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# *Quicklook at* **Dogs**



## About Quicklook at Dogs

**W**E share a stronger bond with dogs than we do with any other animal. Why is this?

*Quicklook at Dogs* explores the extraordinary relationship we have with dogs. It explores their origins and development, which has been closely intertwined with Man for many thousands of years. Dogs can play a significant role in our lives. Some of them perform important tasks.

Why have different breeds developed? How has this been achieved? What are the pros and cons of the process? How is breeding regulated? What, exactly, is a pedigree dog? What are the main breeds and classes of dog? What should we look out for before getting a dog?

The book looks at the life of a dog, health issues and the place of dogs in the modern world. What laws apply? How is irresponsible breeding to be dealt with? What can be done about stray and abandoned animals? There are many charities working in this area: who are they and what do they do? Spend a day following a busy kennel maid.

Celebrate the lives of some famous dogs. Consider what the future may hold.



**Quicklook at**

# *Dogs*

Mel Kavanagh



**Quicklook**  
books

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# *History of the dog*



## **Development of the dog**

**T**HE dog is a canine, one of a group of animals that includes foxes, wolves and wild dogs. The domestic dog is believed to be a distant descendant of the Asian wolf. For some 15,000 years there has been an association with man and this time span has produced the domestic dog we know today. Present day wolves are the dog's nearest genetic relative.

A large group of physically strong animals, with the capacity to kill each other, required evolution to ensure that packs developed behaviour aimed at keeping the peace and allowing the pack members to interact and get along safely. This ability to interact, understand, acknowledge and act on a complex variety of signals has meant that the canine brain is well developed and receptive to many stimuli. While some experts feel the modern dog has little relationship with the behaviour patterns of wolves, underlying aptitudes persist. These allow new behaviours to be developed in the modern dog, suitable for living close to man.

Initially dogs probably simply hung round human habitation scrounging for scraps and presumably they were themselves sometimes killed and eaten by their human hosts. With man's movement away from a hunter gatherer life to crop cultivation and animal keeping, animals began to have a value beyond the immediate need to kill and eat them. Herds were kept and over time dogs began to be used to work flocks and to guard them. The sheep dog in ancient form was born. Its value grew as its ability to carry out its tasks was better appreciated. In the same way cats probably began to be seen as having inherent value as they kept rat and mice infestations down and so protected grain stores. Today the two most popular pets are still the dog and the cat. Their

long association with man is deeply rooted in human society.

## **Relationship with man**

In our busy and increasingly technological world we are becoming ever more quickly detached from our origins. Modern living has moved us far from the lifestyle of even our grandparents. Nowadays children seem unaware where our food comes from. They may know that cows produce milk, but many children have never seen a cow. Many will be unaware that it must first have a calf. Meat comes from cattle, sheep, pigs and birds rather than being something that just appears, wrapped in cellophane, from the supermarket.

It would seem reasonable to assume that people now have less time for animals and one would expect pet numbers to be falling. Dogs, with their high demands for exercise and attention, would seem destined to be the ones to lose out. A recent (2006) estimate of the number of dogs in the UK put the figure at 10.5 million. This compares with a figure of 10.3 million cats. In 1989 the figure for dogs was 6.4 million. Most dogs are owned by families. Interestingly, households with gardens are more likely to have a dog and dog owners are less likely to be educated to degree level than cat owners. This may be because of the time commitments often associated with occupations requiring higher level qualifications. Cats do not have to be taken for walks and are widely considered less demanding pets.

Most people buy a dog for companionship or because they have wanted one since childhood. Only 5% consider security the main reason for purchase. A third of dogs come from rescue/rehoming centres and about a quarter from friends and acquaintances. Relatively few come from recognised breeders. The vast majority of dogs are described by their owners as pedigree. By this they mean their dog looks like one particular breed, but most will have no pedigree paperwork or be registered with their relevant breed societies.

Other interesting findings were that three quarters of households with dogs only have one dog. Less than twenty percent had two. In the same survey only seven per cent had one or more cats and one or more dogs. It is clear there are a lot of dogs in modern society and despite our increas-

ingly busy lifestyles their numbers appear to be growing. Dogs seem to be becoming increasingly important.

We can never know exactly how the close association between dog and man developed, we can only speculate. The dog is by nature a social animal, it wants to belong. Its nature is to live in a pack with a hierarchy of members. Man is also a social animal. Perhaps it was just that the dog, with the potential to be domesticated, and Man came to be in the same place at the same time. Of all the many species of animal only very few have been domesticated and of those few, the dog seems to be the most cherished. Only a few species of animal are kept as pets for their own sake. I would define pets as animals that seek out human attention and seem to get genuine pleasure from our company and contact.

## **Size and type**

As human society evolved, the need to meet immediate food and shelter requirements receded and other human skills could develop. People could begin to specialise. Potters and weavers could concentrate on their skills and trade with others for food and water etc. This diversification in human skills began to be reflected in the various uses to which dogs were put. Big, strong, aggressive dogs were more suited to guarding flocks and better able to defend themselves. A small aggressive dog would be no use in chasing off a wolf or bear. Dogs with an excellent sense of smell were better at hunting.

The more affectionate puppy-like dogs were perhaps allowed to linger at home around the fire. They probably appealed to children, who simply liked to play with them. Since dogs do not have a particularly specialised diet, they could live on scraps and leftovers.

One can begin to appreciate how, over time, subtle changes could be made. It makes sense to breed good hunting dogs with other good hunting dogs. At a primitive level there was a degree of selective breeding, even if the owner was not consciously trying to achieve any outcome other than to breed another hunting dog.

We can leap forward in time to look at the modern dog, where the vast majority have no utilitarian role. Dogs nowadays are mainly kept as pets. There are over 200 breeds currently listed. They are all dogs, all



the same species and all, barring practical issues such as incompatibility in size, capable of breeding successfully with each other, yet their sheer physical diversity is staggering. We have all sizes and shapes from the tiny Chihuahua to the huge Great Dane. Clearly we have moved a long way from the original dog.



**W**ARM blooded mammals, such as man and dog are broadly built to the same basic design; we all have hearts, brains, lungs, eyes, ears, four limbs and a head. While people look different from dogs, cats and rabbits we are all very much the same on the inside. Other than our brain power we, mankind, are essentially little different to these other animals. There are nonetheless notable differences. Dogs have all the same organs as us but none of them has an appendix. They have a fantastic sense of smell and possess many millions of times more odour detecting cells in their noses than we have. Dogs have limited colour vision. They can see blue, but green, red and yellow tend to look the same. Their hearing is better than ours. Obviously they have more hair.

While most people are more or less people sized and most domestic cats are more or less domestic cat sized, dogs come in a huge range of shapes and sizes.

Dogs stand and walk on their toes. Toe pads are tremendously well developed structures and while evolution has not accounted for broken glass, which cuts them readily enough, pads are surprisingly proof to thorns and general debris. The foot is the only part of the dog's skin to have sweat glands. Their hocks are the same anatomically as our ankles. If you stand on tip toes your leg is now the same shape as a dog's. Your knee will be the same as the dog's knee, or stifle, to be correct. The common names given to the joints differ but they are made up of the same bones. Indeed all mammals have the same basic bone structure and tend to have the same bones and joints. Proportions differ and also how we use them. While people walk on the flats of their feet and dogs walk on their four toes, horses' legs are adapted such that they are in effect stand-

## *About the author*

**M**EL KAVANAGH is a highly qualified veterinary surgeon, with over 20 years experience.

He founded The Animal Doctor – a respected veterinary practice in Birmingham. Although it deals with all small animals, Mel's main area of expertise (and interest) is dogs and cats, and he has treated thousands over the decade that The Animal Doctor has been open. He holds several post graduate qualifications at Certificate level in veterinary medicine, notably in orthopaedics, surgery and anaesthesia.

Mel is married to Deborah, who has 25 years experience in caring for animals, including work at a rescue centre for dogs. They are themselves animal lovers and owners.

In his spare time Mel is a fitness fanatic and, over the last few years, he has completed both the Marathon des Sables in Morocco and the gruelling Ironman triathlon (consisting of a 2.4 mile swim, a 112 mile bike ride and a full London marathon).

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We look at breeds, how they developed and some associated problems. The implications of having millions of dogs in our society are considered.

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● Spend a day at the sharp end, following a busy kennel maid.

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## About the author

Mel Kavanagh worked as a veterinary surgeon for over 20 years. His main area of interest and expertise is dogs and cats – he has treated many thousands.



Himself an animal lover and owner, Mel is married to Deborah, who has over 25 years' experience in caring for animals, including work at a rescue centre for dogs.

In his spare time Mel takes part in *Ironman* events.

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