



## History of the Volpino Italiano

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### LATER HISTORY



The breed's continued popularity is evident in Italian art. Carpaccio painted a diminutive small white Spitz (*left image*), usually identified as a Pomeranian but more accurately a Volpino, in 1502 – *The Vision of St. Augustine*. French art depicted small white Spitz, such as the one featured in Nattier's work of 1759, often referred to as a Pom. The Irish artist Hone painted a beautiful smaller white dog in 1776. Evidence suggests that small/medium Spitz dogs could be found throughout Europe for centuries and there are countless examples of their continual popularity.

In the 1830s the famous English archaeologist Sir William Gell, who for many years had lived in his villas in Rome and Naples, owned a celebrated 'Pom' called Mr Nix. He claimed his favourite dog could speak some words such as grandmamma. Gell died in 1836 and sadly his loyal dog pined to death within the month.

*right - Lord Egremont's mistress circa 1815*

Walter Savage Landor (the prototype for Dicken's Mr Boythorn in *Bleak House*) was a passionate enthusiast of Italian 'Pomeranians'. In the 1840s he lived in Italy, apparently owning the villa Fiesole, once the home of Michelangelo. While there he acquired a dog he called Pomerio that he brought back to Bath. It was written at the time 'One attendant he had, a native of Florence, the most cherished attendant that ever poet and scholar was blessed with. This was a black eyed, sharp faced, long-haired Pomeranian Dog of purest breed. The affection between Pomerio and his master was beautiful to see'.

Landor would vow to his dog 'I shall never survive thee carissimo' – unfortunately Pomerio was poisoned and died. Although Landor felt the loss acutely he wisely sent to Florence to acquire another Pomerio!

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote in 1867 of small white Spitz in Paris with a great muff of stiff hair round their necks. Her words perhaps sum up many early views 'he is said to be the most faithful little creature in guarding the property of his owner. What is peculiar to these little dogs is the entireness of their devotion to their master. They have not a look, not a wag of the tail, for anyone else; it is vain for a stranger to try and make friends with them – they have eyes and ears for one alone'.



### THE SHOW ERA

Dog shows were already popular events prior to the founding of the Kennel Club in 1873. In pre-KC days any breed was eligible to be shown. At the Birmingham Agricultural show in 1862 both Pomeranians and 'Vulpino' (their spelling) or Roman Dogs were exhibited. The Pomeranian was one of the original breeds recognised by the KC in 1873. However, it is clear this name encompassed a variety of European Spitz including the Volpino, the Keeshond, the German Spitz dog and the French Loulou/Loup Loup as stated by canine historians, breeders and exhibitors of the Victorian and Edwardian era including Mr Vale Nicholas in the Kennel Encyclopaedia prepared by the KC committee chairman.

It is quite possible that the original list of 43 Poms recorded in the first Stud Book of 1874 included dogs previously shown as Volpino or Roman dogs with the clue being in their names. There are 4 Carlo's and one Blanco. An engraving of the 1864 Islington show winners included Topsy, a small/ medium size white 'Pom' bearing a marked resemblance to a Volpino Italiano. A story published in 1863 describes the late arrival at a show of a dog called Spitz from Rome and a bitch named Finette from the south of France. Their litter was also exhibited. The engraving that illustrated the story depicted two dogs and puppies of Volpino type.

In the Stud Book of 1885, Volume XII, a bitch named Pan is recorded, sired by Mousky from Florence. Pan was born in July 1880.