



# THE PURSUIT OF THE NOBLE GREYHOUND IN HISTORY AND ART

Presentation by Chris Boyd, former Greyhound Owner, Trainer and  
Greyhound Racing Stipendiary Steward  
(pictured above his pet of 15 years "Princess Tweeny")

# GREYHOUNDS ARE SIGHTHOUNDS

Sighthounds are gräoid- (greyhound-) shaped dogs recognised by World Canine Organisation as bred to pursue prey, keep it in sight and overpower by great speed and agility.

Scenthounds (Beagles, Bloodhounds) hunt by scent

Sighthounds: L-R: Saluki, Borzoi (Russian Wolfhound) and Azawakh





In North Africa and Asia ancestors of greyhound used for hunting. Dogs resembling greyhounds found on temple drawings in Turkey 6000BC and decorate a funerary vase from Susa in Iran 4000BC

Bedouin tribes selectively bred greyhounds/ Salukis as hunting companions. The Koran permits eating meat killed by hawks or Salukis/greyhounds, and they can sleep in tents and ride camels.







In Egypt greyhounds were the favourite hounds of the upper class and were often mummified and buried with their owners.

Tombs were decorated with images of their hounds – notably Tutankhamen, Amenhotep II, Queen Hatshepsut and Cleopatra VII.

Egyptian god Anubis - a jackal or hound-type dog. Resembles modern Pharaoh Hound (left)





Alexander the Great (356-323) - favourite dog a greyhound named **Peritas** (Macedonian for **January**) accompanied him on his military exploits. Plutarch records "It is said, too, that when he lost a dog also, named Peritas, which had been reared by him and was loved by him, he founded a city and gave it the dog's name." The city was probably somewhere in India.





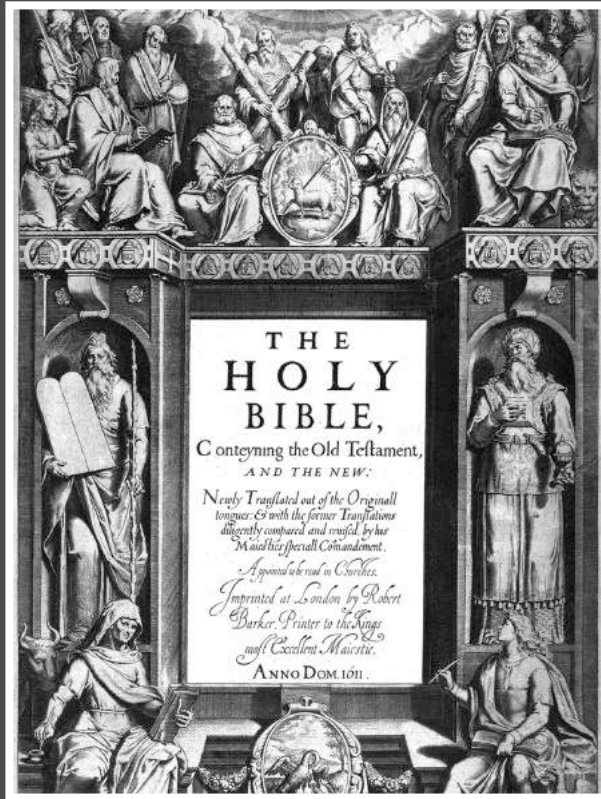
Ulysse accompagné d'Eumée, & pauvrement habillé, s'achemine en sa maison, où son chien Argos l'attend. Par cet exemple, il ne faut plus mettre en doute, Que les animaux n'aient un certain instinct, qui les rend capables de reconnoître leurs bien-facteurs.

Greek Gods were often portrayed with greyhounds – Hecate (goddess of wealth) and Pollux (protector of the hunt).

First breed of dog mentioned in western literature was in Homer's **The Odyssey**. After fighting the Trojans Oysseus returns home against the wishes of the god Poseidon in disguise, and the only one to recognise him is his sighthound Argus.

Odysseus was said to have blinded the Cyclops (Poseidon's son)

The Greyhound is the only breed of dog mentioned by name in the Bible (Proverbs 30:29-31, King James Version):



*There be three things which do well,  
yea,  
Which are comely in going;  
A lion, which is strongest among  
beasts and  
Turneth not away from any;  
A greyhound;  
A he-goat also.*

It likely helped that greyhound coursing was popular with the court of King James.





In the 900s, King Howel of Wales made killing a greyhound punishable by death. King Canute of England established the Forest Laws in 1014, reserving areas of the country for hunting by the nobility. Only nobles could own greyhounds; any "meane person" (commoner) caught owning a greyhound would be severely punished and the dog's toes "lawed" (mutilated) to prevent it from hunting.





The Greyhound is the first breed of dog mentioned in English Literature. The monk in Geoffrey Chaucer's 14<sup>th</sup> Century "The Canterbury Tales" spent great sums on his greyhounds:

Greyhounds he hadde as swifte  
as fowel in flight;  
Of prikyng and of huntyng for  
the hare  
Was al his lust, for no cost wolde  
he spare.

Edmund de Langley in "Mayster of Game" in 1370 describes the ideal greyhound

The Greihound should have a long hede and somede grete, ymaked in the manner of a luce; a good large mouth and good sessours . . .

The neck should be grete and long, and bowed as a swanne's neck.

Her shuldres as a roebuck; the for leggs streght and gret ynow, and nought to hind legges; the feet straught and round as a catte, and great cleas;

... the thighs great and squarred as an hare; the houghs steight, and not crompyng as of an oxe.

A catte's tayle, making a ring at eend, but not to hie.

Of all manere of Greihondes there byn both good and evel; Natheless the best hewe is rede falow, with a black moselle.



Renaissance Artists considered the greyhound a worthy subject – the works of Veronese, Uccello, Pisanello and Desportes depict greyhounds in a variety of settings with emphasis on the hunt.

Left – **Alexandre-Francois Desportes** self portrait in hunting dress 1699





Paulo Uccello "The Hunt in the Forest" 1470





Paulo Veronese "Boy  
with a Greyhound" 1570s



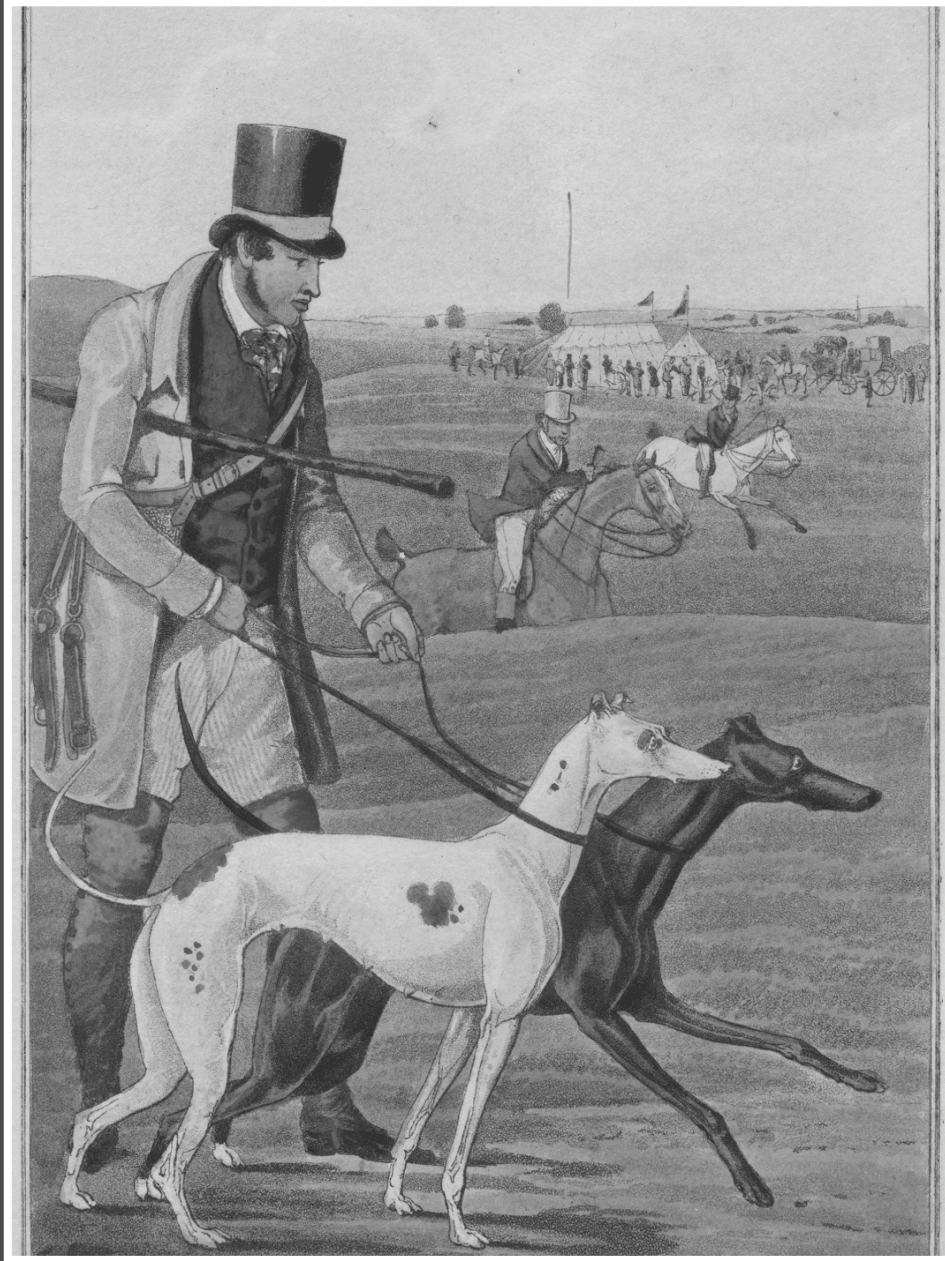
Antonio di Piccio Pisano (Pisanello)  
"The Vision of Saint Eustace"  
1438-1442

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) mentioned greyhounds in a number of his plays.

In “Henry V” Henry's speech to his troops just before the Battle of Harfleur compares people to coursing greyhounds:

I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,  
Straining upon the start.  
The game's afoot.





The Earl of Orford created the first coursing club in 1776 at Swaffham in Norfolk.

Greyhounds were a familiar sight with the nobility and royalty in England in the 1800s with Albert, the husband and consort of Queen Victoria, having a pet greyhound “Eos”



Greyhounds imported to North America from Ireland and England in the mid-1800s to rid farms of an epidemic of jackrabbits, and to hunt coyotes who were killing livestock.

The US cavalry used greyhounds as scouts to spot Native Americans, as they were fast enough to keep up with horses. General George Custer took his 22 coursing greyhounds with him on his travels. He coursed his hounds the day before a battle, including the day before the Battle of Little Big Horn.





Around 1912, Owen Patrick Smith invented the mechanical lure. He opened the first greyhound track in Emeryville, California. Six years later he owned 25 tracks around the nation. Florida became the US capital of the sport after dog racing was introduced there in 1922.



Greyhound racing has hit hard times in the Twentieth Century.

In UK, popularity declined in the 60s. Many tracks closed in 70s and 80s.

In America, greyhound racing flourished in 80s but lost popularity in the 90s, due to the rising popularity of other forms of gambling and rising public sentiment against the exploitation of greyhounds.

A number of US tracks have closed in the last two decades. Currently 22 tracks open in the US, with 12 in Florida. Others in the South. Fewer countries now race Greyhounds (USA, UK, Ireland, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand).

Competitive coursing is amateur sport today. Greyhounds compete for honours, not money. Live hares replaced by artificial drag lures. The course is typically 1000m long. A white plastic bag attached to a line strung along a series of pulleys. A motor winds up the line, causing the bag to mimic the movements of a hare.



Greyhounds as pets .org.nz

# Greyhounds

Nineteenth-century, modern, and contemporary art curator Gary Tinterow describes the joys of being a long-term greyhound owner.

PLAY ▶

*I remember the first time that I walked my very first adopted greyhound, Elliot, on Fifth Avenue. A woman in a very extravagant fur coat came up and said, 'What a beautiful dog. So thin, so elegant.'*