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**Opening Extract from...**

# A History of Britain in 100 Dogs

Written by Emma White

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A HISTORY OF BRITAIN IN 100 DOGS

To Saxon, and all the other dogs

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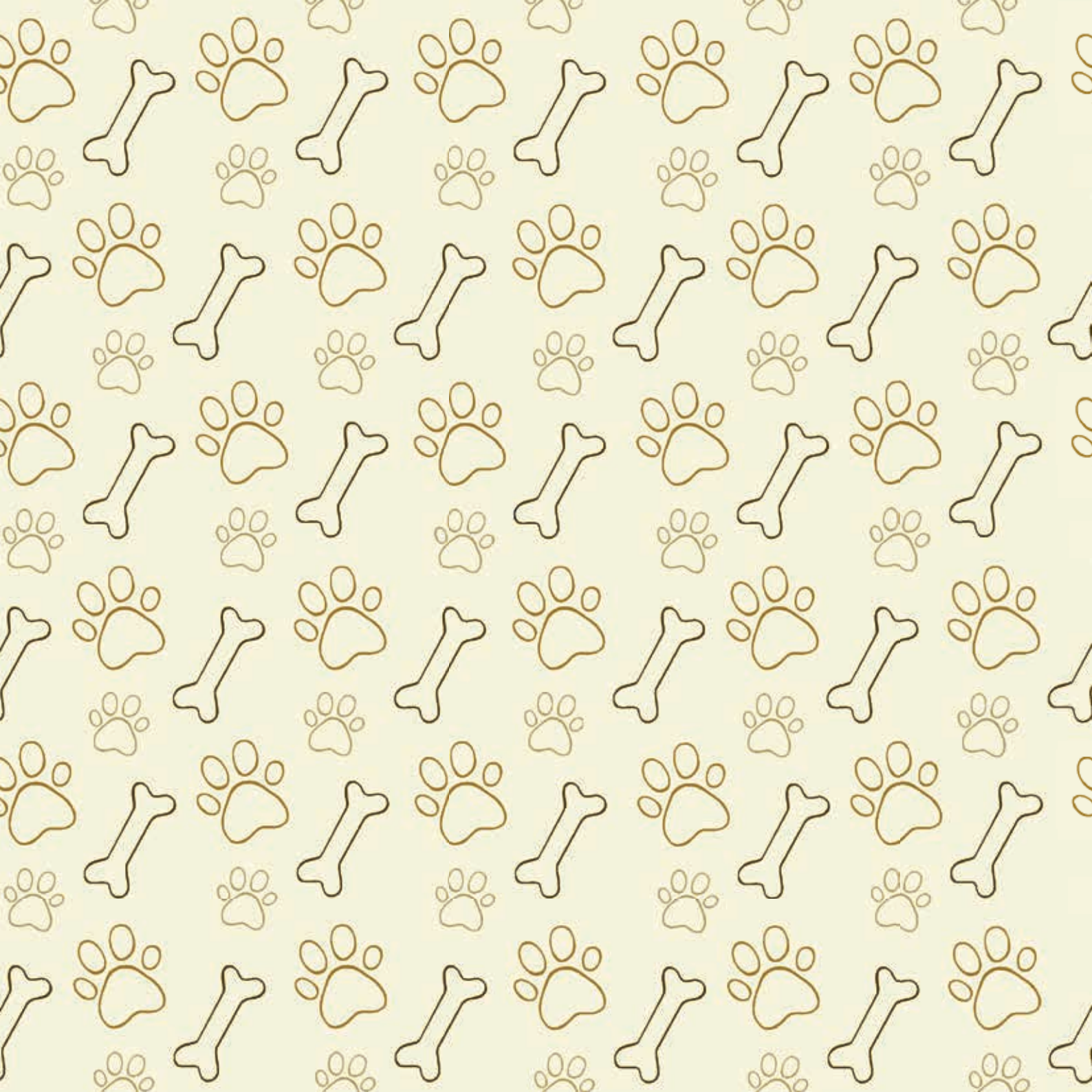

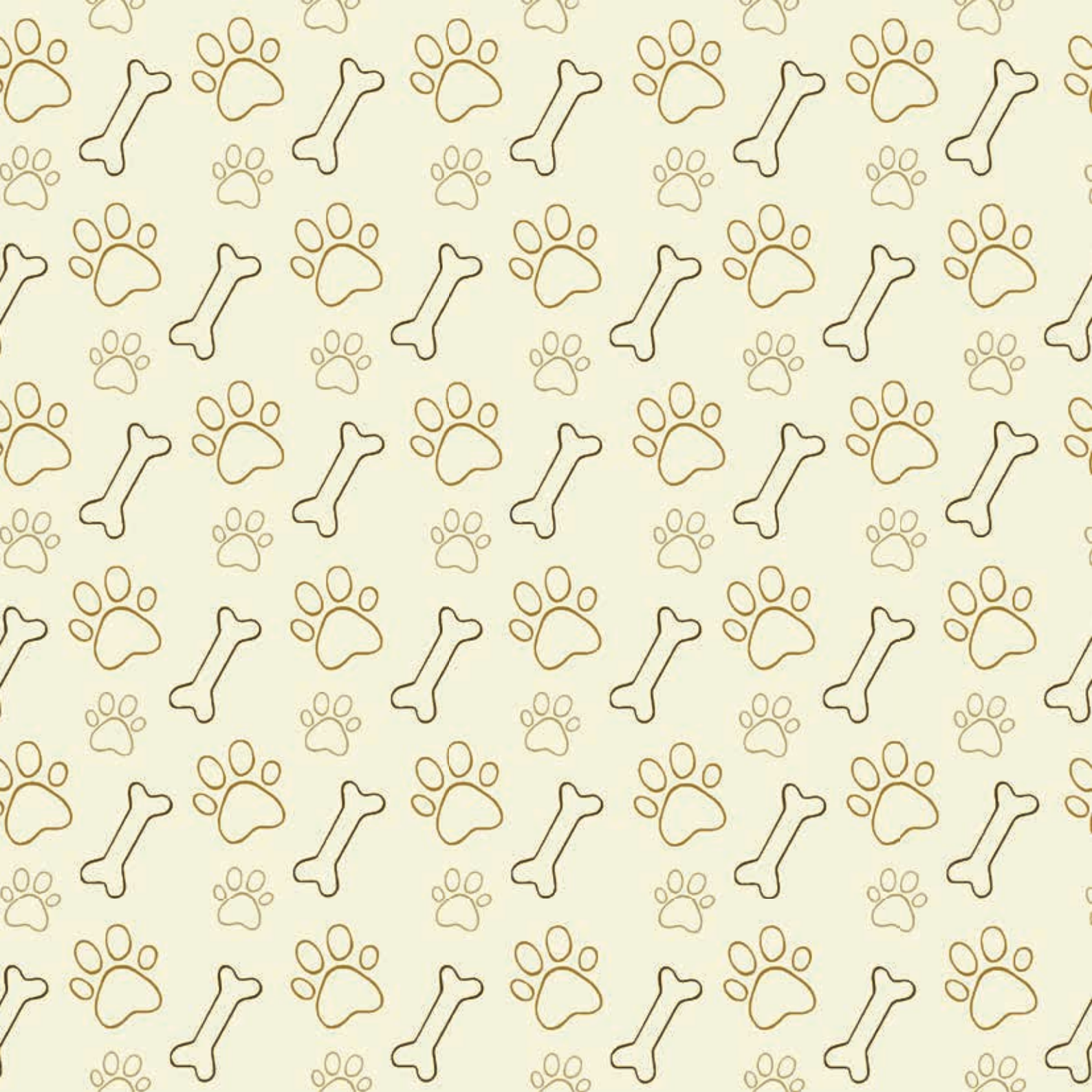

# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

I hope this book will be enjoyable to anyone interested in the way that dogs are a part of our lives and our history, whether the reader is curious about breeds or famous individual canines, but also to those with a more general interest.

Many of these chapters cover important periods in time as they relate to dogs, while others simply illustrate their part in momentous occasions. With so many stories to choose from, it was impossible to include them all and so I was forced to narrow them down to my personal favourites; any omission of certain accounts or breeds is purely due to space issues and not meant to cause any offense. The tales included range from those with documentary evidence to those of pure legend and everything in between: dogs with whom we have grown up on our TV screens, those we have read about or others we may have seen on the news. Some famous canines are found within these pages, along with those who are unnamed or whose real identity remains unknown.

This was never intended to be a breed companion, and as such many breeds that we know today will not be found here. There is a wealth of information available for anyone wanting to study the history of a breed, and there are some suggestions in the references at the end. The aim of this book is to show the long journey that we have shared with all kinds of dogs in Britain, and everything they have done and still do for us today.

It has been a pleasure to learn and research the stories of all the dogs here, brought together under the common umbrella of our history. Over the months, I have formed a new appreciation of the abilities and nature of dogs, which I hope to share with you. Some of the stories have made me laugh out loud while others have brought me to tears, sometimes of joy, but not always. I hope that you will laugh and cry with me as you read, but above all understand the amazing part that dogs play in our lives, no matter what century we live in.

Remember, around every corner, at every important juncture in our history, there will be a dog somewhere, and hopefully someday it will be included in a book like this.

Emma White
2016

# 1 | Ancient Dogs

**It is difficult to exactly ascertain the number of breeds that were in existence in ancient Britain. There are many different accounts from historians, many of them not contemporaries, and, of course, the breeds that were in Britain at this time would look very different from their modern-day counterparts.**

It is believed that in the Celtic world many breeds existed, both large and small, suggesting that even then dogs could have been kept as pets as well as working animals.[1] Regardless of if this was true, the main purpose of dogs at this time was to aid man in his daily life and leisure pursuits.

Byzantine mosaic of a musician with his dog. (John Copland, Shutterstock)
*Opposite:* A mosaic of a Roman dog on a lead. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

Hunting would have been a key component of daily life, especially for leading individuals, and large dogs would run alongside horses to aid in the pursuit of game. These dogs could flush out small prey, wear down the pursued or chase them into snares. This activity was not only for enjoyment but also provided food and animal skins for bedding and decoration, as well as keeping the number of potential pests down.

The Greek writer Strabo (*c*.64 BC–*c*.AD 21), in his colossal writings about the world that cover Britain and Gaul (now mainly modern-day France), mentions indigenous dogs. Part of his description of Britain is worth reproducing here:

> The greatest portion of this island is level and woody, although many tracts are hilly. It produces corn, cattle, gold, silver, and iron, which things are brought thence, and also skins and slaves, and dogs sagacious in hunting; the Kelts [sic] use these, as well as their native dogs, for the purposes of war.[2]

Strabo's words clearly indicate the presence of native dogs for war, those which were possibly taken back to Rome by Caesar as fighting dogs. These could have been ancestors of the mastiff or the bulldog, two of the oldest British breeds.

# 2 | Mastiffs

**Mastiffs were dogs of war and accompanied the Celts who fought against Caesar when he landed in Britain in 55 and 54 BC. The respect for the mastiff is shown by the Romans taking the breed from Britain back to Rome to fight in their arenas.**

*Above:* A large English mastiff. (Susan Schmitz, Shutterstock)
*Right:* Charles V of Spain, who received over 400 Mastiffs to help fight the French. (Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-113618)
*Below:* Victorian wood engraving of a mastiff. (Wellcome Library, London)

The breed of the Roman era would not resemble the one we have today and therefore many modern accounts speak of a 'mastiff-type dog'. However, the dog was certainly large and strong, as it was said to be able to break the neck of a bull.

The mastiff breed is discussed in *The Master of Game*, a book written by nobleman Edward of Norwich, 2nd Duke of York, between 1406 and 1413, which deals with the care, training and employment of hounds for hunting (medieval pets and hunting will be further discussed in another chapter). Edward consigned the mastiff breed to protection of the household, as he felt their nose to be inadequate for proper hunting, and so the breed was covered in only one page.[3]

Mastiffs have historically been valued by royalty. Charles V of Spain was said to have received 400 mastiffs in iron collars from Henry VIII to help fight him against the French during the Siege of Valencia.

The bull mastiff we know today derives from the original mastiffs. It is possible that mastiffs and the English bulldog have a joint ancestry.

# 3 | Bayeux Tapestry

**The Bayeux Tapestry is an iconic artefact recounting the lead up to the Norman Conquest and the Battle of Hastings in 1066. It is synonymous with a period of British history when noblemen fought for the throne of England and the country laid claim to parts of France that would be bitterly contested for the next 400 years, ending with the Hundred Years War.**

The Bayeux Tapestry tells the story of William the Conqueror's succession to the English throne and illustrates his divine right to the throne as named successor of Edward the Confessor. The tapestry is 229ft long, 19in tall and weighs 772lb.[4] It covers the period from 1064 to 1066 and is thought to be incomplete, with the final scene, possibly showing William's coronation on Christmas Day 1066, having been lost over the centuries.

Although known as a tapestry, it is more correctly an embroidery and is now thought to have been produced either entirely or at least partly by English needlewomen. Historians have tried for many years to trace its existence, but the first 400 years of the tapestry's life remain shrouded in mystery and uncertainty,


Bayeux Tapestry detail showing the dogs in the border. (Myrabella)

although it is widely thought to have been produced under the orders of Odo of Bayeux, half-brother of William and later Earl of Kent. The first documentary evidence of its existence is in an inventory of the treasures of Bayeux Cathedral in around 1476, where the tapestry is listed as item 262. A translation of the entry tells us the following:

> Item, a very long and narrow textile that is embroidered with images and inscriptions that show the conquest of England, which is hung around the nave of the church the day and octave of the Feast of Relics.[5]

The movements of the tapestry over the centuries have been numerous, and during conflict and revolution it has often been taken for safekeeping and put back on display as a sign of victory or peace. Napoleon is said to have had the tapestry moved to Paris so he could use it as inspiration for planning an invasion of Britain.

Along with many other parts of daily life, such as eating, hunting and agriculture, dogs are portrayed as part of the story of the Norman Conquest. These are most likely to be hounds for hunting, a key part of a nobleman's life, and seem to

resemble a greyhound-type breed. The dogs appear both in the main scenes and in the top and bottom borders of the tapestry. Near the beginning of the work, when Harold is heading for the coast, his pack of hounds is shown leading the way. Similarly, when Harold is shown eating his final meal on land before leaving for France, two dogs are shown being carried on to the ship.

The number of dogs counted in the tapestry can vary from totals in the thirties to the fifties. A number at the lower end is probably more accurate, as some of the dogs are difficult to distinguish from other animals. Livestock as well as mythical creatures are dotted around the borders of the work, and many can possibly be mistaken for dogs.

The inclusion of dogs in this important historical artefact, which in its time was a demonstration of the right of William to the throne of England, shows the significance of these hounds in daily life. In a tapestry like this, where the needleworkers would have likely had dictated to them the scenes and themes to be included (such as divine right and victory in battle), the value of dogs is clear. That they represent wealth and importance is clearly evident from their inclusion on the ships coming across the Channel.

# 4 | Domesday Book

**Domesday Book derived its name from the Day of Judgement. As the book had all of the details about who owned what and where, it was a document from which there could be no appeal regarding its judgement. Nowadays it forms the basis of our national land ownership. At over 900 years old it is still admissible as evidence in legal proceedings relating to land entitlement.**[6]

The Domesday survey was commissioned by William the Conqueror (1066–87) in around 1086 for the purpose of assessing the lands that belonged to the king and his people. The survey was conducted in minute detail, with commissioners visiting all areas of the country to establish who owned what and how much it was worth.

Page from Domesday Book for Warwickshire,

However, the detail of the survey did not stop there. A surviving version of the regional returns for Ely Abbey contains a copy of the commissioner's brief, showing what he was instructed to find out:

The name of the place, who held it before 1066, and now.
How many hides. (Land unit around 120 acres.) How many ploughs.
How many villagers, cottagers and slaves, how many free men and Freemen.
How much woodland, meadow and pasture. How many mills and fishponds.
How much has been added or taken away. What the total value was and is.
How much each free man or Freeman had or has.
All threefold, before 1066, when King William gave it, and now.[7]

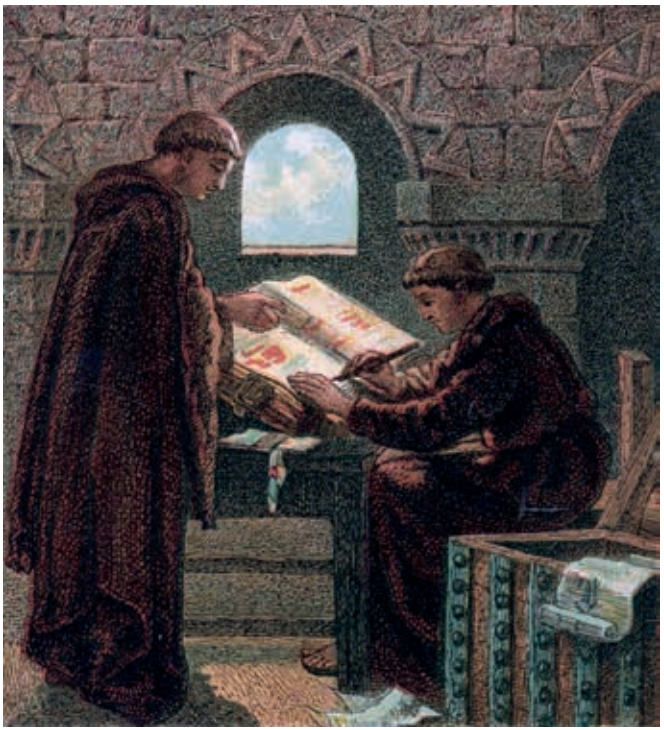
There are in fact two Domesday Books: Little and Great. Little Domesday covered Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk and is much more detailed than its larger counterpart. Great Domesday covers a much larger area of the country. However, it is not complete, as large cities such as London, Winchester and Bristol are not recorded.[8] Other areas, such as Cumberland and Westmoreland, which were not yet part of England, were never surveyed.[9]

An early depiction of a dog, *c.* 1100.

In the returns for Gloucestershire and Warwickshire, evidence can be found for the existence of dogs in everyday life. In the return for Cheltenham, details include the number of villagers, mills, ploughs and slaves. The entry ends with the revenue payable by the area: before 1066 it paid £9 5*s* and 3,000 loaves for its dogs; then it pays £20, twenty cows, twenty pigs and 16*s* for bread.[10] Under King Edward the custom fee for dogs in Cheltenham was paid in kind, in the form of cakes of dog-bread, but under King William this had been commuted to a monetary fee of 16*s*. Throughout the Domesday survey there seems to have been a move from the payments received in kind, such as bread or animals, in Edward the Confessor's time to monetary payments in William the Conqueror's reign.

Cheltenham was not the only place where the customs due for dogs are mentioned; in Warwick, for example, '23 pounds' were paid for the custom of dogs. Therefore dogs have raised funds for government since at least 1086 until the modern dog licence was finally abolished in the 1980s, over 900 years later.

Writing Domesday Book, from a nineteenth-century illustration.



# 5 | The Laws of the Forest

**From before Norman times, laws have been in place to protect and restrict the use of designated forests throughout Britain. All forest belonged to the king and, as such, the right to hunt in them was held by the monarch alone. He could bestow rights, however, to nobles for hunting a certain amount of wild beasts per year.**

*Below:* The original seal from a copy of the Magna Carta, showing King John hunting. (British Library, Add. 4838)
*Opposite:* Early Georgian print of dogs hunting in the forest; one has caught a deer. (Wellcome Library, London)

In the time of King Cnut (1016–35) laws were put down to protect forest land. However, it was William the Conqueror (1066–87) and his heirs who more strictly enforced them and extended the area of the country which they covered.

By Henry II's reign (1154–89) over a quarter of the whole of England was considered part of royal forest land – and therefore land of the king.[11] It was not necessarily forested as we would understand the term today, and could be fields and pasture. Declaring these areas as royal forest land stopped ordinary people from using the space to graze animals and collect firewood for cooking. Before this time, those who owned the land had been free to hunt on it as they wished.

There were, of course, consequences for all those who lived on and near this protected land. Many of those who disregarded the laws and were caught were punished and hefty fines were levied (see the chapter on financial rolls for more on this). Punishments could be more severe than fines, however, and the price for taking deer was the death penalty. Moreover, for those who lived on royal forest land, their ability to own a dog was compromised. Of course, at this time, most dogs were kept for security, working or hunting reasons.

It was accepted in all of the forest laws that dogs were an important asset and it seems there was no restriction on who could actually own one, just that it could only be near the dwelling for security of property and not used to hunt. However, this meant that harsh penalties and even mutilation of the dogs could be imposed for those living within the confines of the royal forest land to ensure it could not be used in a way that went against the laws. Mastiffs are specifically mentioned;

Early German woodcut of a man and his dog hunting in the forest. (Wellcome Library, London)

this is the breed that seemed to cause most concern in the forest and also that was most common at the time.[12]

Under the forest laws the owners of mastiff dogs were forced to have their dog mutilated in order to stop them from hunting. This mutilation was termed 'expeditating'. The manner of expeditating dogs is mentioned in Carta de Foresta, Artic. 6:

> Three Claws of the Fore-feet shall be cut off by the Skin: And accordingly the same is now used, but setting one of his Fore-feet upon a piece of Wood eight Inches thick, and a Foot square, and then setting a Chizel of two Inches broad upon the three Claws of his Fore-foot, to strike them off at one Blow; and this is the manner of expeditating Mastiffs.[13]

In the time of Cnut, a different practice was used to lame such dogs, which was to cut the hamstring.[14] 'Little dogs' are also mentioned as being allowed in the forest in Cnut's time, but there is no further description of what breed these dogs were.

The Magna Carta of 1215 is well known to most people, if only by name. From the reign of King John (1199–1216), its contents created more rights for the barons, who were attempting to restore rights they felt had been stripped from their families after the invasion of William the Conqueror. The charter only became known as Magna Carta in 1217, in order to distinguish itself from a smaller piece of legislation that had been removed from it, which was called the Carta de Foresta (or Charter of the Forest).

The Charter of the Forest was signed in 1217 by the child king Henry III (born 1207, ruled 1216–72) and gave back the right to use the forest. The rights contained within the charter were important for a wider section of society than just the barons and noblemen. It actually gave rights to freemen to use the forests for fuel, grazing and pasture, and protected them from the higher classes. The death

penalty for stealing deer was also removed. Relating to dogs, the charter softened the approach to expediation, stating that this was only necessary in those areas of forest where it had been carried out since the reign of Henry II. This meant that those areas that were no longer forest under the terms of the charter, which was most of the area Henry II had expanded it to encompass, no longer needed to expeditate their mastiffs.[15] It did not, however, reverse the need to expeditate mastiffs residing in the areas still classed at royal forests. During this period, the punishment for not having a dog expeditated was no more than 3*s*. However, in today's money, this would roughly equate to over £80.[16]

A further set of laws, The Assises and Customs of the Forest (*c*.1278), repealed some of the rules relating to dogs. Mastiffs and greyhounds could now be kept within the forest unexpeditated, as long as they had a lawful claim to do so by grant of the king.[17]

English mastiff with a forest in the background. The claws of these dogs were struck off to prevent them from hunting in the king's forests. (Wellcome Library, London)

The main source for the forest laws is John Manwood's *Treatise of the Forest Laws*. Written in 1598, Manwood's aim was to put together all of the laws, both past and present, that governed the forest into one book. The book went through several reprints and was again edited and the language modernised for a 1717 edition. His work has been used here to describe some of the laws pertaining to the keeping of dogs within the royal forests.

By Tudor times, most of the laws relating to the forest had been repealed and those remaining mainly served to protect timber. However, some clauses on the 1217 charter were still in force in the 1970s, making it the longest statue in English law.

# 6 | The Legend of Gelert

**The message at the heart of the Legend of Gelert is one that has been repurposed many times over the centuries. It is a tale of regret and the consequences of actions carried out in the heat of the moment without knowing the full circumstances.**

Historians debate whether the story is true or just a vehicle for the meaning it carries, but one thing is for certain: if you go to Beddgelert, at the foot of Snowdonia, you can see the memorial to Gelert, which is at his supposed final resting place.

Putting aside whether or not the legend is true, what it portrays are the characteristics that any owner would admire in their dog: friendship, protection and loyalty.

*Below:* An engraving of Gelert, the dog of Prince Llewelyn. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

What breed of dog Gelert was is not definitively known. However, his bravery and size in the legend implies that he was a wolf/dog cross. The legend says that Llewelyn the Great had a beautiful dog named Gelert who had been a gift from King John in 1205. The dog always accompanied Llewelyn when he went hunting, and one day his absence was sorely noticed. When the prince returned home he was angry at the dog, who met him at the door of Llewelyn's infant child's room, stained in blood. Llewelyn called out to his son but received no reply. Upon seeing the room in disarray, he thrust his sword into Gelert in anguish for perpetrating this foul deed. The dog died instantly and as the prince rushed into the room he heard his son cry. He searched for the boy and finally found him covered by a blanket, with the body of a dead wolf nearby. He knew instantly that

*Above:* A postcard showing the story of Gelert. (Mary Evans Picture Library). *Below:* Gelert's grave. (The History Press)

Gelert had protected his son from this ravenous wolf and that in killing his dog he had betrayed the friendship and loyalty between them. As penance, Llewelyn built a chapel and raised a tomb to Gelert; the spot where this chapel is thought to have been is called Beddgelert or 'the grave of Gelert'.