

SO, WOULD YOU LIKE  
TO BE OWNED BY A



**KEESHOND?**

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE  
BREED

**PUBLISHED BY:-  
NORTH OF ENGLAND KEESHOND CLUB**

## THE KEESHOND

The dog that we know in England as the Keeshond (pronounced – “kaze-hond”) or Dutch Barge Dog is a medium sized Spitz breed that the Germans call a Wolf Spitz, the French the Chein Loup and the Italians the Volpino! Smaller varieties are known as the German Spitz, Mittel or Klein.

The Keeshond might easily have come from the Northern Regions with traders or possibly the Vikings, as like all the other Spitz breeds they originate from the Northern Hemisphere. Like all Spitz they are identifiable by their wedge shaped heads, dense off standing coats and curled tails characteristically carried high over their backs.

Although they still make good boat dogs, Keeshonden (the plural of Keeshond) are much more popular now as shore-bound guardians and companions. There is a legend dating back to 800 AD in which two men and a dog, at sea in a fishing boat, are caught in a violent storm in the black of night. Driven off course into unfamiliar waters, the men are certain they will perish, until, unexpectedly, they reach shore. The men survive the ordeal, and thereafter look upon the dog, who also escapes without harm, as the talisman for their good fortune. From that day forth, it was considered lucky to have a dog aboard a ship. The great Seal of Amsterdam, the city where the troubled fishing boat is believed to have come ashore, displays a ship bearing two men and a dog that looks very much like a Keeshond.

As the breed spread to most of Europe, the Dutch remained loyal to the medium sized compact dog not only as a barge watch dog but also as a farm dog. The smaller variety was popularised as a house dog. In 1781, the Conservative Dutch political party known as the Orangists (supporters of the Prince of Orange) was opposed by the Patriots (the rebellious "People's Party"). Cornelius "Kees" de Gyselaar, the rebel leader, had as his constant companion a beloved pet dog that eventually became the symbol of his political party. "Kees' hond" appeared in many political cartoons of the day. The appellation stuck, but when the party was defeated and the Orangists led the country, many Keeshond owners did away with their dogs, afraid of being identified with the now unpopular Patriots.

At the same time, the Keeshond was also losing his popularity as a barge dog. As they became roomier, vessels were able to accommodate the larger breeds of guard dogs. Aside from a few bargemen and farmers, who remained loyal to the breed, Keeshonden virtually vanished in Holland until the 1920s. Then, through the efforts of the Baroness van Hardenbroek, interest in the breed was revived and enthusiasm soon spread throughout Europe. Her own dog, Champion Bart is recorded in many modern pedigrees.

The breed was still very popular in Germany although they seemed to prefer their “Wolf Spitz” somewhat larger than our Keeshond. The name is interchanged depending where in Europe you reside but in truth the modern day Keeshond and or Wolf Spitz is pretty much a standard size and weight wherever he may hail from! In Germany they have kept a stud register since 1899 and also a breed standard.

It seems odd that a dog known fondly as "the smiling Dutchman" could have had such a tumultuous history. The modern Keeshond is one of the gentlest of dogs. Never bred as a hunter and never used for any other specialized work, these dogs are companions extraordinaire and great home lovers. Indeed, anyone who had owned a Keeshond would agree with his statement that this is a dog that wants to please; an affectionate dog with a wonderful disposition. Let it not be said, however, that the Keeshond is not a good watchdog. His intelligence and devotion to his home makes him very protective and keenly alert to any stranger who may approach, but Keeshonden are not attackers or yappers, and quickly offer their friendship to those who are welcomed by their owners. Typically, they are not afraid of anything or anyone.

The breed as we know it today was brought to and developed in England by Gwendolen Wingfield-Digby. As a young girl she went on a sailing holiday on the Dutch canals on her father’s yacht and immediately fell in love with the barge dogs. She bought two wolf sable puppies which were of course later joined by others from both Holland and Germany. The story really unfolds when she married and moved into the marital home – Sherborne Castle! In this wonderful area of Dorset the breed flourished and in 1925 The Dutch Barge Dog Club, later renamed The Keeshond Club was formed at the castle.

In its native Holland and other parts of Europe the breed was seen in many colours and this simple fact led to the formation in 1936 of the North of England Keeshond Club as the members of The Keeshond Club favoured only the wolf grey / black variety. The North of England Keeshond Club was formed by Keeshond breeders and owners from Yorkshire and County Durham and an application to register the newly formed club title with The Kennel Club was made on 10th October 1936. According to Kennel Club records the club was duly officially 1st registered on 15th December 1936 “To promote the breeding of Keeshonds and do all in its power to protect and advance the interests of the breed”. The original committee included Mr C H Blanchard, President; Mr J Sutherland, Vice President; Mr R Siddall, Secretary; Mr Ward, Chairman and Mr Frank Hill, Treasurer. The founder members included Mrs Wingfield-Digby, Mrs. Alice Gatacre and Mrs. Doreen Anderson. The membership fee was recorded as 10 shillings (50p) per member or 15 shillings (75p) joint.

Initially the club adopted a different standard to the Keeshond Club (which was founded 11 years earlier). It allowed the showing of pure white and pure black keeshonden as well as the more familiar wolf-grey, omitted to describe the eyes and did not include white chests under "undesirable points"! However, within a few years the standard was altered to become similar to that of the Keeshond Club and nowadays both clubs adhere to the current standard approved by The Kennel Club which states that colour should be a mixture of grey and black. Pure white and pure black keeshonden are still bred and shown on the continent.

Unfortunately, information on the club's early years is sketchy because the club records from 1936 to 1968 have been lost. Further information on this period, such as it is, can be found in the following books and publications which formed the basis for this article.

The North of England Keeshond Club Golden Jubilee Year Book: Article by Mary Smyth  
The North of England Keeshond Club - Book of Champions 1993 - 1999: Brian Curry  
The Keeshond: Alice Gatacre  
A Club Remembers (from Keeshond 2000 Magazine Sept 96): John Beacock

The breed has now gone full circle and in August 2000 the breed and its devotees returned on mass to Sherbourne Castle for a week of celebrations to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of The Keeshond Club. The climax to the week being two shows back to back and a marvellous celebration meal. With Keeshond folk from around the World effortlessly mixing with and admiring many, many wonderful Keeshonden, Sherbourne Castle was once again ringing to the sound of happy, healthy, boisterous Keeshonden. Sadly Mrs. Winfield Digby died in 1975 aged 90 but the debt that we owe her is immeasurable!



Above is a dutch political lampoon of the 18<sup>th</sup> century depicting the Keeshond in the popular trim of the time – “lion clip”.



The Great Seal of Amsterdam, Holland  
Courtesy of Yale University,  
New Haven, Conn

## **OBEDIENCE—ALL IN GOOD TIME**

In general, Keeshonden are very intelligent even though this may not be apparent to a number of Keeshond owners. It is not necessarily true that intelligent dogs are the easiest to train, or that dumb dogs can not be trained. Before one can really become a good trainer of dogs, one must understand a bit about canine psychology and be able to determine the best approach for their particular dog.

Intelligent dogs are often easily bored and can be stubborn. The Keeshond can be very inventive when bored. They generally do not adapt well to repetitive routine obedience exercises, preferring to be challenged with new exercises and games once one command is learned. They are not always the best choice for strict precision obedience as they tend to have a sense of humour and to be clowns.

This can be exasperating for the structured obedience person. Fortunately, Keeshonden are very people and food oriented and are quite willing to please, especially if a snack might be forthcoming.

If you like a dog with some personality and one that can make you laugh at the end of a busy day, a Keeshond will be perfect for you. If you prefer a rigid, obedient performer that pays very strict attention to details and will follow your every command with absolute precision, you might want to look elsewhere. If you are one of those people who can be very jealous if your dog is willing to perform for anyone with a treat in their hand you might want to look elsewhere too...Keeshonden are not very picky about who they do their tricks for if it will get them a biscuit.

## **BUYING A KEESHOND PUPPY.**

Always purchase your puppy from a reputable breeder! Never buy from commercial pet outlets or any establishment that sells any number of different breeds. Beware establishments that accept credit cards – these places will know nothing of the breed and will have no detailed knowledge of your puppy’s pedigree. Luckily it is extremely rare for Keeshonden to be sold through these outlets but we must all remain vigilant. The Kennel Club will always put prospective puppy buyers in touch with reputable breeders.

Tell the breeder your requirements but don’t be surprised if you are asked a lot of searching questions. Good breeders will want to know exactly where their precious puppies are going and exactly who you are! You may indeed come to the conclusion that the breeder doesn’t really want to sell his puppies and that he or she is doing their best to put you off. Not so, but you may be surprised at the number of people who didn’t realise that puppies are indeed babies and do cry through the night, do piddle on the floor and do need feeding little and often. Many, many puppies have in fact been returned to breeders for these exact same reasons. Puppies are a life long commitment. Be well prepared for the arrival of your new puppy, and remember that he or she will become an integral member of your family and should be respected as such. He will need lots of attention, regular cuddles, a well fenced garden, his own bed, loads of toys either bought or improvised and above all else forgiveness and understanding when he repays all your love and attention by chewing up your best slippers! Remember that when you first take him home he will be around 8 to 10 weeks old (never purchase a puppy under 8 weeks) and every inch a baby.

Reputable breeders will insist that the puppy is returned to them at any stage of its life if you cannot continue to look after it so do not be alarmed if you are asked to sign an agreement to that effect. Never ever ship puppies on to a friend no matter how well meaning they may be. Always seek the help of the breeder if you are experiencing any problems whatsoever.

Keeshond puppies are few and far between so do not be alarmed if you are not allowed to choose your own puppy. Breeders will often have waiting lists and will indeed usually keep one or more from a litter for themselves. Be assured though, whether a future show champion or a family pet your Keeshonden will never give you less than 100% loyalty and he deserves nothing less from you!

**Never buy a puppy of any breed if you, your partner or family are out at work all day.**

## SO NOW YOU HAVE YOUR NEW PUPPY!

So now you have your little bundle of fluffy mischief – the fun begins! You know of course where he will sleep because you sorted all that out before you brought him home. You picked him up as early as possible in the day so that he would have plenty of time to settle in before you all retired for the night. Be patient with him because it will be his first night away from mum and his siblings and he **will** be a frightened little fellow. No matter how much love and attention you have showered on him it is still going to be a traumatic night for him.

Whether you have bought a dog basket or simply improvised with a cardboard box (cardboard boxes are ideal because it will not matter if he chews them up), make sure that his bed is placed somewhere safe, where he cannot get himself into trouble. The kitchen or utility room are often chosen as the ideal places for the puppy's sleeping quarters as they are usually tiled and make cleaning up those little accidents far easier, but beware the dangers lurking! To a puppy, that interesting little cable running from the fridge to the wall socket can seem terribly inviting and plastic bottles full of bleach or other cleaning products might look harmless enough but the contents are fatal to a puppy.

There are many dangers around the house and garden that any dog owner should be aware of. Foods such as chocolate, onions, grapes and raisins **are poison** to any dog. Anti freeze, slug pellets (there is no antidote to slug pellets) and many garden plants including daffodils, rhubarb leaves, fox-gloves, yew, rhododendrons and laburnum **are poison**. Beware mistletoe at Christmas. Mistletoe berries **are poison**. All cases of suspected poisoning should be treated as an emergency and immediate veterinary advice sort. If you know what your dog or puppy has ingested tell the vet straight away and take any bottles or labels with you. Do not delay.

Puppies will sleep a lot, piddle a lot, play a lot and then sleep a lot more. Never allow children to play unsupervised with your new puppy as puppies tire easily and although play and human interaction are vitally important to your puppy's development and maturity, they should always stop when **he** wants to stop. There will be plenty of time for the whole family to enjoy games and outings as he grows stronger and lead training has been achieved but never take a puppy on long walks as joints and ligaments are easily damaged. Your puppy needs the freedom to play and romp at his own pace. A secure well fenced garden is vital as puppies can wriggle and escape through the smallest gap in the blink of an eye. Always be firm but kind with your puppy. When he does wrong make sure that he knows what "no" means! Never laugh at him for doing something wrong and then scold him the next time as this will confuse him.

Always make sure that he has plenty of fresh water available at all times. Put plenty of old newspapers down while you puppy learns to be clean. House training varies from puppy to puppy and you must be patient, just like human babies some take longer than others to learn. **Never** rub your puppy's nose in his dirt – this is cruel. Encourage him to go on the newspaper and make a huge fuss of him when he does. Slowly reduce the amount of paper that you put down and place nearer and nearer the door and then place outside the door. Anticipate when nature will want to take its course and take him outside and again make a huge fuss when he performs on cue. He will want to please you and before you know it he will tell you when he wants to go out!

## HOW TO HOUSE TRAIN A NEW PUPPY

**Here's the best advice anyone can give any new puppy owner:**



Get a newspaper, roll it up **very** tight, secure it with a rubber band and leave it on the coffee table. Then, when the puppy piddles in the house, chews up a slipper, or does anything it is not supposed to: You simply take the newspaper and bang it on the top of **YOUR** head very hard while repeating

"I should have been watching my puppy"!

## THE ADULT KEESHOND

The adult Keeshond has a dense, harsh, off standing coat of shades grey through to black although solid colours such as black or white are not allowed under the Kennel Club standard for the breed. Solid colours are still seen on the continent.

The general, overall appearance of a Keeshond in full coat can only be described as impressive. The huge ruff that surrounds his wedge shaped, fox like head makes him stand out from the crowd! His natural stance, ears pricked and erect, feet firmly planted and tail tightly curled and held high on the back has that stamp of alertness of the wonderful watch dog and companion that he truly is. Nothing goes un-noticed by a Keeshond and he will always warn when friend or foe approaches. He is a natural guard but never truly aggressive and will accept any stranger if his master approves.

Like most Spitz, the Keeshond is an independent minded soul and they do like to think for themselves so blind obedience does not come easy. Obey they will but sometimes they make it perfectly clear that they are doing it, not because you demand it, but because they themselves thought it was a good idea.

Being a typical Spitz, the Keeshond is very much food orientated and care should be taken with diet. Not being “faddy” eaters they tend never to refuse food so weight gain can easily happen! Ideally a mature male should weigh in the region of 45lb and the female around 36lb although much will depend on the individual animal and common sense should be applied when assessing a dogs overall weight and stature etc.

Seen from afar the first thing that attracts most people to the Keeshond is its abundant coat! Some people advocate never bathing a Keeshond as they are a naturally clean breed-dirt just seems to fall off the coat when dry-but it does seem rather unlikely that even a Keeshond would go its entire live without the necessity of a bath. Bathing should therefore be done occasionally when needs must. Over bathing will deplete the natural oils in the coat and will almost certainly result in the dog moulting. To keep the coat clean and tidy regular brushing is vital and this should be part of your dogs’ weekly routine from the moment your puppy arrives. A variety of brushes are required and the breeder should give all necessary advice needed, but if you are unsure, ask him to demonstrate the best techniques and don’t be afraid to keep on asking. A well groomed Keeshond always turns heads, so learn the art of grooming and be prepared for that 20 minute walk to the shops to last a lot longer. You will make new friends every time you set foot out the door.

Most Keeshonden love to ride in the car so it is advisable to start them off as young as possible. They are easily lead trained and will demand a walk a least twice a day, so if you are a couch potato, find yourself another breed! Exercise does not need to be aggressive but it should be regular.

The Keeshond is a unique breed, you never own a Keeshond, they own you!



## HEALTH ISSUES

The Keeshond is on the whole a healthy dog, suffering from none of the more common inherited problems associated with eyes and joints (eg hip/elbow dysplasia), found in many popular and numerically larger breeds. Three health issues that have been raised are Epilepsy, Primary Hyperparathyroidism (PHPT) and Skin & Coat problems. If any health problems do arise with your dog which gives cause for concern, the first person to contact is the breeder of your dog. Failing that the owner/breeder of the stud dog if known or the secretary of either of the keeshond clubs.

There has been a major breakthrough in the USA and the gene for PHPT in the Keeshond has now been identified by Dr Richard Goldstein of Cornell University. The North of England Keeshond Club has provided ‘an open register’, so that any one can make available the status of their dogs. By testing all breeding dogs & bitches whose status of PHPT is unknown and by not using a gene positive dog or bitch to breed from, we now have the unprecedented opportunity to make this disease history within a very short period of time. We are a numerically small breed with a small gene pool and it is our responsibility as owners of this beautiful breed to keep it as healthy as possible for future generations. This can only be done by every one being open and honest about health problems as and when they arise.

This still leaves Epilepsy. Dr Barbara Skelly MA, VetMB, PhD, CertSAM, DACVIM, DECVIM, MRCVS of the Department of Clinical Veterinary Medicine, Cambridge is now focusing on this disease. Dr Richard Goldstein is keen to collaborate with us in the investigation of the epilepsy problem and we are joining forces to increase the number of samples from epileptic dogs that we have. Blood samples from epileptic dogs are still needed to make the chances of success greater. Now is the time to take advantage of new techniques at our disposal and make sure that epilepsy also becomes a disease of the past.

Details of two of the Clubs supported charities, relating to Epilepsy, are given below. More information on PHPT & Epilepsy is available from the Club’s web site – Health Section on the Breed page.

Anne Morley is the Hon. Secretary of the **Canine Epilepsy Support Group** and has published a book which explains what epilepsy is, its diagnosis and goes on with information and advice. Chapters include standard veterinary treatment, liver damage, home management of fits, which can be eased if the owner knows what to do. Also triggers which may bring on attacks, calming signals & a great deal of very helpful information. There are tips for owners, useful addresses and a chapter by John Saxton, B.Vet.Med, Vet.FFHom., Cert IAVH, MRCVS. on alternative treatment alongside conventional treatment. If you have an epileptic dog, this book can help to understand what is happening & how to make life easier for everyone. Sadly, as yet there is no magic wand, but many dogs can lead happier lives with the aid of the advice contained within these pages.

Further information about the Canine Epilepsy Support Group from  
Mrs Anne Morley, 21 Sea Lane, East Preston, Little- Hampton, West Sussex, BN16 1NH. 08707 469329

### **The Phyllis Croft Foundation for Canine Epilepsy (PCFCE): -**

The Phyllis Croft Foundation for Canine Epilepsy was founded to bring support and comfort to the owners of dogs with canine epilepsy, to raise public awareness of the condition. The need to promote education about epilepsy is essential and we are learning all the time.

The period taken to establish a diagnosis is undoubtedly a lonely, distressing and frustrating time for the owner. This is the time that the PCFCE can provide support and information and an opportunity to share experiences so that the owner can make the most of their relationship with their vet. We offer a counselling service to all who need it. The PCFCE has hundreds of members throughout the country and abroad, including pet owners, breeders, veterinary surgeons and people simply wanting to find out more either confidentially or in contact with other members. If you don’t feel you can join us but want more information, an SAE and or donation would be much appreciated. All enquiries will be treated in confidence unless the writer has given permission for us to pass on details of their enquiry.

Please contact the PCFCE Secretary for further information:

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**THAT'S ALL**



**FOLKS**

PLEASE CONTACT THE SECRETARY FOR FURTHER DETAILS