



(Far left) Alexander, 4th Duke of Gordon (1743-1827).

(Left) George, 5th Duke of Gordon (1770-1836). Portrait by Ramsay Richard Reinagle.

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PART 5:

Alexander, 4th Duke of Gordon and George, 5th Duke of Gordon, and the Gordon Setters

Most dog breeds were developed after hundreds of years of evolution and lengthy selection by breeders.

However, some breeds owe their existence to just one person, whose name they bear.

“BLACK AND FELLOWS SETTING DOGS”

The above introduction is not entirely correct this month. Long before Alexander, the 4th Duke of Gordon was born, black-and-tan setters could be found in Great Britain. In Gervase Markham’s *Hungers Prevention: or, The whole arte of fowling by water and land* (1621), one can read about “black and fellows setting dogs.” “Fellows” means fallow, pale red or tan. According to Markham, “black and fellows” setting dogs were the strongest and had the greatest stamina – “a black and fellows setting dog... hardest to endure labour.” *Dogs and Partridges* by the French painter Alexandre François Desportes (1661-743) depicts a black-and-white setter with tan markings. In *A Treatise on Field Diversions* (1776), the author wrote, “Already fifty years ago one distinguished two kinds of Setters, the black and tan and the orange or lemon and white.” That was nearly 20 years before the 4th Duke of Gordon was born. Last but not least is a watercolour de-



Mr. Howard Mapplebeck’s Gordon Setter ‘Blossom,’ from Vero Shaw’s *The Book of the Dog* (1887).



The Gordon Setter in *The Dog by Stonehenge* (1872).

picting a black-and-tan setter in Sydenham Edwards' *Cynographia Britannica* (1805).

The black-and-tan pattern was well established – in terriers, Bloodhounds and Foxhounds, for example, but also in the old land spaniels, the ancestors of setters. The conclusion is that the Gordon Setter does not owe its existence to the 4th Duke of Gordon, but certainly bears his name. And, thanks to the Dukes of Gordon, the breed became well known in the 18th century. But first, let's meet the Gordon family and have a look at Gordon Castle.

GORDON CASTLE AND THE GORDON FAMILY

Gordon Castle, situated near the village of Fochabers in Moray (Scotland), was designed by John Baxter for Alexander in 1769. It replaced an earlier castle, built by George Gordon, 2nd Earl of Huntly, in the 1470s and enlarged by his grandson into a Renaissance palace.

When John Baxter completed the new Gordon Castle, it was described as "the most magnificent edifice north of the Forth." During construction, part of the village of Fochabers had to be demolished and rebuilt elsewhere to make room for the extension.

After the rebuilding, Gordon Castle was an impressive building presenting a northern façade 568 feet

(173 metres) long. The six-storied tower still rises to a height of 84 feet (25.6 metres). The interior contained a valuable library, magnificent dining and drawing rooms and was richly adorned with marble statues and busts, portraits and other paintings. About 1,300 acres of woods belonged to the castle. In its heyday, Gordon Castle was likely the finest Georgian house in Scotland.

Early records state that the Gordons, a family of Norman origin, settled in Berwickshire, Scotland. Adam Gordon was granted land in Long-Gordon by Malcolm III, a Scottish monarch who ruled from 1058-93. Adam fought for Malcolm and died by his side. This was the beginning of a long family history of soldiers,



Gordon Castle near Fochabers, Scotland.



Top: *Setters with the day's bag*, by 19th-century painter Alfred Duke. Above, left: *Day's Catch* (detail), 1877, by James Hardy Jr. Above, right: John Emms, *Waiting for the Guns*, 1888.

crusaders, chancellors, earls and dukes. The family has a colourful past, being related to many other noble Scottish and English families and involved in battles, uprisings and rebellions. They also bred horses and dogs. This is the family Alexander, the 4th Duke, was born into in 1743.

ALEXANDER AND LADY JANE

In 1741, Cosmo George, 3rd Duke of Gordon (1719-52) married Lady Catherine Gordon (1725-79). He died while on a tour in France, leaving his wife, three sons and three daughters.

His eldest son, nine-year-old Alexander, succeeded his father as the 4th Duke of Gordon. In 1761, young

Alexander was elected one of the representative Peers of Scotland and created a Knight of the Order of the Thistle in 1775. In 1784, Alexander received the titles of Baron Gordon of Huntly and Earl of Norwich, inherited from his great-grandmother. Aside from the titles, he had a considerable fortune, owned pieces of art, acres of land and a castle – quite a lot for a good-looking boy with reddish hair.

As a young man, Alexander lived in the Gordon town house almost opposite the Maxwell family. Sir William Maxwell's daughter, Lady Jane, was so strikingly beautiful that a song was written about her: *Bonnie Jennie of Monreith, the Flower of Galloway*.

In 1767, at the age of 17, Jane married Alexander. Two sons and five daughters were born; the eldest son became Alexander's heir: George, the 5th Duke of Gordon (1770-1836). In addition, Alexander had an illegitimate son, also called George. Lady Jane used to refer to the boys as "my George" and "the Duke's George."

After the marriage, the Duke and the Duchess lived at Gordon Castle for about 20 years. Lady Jane organized parties, planted trees and took a keen interest in farming. She was an excellent hostess and entertained well-known poets such as Robbie Burns at Gordon Castle. After his visit, Burns wrote the poem *Castle Gordon* and in his *Journal* he noted, "... the Duke makes me happier than ever great man did – noble, princely, yet mild, condescending and affable, gay and kind." The Duke himself wrote such well-known songs as *Cauld Kail in Aberdeen* and *The Reel o'Bogie*.

DRAMA

When staying in London after leaving Gordon Castle in 1787, the Duchess continued giving parties and had everyone dance Scottish dances. Her name is closely connected to the foundation of the regiment of the Gordon Highlanders.

In 1799, she became depressed – not surprisingly, because her son George had gone off to war, her second son, Alexander, had died at the age of 23, and above all, her husband had moved his lady friend Jean Christie – the mother of the other George – into Gordon Castle. He now openly kept his mistress at the castle, while the Duchess – if one can believe the gossip – had assignations with her lovers elsewhere.

However, the Duke had a small house built on the River Spey for his estranged wife. Every inch a gentleman. Lady Jane died in 1812 in London. Alexander married his mistress Jean in 1820 and another nine children were born.

CREDIT

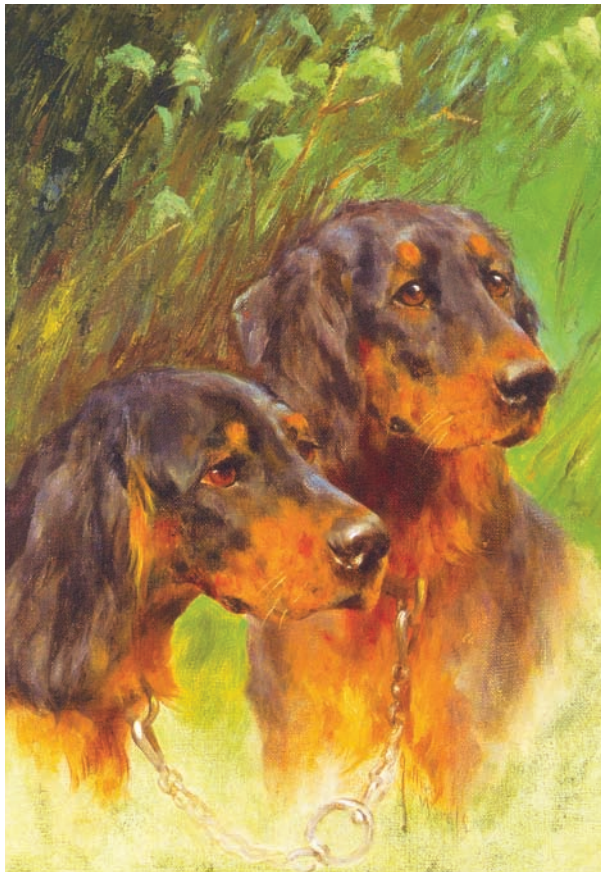
Alexander, the 4th Duke of Gordon, whose name is so closely linked to the Gordon Setter, was a royalist like his father and raised several regiments for the government. He played an important role in the history of Port Gordon, one of the villages he established, and was known as an accomplished and exceedingly genial gentleman. In 1793, the Duke was elected Lord Chancellor of the University and King's College in Aberdeen.

When not busy with military or public affairs, the Duke's favourite pastime was hunting with setters. In the rough and extended fields of Scotland or on the heavy heather-covered Scottish moors, the setters were ideal gun dogs, experts at setting game birds, mostly grouse. Not surprisingly, Alexander started breeding them in his own kennels. The question is: how did the Duke obtain or breed the black-and-tan setters?

Although credit for the existence of the Gordon Setter is given to Alexander, there are many different stories about how his dogs were established. One story is that the Duke crossed a black-and-white Scottish Collie – belonging to one of his farmers and very good at finding game – with his setters. This crossing resulted in the early black-and-white setters. It's said that the Duke sent one of the pups with a £5 note to the farmer's son, who tried to make a sheepdog of the pup, but it was useless.

This could have been an isolated outcross, but in my opinion certainly not the start of "a new kind of setter." We know that setters existed in England as early as the 1600s and there is evidence of several noted kennels of black-and-tan setters outside Scotland – for example, in the Midland Counties – well before Alexander started his kennel at Gordon Castle. So it's more likely that the setters at Gordon Castle came from elsewhere. Experts think that they were obtained from Thomas William Coke, later the Earl of Leicester. The Duke used stud dogs from the Earl of Leicester; did he go back to relatives of his own dogs for a mating? We will never know exactly what happened.

In *Dogs of the British Isles* (1882 edition), Stonehenge writes, "It is certainly possible that the Scottish Setter, also named Gordon Setter, has been crossbred with a Bloodhound." Not a word about a Scottish Collie. Idstone mentions the story about the Collie in *The Dog* (1872), but doubts its truth. Idstone also writes about the head of the Gordon Setter: "It is less fine than the head of an English Setter and sometimes it even gives the impression of a drop of Bloodhound blood." Vero Shaw (*The Book of the Dog*, 1879-81) is



Gordon Setters by Arthur Wardle (1864-1949).

convinced about a Collie crossing, but offers not a word about a Bloodhound.

THE DUKE PREFERRED THE BLACK-AND-TANS

We don't know in which year the Duke established his kennel, but we can be almost sure that his setters were black, white and tan, black-and-white and black-and-tan. It's believed that the Duke preferred the black-and-tan dogs and therefore concentrated his breeding on them. That's the most logical explanation why the black-and-tan setters at Gordon Castle were eventually named after the Duke. History says that the Duke would not shoot over his setters until they were five years old, as they were very wild when they were young and matured slowly.

As Rev. Pearce ("Idstone") wrote in 1867: "The origin of the breed is not well known. The late Duke of Gordon, at any rate, brought it up to its present excellence. However, no less important than the development of the breed by the Duke of Gordon has been its establishment and perfecting during the latter half of the 19th Century and after."



THE KENNEL BOY

Very little is known about Alexander's dogs, because there are no stud books or any other records. But we do know that the Gordon strain was present at the castle before 1815. In *Dogs of Scotland* (1891), D.J. Thomson Gray describes the breed in detail. Gray had spoken to Bill Roger, who had worked as a kennel boy for the Duke before the Battle of Waterloo (1815). Bill told the author that around 1820, Gordon Castle had one of the most famous kennels of the British Empire. The dogs were not uniform in colour; they were mostly black with red (tan), black with red and white, brownish-red with white, black-and-white or yellow-and-white. The black-red-and-white dogs had big black and white markings above the eyes and rust-coloured markings on the cheeks. Their heads and ears were black and many of them had white on the chest and feet. The dogs were heavy-bodied, had big feet, were heavily feathered and had beautiful heads with spaniel-like ears. Light eyes and weak heads weren't tolerated. The Gordon Castle setters were generally easy to train. They were not fast but had great stamina, working from early morning until late in the afternoon without a rest.

CONSIDERATE LANDLORD

After Alexander's death in 1827, his son George became the 5th and last Duke of Gordon (1770-1836). Like his father, George was a military man, joining the army in his 20th year. He was educated at Cambridge, served in the Gordon Highlanders and became a general in 1819. After his father's death, he moved from Huntly Lodge – where he had been living with his wife Elizabeth Brodie of Arnhall – to Gordon Castle and took over his father's dogs and kennels. He was known as a kind and considerate landlord.

Both father and son were painted and their portraits are in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery in London.

AUCTIONEERS

Between 1827 and 1836, the kennel was considerably reduced in number. It's possible that some dogs were given away to other breeders, to friends or to the Duke's gamekeepers. In July 1836, the year George died, only 11 Gordons were offered for sale at Tattersall auctioneers. The list of dogs included "Duke, 5 years, a black and tan dog, by his Grace's famous Old Regent x Ellen. 34 Guineas, sold to Lord Abercorn.... Juno, 5 years, black and white, by Old Regent x Juno. 34 Guineas, sold to the Duke of Richmond.... A puppy 4 months old, by Regent ex Crop, pupped March 5th 1836. 15 Guineas to Lord Douglas." It's remarkable that in this list of 11 dogs there is only one black-and-tan!

Upon the death of the 5th Duke, the title became extinct and the estate passed to the Duke of Richmond, George's nephew, who later became the Duke of Richmond and Gordon. Some historians suggest that after the Duke of Richmond revived the kennel of "Castle Setters," the principal colour of the dogs was still black, white and tan with only a few black-and-tans. The 'Castle kennel' was finally closed in 1907 and Isaac Sharpe of Stylish Gundogs bought the remaining setters. They were all black, white and tan.

FROM BLACK AND TAN SETTER TO GORDON SETTER

At the dog show in Newcastle in 1859, a Gordon Setter was awarded first prize for Setters. At the first-ever field trial, in 1863, the first three places were awarded to Gordon Setters.

When The Kennel Club was founded in 1873, the breed was classified as Black and Tan Setter. The reason could be that at that time, Black and Tan Setters registered in the Kennel Club Stud Book had no connection with Gordon Castle. But times change. In 1923, The Kennel Club accepted the name Gordon Setter, not because the breed can be accredited solely to the Dukes, but because there is no doubt that these Scottish noblemen played an important role in the development of the Gordon Setter.

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