

**THE  
ILLUSTRATED STANDARD**



**OF THE  
IRISH WOLFHOUND**



## INTRODUCTION

Irish Wolfhounds, according to legend and history, originated in those days long ago veiled in antiquity when bards and story tellers were the caretakers of history and the reporters of current events. One of the earliest recorded references to Irish Wolfhounds is in Roman records dating to 391 A.D. Often given as royal gifts, they hunted with their masters, fought beside them in battle, guarded their castles, played with their children, and laid quietly by the fire as family friends. They were fierce hunters of wolves and deer.

Following a severe famine in the 1840s and the arrival of the shot gun that replaced the need for the Irish Wolfdog to control wolves, there were very few Irish Wolfhounds left in Ireland. It was in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century that Captain George A. Graham gathered those specimens of the breed he could find and began a breeding program, working for 20 years to re-establish the Breed. The Standard of the Breed written by Captain Graham in 1885 is basically the standard to which we still adhere.

Today's hound seldom hunts live game, does not go to war, and is owned not only by the highly placed but also by the common man. Yet he still has that keen hunting instinct, guards his home and family, is a constant companion and friend, lies by the fire at night, and plays with the kids. Being a family companion has replaced his original, primary function as a hunting hound, but he will still, untrained to do so, give chase to fleeing prey.

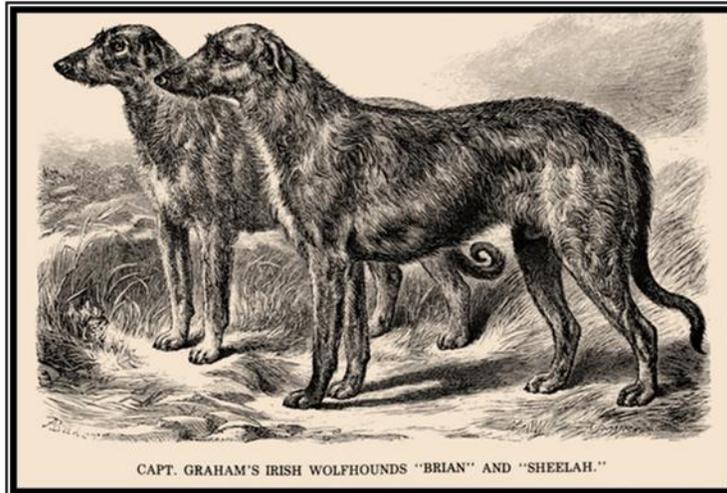
Per the Standard, an Irish Wolfhound must be "of great size and commanding appearance." He has a large, muscular greyhound-like shape. He is the tallest of dogs not the heaviest. His chest is deep; his neck long and strong. He is a superb athlete and an endurance runner.

When judging the Irish Wolfhound in the ring, primary consideration must be given to the hound's ability to do the job he was bred to do centuries ago. The trot observed in the ring is a working gait while looking for prey in the field. It must be smooth and effortless, covering ground. It is only when he gives chase that he breaks into the double suspension gallop.

He must be well balanced and well muscled, enabling him to carry his large frame over long distances. Never appearing lumbering, weak or fragile, he is a combination of power and grace.

This Illustrated Standard is intended to help owners, breeders, and judges understand the fine points and unique attributes of the Irish Wolfhound.

## THE STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE



**GENERAL APPEARANCE** -- *Of great size and commanding appearance, the Irish Wolfhound is remarkable in combining power and swiftness with keen sight. The largest and tallest of the galloping hounds, in general type he is a rough-coated, Greyhound-like breed; very muscular, strong though gracefully built; movements easy and active; head and neck carried high, the tail carried with an upward sweep with a slight curve towards the extremity. The minimum height and weight of dogs should be 32 inches and 120 pounds; of bitches, 30 inches and 105 pounds, these to apply only to hounds over 18 months. Anything below this should be debarred from competition. Great size, including height at shoulder and proportionate length of body, is the desideratum to be aimed at, and it is desired to firmly establish a race that shall average from 32 to 34 inches in dogs, showing the requisite power, activity, courage and symmetry.*

**HEAD** -- *Long, the frontal bones of the forehead very slightly raised and very little indentation between the eyes. Skull, not too broad. Muzzle, long and moderately pointed. Ears, small and Greyhound-like in carriage.*

**NECK** -- *Rather long, very strong and muscular, well arched, without dewlap or loose skin about the throat.*

**CHEST** -- *Very deep. Breast, wide.*

**BACK** -- *Rather long than short. Loins arched.*

**TAIL** -- *Long and slightly curved, of moderate thickness, and well covered with hair.*

**BELLY** -- *Well drawn up.*

**FOREQUARTERS** -- *Shoulder, muscular, giving breadth of chest, set sloping. Elbows well under, neither turned inwards nor outwards.*

**LEG** -- *Forearm muscular, and the whole leg strong and quite straight.*

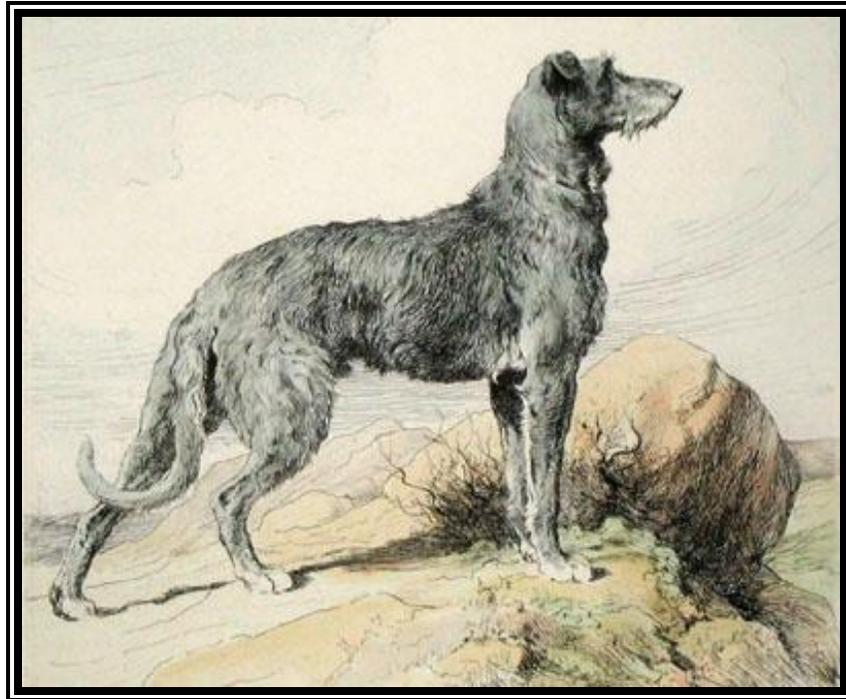
**HINDQUARTERS** -- *Muscular thighs and second thigh long and strong as in the Greyhound, and hocks well let down and turning neither in nor out.*

**FEET** -- *Moderately large and round, neither turned inwards nor outwards. Toes, well arched and closed. Nails, very strong and curved.*

**HAIR** -- *Rough and hard on body, legs and head; especially wiry and long over eyes and under jaw.*

**COLOR AND MARKINGS**-- *The recognized colors are gray, brindle, red, black, pure white, fawn, or any color that appears in the Deerhound.*

**FAULTS** -- *Too light or heavy a head, too highly arched frontal bone; large ears and hanging flat to the face; short neck; full dewlap; too narrow or too broad a chest; sunken or hollow or quite straight back; bent forelegs; overbent fetlocks; twisted feet; spreading toes; too curly a tail; weak hindquarters and a general want of muscle; too short in body; lips or nose liver-colored or lacking pigmentation.*



### **LIST OF POINTS IN ORDER OF MERIT**

- 1. Typical. The Irish Wolfhound is a rough-coated Greyhound-like breed, the tallest of the coursing hounds and remarkable in combining power and swiftness.***
- 2. Great size and commanding appearance.***
- 3. Movements easy and active.***
- 4. Head, long and level, carried high.***
- 5. Forelegs, heavily boned, quite straight; elbows well set under.***
- 6. Thighs, long and muscular; second thighs, well muscled, stifles nicely bent.***
- 7. Coat, rough and hard, specially wiry and long over eyes and under jaw.***
- 8. Body, long, well ribbed up, with ribs well sprung, and great breadth across hips.***
- 9. Loins arched, belly well drawn up.***
- 10. Ears, small, Greyhound-like carriage.***
- 11. Feet, moderately large and round; toes, close, well arched.***
- 12. Neck, long, well arched and very strong.***
- 13. Chest, very deep, moderately broad.***
- 14. Shoulders, muscular, set sloping.***
- 15. Tail, long and slightly curved.***
- 16. Eyes, dark.***

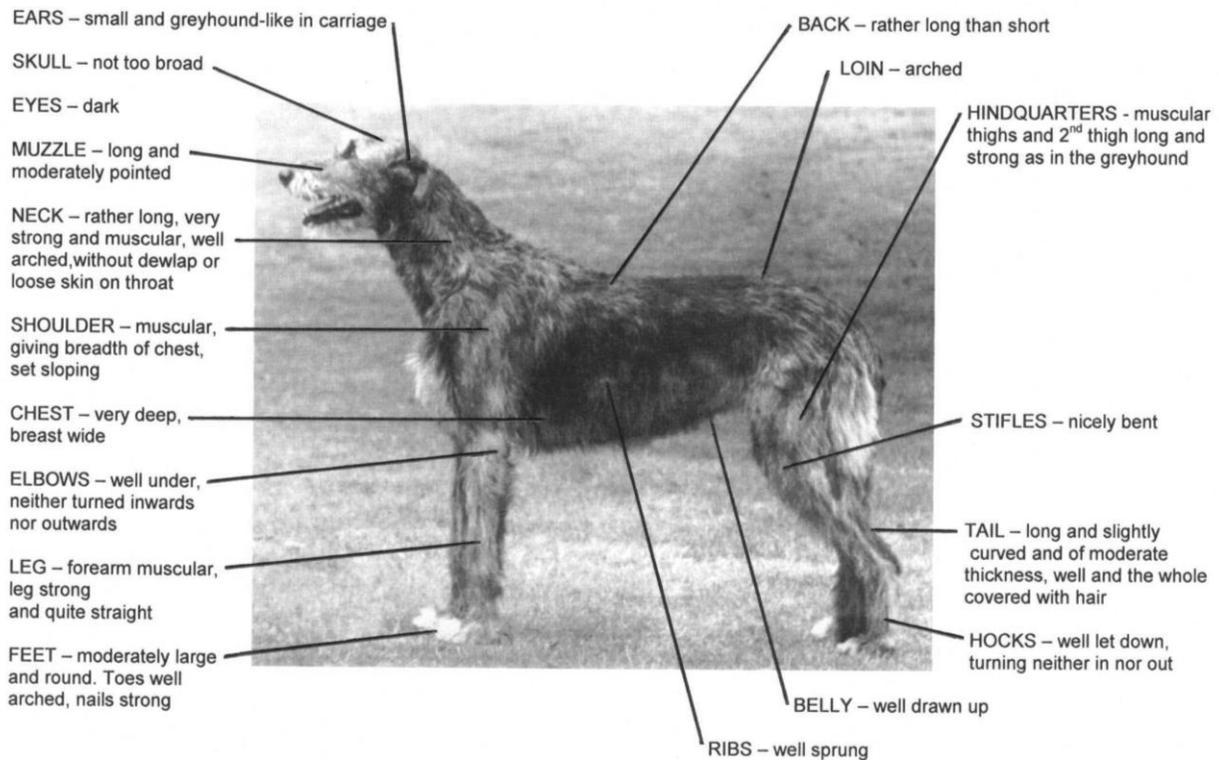
***Note - The above in no way alters the Standard of Excellence, which in all cases be rigidly adhered to; they simply give the various points in order of merit. If in any case they appear at variance with the Standard of Excellence, it is the latter which is correct.***

The Irish Wolfhound Standard was written in England in 1885. It was adopted by the Irish Wolfhound Club of America at its formation in 1926. Since that time it has only been revised twice, in 1947 when the minimum heights and weights were increased, and in 1950 when the reference to the Great Dane and Deerhound were eliminated. It is a tribute to its writer, Captain George Augustus Graham, that although this Standard is essentially unchanged from the original of 1885, it continues to provide guidance for the production of the quality animals seen today while enabling the use of historical Irish Wolfhounds as examples for this Illustrated Standard.

# THE IRISH WOLFHOUND

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## OF GREAT SIZE AND COMMANDING APPEARANCE



DOGS – minimum height and weight should be 32 inches and 120 pounds  
BITCHES – minimum height and weight should be 30 inches and 105 pounds  
COAT – rough and hard on body, legs and head; especially wiry and long over eyes and under jaw

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**“THE GENTLE GIANT”**



## THE ILLUSTRATED STANDARD OF THE IRISH WOLFHOUND

The Irish Wolfhound Club of America considers those factors set forth in the Standard of Excellence and Points in Order of Merit to be the blueprint by which the Irish Wolfhound is to be bred and judged. It is the mission of all who breed or judge the Irish Wolfhound to give full consideration to those specifications, regardless of personal preferences or interpretations. This consistency is essential if the Irish Wolfhound is to march into the future retaining all of its majesty and grandeur.

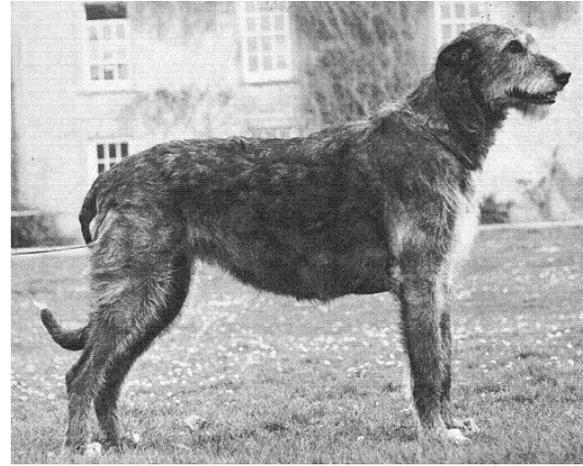
(Note: The ***bold, italicized text*** is from the Standard and the regular text is commentary.)

**GENERAL APPEARANCE:** *Of great size and commanding appearance, the Irish Wolfhound is remarkable in combining power and swiftness with keen sight. The largest and tallest of the galloping hounds, in general type he is a rough coated, Greyhound-like breed; very muscular; strong though gracefully built; movements easy and active; head and neck carried high, tail carried with an upward sweep with a slight curve towards the extremity. The minimum height and weight of dogs should be 32 inches and 120 pounds; of bitches, 30 inches and 105 pounds; these apply only to hounds over 18 months of age. Anything below this should be debarred from competition. Great size, including height at shoulder and proportionate length of body, is the desideratum to be aimed at, and it is desired to firmly establish a race that shall average from 32 to 34 inches in dogs, showing the requisite power; activity, courage and symmetry.*





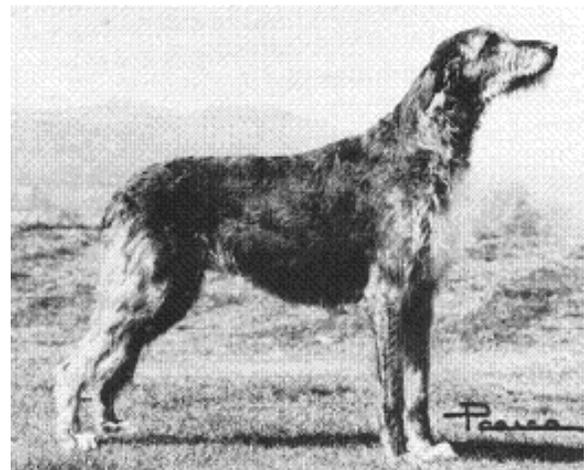
Although great size, including height at the shoulder and proportionate length of body is to be desired, it is not to come at the expense of balance and symmetry. Some judges equate great size with height alone and reward tall, finely-boned and narrow-bodied animals, but height is only one component of the whole hound.



Type calls for a rough-coated Greyhound-like breed; very muscular, strong though gracefully built, showing the requisite power, activity, courage and symmetry. Understanding the balance of power and swiftness in the Irish Wolfhound is necessary if one is to evaluate the breed. The Irish Wolfhound should not be Mastiff-like nor should it have a Deerhound appearance. It should never suggest frailty or weakness.



Great size should be synonymous with the substance and power necessary in a dog that is to hunt large and formidable prey. This size does not come from bulk weight or merely inches at the shoulder, but from great depth of body, spring of rib, strong muscular structure and good bone. The Irish Wolfhound is longer than it is tall. The proportions of all of the early dogs seemly show a beautiful symmetry of being slightly longer in the body than the height at the withers.

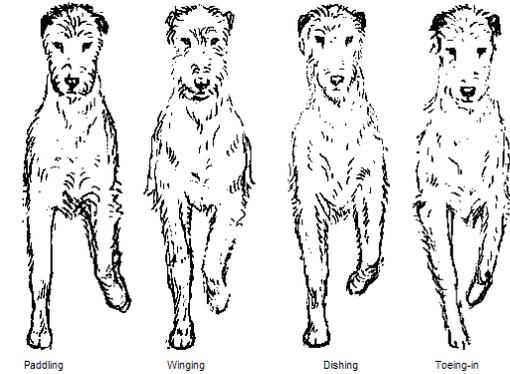
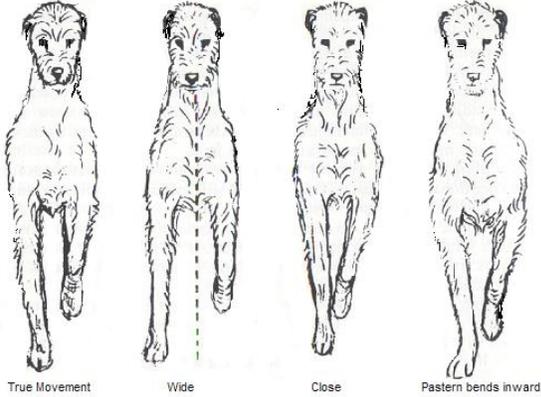


The breed should exude strength and power with commanding appearance and still maintain the graceful Greyhound-like image. It is important to remember that the Irish Wolfhound was originally intended to be a powerful hunter of big game. In order to comply with the "commanding appearance" called for by the Standard, an Irish Wolfhound should have an intelligent expression and imposing bearing. The old coat of arms "gentle when stroked, fierce when provoked" typifies this range of expression.

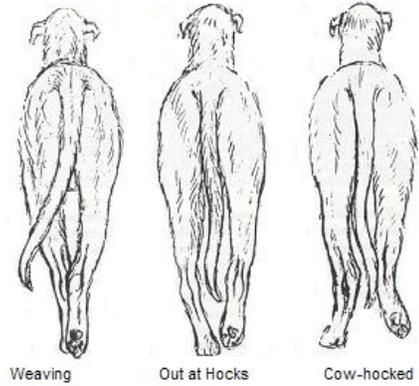
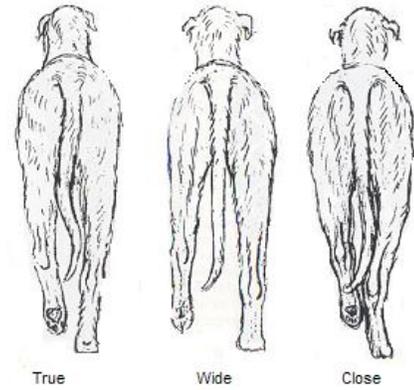
## MOVEMENT - *Easy and active.*

The Irish Wolfhound should not move wide in the front or rear, but rather converge or single track.

### FRONT MOVEMENT



### REAR MOVEMENT



The stride is long and smooth with great reach and a strong, powerful drive. The Standard's reference to "*movement easy and active*" describes a sound and effortless gait.

SIDE MOVEMENT



POWER and SWIFTNESS



**HEAD - Long, the frontal bones of the forehead very slightly raised and very little indentation between the eyes. Skull not too broad. Muzzle, long and moderately pointed. Ears, small and Greyhound-like in carriage.**

***Faults listed: too light or heavy a head, too highly arched frontal bone; large ears and hanging flat to the face.***

As a hunter of large and fierce prey, the Irish Wolfhound needs jaws of sufficient length and strength and must possess a punishing bite to cope with his quarry when he overtakes it. Although the Irish Wolfhound bite is not specifically mentioned in the standard, it should be serviceable and in keeping with the overall soundness of the breed.

He needs plenty of muzzle before his eyes. Any tendency to a weak or snipey muzzle is a serious fault. The head should show strength, with good fill in front of the eyes to give strength to the jaw. It should have a slight, even tapering from the backskull to the nose. The skull should not be broad as in a Mastiff-like look and there should not be an exaggerated zygomatic arch (not a bulbous look on the side of the skull). The distance from the occiput to the frontal bones should approximate the distance from the frontal bones to the end of the muzzle. There should be very little stop. While the occiput may be prominent, the skull should not be rounded. The ears should be carried tucked tightly to the side of the head, as in a Greyhound, when in repose and semi-erect when looking at objects in the distance. The most desirable ears are small and Greyhound-like. A flat ear is not desirable and detracts from the overall appearance.



**NECK - Rather long, very strong and muscular, well arched, without dewlap or loose skin about the throat.**

**Faults listed: short neck; full dewlap.**

The neck must be strong with well developed muscles, particularly where it attaches to the head. Additionally the neck should flare in breadth and width where it joins the chest and shoulders, fitting smoothly into the withers. The Irish Wolfhound cannot function in his role as a hunter of large game without the strength of jaw and neck to bring down its quarry. Captain Graham called for "a neck thick in comparison to his form, and very muscular". It should be well arched and powerful.



**CHEST - *Very deep. Breast wide.***

***Faults listed: Too narrow or too broad a chest.***

The chest should be deep with the lowest point at or just below the elbow. The brisket and forechest are well-filled and rounded, never hollow. There should be depth and breadth of chest to allow lung and heart room. Chest capacity depends on long ribs which should be well-sprung.



Captain Graham said “Girth is also most essential, as without it, the necessary lung and heart action is impossible. The ribs should be reasonably sprung, but not as to resemble a barrel-like appearance. Too great a width contributes to coarseness, and is a handicap to the coursing hound, while a too narrow chest could spell lack of room.”

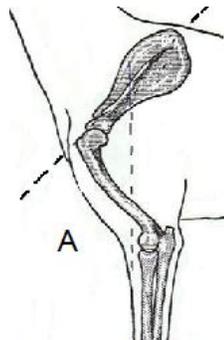
The late 19<sup>th</sup> century English author, Stonehenge, stated “With regard to the chest, there are two things to be considered, namely, capacity for the lodgment of the lungs and heart, and the



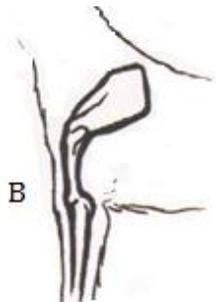
attainment of that form most conducive to speed and working. It must not be too deep, or the animal is constantly striking it against obstacles; it must not be too wide, or the shoulders are unable to play smoothly upon it, as they must do in the action of this quarter; but it must be of sufficient capacity to lodge the heart and lungs. So, neither too small for good wind, nor too wide for speed, nor too deep to keep free from the irregularities of the ground.”

**FOREQUARTERS - Shoulders, muscular; giving breadth of chest, set sloping. Elbows well under neither turned inwards nor outwards.**

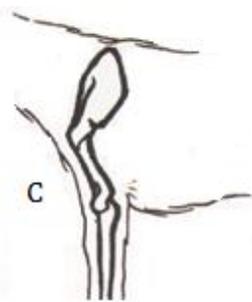
The scapula should be well laid back into the topline and the upper arm should be set back under the dog. In addition to the angular relationship of scapula and humerus as viewed from the side, the elbow should be set well under the dog fitting closely to the chest wall. This is clearly described in the Standard when it states that the elbows should be well under and turn neither inward nor outward. The shoulders should be held in well with smooth muscles, not heavy or bulky over the shoulder blades.



Correct shoulder



Short, Upright upper arm



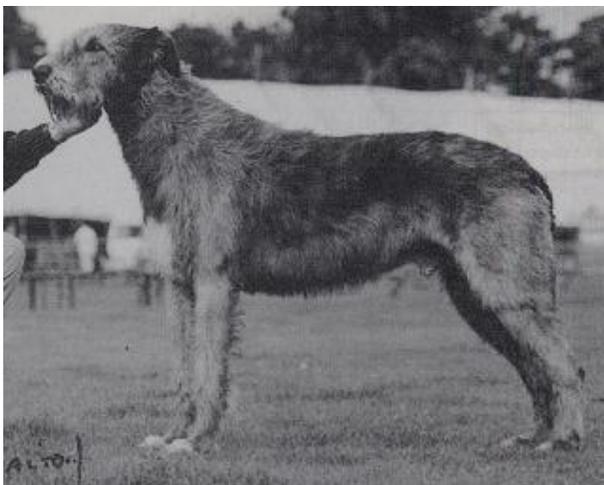
Straight shoulder angle too open



**BACK - Rather long than short. Loins arched.**

***Faults listed: sunken or hollow or quite straight back; too short in body.***

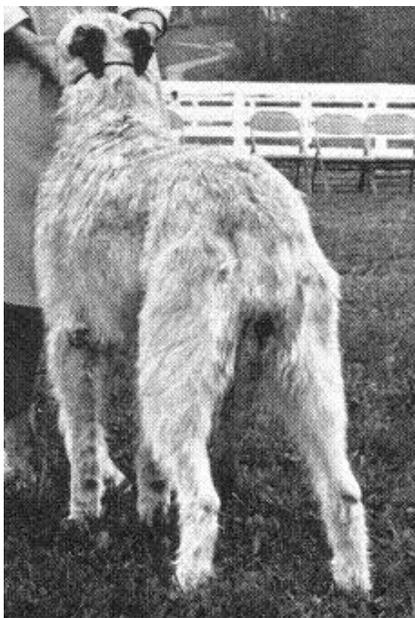
The body should be long and well ribbed up with great breadth across the hips. In the topline, the slight rise over the loin is a critical part of the gazehound structure. The entire back is not arched, nor does the topline fall away. The topline should not dip behind the shoulders nor be roached, flat, sagging or sloping. The loin should be broad, powerful, and well muscled, linking the moderately sloping croup and tail. Length of ribcage is very important as it contributes to the support of the spine and correct belly tuck up and topline. In addition, chest capacity depends on long ribs that should be well sprung and neither barrel shaped nor flat. Incorrect shoulders, rear assembly, short ribcage and lack of muscling in the loin area can all contribute to a poor topline. This is a very serious fault in a coursing dog whose loin must have the strength and musculature to extend and contract at a gallop.



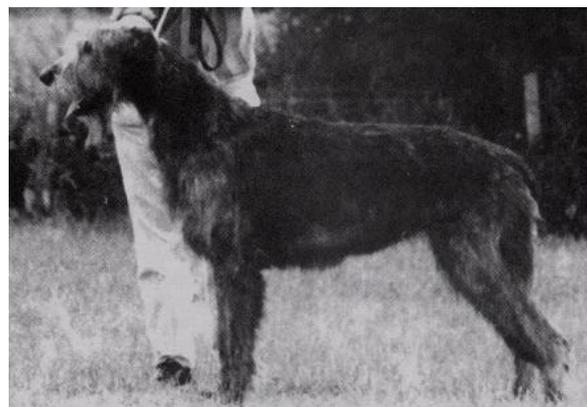
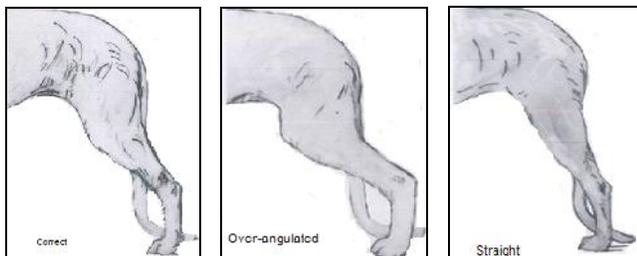
**HINDQUARTERS** - *Muscular thighs and second thigh, long and strong as in the Greyhound, and hocks well let down and turning neither in nor out.*

**Faults listed:** *weak hindquarters and a general want of muscle.*

As in any galloping hound, the pelvis should be broad and powerful, with long, strong, muscular thighs and second thighs. "Hocks well let down, turning neither in nor out." This describes a low hock. A well-muscled second thigh of appropriate length is needed if the hocks are to be low, strong, and flexible to give proper drive in motion.

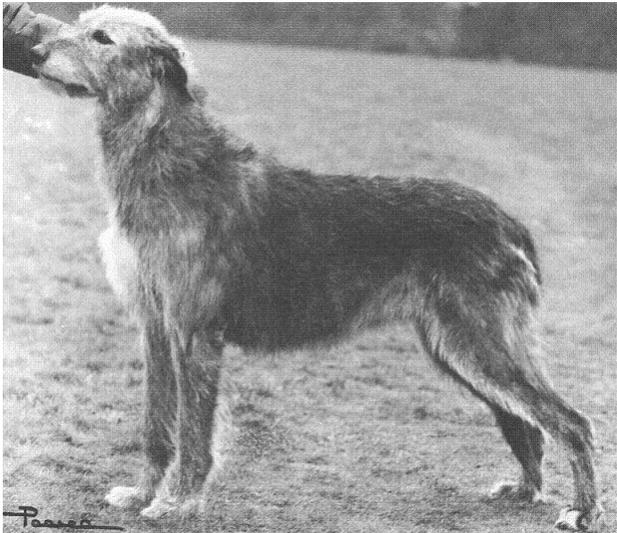


There should be good breadth of stifle, and the List of Points in Order of Merit call for the stifles to be 'nicely bent'. Over-angulation is not desirable in the Irish Wolfhound and serves no purpose in the hunt. Hindquarters should be balanced in relationship to the forequarters.



**BELLY - *Well drawn up.***

The underline is affected by the rib cage which should extend well back before it curves upward to the tuck-up or drawn-up belly. The Greyhound outline in all sighthounds calls for a deep chest to provide room for the heart and lungs. This must be combined with the correct tuck-up, without which the dog cannot gallop correctly.

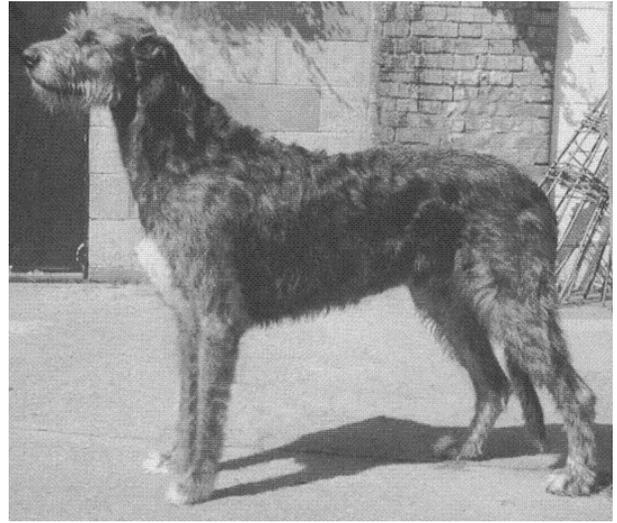


**LEG - Forearms muscular, and the whole leg strong and quite straight.**

***Faults listed: bent forelegs; overbent fetlocks.***

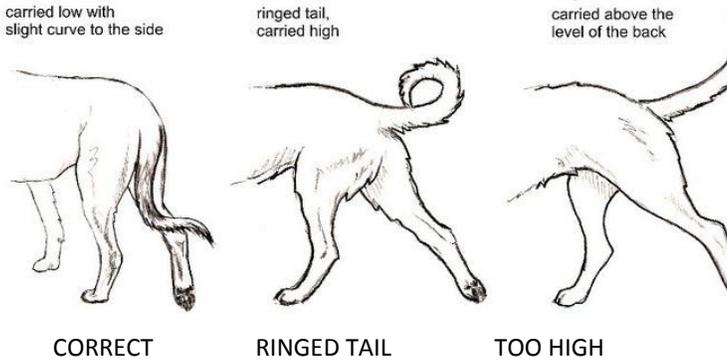
The legs should be heavily boned with well developed muscling, conveying an appearance of strength and power. Pasterns should be set slightly sloping to create a cushioning effect in the gait. Pasterns too straight can cause a dog to knuckle over.

Good length of leg.



**TAIL - Long and slightly curved, of moderate thickness, and well covered with hair.**

**Faults listed: too curly a tail.**



CORRECT

In the ring, the tail may be carried up when the dog is alert but should drop to a correct position when the dog is calm. The hair cover should be thick enough to protect to the tail.

The tail, when carried correctly in the gallop, acts as a counterbalance, moving constantly to enable fast turns. When trotting, the tail should not be carried above the topline but rather down with a slight curve at the end.



CORRECT



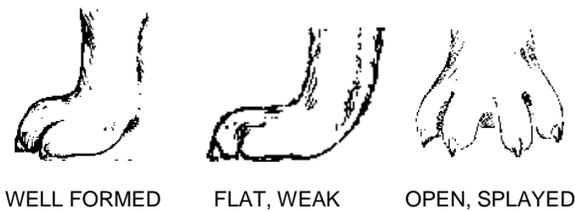
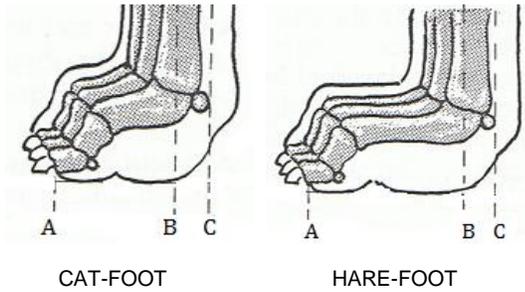
USING THE TAIL AS A COUNTERBALANCE



INCORRECT TAIL CARRIAGE

**FEET - Moderately large and round, neither turned inwards nor outwards. Toes, well-arched and closed. Nails, very strong and curved.**

**Faults listed: twisted feet, spreading toes.**



When the Standard describes moderately large, it refers to both bone and large, well cushioned pads. Round indicates that a hare foot is not desirable. The toes should be tight, close and well arched. Such a foot will have spring and give as it hits the ground, absorbing the shock of movement.

**FRONT FEET**



**REAR FEET**



**HAIR - Rough and hard on body, legs and head; especially wiry and long over eyes and under jaw.**

The Irish Wolfhound is a rough-coated breed with a dense, soft undercoat, and a hard, wiry outercoat that makes him impervious to all types of weather. A woolly or silky coat is atypical and incorrect.



**COLOR AND MARKING** - *The recognized colors are gray, brindle, red, black, pure white, fawn or any color that appears in the Deerhound.*

**Faults listed:** *lip or nose liver-colored or lacking pigmentation.*



RED



BRINDLE



BRINDLE



GRAY



WHITE

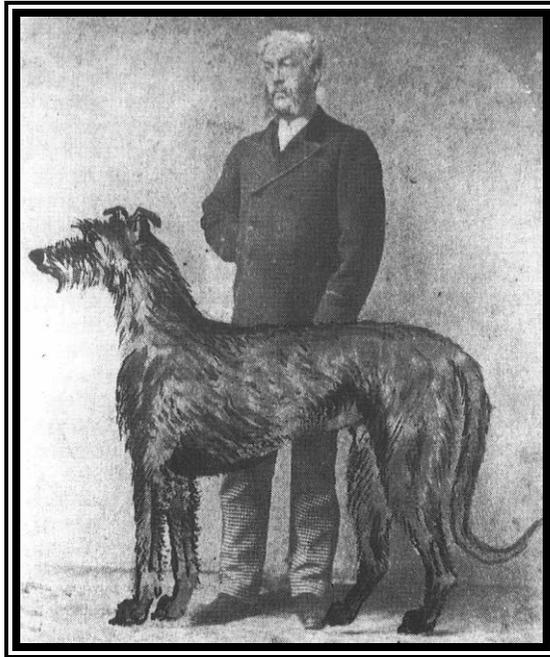


BLACK



FAWN

## NOTEWORTHY IRISH WOLFHOUNDS OF THE PAST



CAPTAIN GEORGE AUGUSTUS GRAHAM & MODEL

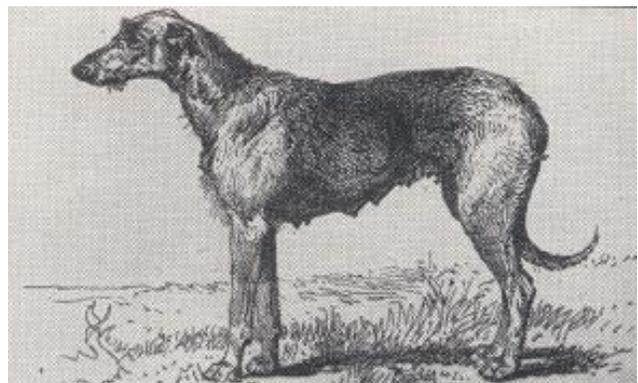
There has been much speculation as to the type and appearance of the ancient Irish Wolf-dog, Irish Greyhound, or Irish Wolfhound, which the present dog is supposed to represent. However, it is certain that at an early time in history, Ireland was known for Greyhounds of considerable size. Ossianic literature abounds with descriptions of hunting, battle, and heroic scenes attributed to the Irish Wolfhound.

In 1885, the Irish Wolfhound Club was founded to “promote the more complete recovery of this grand dog, and to fairly establish the race .... “ Also in 1885, Captain Graham wrote “.... I by no means assert that we still have a pure strain, yet I distinctly contend and reaffirm that more or less true and authentic blood does exist .... whereupon to rebuild the old breed.” I hardly think the breed will be any more manufactured than has been the case with many that are now looked upon as ‘pure.’ Recovered would strike me as a more appropriate term.”

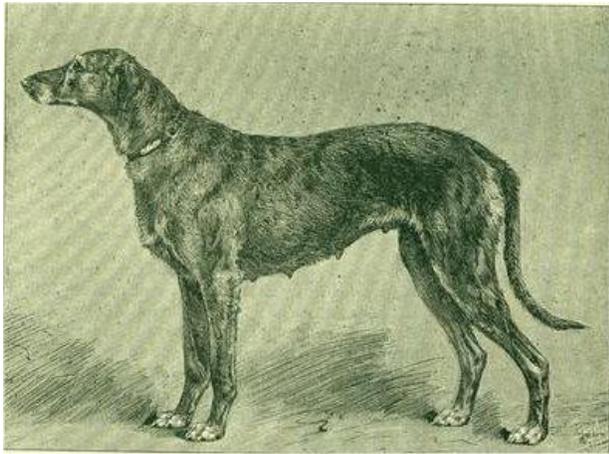
Following are illustrations and photographs of some of the early dogs to which we owe the existence of today’s Irish Wolfhound.



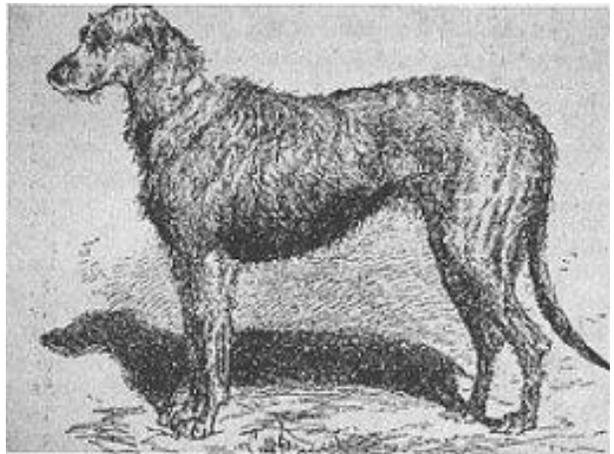
SCOT – 1877



CH. SHEELAH – 1882



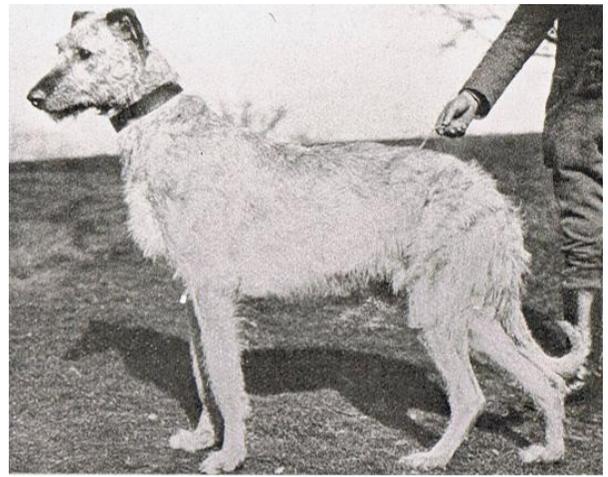
HECLA - 1885



MERLIN - 1886



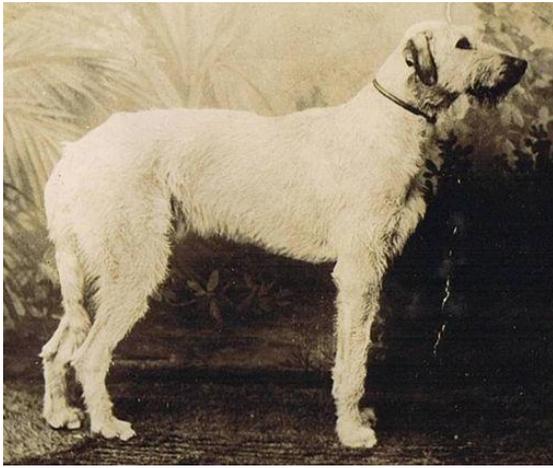
BRIAN II - 1893



CH. O'LEARY - 1896



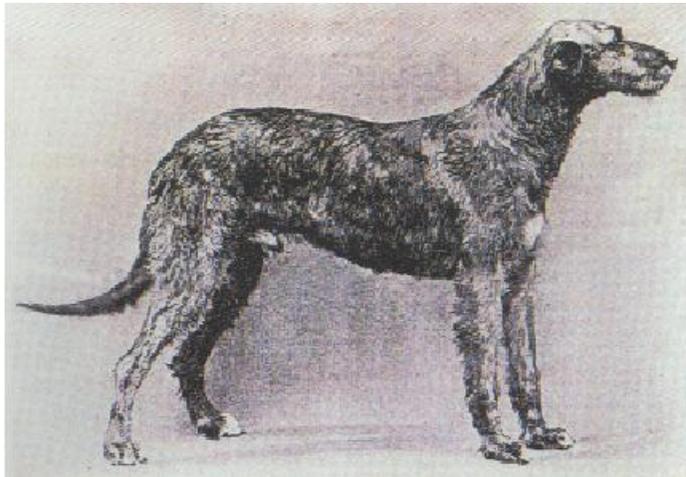
WOLFE TONE - 1900 & CH. COTSWOLD - 1902



STEYNING WOLF – 1903



FELIXSTOWE GWEEBARRA – 1909



FELIXSTOWE REGAN



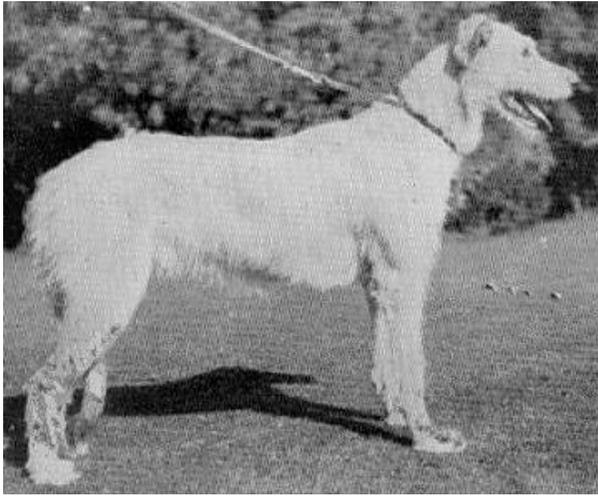
COURAGE OF GREVEL – 1919



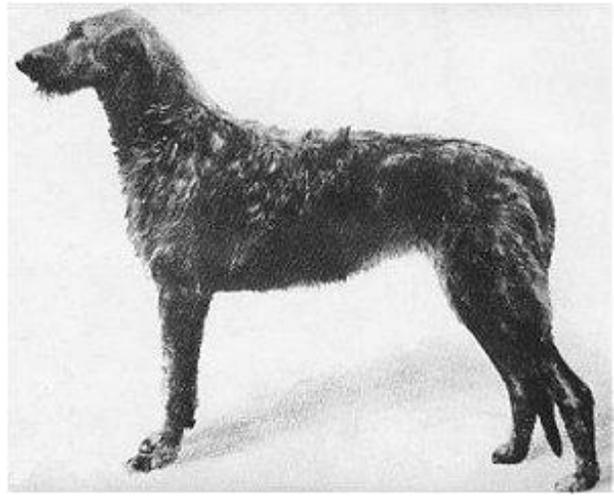
TORNA OF IFOLD – 1922



INT. (IR.UK.) CH. SULHAMSTEAD THELMA – 1923



Cragwood Darragh – 1924



Ch. Clodagh of Ooborough – 1924



Int. (Ir.Uk.) Ch. Finbarr Boroimhe – 1925



Lady of Raikeshill – 1926



Chulainn Dauntless – 1926



Ch. Erin of Ouborough – 1928



# THE ILLUSTRATED STANDARD OF THE IRISH WOLFHOUND

Revised May 2011

The 2011 Irish Wolfhound Club of America Illustrated Standard Committee consisted of 4 breeders, each with over thirty years of experience in the breed.

The Committee:

Judy Simon, Chairperson  
Stoneybrook Kennels – 1976, 35 years

Elizabeth Murphy  
Carrokeel Kennels – 1965, 46 years

Jocelyne Gagne  
Starkeeper Kennels – 1978, 33 years

Michael Hussey  
Ballyshannon Kennels (1972), Dinnree Kennels (1982) – 1972, 39 years

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Acknowledgements: Sue McClure and Ronald Carswell

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