The Origin of the Australian Terrier

There appears to be a general impression that the origin of the Australian Terrier is cloaked in mystery! For some years I have read articles which have claimed that various breeds have contributed to the synthesis of the “Aussie” and they provided most interesting reading. However, some of those breeds had not even been imported into Australia when the breed was established.

The Australian Terrier was originally known as the Broken Coated Terrier and was similar in type and character to terrier of the same name in Scotland about that time. The name was changed to Australian Rough Coated Terrier in 1889, which name was meant to indicate Australian-bred stock of Rough Coated Terriers, as distinct from the imported stock, and a specialist club was formed to draw up a standard and to foster the breed. The breed was first exhibited at the main Australian shows as the Broken Coated Terrier, and enjoyed quite varied classification, the classes provided including color and weight divisions: under seven pounds and seven pounds and over were allotted to each of the three color groups.

The colors entered were:
1. Rough Coated Terriers-Blue
2. Rough Coated Terriers-Sandy
3. Rough Coated Terriers-any color except blue or sandy

The last-mentioned class no doubt catered for the Blue and Tan, and as appeared at that time, the Black and Tan.

Most interesting were some of the pedigrees which claimed an IMPORTED parent. Take, for example, “Pelham Napper”. This dog was exhibited in the seven pound and over Blue Class and won V.H.C. He claimed as his sire “Pelham Scottie” IMPORTED. “Bir Twig”, another exhibit at the same show, had for his dam “Jolly” IMPORTED. At this time the Victoria Poultry and Dog Society held their annual exhibition and the chief winner was a kennel mate to “Bir Twig”, just mentioned “Bir Pinchar”, who also repeated his win of special for Best Rough Coated Terrier in the Show of the previous year in 1896. He was then two years old. His color was described as Deep Blue Grey and he was advertised as a Rough Coated SCOTCH Terrier. “Bir Twig” was entered in the class for Sandies and was described by his owners as a rich fawn.

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There is no doubt what so ever in my mind that the Australian Terrier originated from the following breeds:

- Skye Terrier
- Scotch Terrier
- Dandie Dinmont Terrier

At different times the Yorkshire Terrier was introduced. Some years later the Irish Terrier and of recent years the Cairn Terrier. But these were used well after the breed was established and were more in the nature of experiments to secure either color and to reduce or control size.

It is claimed that the popular color in the Scotch Terrier in the early days was a red, and from this variety emanated the Irish Terrier, perhaps indirectly. The Yorkshire Terrier is descended from the Skye Terrier, so that these breeds were only a slight variation of their progenitors that were originally used. I must mention that in the Australian Terrier was already recognized before Irish Terriers came to this country, and this applies also to Yorkshire Terriers, and if course, it was many years later when Cairn Terriers were imported. I have reliable knowledge that some of the best specimens were bred from “black and tan” bitches. Do not confuse SCOTCH with the later variety Scottish.
To more readily visualize the “Scotch Terrier” as the dominant influence in the Australian Terrier type, I refer to three interesting pictures:

1. “Scotch Terrier, engraved by Lizars (1840) from a drawing by Stewart.
2. “Peto”, a Scotch Terrier drawn by L. Wells in 1848. This dog was black and tan and was cropped and docked.

(These all appear in the recently published The Scottish Terrier by Dorothy S. Caspersz in the Dog Lovers Library Series.)

Mr. Radcliffe exhibited “Rough” in 1865 but without success. It was suggested that although he competed against the “Scotch” Terrier, he had no separate breed classification. The smaller variety of broken haired Terriers had also failed to win in competition with the Yorkshire Terrier.

The interested fancier would, I am sure, agree that certain features in these specimens have been retained to this day. It may be noted also that the early Scotch Terrier was not infrequently black and tan, although mostly red.

Skye Terrier. Attention is drawn to a picture of Mr. A.H. Shaw’s “Flora” (1877) taken from a drawing on wood by L. Barton Barber. (Page 405 in Cassell’s New Book of the Dog). It will be agreed that the “long body on short strong legs, adapted for burrowing” has not changed very much in the evolution of the Australian Terrier. The Skye, the Scotch, and the Dandie Dinmont too have a common ancestry, so it is to be expected that certain features in common to these breeds have persisted in the resultant Terrier. In the early history, any native Scottish breed was classified as a “SCOTCH TERRIER”, and evidence is available that these breeds were inter-bred. So it is seen that this early development of the Australian Terrier is not at all unlike that of the Rough Coated Terriers which were undoubtedly bred in Scotland about the same time. (1874).

The Clydesdale or Phisley Terrier (color blue and tan) could not possibly have been in the party as this breed was not in Australia at the time.

Manchester Terrier. It is assumed that the Manchester Terrier was used on limited occasions to enrich and fix the areas of tan.

The Dandie Dinmont, in 1859 was described as being blue and tan and also red, with a silky top knot. His size was smaller and nearer to the size of the Australian Terrier.

It has been suggested that the Bedlington Terrier was utilized at one stage, but I seriously doubt whether it had any lasting effect. It use was certainly not general and no doubt just another experiment to which the breed was subjected. The Irish Terrier first appeared in Australia in 1883, whilst the earliest records of any importation of Yorkshire Terriers were “Prince of Leeds” and “Queen of Leeds” which were the first prize winners at the Crystal Palace in 1891. The Bedlington Terrier and the Dandie Dinmont are, no doubt, connected in their early family trees and I suggest that the Bedlington influence is really from the Dandie Dinmont. The influence credited to the Irish Terrier is from his progenitor, the Red Scotch Terrier; that of the Yorkshire Terrier, more correctly from his ancestor the Skye Terrier. The characteristics top knot has no doubt come through the influence of the Dandie Dinmont, which also remembered to pass on the legacy of the bad Australian Terrier front, which fortunately is now fast disappearing.