



Authors Note

This work is complementary to my chapter titled “*Halls Heelers*” in the book “*Over-Halling the Colony*” published in 1990 (ed. Russell Mackenzie Warner, Australian Documents Library, ISBN 0 908219 07 5). Ongoing research during intervening years has exposed a need to update my original work. Please note that this work is abridged; those requiring a more detailed view should please contact me by email at misty@finalfiler.com

An Introduction

Australia can boast two breeds of highly specialised working dogs. One is the Australian Cattle Dog (the “*Blue Heeler*”); the other is the Kelpie sheepdog. Both are national icons developed in the 1800s to answer urgent needs of pioneering stockmen for suitable working dogs. The Halls Heeler, or Blue Heeler, came first in the 1830s; the Kelpie followed about forty years later. The Halls Heeler was a completely new cross breed, while the Kelpie developed from pairs of special Scottish working sheepdogs imported in the period 1865 to 1870.

Early Colonial Days

Before the arrival of the first large group of farmers, farm workers and tradesmen on the ship “*Coromandel*” in 1802, colonists relied heavily on supplies of salted pork and beef from England or America. By 1805, colony bred pork became their staple meat. Mutton and lamb was gradually added to the menu as sheep numbers increased. The few cattle they had were mainly used for dairy or as beasts of burden because work horses were then rare in the colony. This situation continued through until around 1820.

In the settled coastal area around Sydney Town, Parramatta, & Green Hills (Windsor), cattle, sheep, and pigs were kept in small timber fenced enclosures close to dwellings. They were only let out to graze during daylight hours, and it was usually the children who cared for them. Consequently, stock were quiet natured and easily handled. So before 1820, they had little need for dedicated droving dogs in these areas; however, they did need suitable guard dogs to prevent loss of their valuable stock from Dingo attack, or more likely from theft. Imported dogs like the “Bobtail” were most suitable for these guard duties.



Developing the Colony

For pioneers who knew the soft green countryside of the British Isles, the colony of New South Wales must have seemed very harsh by comparison. Once pioneers crossed the mountains to the Upper Hunter Valley, in the mid 1820s, they found that cattle put to graze on vast new areas of unfenced land, quickly found the shortcomings of their imported dogs. Cattle became progressively wilder, more difficult and dangerous to handle. Other problems included the climatic extremes, especially the summer heat, and having to drive cattle very long distances, often through dense scrub or precipitous mountains. It was around 275 km from the saleyards in Sydney to “*Dartbrook*”. When they later crossed the Liverpool Ranges in the early 1830s the situation became worse as they began establishing remote cattle runs on many thousands on acres of the Liverpool Plains and beyond.

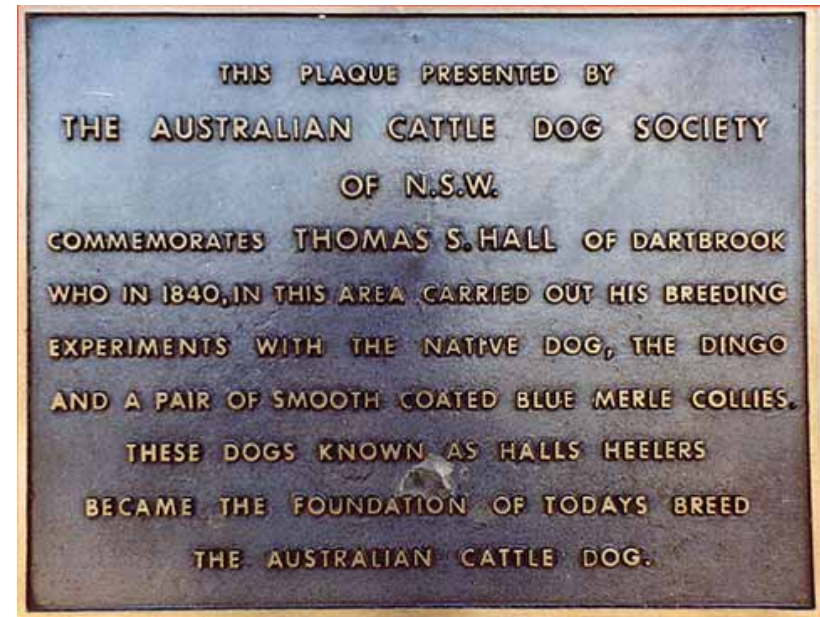
Around 1825, a group of young lads, mostly colony born into farming families based in the Hawkesbury area (sometimes referred to as “*cornstalks*”), began establishing cattle stations in the Upper Hunter Valley. These pioneers steadily and successfully overcame problems as they arose; they were resolute, resourceful and with great strength of character. From them came the Australian characteristics and ideals their descendants inherited with great pride.

One such pioneer was seventeen year old, colony born, Thomas Simpson Hall (1808-1870) who, with some of his elder brothers, explored the Upper Hunter Valley in 1825. They selected two sites and established properties; one they called “*Gundebrri*” near present day Merriwa, and the other, near Aberdeen, they named “*Dartbrook*”. Thomas Hall is shown in the 1828 census as being 20 years of age and manager of “*Dartbrook*”; this became his permanent home for the rest of his life.

Using “*Dartbrook*” as a base, Thomas later rode through the north-west, New England, and into present day Queensland setting up properties for the family. During one trip he was speared by aborigines and one of his men hacked to death. He became the manger of family freehold properties in the Hunter Valley area, and the long string of distant leasehold cattle runs. In all, he was eventually responsible for, and controlled, operations on over a million acres of good grazing lands.



THOMAS HALL



PLAQUE ON "BLUE HEELER BRIDGE", ABERDEEN, NSW

<< The map at left shows early stock routes between Sydney and the Liverpool Plains. The original route from Windsor to "Dartbrook" followed the track explored by John Howe in 1819 via Putty, and after leaving Bulga they by-passed Singleton by traveling via Jerry's Plains. This route also continued on to the other large Hall property "Gundebri" near Merriwa. Later, the route via Wollombi became more popular.

Some approximate distances:

- Sydney to Windsor..... 60 km
- Windsor to Dartbrook.....225 km
- Dartbrook to Murrurundi..... 80 km
- Murrurundi to Cuerindi Run.....180 km
- Cuerindi Run to Bingera Run.....120 km
- Bingera Run to Weebollaboilla... 110 km

As early as 1824, explorers had found a steep but usable track across the Liverpool Range above present day Murrurundi. However, in 1825, before pioneers could expand their grazing to the rich Liverpool Plains a severe drought gripped the region that was to last for five years. Dreams of expansion had to be put on hold; many farmers and graziers experienced financial trouble trying to survive this drought. On “*Dartbrook*”, Thomas set about breeding the horses, cattle and sheep needed to stock the new properties they proposed to establish over the ranges once the drought ended.

Having already experienced trouble driving cattle 225 km between the Hawkesbury River and “*Dartbrook*”, mostly through rough mountainous country, and with an eye to establishing more grazing properties over the Liverpool Plains, Thomas recognised two major problems. Firstly, to drive cattle to and from distant properties they needed first class droving dogs. These cattle dogs would have to be tough to stand up to difficulties of working long and hard in very harsh climatic conditions and over a wide range of terrains. These extended from scorching open plains where they also had to contend with crippling burrs and bindii, to thick bush and treacherous mountain tracks. No such working dogs then existed in the colony.

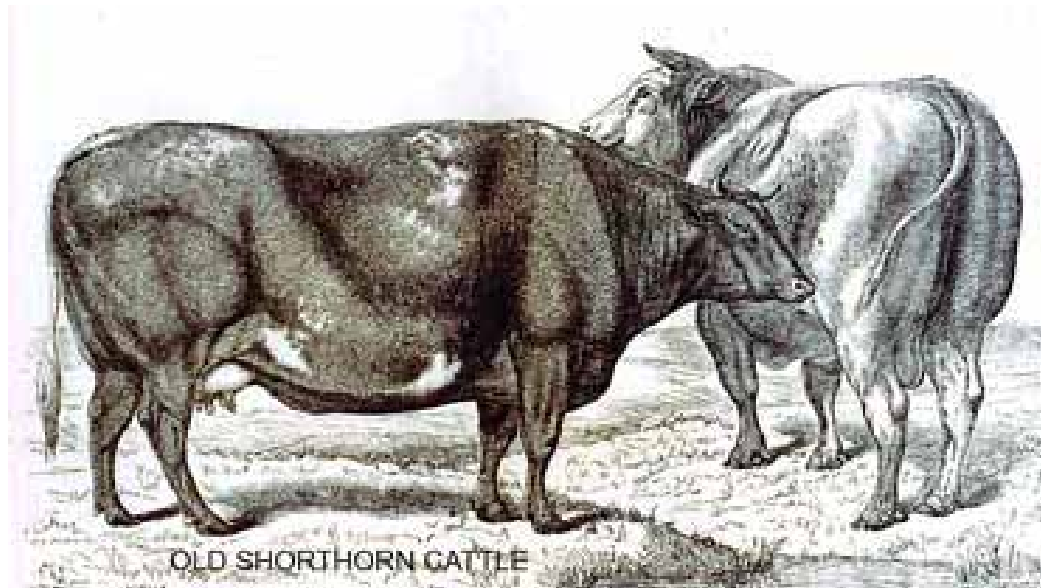
The second problem Thomas considered were the great dangers associated with handling and droving wilder horned cattle, particularly on long drives; dangers not only to the stockmen but also to the cattle themselves. To overcome these problems, Thomas established two breeding programs on “*Dartbrook*”. The first was to breed a suitable working cattle dog; the second was to breed polled (hornless) cattle.

These breeding programs were well under way by 1832 when Thomas led his younger brother Matthew, his nephew Joseph Fleming, and some convict stockmen from “*Dartbrook*”, across the Liverpool Range and travelled via Loder’s “*Cuerindi*” station near present day Quirindi to reach the Namoi River at a spot near present day Carroll previously discovered in 1825 by explorer, Allan Cunningham. Following Cunningham’s tracks upstream they reached the junction of the Manilla and Namoi Rivers at present day Manilla. Then, instead of following Cunningham’s track north up the Manilla River towards Bingara, Thomas elected to proceed up along the Namoi River. This led them to the extensive rich grazing lands of the Upper Namoi Valley. Here Thomas established “*Cuerindi Run*” (“*Cuerindi*” was said to be an aboriginal word for “*nest in the hills*”). They then moved further upstream and established “*Mundowey Run*” for Joseph Fleming. In all, these two properties comprised 107,200 acres of choice grazing land. They had protective surrounding hills, a wide valley floor and a double river frontage from just above Manilla all the way up to the foothills of the ranges where waterfalls mark the start of the Namoi River.

The experiences gained by Thomas of topography and climate from this 520 km round trip over the Liverpool Ranges prompted him to accelerate his breeding programs once he returned to "Dartbrook". It is well recorded that, by 1840, Thomas had succeeded with both goals. Not only had he established a pure bred herd of polled shorthorn cattle (Durhams), but he also produced a new cattle dog so well suited to their needs that during the rest of his lifetime he saw no need to alter it in any way.

Polled Shorthorn Cattle

The establishment of the herd of polled shorthorn cattle was relatively straightforward.



From his parents, Thomas had learnt about family farms in Northumberland. He knew that numerous relatives still worked farms there. The neighbouring county was Durham, where, in the Tees water Valley late in the 1700s, Charles Colling (1751-1836), and his wife Mary (nee Colpitts 1763-1850), with the help of his brother Robert, began scientifically developing local shorthorn type cattle into a greatly improved breed at first called "*Collings Shorthorned Cattle*", but which soon became known as "*Durhams*" or "*Shorthorns*".

Collings bred two distinct types of improved cattle, one for beef production, and the other for dairy. Some were born without horns and these were called "sports". The new cattle were taken up by farmers in Northumberland, including members of the Hall family. And so, in the early 1830s, Thomas was able to import

"sports" of the beef cattle variety from there.

Developing a New Cattle Dog

The first recorded attempt at breeding a suitable cattle dog for Australian conditions was carried out c.1830 by a drover named James "Jack" Timmins (1757-1837), who drove stock between Sydney and Bathurst.

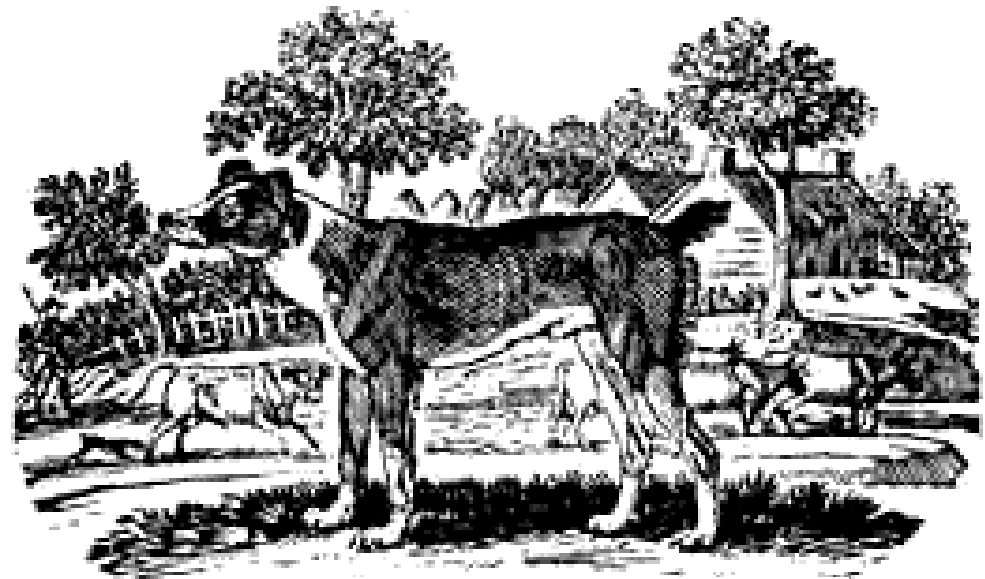
He crossed a “*Back Bobtail*” working dog with the Dingo. The resulting red dogs were called “*Red Bobtails*”, however, the cross proved too severe. Some claimed “*Jack’s*” 14 years old young son John (also called “*Jack*”) bred these dogs, but research cannot support such claims.

The development of Thomas Hall’s new cattle dog originated to some extent in Northumberland but called for far more ingenuity and patience. Following is its history:

In Northumberland they once bred a droving dog called a “*Cur*”, or “*Curre*”. This dog was illustrated by the famous engraver Thomas Bewick in a book titled “*A General History of Quadrupeds*” published in 1790. Bewick was a native of rural Northumberland so he had first hand knowledge of the local farm dogs. There is some text accompanying his illustration which states:

“Is a trusty and useful servant to the farmer and grazier; and although it is not taken notice of by naturalists as a distinct race, yet it is now so generally used, especially in the north of England, and such great attention is paid in breeding it, that we cannot help considering it as a permanent kind.”

They are chiefly employed in driving cattle; in which way they are extremely useful. They are larger, stronger, and fiercer than the Shepherd’s Dog (Border Collie type); and their hair is smoother and shorter. They are mostly of a black and white colour; their ears are half-pricked; and many are whelped with short tails, which seem as if they had been cut; these are called Self-tailed Dogs. They bite very keenly; and as they always make their attack at the heels, the cattle have no defence against them: in this way, they are more than a match for a Bull, which they quickly compel to run. Their sagacity is uncommonly great...”



BEWICK’S “CUR” OR DROVER’S DOG

Note dog heeling cattle in background

The text goes on to describe other droving dogs then used in southern England, like the Bobtails (Old English Sheepdog). It is interesting to note a part of the description of these dogs, as follows:

“...as these Dogs have frequently to go long journeys, great strength, as well as swiftness, is required for that purpose. They are therefore generally of a mixed kind, and unite in them the several qualities of the Shepherd’s Dog, the Cur, the Mastiff, and the Greyhound.”

Research indicates that although the “*Northumberland Drovers Dogs*” were generally black and white, they were sometimes of blue marbled or mottled colours (commonly called “*Blue Merle*”).

To save any confusion with the numerous other droving type dogs then in Britain (including other “*Curs*”, and for ease of identification, I shall call the dogs we are concerned with the “*Northumberland Blue Merle Drovers Dogs*”. In this context, the words “*Blue Merle*” are descriptive of coat colour only.

Being an accomplished bushman, Thomas Hall had ample opportunity to study the Dingo in its natural setting, and like so many other “bushies”, Thomas came to admire the amazing durability and other characteristics of the breed.

He reasoned that he should combine the qualities of the Dingo with, those of the “*Northumberland Blue Merle Drover’s Dog*”. With this in mind he captured a few pairs of Dingoes and kept them in specially built kennels on “*Dartbrook*”.

Over time they adapted to living in captivity and began to breed. While this was taking place, Thomas imported a pair of “*Northumberland Blue Merle Drover’s Dogs*” from family farms in Northumberland and allowed them to breed in separate kennels on “*Dartbrook*”. From progeny of the Dingoes and imported dogs, Thomas began selective cross breeding around 1832.



THE AUSTRALIAN DINGO

Photo courtesy of Berenice Walters

It is not known how many back crosses he made; what we do know is that from these matings he produced the cattle dog he desperately needed. This working cattle dog proved so suitable that no breed changes were considered necessary by Thomas for the rest of his life (he died in 1870).

The following text is included here to help you, the reader, come to a better understanding about later developments in cattle dog breeding.

The Cattle Dog Club of Sydney

"It's a national disgrace for Mr. Thomas S. Hall to be almost unknown while a lot of Benchies (show dog breeders) round Sydney claim the glory of founding the Australian Cattle Dog"

Berenice Walters, "Wooleston" Kennels, Bargo

Many and varied arguments have taken place over the years regards origins of the Australian Cattle Dog (ACD). Most country folk, and many city folk, know these dogs as Blue Heelers or Queensland Blue Heelers; very early in the 1900s, members of the old Cattle Dog Club of Sydney adopted the term "*Australian Cattle Dog*".

The Cattle Dog Club was a group of Sydney based men whose recreational interest was in breeding and showing cattle dogs. Some postal workers held membership, as did legal men, butchers, journalists, and so on; none were regular stockmen or drovers working cattle on a day to day basis. Initially, they were interested in a variety of types of cattle dogs, including an imported type often referred to as the "*Smithfield*".

However, by late in the 1800s prominent club members concentrated on breeding from bloodlines of a particular cattle dog, which they acknowledged as originating from a Mr. Hall, of Muswellbrook (Thomas S. Hall 1808-1870). These breeders included Robert (Bob) Kaleski 1877-1961, James Henry (Harry) Bagust 1860-1914, his brother John George (Jack) Bagust who died in 1909, and Charles Pettit.

Kaleski wrote that Alex Davis, a butcher, brought some of Thomas Hall's dogs to Sydney late in the 1870s, after Thomas Hall had died, and the Bagust brothers began breeding from a pair of these dogs.

Around 1897, Kaleski wrote a breed standard for the cattle dog based on the speckled blue Halls Heelers he and the Bagust brothers were breeding from, although by that time it is highly probable the Kelpie cross had already been introduced into the cattle dogs. Kaleski's breed standards were published in 1903 and amended 1910; Kaleski published his famous book "*Australian Barkers & Biters*" in 1914.

Considerable in-fighting took place between members of the Cattle Dog Club early in the 1900s. This resulted in a proliferation of barbed arguments about origins of the cattle dogs appearing in newspapers or journals. Often writing under an alias, arguments were sometimes irrational and often very misleading. Unfortunately, the legacy of these articles lives on. Somehow, later historians have unwittingly placed greater emphasis on many of these old writings than they should. If you do proper research, most articles from these sources do not stand up to scrutiny. As a good example, we have an account published in the prestigious RAS Journal by a prominent member of the Cattle Dog Club, who was also a judge appointed by the Royal Agricultural Society of Sydney.

He makes the claim that Judge Alfred Cheeke (misspelled Cheek), and his father, bred the first blue cattle dogs in the 1880s. This wild claim completely disregards the fact that the first blue cattle dogs were bred some fifty years before then. In any event, Judge Alfred Cheeke was dead before the 1880s. He visited England during 1875, and returned to the colony very early in 1876 suffering ill health; he died in Sydney on 14 March 1876. No records have been found to substantiate that the Judge ever bred dogs at all; the only record found relates to a pup from his red Setter bitch, Juno, being shown by Alfred Rose at Campbelltown in 1872.

Fortunately, while Sydney breeders were doing their thing, stockmen and drovers in far north western NSW and Queensland, like Harry Hillier and the Lanagans of Bingara, "Jack" Timmins and his sons of Collarenebri with their "*Timmins Biters*", and many others, recorded how they continued breeding working cattle dogs from Hall's Heeler bloodlines without introducing bloodlines from other breeds. The modern Stumpy Tailed Cattle Dog evolved from the same source. Working dogs bred in isolation became famous as Blue Heelers or Queensland Blue Heelers because they retained all the original working capabilities of the Hall's Heeler. Sydney breeders of show dogs admitted that, because of other breed infusions they had experimented with; their dogs had lost a lot of working ability.

Summary

Always researching colonial history, I believe I have heard every claim about who founded the Blue Heeler (or ACD), and carefully studied each claim. Over the years I have discussed my research with leading cattlemen, breeders, scientists, historians and others, and come to the conclusion that only one claim can be substantiated by available evidence. The Australian Cattle Dog (Blue Heeler) originates from cattle dogs first known as Hall's Heelers. This breed resulted from cross breeding between the old "*Blue Northumberland Drover's Dog*" (or Cur) and the Dingo and was founded between 1830 and 1840 by a colony born pioneer cattleman named Thomas Simpson Hall (1808-1870) of "Dartbrook" station in the Upper Hunter Valley of N.S.W. directly across the Hunter River from Aberdeen, and near to Muswellbrook.