

The Standard: A History Lesson

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The Bedlington Terrier Standard was penned by the Bedlington Terrier Club of America in 1932. The BTCA Breed Standard gives credit to the Bedlington Terrier Association (of Great Britain) who wrote their Standard in 1924. The breed's founding fathers had envisioned a fearless hunter with great speed, a dog who wasn't deterred by vicious vermin, yet provided loyal companionship. These Englishmen methodically selected and bred their dogs for specific characteristics. When each feature, attribute, and characteristic was agreed upon, the Standard was written. The new breed was given the name, Bedlington Terrier.

Today, our Bedlingtons hunt for sport, with few exceptions. We have removed this tenaciously courageous hunter from the terrain and put him in the show ring. Does this give breeders license to forget the purpose of the Bedlington and ignore the breed standard? Look back at historical photos of our breed then picture today's Bedlington. With the exception of grooming, do you see the same dog?

The dogs of yore were not perfect. Improvements have been made while some characteristics suppressed. But the breed standard is more than just a guideline, it is a constitution. Its words were carefully chosen based on the function and purpose of the Bedlington. Descriptions can be subjective. However, it is important to not lose sight of what is and is not correct. If the Bedlington was still a working terrier, breeders would be less likely to manipulate the standard for personal preferences.

For example, the Bedlington is *slightly longer in body than it is tall*. The length of body includes "flat ribs", "deep chest through the brisket", "a natural arch over the loin creating a definite tuck-up of the underline," and is "markedly flexible". Without length of body slightly longer in ratio to

height, our dogs would not be able to achieve the great speeds they were originally bred to have. And they certainly could not bend and flex when going underground.

Height is another example. Should we push the limits of the *preferred height*? Focusing only on the excerpt "only where comparative superiority of a specimen outside of these ranges clearly justifies it, should greater latitude be taken"... This quotation should not allow breeders to disregard preferred height requirements. If our Bedlingtons can not fit through the tunnel of its prey, how can it be called superior?

These are two examples of what is currently being bred and rewarded in the conformation arena. Other issues exist with short heads, cottony coats, lack of color, flat movement, and loss of overall refinement. Bedlingtons will continue to lack breed type if breeders continue to overlook the standard and the breed's history. Lack of breed type results in cartoon-like dogs or caricatures reminiscent of what the breed should truly resemble. When these exaggerated dogs are rewarded in the show ring and become the preference of Judges, breeders will continue to migrate away from the



standard and more toward what wins the ribbons. With all due respect, AKC Judges are not the keepers of our breed, we are.

Written by past fanciers, The Bedlington Terrier Standard is a blueprint that constitutes correct breed type. It is now the responsibility of today's breeder to remember the breed's history, remember its original purpose, and pledge allegiance to the standard. And to never breed for personal preference or what is currently en vogue.