

# DOGS ON BUTTONS *by Diana L. Hefti*

Dogs are descended from wolves and other wild canines. They are related to foxes, coyotes, and dingoes. The various dog breeds were developed over many years by mankind, to fit their needs. The basic instincts seen in our domestic dogs are all present in their wild cousins. Herding behavior is present when wolf packs cut out one animal from a herd and head it off to make their kill.



Pointers, setters, along with other sporting and hound breeds reflect the natural stalking and tracking ability of the wild canine. A dog also has a natural instinct to pull against a restraint which has turned into the ability of the sled and draft dogs to pull heavy loads. Over the years, man has modified and strengthened these abilities to allow the domestic dog to become his partner in many of mankind's livelihoods.



As in button collecting, dogs are also categorized for the purpose of showing them. These categories divide the dogs by how man has used them, or developed their natural instincts.

Sporting dogs include all the setters, pointers, retrievers and spaniels – those dogs that go with the hunter to point or flush game (usually birds). These dogs use their noses to find the birds, then indicate it to the hunter by pointing, “setting”, or flushing. After

the hunter has made his kill, these dogs then retrieve the birds for him. Hounds are all the dogs that trail game – either by nose or eyesight, and include breeds like beagles, bloodhounds, Borzoi and greyhounds. These dogs usually bay to indicate to the hunter where they are trailing, or when they have treed or cornered their game.

Working dogs are breeds used for draft, rescue and protection work. Dogs like Saint Bernards, mastiffs, great Danes, huskies, Newfoundlands and Doberman pinschers fall into this category.

The Western Regional Button Association is pleased to share our educational articles with the button collecting community. This article appeared in the May 2010 WRBA newsletter, *Territorial News*. Enjoy! And consider joining WRBA! Go to [www.WRBA.us](http://www.WRBA.us)

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Pug or Boston



Crop-Earred Dog



Dog Chasing Cat



Dog Carrying a letter



Boy and Dog in Doghouse



Painted Under Glass Set in Metal

## Antique Metal Buttons



Poodle



Girl Hugging a Newfoundland



Poodle



Dog Chasing Birds from Food Dish



St. Bernard



Tinted Metal Spaniel



Black Glass



Lithograph Newfoundland



Lithograph Sheltie



French Transfer on Porcelain



Brass



Pressed Horn



Carved Wood Pug



Pressed Wood Bulldog

Top: Brass



Italian Glass Mosaic Cavalier King Charles



Samoyed Hand-Painted on Ivory

## More Antique Dog Buttons



Lithograph Sheltie



Brass German Shepherd or Malinois

Top: Brass

These dogs pulled their master's carts or sleds, protected their estates or property, and rescued those lost in the snow or water. Herding breeds are the dogs that took care of their master's animals. Breeds like border collies, Australian shepherds, German shepherds and collies all tended flocks of sheep or herds of cattle for their owners. Some dogs like Kuvasz are included in the herding group, though their job is to live with the flock of sheep and protect them from predators. Terriers hunted vermin. Breeds like Scottish terrier, West Highland white terrier, Jack Russell terrier, and schnauzers are all game little dogs that were used to keep rat (or other vermin) populations under control on farms, boats, and docks. With only a few exceptions, the majority of terrier breeds were developed in Great Britain. (Exceptions include the schnauzers [Germany] and the Australian terrier [Australia].)



Toy dogs include all the very tiny breeds. These dogs main "job" is to sit on our laps and look cute. Many of these early lap dogs were also used as "flea catchers" – fleas prefer animals to humans, so given a choice between the court lady or her lap dog, the fleas would naturally gravitate to the dog! Dogs like Chihuahuas, Papillions, Yorkies, Maltese and pugs fall into the toy dog breeds. The last category of dog

breeds is the Non-Sporting group. These dogs are all very different from one another. Dogs are put into this group if they don't fit into one of the other categories (like our "unlisted" buttons!!) Poodles, Chows, Dalmatians, and Keeshonden fall into this group. While some of these dogs originally had jobs – like Dalmatians ran with coaches, and poodles were hunters and retrievers, these dogs in general no longer perform these jobs, so were grouped into the non-sporting category.

As a dog fancier, and a button collector, collecting buttons with dogs on them was a natural for me. Dogs have long been a favorite

subject on buttons. In fact, dogs were one of the most popular subjects featured on buttons during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Fortunately, modern button makers are also fond of man's (and women's) best friend, and continue to include dogs on buttons today.

Many different breeds of dogs have been shown on buttons. Some breeds are readily identified, while others are a guess at best. Some of the difficulty in identifying the breeds of dogs is caused in the changes of the breed's appearance over the years, and in other cases, the artist or button maker used a lot of artistic license in portraying the dog. Sometimes the doggy subject must have been a mixed breed or a breed unfamiliar to us today. Modern button makers feature dog breeds only seen in recent years, and even include animated characters like the puppies from the 101 Dalmatians movie.



### Antique Buttons

Some breeds of dogs were very popular on antique buttons. Fanciers who own "antique" breeds, or those that were popular during the 1800's, have the most to choose from. Sporting (or gun) dogs are easily found. There are numerous buttons showing setters, spaniels and retrievers. Many of the old buttons were made of various types of metal. That means it is pretty much impossible to determine if that setter



in the field is an Irish setter, English setter or Gordon setter. The same goes for spaniels. Many of the buttons show a spaniel-type head or body shape, but without color it is hard to say for sure which spaniel was portrayed.

Hounds are also seen quite often on older buttons. Probably the most common hounds seen are members of

# Terriers on Buttons



Antique Vegetable Ivory Terrier



1930's or 40's White Metal Cairn Terrier



Antique Black Glass Terrier



Modern Metal Scotty & Airedale



Antique Fabric & Metal West Highland White Terrier



Antique Fox Terrier Under Glass



1930's Bakelite Border Terrier



Antique Brass Terrier with Cut Steel Decorations



Modern Coconut Shell Scottish Terrier



Antique Fox Terrier Painted on Black Glass



Modern Airedale or Kerry Blue Terrier Metal on Pearl

# A Selection of Hound Buttons



Modern Glass Dachshund



Modern Painted Metal Beagle



Transfer Printed Porcelain Whippet



Antique Brass Greyhound



Modern Painted Wood Borzoi



Modern Painted Hound



Modern Ceramic Beagle



Antique Meerchaum Greyhound



Antique Brass Hounds



Antique Brass Hound



Antique Brass Italian Greyhound

the greyhound family. Without a point of reference, it is often hard to tell whether the dog shown is a greyhound, whippet or Italian greyhound. Greyhound heads are very common and often very beautiful buttons with decorations of cut steels. Foxhound and coonhound-type dogs are also commonly found on antique buttons.

Terriers are also plentiful on antique buttons. Fox terriers, Airedales, Scottish terriers, West Highland white terriers, bull terriers and Yorkshire terriers are all commonly found. Many more buttons have dogs easily identifiable as terriers, though it is harder to decide just which breed they represent. One beautiful button that is identified in the Big Book of Buttons as a Scottie, isn't (at least in my opinion). It is definitely a terrier, but doesn't have the correct head for a Scottish terrier.



Working and herding dogs are also found, though they are not as common as the dogs mentioned above. St. Bernards tend to look very spaniel-like on the old buttons, but usually have the cask around their necks. Newfoundlands can also be found on a number of buttons. Collies, spitz-type Arctic dogs, boxers, plus Great Danes and other mastiff-type dogs can also be found. Non-sporting and toy dogs like

poodles, bulldogs, pugs and Boston terriers are all fairly common. Cavalier King Charles spaniels were popular with the British royalty so are seen surprisingly often in antique buttons and are usually identifiable. There are a few gorgeous antique buttons with different dog breeds hand-painted on ivory, then mounted under glass with a gilt frame, including the lovely Samoyed shown in one of the printed pictures.

### Modern Buttons

Modern buttons, or those made after 1918, are made both by commercial manufacturers and individual studio artists. Dog subjects are just as popular as ever. During the 1930's and 1940's,

terriers were extremely popular subjects – especially Scotties, due to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's pet Scottie Fala. You can find these little guys in celluloid, Bakelite, Burwood (pressed wood), metal, glass and every other imaginable substance and design. The Danforth Company has issued a set of adorable puppies in different poses. There are beautiful plastic buttons currently being made, with scrimshaw-like carvings of many different breeds. Lovely hand-painted buttons are being imported from Russia, showing detailed breed portraits. Studio artists have worked to create dogs from glass, enamel, porcelain, metal, paper Mache and even shrink-art plastic.



One of the most interesting things about dogs on buttons is the variety of settings they are shown in.

Sometimes just the dog's head or body is shown, with no other background. Other buttons show entire scenes. Some buttons show dogs involved in everyday settings – like hunting dogs in the field pointing or retrieving game. Some are humorous like the one showing the

little boy and dog together in the dog house, or the dog chasing the birds away from his food dish. Circus dogs jump through hoops. Other dogs carry letters to mail. One charming button shows a little girl hugging a Newfoundland in front of a gate and wall. Some show tense scenes like the mother dog and her puppies climbing onto the roof of their dog house to escape a flood.

### Other Types of Buttons

Most of the buttons pictured for this article are considered "dressmakers" buttons, meaning they were used on men's and women's regular clothing. However, dogs were also pictured on several other types of buttons and related collectibles.

Both gun dogs and hounds often



# Modern Buttons Made After 1918



Collie Decal on Wood



Carved Jade Akita or Northern Breed



Carved Wood With Glass Eye



Metal Pekingese



Brass Boxer



Painted Wood



Satsuma Poodle



Glass Border Collie

Painted Wood Old English Sheepdog



Metal Bulldog



Cavalier Decal on Ceramic



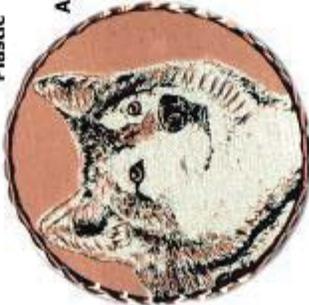
Enamel Great Dane



Paper Dalmatian Under Plastic



Shrink Art Australian Shepherd



Engraved Copper Malamute



Enamel Bulldog Mounted on Leather

# Modern Buttons Made post 1918



Grey Glass Borzoi



Metal Boston on Pearl



1930's Plastic Poodle



Jasperware German Shepherd



Paper Mache Pointer



Fabric Great Dane



"Scrimshaw" on Plastic



Carved Bone Husky

appear on sporting buttons. Sporting buttons were worn on the coats of hunters and other sportsmen, and usually issued in sets. Sets generally included a dog (or dogs), a horse, birds, deer, fox and other wildlife. Some sets included big game animals like giraffes, elephants and tigers, or even fishermen. One lovely 18<sup>th</sup> century English sporting button set included twenty-eight hounds, with each dog hand engraved on the silver button, along with his or her name. Some collectors try to compile complete sporting sets, while others specialize in only one subject (like the dogs).

A related category is hunt buttons. These buttons were presented to and worn by members of local hunt clubs. While most hunt buttons feature only the hunt's initials, some also show a fox, rabbit, badger or other prey. Hunt buttons occasionally show a hound, though these are harder to find. Even though these don't always feature a dog on the button, they are still often coveted by dog button collectors, as the hounds are so integral to the hunt.



Livery buttons were worn by the servants of noble families. Each noble family had their own coat of arms, which were then placed on the livery or "uniform" of the servants, including the buttons. These buttons often featured the family crest. Livery buttons are very distinctive in style, and all showing a crest will have either a crown, chapeau (hat) or torse (what looks like a twisted rope) beneath the design of the crest. A

great many families had dogs as their crest. Talbot hounds, greyhounds, and whippets are all fairly common. They can be found sitting, standing, and lying, or sometimes just the head is shown. Other canines like foxes and wolves were also used. Some livery buttons have been darkened for use when the family was officially in mourning.

Uniform buttons were used on all branches of military uniforms,

as well as civilian uniforms like police, fire, banks, transportation, and many others. So far, I have found a dog on only ONE military uniform button, but I am sure there must be others! The Yukon Regiment from Canada was in service from 1962-1968, and features a lovely Husky on the front (and a torse under his feet). The U.S. bus company Greyhound Lines features a running greyhound on their older buttons. If anyone knows of other uniform buttons with dogs as part of the design, I would love to know about them.



Bridle Rosettes, or Bridle buttons, were used on horse bridles as decoration. They are usually fairly large, often with the design under domed glass, and have a heavy rectangular shank on the back for the leather straps to go through. Some have been remade over the years by removing the shank and replacing it with a pin mechanism so they can be worn as a brooch. Dogs were a popular design on these neat items, along with horse heads, flowers, flags and initials.

### Collecting

Collectors have lots of choices on how to put their collection together, depending on their main focus. Button collectors usually try to have examples in their collection showing a wide variety of breeds, made out of as many different types of materials as possible. They will also look for both old and modern buttons, showing the dogs performing as many different activities as they can. Dog collectors will most likely want to focus on buttons showing their breed (or breeds), or at least dogs from their breed's group. Some breeds are nearly impossible to find on buttons, so those of us with hard-



to-find breeds just collect the dog buttons we enjoy. Some collectors also include other canines in with their dogs. Wolves and foxes are also common subjects, and can be found on both antique and modern buttons. As always with any collectible, you should only buy the items you love.

**4 Sporting Buttons**



Golden & Bird



Two Hounds



Setter or Retriever



The Yukon Regiment, Canada



Bridle Rosette with Dog



Cattistock



Dunston Harriers



Staintondale

**4 Hunt Club Buttons**



Dunston Harriers



Cottesmore



Staintondale

**Some Livery Buttons With Dogs**



Greyhound



Mourning Button



Talbot Hound



Talbot Hound Head



Fox

**References and Recommended Reading**

These books may be difficult to find, as they are out of print. Check your local library for a copy, or try sources like ABE Books to find used copies for yourself. The National Button Bulletin issue can be purchased through the National Button Society, if there are any copies still available. It has a nice article with dog buttons featured.

**The Big Book of Buttons**

By Elizabeth Hughes and Marion Lester  
New Leaf Publishers, Maine, US  
2<sup>nd</sup> Printing, © 1993  
Pages 294-309 and 652-670

**Buttons: A Guide for Collectors**

By Gwen Squire  
Published by Frederick Muller Ltd, London, England  
© 1972  
Plates 64-77

**The National Button Bulletin**

Vol. 60, No. 3, July 2001  
Published by the National Button Society  
Pages 140-155 and color plates i-viii

**Buttons of the Canadian Militia: Army, Naval and Air Forces, 1900-1990**

By Eric Smylie  
Vanwell Publishing Limited, Ontario, Canada  
© 1995  
Page 70

A short note about breed identifications. I have identified breeds on the button pictures to the best of my ability. A lot of them are rather open to interpretation.

I have been involved with training and showing dogs since the early 1970's. I started with an Irish setter and Brittany, and currently train and show my Australian shepherds in agility, conformation and Rally obedience. You can meet my dogs at [www.gleneyaussies.net](http://www.gleneyaussies.net). I have been helping train other people and their dogs since 1984.

A slightly different version of this article appeared previously in the July 2003 issue of Canine Collectibles Courier, and has also appeared on the DogCo.com website. This version was given as a

program to the Washington State Button Society on April 21, 2007.  
Any errors are mine alone.

**List of Buttons used in article. In order.**

- Antique Handkerchief Comer
- Antique Spaniel with cut steels
- Modern German Shepherd Dog
- Vintage Poodle with pastes
- Cartoon Dalmatian from 101 Dalmatians
- Antique sleeping spaniel
- Diana and her Hounds
- Vintage Bakelite Border terrier
- Pearl American Eskimo or Pomeranian
- Danforth Pewter puppy
- Brass Momma dog and puppies in flood
- Sporting Button – hound and nursing puppies
- Golden's Bridge Hunt Club
- Heraldic Wolf Livery Button
- Greyhound Bus Uniform button
- White Metal Boxer
- Italian Glass Mosaic Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

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**Buttons pictured for this article owned by Barbara Johnson, Judy Schwenk and the author. The author wishes to thank both Barbara and Judy for kindly allowing me to share some of their beautiful buttons with the rest of the world.**

