

*Extract from:*

# **The Police Dog: History, Breeds and Service**

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## **Chapter 11**

### **British Origins**



Edwin Richardson and his dogs.

The countries of the British Isles have in general been among the least engaged of European nations in the police patrol canine program, with no native protection breeds and a strong pacifist streak in the class oriented civilian canine community. The British have regarded protection style working dogs as a perhaps necessary but an unpleasant activity properly restricted to military and police trainers. There is little protection sport activity or civilian participation in police training as exists, for instance, in the Netherlands. The early eradication of the wolf and other predators, and the dispersed rather than large flock nature of sheep husbandry resulted in the native working shepherd's dogs being much less adaptable to the police patrol role than the continental varieties.

The hysteria driven campaign in recent years to lock out fighting style dogs, a culture with strong British roots, and eradicate undesirable foreign breeds is not an aberration, but consistent with the British character and heritage.

In spite of all of this, early in the twentieth century, there was significant activity, albeit with very little long-term consequence.



Airedale Terrier

## **Edwin Richardson and his Airedale Terriers**

Since there was so little interest in police canines in Great Britain, simply as a matter of culture, as in America those enthusiasts who sought to create interest found themselves swimming against a very strong tide. Perhaps the most prominent and well known of these early pioneers was Lt. Col. Edwin Richardson (1860 - 1946). As a consequence of his prodding, representatives from the Metropolitan Police went to France in 1906 but were not impressed, likely going over not intending to be impressed.

The Airedale was the largest and most robust Terrier of that era; and in the eighteen nineties was imported extensively by the Germans and other Europeans. Although originally imported as a hunting dog, the Germans soon began to promote the breed as police and war dogs, resulting in the breeding of much larger dogs and altering the overall character of the breed. Although almost forgotten today, the Airedale was in Germany a serious competitor with the native German Shepherd for police and war service; perhaps even then the attraction of the exotic import held sway over the more pedestrian home breeds.

Major Richardson was a devoted promoter of the Airedale, exporting dogs to Russia where his dogs were used during the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 and in 1910.

The first British police dogs were Airedale Terriers used by the Railway Police for night patrol on the Hull Docks, to help in maintaining order among disorderly sailors returning from leave, likely in the best 'have fun when and where you can' tradition of sailors everywhere. The decision to use the Airedale was based on the perception of the breed as being "stronger, hardier and having a keener sense of smell." National pride was no doubt a factor in this perception, but in the big picture the future belonged to the herders rather than the terriers. The absence of any need for strongly protective herding breeds in Britain was perhaps the key factor in the eventual emergence of continental breeds, training and deployment practices becoming the worldwide standard.

As a side note Chapman mentions that the Airedales used on the Hull Docks were imported from Belgium rather than coming from within the British Airedale community. (Chapman, Police Dogs, 1990) This and other indications, such as no mention of military or police work in popular British Airedale books and publications of the era, indicate that the British Airedale establishment had a negative or at least disinterested attitude. This has persisted until this day and been a severe detriment to the advancement of serious British working canines. Actually, there was a fair amount of early day interest in the Airedale on the continent, in Germany as well and Belgium, although this seems to have pretty much died out by the 1930s.

The popularity of the Airedale in Germany, especially as a police or protection dog, likely seems strange to many of us in light of such famous German working dogs as the German Shepherd. But we need to understand that the Airedale was already a well-known breed when von Stephanitz began his first tentative efforts in the 1890s and the SV was not founded until 1899. By this time police patrol

operations were under way in Belgium and the German Shepherd was probably not widely known in Germany when the Airedale was getting his toe hold.

Edwin Richardson was the leading British proponent of the police and military canine applications, publishing a number of books, magazine articles and engaging in public speaking engagements. He was the director of the British war dog program during WWI. As mentioned previously, this was very much a matter of shoveling sand against the tide of public and official disinterest, something for which I can have a certain amount of personal empathy.

A number of sources mention that the British programs of this early era were much less formal than those on the continent such as Ghent, in that often they were not formally trained or acquired specifically for police duty but more the personal companions of the individual patrol officer. Two trained Airedales bred by Major Richardson were shipped to the Baltimore police in 1915 and put into patrol service, but this program was discontinued in 1917, apparently because there was no real knowledge or appreciation of the necessary training and the dogs reportedly never did participate in an arrest. (Chapman, Police Dogs, 1990)

At the commencement of WWII the British were again unprepared – had no canine military program, and needed to start again from scratch. This time the leadership fell to James Baldwin, who had been a British Army Major serving under Richardson during the WWI training program. Baldwin had become enthused about German Shepherds while serving in France and became a prominent breeder and proponent of this breed between the wars. Although it was politically correct to call them Alsatians, the German Shepherds became the preferred breed. Just as in America the supply was so short that there was a public solicitation for suitable candidates, and whatever could be acquired from most any source and trained served.

Effective, wide spread British police canine utilization was greatly repressed until well after WWII because of a general resistance to using non-British breeds – or more generally resistance to anything German.

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