

## Rae Furness of the Raycroft Clumbers

I've been asked to write a few lines on Rae and her dogs. It's hard to believe that she died as long ago as October, 1993. There must now be a number of



present day exhibitors who never knew her but the affix Raycroft still appears in most of the extended pedigrees of today's dogs.

She was born Rachel Lamb in a house situated on the estate of the legendary William Arkwright and was brought up with a Newfoundland, an Airedale, Cairns and her father's kennel of working gundogs.

She left school in 1936 and told her parents much to their disgust, that the only thing she wanted to do was to breed dogs! The breed she chose were Irish Setters.

She showed an Irish belonging to her mother's cousin which did quite well but her sights were always at the top, so her father bought her two bitches from Mrs Baker (Gaeland). Within three years she was winning cc's. At the same time she also showed a few Pointers and English Setters. Incidentally, Joe Braddon's first Pointer came from Raycroft, as did Miss Barnes first English Setter.

During the war years Rae kept a small kennel of setters which she campaigned as soon as shows resumed. She made up the first post war champion. The trend continued, there have been about forty Raycroft champions in Irish Setters.

Eric Furness had his own private pack of Bloodhounds, a very famous line of working springers and a strong kennel of hunt terriers, so when they married in 1951 something had to go, so Rae gave up her English Setters. She always said that while all Irish were different in character English were more or less the same!

But there was also a Clumber Spaniel in Old Brampton Hall, Thornville Sindy. At Blackpool in the late 50's Rae had lunched with Warner Hill. Afterwards they were walking past the Clumber ring and he set her a challenge to take on the

breed and give it her support. Back home she told Eric she was going to mate Sindy and start showing Clumbers. I know what he said and it is not for printing here!

Sindy was mated to Sh Ch Thornville Sheriff and produced five puppies, Rae kept Raycroft Sam. Eric shot duck over him, Rae won a cc with him, and he eventually was sent to America. Sam's sister, Sara Ann, was owned by Judith Hancock (Hawkhill) and as she wanted to concentrate on her English Springers she let Rae have her back. That was the start of it all.

Rae went on to breed 29 UK Clumber Spaniel title holders and win over 200 cc's, I tried to count the overseas winners but got lost. But a lot of these dogs were something else, a Cruft's Best in Show, general championship Best in Shows, group winners, Pup of the Year, breed record holders, top sires and dams, and Full Champions as well. I am not going to list names as this is an article not a book!

How did she do it? She had money, time, enthusiasm, determination and skill.

Rae had fixed ideas about breeding from an early age. She was a great believer in in-breeding to start with, you have to in-breed to establish type. She mated brother to sister and father to daughter with great results. With her Irish she only ever used one other kennel's stud dogs and they in turn only ever used hers. She believed that good dog breeding involved common sense and a certain degree of hardness, weak puppies or ones that the bitch doesn't want to bother with are allowed to die.

It does none of us any harm to look at some of her dogs' pedigrees and try to understand how the mating was planned. It's like snooker, not only are you concentrating on this attempt but planning the next few. If it works you win, if not you just have to sit there and think about what you did wrong whilst someone else is winning. She was a winner, a title holder in her first litter and one in her last.

As a judge she was known and respected throughout the world, her last appointment was to be Best in Show at Driffield, sadly she did not make it. Though, when asked by Jane Lilley once did she prefer judging to showing?

' I'd rather show, I do like judging but if I had to give up one or the other, I'd give up judging.'

Rae Furness was first seen in the ring in 1936 and for the last time in 1993. She left an impression on all who knew, the irreplaceable 'Mrs Clumber.'

Ian Layfield