocracy, one could truly tell a gentleman by his horses and his greyhounds. The greyhound appears in many works of art and literature during this time. The Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts the Battle of Hastings, shows William the Conqueror with his greyhounds. The greyhound is also the first dog to be mentioned in English literature. In Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, greyhounds are described as "swifte as fowel in flight". Edmund de Langley's Mayster of Game, written in 1370, describes the ideal greyhound. Two hundred years later, William Shakespeare has the character of Henry V compare his troops to greyhounds, "I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips/Straining upon the start/The game's afoot."

## **During the Renaissance: Standard of Kings, Sport of Queens**

By the time of the Renaissance, greyhounds were so identified with the nobility that many families began using them on their coats of arms, making the greyhound the most common dog in heraldry. Henry VII and Henry VIII of England showed a running white greyhound and two silver greyhounds on their coat of arms and Henry VIII adopted the greyhound as his personal standard. It remains the symbol of the House of York even today. During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, coursing races, with dogs chasing live rabbits, became popular. Elizabeth I of England was especially fond of coursing and commissioned Thomas, Duke of Norfolk, to draw up rules for judging competitive coursing. In 1638, the Renaissance rules of coursing were published. The rules of coursing have not changed a great deal since then and lure coursing today is still judged on the hounds' ability to follow, their speed, and their endurance. Greyhounds remained popular among England's nobility in the nineteenth century.

H.R.H. Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, had a favorite greyhound Eos, who appeared in numerous court portraits.

## **Coming to America**

Greyhounds first made their way to America in the late 1400's when Christopher Columbus included them on his second expedition to the New World. One greyhound accompanied Francisco de Coronado as far as present-day Mexico. Other greyhounds accompanied Ponce de Leon, Hernando de Soto, Vasco de Balboa and Cortez as they traveled throughout the Americas. Greyhounds traveled with English explorer George Cartwright on his expeditions into Canada in the late 1700's. Baron Friedrich von Steuben, who helped General George Washington during the Revolutionary War, kept his greyhound Azor with him during the long winter at Valley Forge in 1777. In the mid-1800's, greyhounds were imported to North America in large numbers from Ireland to control a jackrabbit epidemic in the Midwest and were later used to hunt coyotes. The US Cavalry used greyhounds to help track down Native Americans, while General George Custer reportedly took his greyhounds with him wherever he went. Soon, greyhounds were used as a sporting dog. One of the first national coursing meets was held in Kansas in 1886. The transition from coursing to racing began as early as 1876, when the first artificial lure was used on a straight track in England. In the early 1900's, an American by the name of Owen Patrick Smith developed a lure that could run on an oval track and greyhound racing began to be considered a sport. This led to the opening of the first greyhound racing track in Emeryville, California in 1919 and the transition of the greyhound from royal companion to racing commodity.

*By: Helen Marie and Brianna Kennedy*