



Early History of The Pomeranian To 1860

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Article written/researched by Vivienne Peterson BA - First published 2009 - Copyright Protected

Breaking News...

Mrs Delany

When I wrote this article in July 2008 for publication in the Pomeranian Review March 2009 I always felt one day an earlier reference to Boswell's 1764 sighting would be found. And I'm delighted to share my recent discovery with you. This information is also debuting May 20th in Dog World's special on Poms.

For the time being the earliest reference to the Pomeranian by that name in England can be found in the voluminous correspondence of Mary Granville also known as Mrs Delany. From Bath on the 18th October 1760 she informed Mrs Dewes -

'When we arrived at Tedbury, at four o'clock, who should we see in the inn-yard but the least of men, Mr Sampson! he seemed so glad to see us that, notwithstanding all his littleness, we asked him to come and drink tea with us, which he did, and he and a droll Pomeranian puppy served us instead of cabbage till nine!'

What is perhaps most exciting about this reference is King George II was still alive (although he died within the week) and therefore interest in the breed pre-dated the arrival of Queen Charlotte (1761) and debunks the traditional view that Pomeranians were introduced to England as a result of the Queen's influence. George III was initially enamoured of young Sarah Lennox, daughter of the Duke of Richmond, and it was not until later in 1761 that Lord Bute convinced George to marry Charlotte.

A personal quest to find the earliest reference to the term Pomeranian was fulfilled while researching for this article pre-dating the famous letter of Queen Charlotte written in 1767 by 3 years. A minor observation in the travel journal of James Boswell, then a twenty four year old Scottish law student on The Grand Tour in 1764, provides us with important historical data that modifies Pomeranian breed history.

Boswell's diary recorded his journey by coach between Mainz and Mannheim:

'Friday 2 November - The French traveller was Monsieur Bertollon, a merchant of fine stuffs at Lyons. He and I and my servant and a German woman got into an extra post for Mannheim. The Frenchman had a Pomeranian dog called Pomer whom he was mighty fond of. He was a singular Frenchman, a great lubberly dog with a head like a British tar. He sang most outrageously. He was jolly.' (Ref. Boswell On The Grand Tour Germany and Switzerland 1764 edited by Professor F. A. Pottle 1953)

The Frenchman and Boswell stayed at the Prinz Frederic Inn in Mannheim for a few nights before parting company but unfortunately no more is said of his dog Pomer.

However, from this information we glean that Boswell clearly recognised the breed (there is no reference to this being an unusual/unique sighting) and he used the anglicised version of the breed's name. Pomer is a curious choice of pet name as in German the word 'Pommer' meant a Pomeranian or Spitz dog (ref. Zimmermann 1780). The French name for the breed at that time was Chien Loup (ref. Buffon 1756). This choice of name must have amused dog-loving Monsieur Bertollon.

Additional evidence for the early use of the term Pomeranian is provided by Thomas Pennant. Mr Brookes, a reputable animal merchant in New Road, Holborn London (more renowned for his exotic birds), at the request of Lord Clanbrassil and Lord Monthermer in 1765, agreed to breed one of his Pomeranian bitches to a Wolf he also owned. The noblemen agreed to pay a good price for the puppies. This is documented (Hunter 1789) as the first experiment in Britain of breeding a dog to a wolf. The 1766 litter of ten resembled 'a wolf refined; the fur long, but almost as fine as that of the black fox'. Pennant observed one at the Scottish residence of The Duke of Gordon in 1768 noting the dog was sportive and very good-natured but easily able to kill a deer by attacking its throat. Some of the original litter and later their offspring were bred to a variety of dogs including a pointer, mastiff and a bulldog. Owners of either 1st or 2nd generation offspring included Lord Pembroke whose bitch Lupa (2nd gen.) died on October 16 1782 aged 12 years, the Duke of Queensberry, Dr Eyre of Wells, John Hunter the anatomist & surgeon, M Cerjat of Switzerland and Mr Buckett of Stockbridge. The Wolf may therefore be a more recent ancestor to many of our dogs than previously believed.

Summary - In all the numerous accounts and personal testimonials of this experiment the bitch is referred to as a Pomeranian. By 1766 Mr Brookes owned a mature Pomeranian bitch and additionally it is unlikely she was either rare or of high value as otherwise it would seem reckless to endanger her by breeding her to a semi-feral wolf. Evidence suggests Mr Brookes' Pomeranian was a large bitch of the type categorised by Linne (Linnaeus) in 1740 as 'Canis Pomeranus' and cross-referenced in a 1788 edition of Linne's 'Systema Naturae' to Buffon's term Chien Loup or wolf dog.

Mainz, 1 November 1764 165

tience was again my kind comforter. Barnard and I went and viewed the town. It contains some very good houses, and it has a certain air very becoming in an ecclesiastical town. It was All Saints' Day. We went into two churches, which were both grand. My soul was elevated to devotion by the solemn vespers. Barnard and I supped at my inn. We had with us a French traveller. He were hearty.

FRIDAY 2 NOVEMBER. The French traveller was Monsieur Bertollon, a merchant of fine stuffs at Lyons. He and I and my servant and a German woman got into an extra post for Mannheim. The Frenchman had a Pomeranian dog called Pomer whom he was mighty fond of. He was a singular Frenchman, a great lubberly dog with a head like a British tar. He sang most outrageously. He was jolly. The German *Frow* was oldish and very fat. When he sung, she was like to choke with laughing, and when she recovered her breath cried, "Er is ein lustiger Mensch." I do not remember to have met with a more ludicrous scene, for the Frenchman and the *Frow* mutually laughed at each other. I was highly diverted, though my headache still continued. It was a heavy cold. I was in a real fever. I was just transported like a sack.

EARLY HISTORY

Most historians believe the Deutscher Spitz (German Spitz) and the Volpino Italiano descend from the pre-historic turbarry dog or Torf / Turf Spitz. This is also the view of the FCI. Therefore the modern small Pomeranian, the Volpino Italiano, the German Spitz Klein or Mittel, the Gross Spitz and the Wolfspitz or Keeshond all