

# Coniston Hall "Maud Earl" Acquisition

"Rough and Smooth Basset Hounds" circa 1896-1898

## Introduction

The subject of these two pages is the Maud Earl basset hound paintings commissioned by Mabel Tottie in the late 19th century. They were originally framed as a screen, and this screen was on Bonhams New York auction block at the annual Dog Sale this past February. The fortunate ones who acquired the screen were our members Jim and Sharon Dok, who had the three paintings restored. Following are the stories of both.

## "The Dog Sale, 10 Feb 2009

(Bonhams) New York

Lot No: 178

Maud Earl (British, 1863-1943)

Rough and Smooth Basset Hounds

a set of three, mounted within a three-fold oak screen, all signed 'Maud Earl' (two lower left, one lower right)

oil on canvas laid on panel

each painted panel 45 x 21 in. (114 x 53 cm.) overall 76 1/3 x 68 1/4 in. (194 x 176 cm.)



## Provenance:

Commissioned by Mrs Mable Tottie, Coniston Hall, Yorkshire; Percy Pattison of Lytham St. Anne's; thence by descent.

Percy Pattison, was a dentist in Lytham St. Anne's and was a Gundog enthusiast.

The pictures for the screen were commissioned by Mrs. Mabel Tottie of Coniston Hall, Bell Busk, Hellifield, Yorkshire. She was married to

*(Continued on next page)*

A personal note from Dennis Sprung, President of the American Kennel Club, alerted me to this specific work of art going to the auction block at the "Barkfest Breakfast at Bonham's" this past February. Having experienced Bonham's auctions prior, our absence from that venue gave me some cause for interest, and concerns as well.

I knew that there could well be some intrinsic historical value, attributed to this acquisition, so I called upon two professionals, with credentials above reproach, to view the art work in my absence. Their critique of "the piece" caused considerable excitement, and I owe them both our sincere gratitude for conveying their expectations and concerns.

Enough said, I went online, submitted a bid with a few upward benchmarks, and to my amazement, and shock, my initial bid won "the piece." And now the rest of the story.....

Once again, Dennis Sprung came to my rescue, by connecting me with The American Kennel Clubs' Art Conservation and Restoration point man, Lawrence Castagna. The screen was transported to his studio, in East Hampton, where he prepared an extensive "conservation condition report and treatment proposal". A critical decision to remove the paintings from the screen's wood panels was finalized. We commenced the restoration process of removing and cleaning the three canvasses, which was



completed on May 31st.

Sharon and I travelled to New York in June, visiting Lawrence Castagna's Studio in East Hampton, finalizing the framing selection, and seeing the art work for the first time. We have been involved with the restoration process as each of the paintings evolved.

When I "finally told Sharon....Happy Birthday" in April, she reacted with surprise at my creativity after 40 years together. This acquisition will "fit in just right" with the rest of our collection, but I have to admit that this auction experience has been the most rewarding. Thanks to a simple note from a friend, all the way to East Hampton to view the archival restoration work and shipment to our home on Puget Sound, the acquisition has truly become intrinsic in value for all the right reasons .....they are very special Basset Hounds indeed!

James and Sharon Dok CASTLEHILLS BASSET HOUNDS



Major J.B.G. Tottie JP, ornithologist and breeder of prize-winning horses and cattle. Mabel herself was a successful breeder of long standing, owning Skye Terriers before the Basset Hounds and also kept Bulldogs and Blenheim Spaniels. She was a wealthy socialite and it would have been typical of her to enlist the services (of) Maud Earl, the most fashionable dog painter of the day. A contemporary photograph reproduced in *The Stock-Keeper Christmas Supplement* December 21st 1900 page 23, shows the screen in situ, in the corner of the drawing room at Coniston Hall, (illustrated).

Coniston Hall was sold in 1969 by order of the executors of Mrs. Tottie's son, the late Richard Tottie, and it is reasonable to assume that the screen left Coniston then.

The two roughs on the left hand panel are Ch. Tambour, the first dog champion and Ch. Pervenche (in the foreground), the first bitch champion, both bred in France by Mons Bocquet, acquired by Mons Puissant in Belgium who sent them over to Britain to be sold. They had the distinction of winning the first classes for roughs at Crufts in 1893. Mrs. Tottie acquired them in 1895 and bred from the pair producing Ch. Puritan and his sister Ch. Priscilla who dominated the awards at Crufts until Mrs. Tottie disbanded her kennel.

The middle panel features the smooths, Solomon and Rowena (in the foreground) who won thirty prizes and cups between them; they also won best dog and bitch at Crufts in 1896. Solomon was out of Gravity by Ch. Forester, the most prepotent sire of his day, who Captain Godfrey Heseltine described as "the finest Basset that ever lived". Rowena was out of Maid Marion by Ch. Bowman, a son of Forester.

The third panel shows the bitches Zitta (in the foreground), as she is referred to in an article in *The Stock-Keeper* (December 21st 1900) which mentions the panel, and Gravity. Gravity was another Crufts winner for Mrs. Tottie, being best smooth bitch in 1895. This bitch was a particularly useful brood for Mrs. Tottie, mated to her half brother Ch. Paris (a son of Forester) she produced Ch. Louis Le Beau, one of the most successful hounds at the turn of the century and who won his last (of three) Crufts CCs at the age of ten. His sister, Ch. Lurline was best female Basset in 1897 and the pair won both CCs at Crufts in 1898, the first year CCs were on offer for the breed at Crufts. Louis won a total of eighteen CCs and was a very significant sire.

Prior to the First World War, dogs changed owners as frequently as the British weather changes, and unquestionably Zitta is in fact Xitta (another Forester child), bred by Mrs. C.C. Ellis, another successful breeder of both roughs and smooths. Certainly the hound's colour matches that of Xitta.

We are grateful to Nick Waters for his assistance in cataloguing this lot."

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Lawrence Castagna, art restoration expert  
 Michael Meckler, BHCA Member  
 Staci Smith, Bonhams



## The Breeder

I love my little puppy; she makes my house a home.  
 She is my very sweetest little friend; I never feel alone.  
 She makes me smile; she makes me laugh; she fills my heart with love...  
 Did some person breed her, or did she fall from up above?

I've never been a breeder, never seen life through their eyes;  
 I hold my little puppy and just sit and criticize.  
 I've never known their anguish; I've never felt their pain,  
 the caring of their charges, through snow or wind or rain.

I've never waited the whole night through for babies to be born,  
 The stress and trepidation when they're still not there by morn.  
 The weight of responsibility for this body in my hands,  
 this darling little baby, who weighs just 60 grams.

Should you do that instead of this...or maybe that was wrong?  
 Alone you fight and hope, one day, he'll grow up proud and strong.  
 You pray he'll live to bring great joy to someone else's home.  
 You know it's all just up to you; you'll fight this fight alone.

Formula, bottles, heating pads, you've got to get this right,  
 two-hour feedings for this tiny guy, throughout the day and night.  
 Within your heart you dread that you will surely lose this fight  
 To save this little baby, but God willing...you just MIGHT.

Day one he's in there fighting; you say a silent prayer.  
 Day two and three, he's doing well, with lots of love and care.  
 Day four and five...he's still alive; your hopes soar to the heavens.  
 Day six he slips away again, dies in your hands, day seven.

You take this little angel, and bury him alone.  
 With aching heart and burning tears, and an exhausted groan,  
 You ask yourself, "Why do this?...Why suffer through this pain?"  
 Yet watch the joy your puppies bring, and everything's explained.

So, when you think of breeders and label them with "Greed",  
 Think of all that they endure to fill another's need.  
 For when you buy your puppy, with your precious dollars part,  
 You only pay with money...while they pay with all their heart.

Author Unknown

Contributed by Paul Julsing

