

History of the Pug

Trace the origins of the fascinating Pug from the 11th century BC to the current day.

By Juliette Cunliffe

Black Pugs

In 1877 black was considered a “new” color in the breed. Again there has always been debate as to the actual origin of Lady Brassey’s black Pugs, but she certainly exhibited some black ones at Britain’s Maidstone Show in 1886. One of these was Jack Spratt, who possibly may have been acquired by Lady Brassey on her short trip to China.

However, although black was then claimed as a new color, we know from the paintings of William Hogarth that blacks existed before then. Hogarth’s House of Cards, painted in 1730, depicts a black Pug. A hundred years later, Queen Victoria owned a black Pug that was marked with white. The latter, though, may have been brought into England, perhaps as a gift to the Queen from China.

It has been said that black Pugs had been bred for many years earlier in England, but because they had been bred from apricot-fawns they were considered mutations and thus destroyed at birth. It is also possible, however, that such “blacks” were not true blacks (ebonies), but instead were smuts, so were not considered attractive.

CRUFT AND THE PUG

The formation of Britain’s first Pug Dog Club was discussed in 1881 and approved by The Kennel Club in January 1883. Although not the club’s first Secretary, Mr. Charles Cruft at one time held this office. In 1885 the club held its first show and the show of 1887 was promoted by Cruft himself, revealing his prowess as an organizer of such events. Of course, Cruft went on to produce England’s most prestigious dog shows, which were resumed by The Kennel Club itself in 1948. In 1896 efforts were made to show the black Pug as an Englishmade variety, but despite considerable support this was not allowed. There was a very wellknown black Pug who was known as the “singing Pug.” Apparently, when given a chord on the piano, or by humming, he could pick up the note and sing most tunefully. The black Pug certainly had its admirers, and in 1900 two were reported as having been sold to fanciers in New York for a sum totaling £350.

The Pug in Art

Many artists have incorporated the charming little Pug in their paintings, and from these paintings we have a good indication of the quality of dogs at the time. Goya portrayed some lovely examples of the breed, and from these we can tell that the quality of the breed in Spain was high.

William Hogarth (1697–1764) owned a Pug; his Self Portrait is well known, depicting the artist with his dog. He also included Pugs in other portraits and conversation pieces.

Reinagle is another artist, renowned as an animal painter, who portrayed the charming Pug in his work. Many early dog books include engravings of this adorable breed, though not all of these engravings have been well thought of by breed enthusiasts. Although there are many other portrayals of note, Blonde and Brunette, painted by Charles Burton Barber in 1879, is one of my favorites, depicting a young lady engrossed in her book while her Pug rests comfortably in her arm.

FIRST CLASS

Although Pugs were classified at a show in Birmingham in 1860, there were no entries. The breed was first shown in Britain at Leeds in 1861. In 1886 five Pugs became British champions according to Kennel Club rules at that time, but Challenge Certificates as such were only officially offered to Pugs in 1896. Meissen, or Dresden, porcelain is also famed for its portrayal of the Pug. Indeed, the Pug must surely rank among one of the most popular breeds of dog portrayed in porcelain and other collectable items. Most of those from the 18th century fetch very high prices, and even those from the 19th century are increasingly scarce. Sometimes such renderings are discovered of Pugs with cropped ears, and many have bells around their collars, making them even more charming.

The Pug Comes To America

Although we lack documentation on the arrival of the first Pugs to America, we do know that some dogs were in the country shortly after the Civil War. The breed gained attention because of its uniqueness and, during the 1880s, many Pugs were shown. The breed gained recognition from the American Kennel Club (AKC) in 1885 and was classified in the Toy Group, as it is in other countries around the world.

The breed fell into relative obscurity at the turn of the 20th century as other breeds gained favor, many of which were “exotic imports” at the time. Breeders on the East Coast began stirring up interest in the Pug again, and by 1931 a club was formed. Twenty years later, the Pug Dog Club of America (PDCA), the current parent club for the Pug, was established as the breed’s principal promoter and protector in the US. The first members of the PDCA were prominent Pug people such as Dr. Nancy Riser, Filomena Doherty, Mrs. Joseph Rowe, Suzanne Bellinger, Dr. James Stubbs, Ralph Adair, Mary Lou Mann, Miriam Dock, Mr. And Mrs. John Madore and J. Hartley Mellick, Jr.

JOSEPHINE’S “FORTUNE”

A Pug by the name of Fortune belonged to Napoleon Bonaparte’s first wife, Josephine. Fortune was reputed to have had a somewhat possessive nature, and when the dwarfish man who was to become Emperor entered the bedchamber on his wedding night, the dwarfish dog promptly bit him! By the 1940s, Pug breeders began producing consistent winners. Such kennels as Catawba, Winna Pugs, Paramount, Gin Rickey, Lucky Ace, Clavone and others began to dominate the show scene in North America. The following decade, breeders such as Filomena Doherty, Frederic Soderberg, Mrs. Edwin Pickhardt, Gordon Winders and Rolla Blaylock produced top winners, including an early Best in Show winner, Ch. Pugholm Peter Punkin Eater. To add to the growing Pug fraternity, Peter and Carolyn Standish, Ann Crowley, Shirley and Rayne Thomas, Esther and Gus Wolf, Hazel Martens, Barbara Minella and Agnes Miner represent just some of the important breeders responsible for the Pug’s climb to fame in the US in the 1960s and 1970s.

Since those decades, the Pug has remained a popular breed, frequently seen in the show ring and counted among the top 20 breeds according to the AKC’s registration statistics. Although the Pug is not as flashy and intense as other top contenders in the Toy Group, including his relatives, the Pekingese and Shih Tzu, the breed does well in conformation shows and has racked up an impressive number of Best in Show awards over the years. In 1981, the first Pug ever to win the famous Westminster Kennel Club Show was named Ch. Dhandys Favorite Woodchuck, owned by Robert A. Hauslohner. To date, “Chucky,” as his friends called him, is the only Pug to receive this great honor. He was bred by Mrs. W. U. Braley and Mrs. R. D. Hutchinson and was handled to the win by Robert Barlow.

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The Pug Goes to England Excerpts from Comprehensive Owners Guide: Pugs