



## Poodle History Project

The goal of this project is to illuminate the tasks which the Poodle (and his cousins) were "bred to do". Any breed's job description defines good temperament, which is always breed-specific. Since form follows function, good breed-specific conformation makes the designated tasks easier to perform. For a development of this thesis, see: Dorothy Macdonald, *Poodles: past, present & future*, Poodle Club of America Foundation Seminar, 1997, videotape available for purchase from [PCA](#).

A comprehensive history of the Poodle does not exist. Neither does this exist for the several other varieties of European water spaniel, although evidence in art history indicates that these were a familiar sight as early as the High Middle Ages. Prior to ca 1870 our knowledge is sketchy, excepting certain brilliant examples. Meanwhile, we make do with a series of fascinating sources, which are presented here as an annotated bibliography in quasi-essay format, organized by function. We welcome receipt of additional sources.

Even a casual glance will betray that we are truly fluent only in English. This is a real handicap because the water spaniel with the ever-growing curly coat is a pan-European dog. We've had generous--even heroic--help, particularly with German\* sources. Because our list of volunteers is dynamic (and long!), we've given it a section of its own: [Poodle History Project volunteers](#).

- [Army dogs](#)
- [Circus dogs, fair dogs, music hall and street performers; film stars](#)
- [Companions to genius \(and etc.\)](#)
- [Diminutive dogs](#)
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- [Finders \(arrows and truffles\)](#)
- ["Gordon's Poodle Visuals" \(art history\)](#)
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- [Hair-do's through the ages](#)

- [Herding](#)
- [Medical \(veterinary\) history](#)
- [Obedience dogs](#)
- [Old-timey \(and not so old-timey\) photos \(not including films\)](#)
- [Poodle Lit. 101](#)
- [Rare books](#)
- [Ships' and/or fishermen's dogs, fox "hound", draft/sled dogs, etc.](#)
- [Show dogs and their cousins](#)
- [What's new in the Poodle History Project](#)

**Preliminary conclusions:** Poodles and their "water-dog" cousins are the original versatile hunting dogs. Water-dogs predate the use of firearms in waterfowling; to understand their behaviour--what they were "bred to do"--we must examine what they did before 1600. Members of the European water-dog family, identified by the dense, curly, ever-growing coat, are closely related.

**Please note:** For the purpose of this bibliography, "if it walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's a duck." Which is to say, if it looks like a Poodle, or a Poodle-cousin, or a proto-Poodle, we include the reference. These days, the term "water dog" or "water spaniel", which would be an accurate English-language tag for many of the long-ago dogs in this bibliography, has been largely obscured by "poodle" in English. This everyday tag seems to have shifted gradually: Markham (1621) writes about water dogges (see [Markham](#)); "Poodle" Byng was given his popular schoolboy nickname in the late 18th century at Eton and retained this all his life (see [Companions](#)). In 1837, this semantic shift remained worthy of comment: "Pudel, or as we spell it in English, poodle, is a German word, and is used to designate that race of dogs which formerly used to be called water-dogs." ("Instructions for Truffle Searching" by V. F. Fischer, and translated from German by Francis Mascall, [The Gardener's Magazine...](#), J. C. Loudon, ed., vol. III (London 1837), p. 402.)

We confidently use "poodle" here in our broad catch-all of references.

If you are an art historian wondering if the art dealer who named Stubbs' Poodle in a Punt after the break-up of a stately home at Bristol should instead have called this Water Dog in a Punt, we can only say that this is also, and perhaps more, accurate. If you are wondering if this should be called Norfolk Water Dog in a Punt, you're upping the ante, because although it is certain that water dogs were widely used in swampy Norfolk, this raises the question that maybe this specific dog was brought back from the Continent, having been bought during the European tour by which many English young men from stately homes finished their educations, so maybe it's a Pudel, Poedel or Caniche (all of which are, of course, water dogs). To take this line of thought further, it seems very precious and presumptuous in the Poodle History Project

to call all the Dutch Poodles, for example, Rembrandt's, "Poedels" and Oudry's "Caniche" especially since the latter might have been considered Barbets. All of which is a long way of saying, for the purpose of the Poodle History Project, they're all-- unashamedly--"poodles".

The Poodle History Project is edited and co-ordinated by pet-Poodle-owner Emily Cain, who is responsible for all errors and omissions. To contribute to, or correct, the Poodle History Project, please e-mail

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The head-piece on this page is a woodcut from: Gervase Markham, *Hungers Prevention* (London, 1621), p. 70; for microfilm information, see "[...Visuals](#)": Anon. Markham.

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\* Rosa Engler, *Pudel* (Cham, Switzerland: Muller, 1995) is the best beginners' orientation to the breed, and contains lots of wonderful photographs of Poodles doing things. Even if you don't read German, you'll enjoy it using this [English-language crib](#) by Elizabeth Glew and proofread by Bryan Crow--and Rosa Engler herself. Easy way to order the book: send a \$US20. bill and a *legible* return address to: Rosa Engler, Baiergasse 47, CH-4126 Bettingen/BS, SWITZERLAND. This crib is also linked to our Poodle History Project volunteers section.