

THE AUSTRALIAN CATTLE DOG

The Australian Cattle Dog was bred to meet the need explicit in the name. Even though machinery has reduced its role in the cattle industry it still has a very important part to play.

Long distance droving has largely been replaced by road and rail transport, and helicopters muster cattle on some properties, but the Cattle Dog remains an essential part of the team in yard work or when cattle are to be moved over distances and in conditions where mechanised transport is not appropriate.

The cattle industry absorbs only a small proportion of the Australian Cattle Dogs registered each year. Of the balance some will be used for breed and/or show; others will appear in the obedience ring and related activities, most however will go to a variety of homes, remote both from the dog fancy and the rural industries.

Cattle Dogs are finding different roles that are congenial to them and in keeping with their characteristics and temperament. They are excellent companions/guardians for children, give companionship and security to the elderly and guard the tools of outside workers. The list is a long one.

Years of breeding to the cattleman's needs has produced, not only a dog with superb working ability but also a general purpose dog of excellence.

An excellent family pet, the Australian Cattle Dog is renowned for his devotion. He will lay down his life to protect his family. Cattle dogs have been known to rescue children from drowning, from the threat of snakes and from the unwanted attention of strangers. Burglars warrant special attention.

The Cattle Dog is extremely intelligent and easy to train. His only demand is for constancy – not to be made much of today and ignored tomorrow. Firmness without severity or loud voice will bring out a complete understanding between master and dog. Obedience training is strongly recommended. The Cattle Dog is a working breed and enjoys this type of work.

Cattle Dogs are generally hardy and healthy and commonly live to fifteen years of age or more. The longest living dog, recorded in the **Guinness Book of Records**, is a Cattle Dog that lived to the age of twenty-nine years and five months. It was still working cattle at the age of twenty.



ORIGIN & HISTORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN CATTLE DOG

During the early colonisation of Australia the population was mainly confined to what is now the Sydney Metropolitan area. The land holdings of this time were relatively small and the distances involved in taking stock to market were not great. The stock contained on these properties were used to seeing men and dogs around them and so were relatively quiet and controllable.

Working dogs that were brought out from other countries by the early settlers, although suffering a bit from the warmer climate, are believed to have worked these quiet cattle satisfactorily.

Eventually settlers began spreading north of Sydney to the Hunter Valley, and south to the Illawarra District. With the discovery of the pass over the Great Dividing Range in 1813, by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, vast grazing lands were opened up to the west. Here land holdings were often hundreds and even thousands of square miles and were mostly unfenced. Cattle turned loose on these properties became uncontrollable.

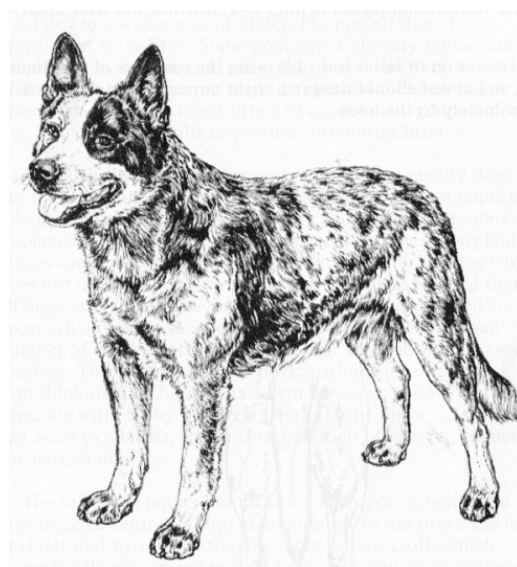
The most popular dog used by the early drovers and cattle owners was a working dog breed brought out from England known as the Smithfield. It was a big black, square bodied, bob-tailed dog, and it had a long rough coat with a white frill around the neck. The head was shaped like a wedge, with long saddle flap ears, and it had a very cumbersome gait. Like the other working dogs of that time, the Smithfield found the high temperature, rough terrain, and long distances to the market, more than it could handle.

Those early working dogs all had the trait of barking and heading while working stock. This is desirable for working sheep and even acceptable with quiet cattle, but only made the wild stock on the big cattle stations rush and run off their condition. It soon became obvious that a dog with more stamina and one that would work quietly, but more forcefully, was needed to get the wild cattle to the sale-yards in Sydney.



A drover named **Timmins**, who regularly drove cattle from Bathurst to the sale-yards in Sydney, knew a lot about the native dog, the dingo, from firsthand experience. He knew that the dingo was a barkless dog, with the useful characteristic of herding its prey, then coming from behind and biting.

Timmins tried crossing the dingo with the Smithfield, with the aim of producing a silent working dog with more stamina which would be more suited to Australian conditions. This mating is believed to have occurred about the year 1830. The progeny from this mating were red, bob-tailed dogs, which were named Timmins Biters. Unlike the Smithfield, these dogs were silent workers but proved to be too headstrong, and severe with their biting. Although this cross breeding was used for a while, it gradually died out. Other cross breeding was tried, such as the rough collie – bull terrier cross, but all these proved to be unsuitable for working cattle.





Thomas Hall

In 1840 a land owner named Thomas Hall, who owned the Dartbrook property at Muswellbrook in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales, imported a pair of smooth haired, blue merle highland collies from Scotland. They were good workers, but barked and headed, both undesirable traits in a cattle dog. Hall crossed progeny from this pair with the dingo, which produced silent workers that became known as Hall's Heelers. The colours of the dogs from this cross were either red or blue merle, with most of them having pricked ears and a dingo shaped head with brown eyes, and were generally of the dingo type. Hall's dogs were a big improvement on any other available working dogs, and became much sought after by cattle men.

George Elliot, who owned a property in Queensland, was also experimenting with the dingo – blue merle collie crosses. Elliot's dogs produced some excellent workers.

A butcher named Alex Davis took a pair of these dingo-blue merle collie crosses to the cattle sale yards at Canterbury in Sydney. Cattle men were impressed with the working ability of these dogs, and purchased pups from them as they became available.

Two brothers, **Jack and Harry Bagust** purchased some of Elliot's dogs and set about improving on them. They crossed them with an imported Dalmation dog in order to gain the Dalmation's sociability with horses and protection of owner's property. This cross changed the merle to a red and blue speckle. Pups were born white, developing their colouring at about three weeks of age. The only problem was that some of the working ability was lost.

The Bagusts then experimented in crossing them with the black and tan kelpie to restore working ability. The result was a compact dog, identical in type and build to the dingo only thicker set, but with peculiar marking found in no other dog in the world. The blue dogs had black patches around the eyes, with black ears and brown eyes, and a small white patch in the middle of the forehead. The body was dark blue, evenly speckled with a light blue, having the same tan markings on the legs, chest and head as the black and tan kelpie, the red dogs had dark red makings instead of black, with an all over even red speckle. They became the forebears of our present day Australian Cattle Dog, and the blue dogs became known as Blue Heelers.

In 1893, **Robert Kaleski** took up breeding and showing Blue Heelers. Realising that there was no check on the judge giving the award in any way he fancied or his interest prompted, Kaleski then drew up a standard for the Cattle Dog. This standard was finally endorsed by the Cattle and Sheep Dog Club of Australia and the original Kennel Club of NSW in 1903. The breed became known as the Australian Heeler, then later the Australian Cattle Dog, which is now the official name for this breed.



Robert Kaleski



Left to Right: Mary Gilmore, Constance Stephens, Robert Kaleski picnicking at Liverpool, Sydney, 1919.



Robert Kaleski & Cattle Dog