

# **SHEFFIELD GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG SOCIETY**

## **THE PAST TO THE PRESENT**

**BY RAY GUEST (Patron)**

The following is a summary of the history of the Sheffield GSD Society from its conception in the mid 1920's until the end of the 1970's based on my father's memories of the early days and my memories from the 1950's.

It was believed the Sheffield Alsatian Society started its life in 1927 based solely on the existence of a receipt issued in that year for my father's membership fee but after his death his brother, who had also been a member, although he never owned a dog, gave me the solid silver Society badge. I have recently had the hallmark checked and found it to have been issued by the Birmingham Assay Office in 1927, so it is reasonable to assume the Society was established a year or two earlier. Incidentally the membership fee was five shillings (25p) for single membership and seven shillings and sixpence (37.5p) for joint membership per annum which was quite expensive when you consider the average working man's weekly wage was between £3 and £5. The same fees were still in force in 1960. The solid silver hallmarked badge was sold, at a profit, for seven shillings and sixpence.

Before the formation of the Society, local Alsatian fanciers entered their dogs at match nights and shows organised by general canine clubs in the City and its surrounding districts. Very few people owned cars in those times; dogs were not allowed on public transport, mainly tramcars, and so the enthusiasts thought little of walking or cycling several miles to attend these events. No wonder photographs of those days show the dogs to be lean and hard.

The popularity of the breed grew rapidly and the enthusiasts, who felt they were not being judged fairly against other breeds by judges who have had little knowledge of the Alsatian, got together to form a society of people with a common interest.

This interest was shared by people from all walks of life, doctors, solicitors, shopkeepers, teachers, engineers, steelworkers, the "little mesters" of the Sheffield cutlery trade, etc.

One of the first venues for the Society's meetings was the basement of the Amalgamated Engineering Unions Office near the city centre. The floor above the basement was supported by substantial concrete pillars which the over enthusiastic handlers didn't always manage to avoid. Fortunately there was usually someone there to apply medical aid.

As the Society became more widely known and the popularity of the breed increased, it was essential. if you wanted to enter your dog at match nights, to get there as least an hour before the official starting time, because the K.C. rules did not allow more than fifty

dogs to compete at each match meeting. Some of today's open breed shows would like that sort of entry.

In spite of the difficult times there were still a few people amongst the membership with money, who contributed prizes for these match meetings. On a particularly good night one could win a leather lead or collar just by winning the first round. The major winners could win clocks, tea and dinner services and of course being Sheffield, cases of cutlery. As a boy I recall a lead lying around the home the like of which I have never seen since. It had been made by a local cobbler and was one of the first things won by my father's dog. There was also a silver toasting fork by the fireplace donated by a local silversmith and various spoons which are still in use today.

There is no record or memory of any specific obedience training classes being held, although everybody's dog seemed to be fairly proficient in the basic obedience requirements.

Shows were held but there is no record of their frequency or status. An old, undated press report of one show, found attached to a prize card, indicated the entry had been good. The judge had been either captain or major (later) Colonel Baldwin.

In the slump of the early 1930's, unemployment in the Sheffield area\*was very high and people could hardly afford to feed their families, let alone dogs. My father's interest in the Society virtually ended when for the third time his dogs died through distemper which was rife in the area. I was often pestering my parents for a dog and my interest in the Alsatian in particular was kept alive by people meeting my father in the street, or visiting the house, asking his advice about their dog or asking him to give an opinion on whether he thought their bitch was in whelp.

There is no knowledge of the fortunes of the Society from the early 1930's until I acquired an Alsatian bitch in the mid 1950's and joined the Society. I had difficulty in finding out if the Society still existed. It was really in the doldrums, there were very few members, a former Secretary/Treasurer had misappropriated what few funds there were, and the Society was in debt. Meetings were held in the back room of a public house hosted by an amenable landlord who owned two Alsatians, one of which would fetch a brown ale of a Guinness from the bar on his master's command. The bitch was so reliable in this task that the landlord would give you the drink free if she got it wrong. The monthly match meetings were not well attended. On a good night there would be five or six dogs.

AT the first AGM, I attended, some 2-3 months after joining, everyone who turned up, including myself and my wife, Betty, was voted on the Committee and still there was not a full complement of twelve. Twice in that year each member of the Committee contributed £2 to keep the Society solvent. In the same year I was, somewhat reluctantly, appointed Secretary. I was astonished at some of those early committee meetings. Because of the past nobody seemed to have any trust in the chairman, treasurer and secretary, and sometimes feelings were so heated they almost came to blows. But we had

a strong Chairman in George Watson who always managed to calm things down and after the meeting the main contestants bought each other drinks before going home.

The venue for the meetings changed from public house to public house several times over the next few years. Each change brought either better facilities, more room or a more amenable landlord. Membership slowly but surely increased and obedience training classes were re-introduced at first on a fortnightly basis and later, as the word spread, on a weekly basis.

I managed my first show, to be held at the Somme Barracks in Sheffield on 6th April 1957 with Major w. Scott (who owned **Champion Danko von Menkenmoor of Hardwick**) judging twelve breed classes and Mr. J. J. Howe from Manchester judging three obedience classes. I typed the schedules and catalogues on the "skins" and ran them off one at a time on a hand operated flat bed duplicator, borrowed, ably assisted with folding and stapling, by my wife and parents, and children! Entry fees were five shillings per dog per class. Prize money was paid, One Pound, Ten Shillings and Five Shillings for first, second and third

prizes respectively for the breed classes and 50% higher for the obedience classes.. Admission for spectators was One Shilling and Sixpence for adults and Nine Pence for accompanied children. The catalogues were sold for One Shilling. The entries for breed were 26 dogs and 35 bitches making 49 and 69 entries respectively, and 15 dogs making 25 entries in obedience. The bread for the sandwiches which were made by my wife was baked the day before the show by my mother. other ladies on the committee provided cakes and biscuits. The show was considered to be a great success. Several of the entries eventually became champions or championship show winners. Further shows were held with continuing success and soon the maximum of three open shows per year were being held. Inevitably, with all this success, internal politics raised it's ugly head, one or two volatile members convinced the membership that under their leadership a new committee could do even better. My wife and I remained on the committee and at the time I was being promoted in my job and with the extra responsibility I was pleased to relinquish much of the work I had been doing for the Society. The new committee failed miserably. The membership decreased, the healthy bank balance was reduced, a show had to be cancelled due to lack of entries and, because of this, the Kennel Club would only allow the Society to hold one show per year for several years. The new committee mostly abandoned their posts and the previous committee members were asked to take up the reins again. The membership slowly increased but the real turning point was when the Society started using the Ellesmere Community Centre for it's meeting and training classes. This provided a large room near the City centre. The Society became a section of the Centre helping to raise funds for the local people to provide outings for the children of the poor and the aged, and "goodies" for them at Christmas.

All breeds of dogs were accepted for the obedience training and the classes with such instructors as Ray Thorpe, Norman Vizard and others, became so popular that numbers had to be restricted. There were waiting lists of people wishing to start in the next session. Because of this popularity, some of the obedience people felt that they should

have more say in the running of the society because they were contributing more to the finances than the breed people. The next A.G.M. was attended by more than one hundred members (most of the previous A.G.M.'s had only managed to attract twenty or so members). It was only the chairman's casting vote which prevented the Society from being managed by owners of other breeds, and who had no particular interest in German Shepherd Dogs. (We had by now changed the name of the Society.) To prevent this from ever being able to happen again the rules were changed. However, it was agreed that the interests of the obedience side would be looked after by two designated committee members. A large section of the obedience people deserted the Society to form their own club thus reducing the membership by about 50%

1977 was the Society's Golden Jubilee. Every member received a commemorative pen knife and on 6th February 1977 a very special open show was held the venue for this show was the Doncaster Racecourse New Stand. The breed judges were Bill Paterson doing dogs and George Woods doing bitches. Although the Society had been unsuccessful in obtaining championship show status there was a definite championship show atmosphere. There were eighteen breed classes and five categories of obedience, which, due to the large entry, was split into fourteen classes. A total of six hundred and thirty nine exhibits made nine hundred and fifty five entries. There was also a parade of nineteen champions which was ably commentated on by the Society's new president, the late Mr. Harry Glover. Partly due to the huge success of this show and the efforts of a hard working committee, championship show status was granted by the K.C. and the first championship show was held on 4th February 1978. This show was judged by Mrs. Judy Pilling (dogs) and Mrs. Sheila Johnson (bitches). There were twenty three breed classes, but, no obedience classes, for the show which was once again held at Doncaster Racecourse New Stand. A total of three hundred and forty three exhibits made four hundred and sixty one entries. The C.C. winners were CH. DELRIDGE ERHARD (dogs) and HENDRAWEN INGOT (bitches).

The next four years saw steady progress with successful championship and open shows managed by a hardworking committee led by stalwarts such as Norman Vizard, Ray Thorpe, Eric Somerfield and myself. The Society had a healthy bank balance. There was a good enthusiastic membership. The future looked very rosy.

The Society in general sponsored a middle of the road type of dog. By this, I mean that exaggerated dogs from either the English side or the German side were promoted. Nor were judges who encouraged this type of dog. However, a nucleus of members who did support the lean, hard roached back dogs of the time secretly got together and canvassed such support from outside the Society. At an A.G.M. all this support managed to oust the leading members of the committee. I still remained on the committee, but, not for long, as I found I could not work with the new officials. The ousted officials were very soon missing the opportunity of training their dogs and entering match nights with suitable judges decided to form another club. At first it was thought that a branch of the B.A.A. would be suitable and then someone thought of trying to resurrect the Derbyshire Alsatian Club. Because of this involvement I lost touch with the activities of the Society for a few years.

In that time the venue at Ellesmere Community Centre had been abandoned due to vandalism to the building and to cars parked outside. A new venue had been found and a neighbour, whose dogs I started to handle at shows encouraged me to at least attend training classes with her as it was within reasonable walking distance. I found the officials and committee at that time, although dedicated to the breed, were more interested in the working side. Breed meeting nights were still held on a monthly basis and were fairly well supported.

After a few years, this venue also became unavailable. The powers that be claimed the building was unsafe and would have to be demolished. Ten years later the building is still standing and is used by the local Asian Community for social and educational purposes.

The next venue to be used was at Stubby Hollows Equestrian Centre near Dronfield, some six miles from the City centre. The venue was not popular at first because it was not in Sheffield. The actual training area was a barn about the size of a football pitch, with an open end and a soft peat and sand floor. These were other factors for its unpopularity, i.e. it was extremely cold in winter being at the top of an exposed hill, and the surface of the floor was easily picked up on shoes and transferred to carpets in the car and at home. However, this was probably the best training area ever occupied by the Society and on fine summer nights training could be done outside in a field close by. Because of the size of the barn, breed training, obedience training and some agility exercises were able to be carried out simultaneously. In spite of the drawbacks the numbers of members, both breed and obedience, increased. Some members travelled forty miles or so every week to take advantage of the training facilities. Match nights were well attended so that it was no embarrassment to invite judges from afar including some championship show judges.

At this turning point in the Society fortunes there was yet again a small hard working committee in being led by an industrious chairman, Doug Stanyard and the Secretary Pat Copeland. My wife and I were invited to join the committee again and very soon I became show secretary. During this period the social side of

the Society became very active. Christmas parties were held for members and their friends in local hostelrys. A couple of very successful barn dances were held at the training venue. A well attended talk given by Malcolm Willis and a very well attended slide show given by the late Eric Stuttard both accompanied by pie and peas were held at our show venue, the Avesta Sports Club.

The next few years saw very successful open shows and championship shows with both British and foreign judges (Italy, Germany, Ireland, Spain and Sweden).

In recent years the venue for these shows has been the Avesta Sports Club which is literally at the bottom of my garden, which was very convenient for me, and being only a half mile from the M1 motorway junction was convenient for exhibitors. Unfortunately, due to inconsiderate exhibitors churning up the grass and getting bogged down in forbidden areas, and not cleaning up after their dogs, this venue is no longer available to us.

In the late 1990's the numbers attending the training classes both breed and obedience, fell quite dramatically, and with the fees at the equestrian centre rising the society was losing money. The auditor of the Society's accounts advised that something must be done soon if solvency was to be maintained. Attempts were made to attract more members which were a little successful but were not sufficient. A search was made for a new training venue but nothing suitable could be found. As a result all dog training was abandoned. This could be resumed if suitable premises become available.

For the **75th Anniversary Year, 2002** there is to be a Championship breed and open obedience show on Sunday, 22nd September. The judges for the championship show will be Kathy George and John Hugo (Australia). A breed seminar is to be held later in the year; details will be published in due course.

I suppose the following applies to most of the breed clubs in this country, and probably around the world. This history of the Sheffield G.S.D. Society indicates it's ups and downs but it should be borne in mind that it's formation from day one was for promotion and welfare of the breed, not the promotion of individuals egos, not the promotion of individuals dogs and not the promotion of individuals business interests. This article is titled "The Past and The Present". Who can foretell what the future holds in store but I hope it will be good.

The shows will continue to be held, currently at a new venue at Goole. It is not entirely satisfactory due to it's distance from Sheffield but from the experience of the one show held there it looks promising.

#### **GLOSSARY**

The following is a list of members past and present who, by showing their dogs successfully at Championship Shows, and/or by obtaining approval from the Kennel Club to judge at that level, helped to bring the Sheffield German Shepherd Dog Society to it's current prominence in the World of the German Shepherd Dog.

Chris and Pat Bows (VORHANDEN)  
Lawrie & Anne Cooke (GLENROYAL)  
Anne Elliot (TANFIELD)  
Nem Elliot (HVITSAND)  
Percy Elliot (VIKKAS)  
Olive Evans (MYNSTONMOOR)  
Alan and Gail Francis (DANSHAWE)  
Ann Frizel (TREGELBERG)  
Ray and Betty Guest (ALBREDA)  
Mel and Ann Hardy (AMHARD)  
John and Janet Hodgson (CALAGRAN)  
Neil and Angela Ibbotson (IBSPARR)  
Mick and Jane Jarvis (ELMTRAUT)

John and Mary Lingard (ZEIGLAND)  
Bill Morton (GAILSMOOR)  
Stuart & Linda Morton (LINSDDOWN)  
Freda Singleton (JONQUEST)  
Eric and Rene Somerfield (RENERIC)  
Tony and Sue Stanbra (TONISTAN)  
Roy Turner (TURNSTYLE)  
Ray and Connie Thorpe (RATHCONDEL)  
Tony and Kath Wade (KYLONIE)  
Sheila Whittaker (SHEDOCAST)  
Chris Wileman (CARLISTON)  
Danny and Linda Wilson (LINDANVALE)  
Andrew and Carol Winfrow (SADIRA)

I apologise if I have omitted anyone; it is not intentional, my memory ain't what it used to be!

