

## **Dr. Nancy Laughton (FCRS yearbook 1998)**

Since it's beginning, 50 years ago, the Flat coated Retriever Society has prol from an invaluable contribution from Dr. Nancy Laughton. Long before I became a member in 1955 she had been working for the improvement of flatcoats, and it was some task in the immediate post-war years. Trying to cast my mind back to my first impressions I find myself remembering a very direct person most seriously focused on every aspect of the flatcoated retriever. I remember being in awe, partly because of her immense knowledge of her sul and partly because I was anyway horribly shy in those days. She and Gwen however were most kind to the aspiring breeder/ trainer. They invited me to stay in their house near Solihull and dispensed knowledge liberally.

Born in Birmingham in 1907 Nancy graduated in medicine at Birmingham University and were qualified there as M.B., C.H.B. in 1931. The same year she acquit a London conjoint degree M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. She was appointed bacteriologist at the University and later became senior lecturer there. In 1948 she gained qualification as M.D. at the Medical School. That was the year of the founding of the Flatcoated Retriever Society; Nancy had already been in the breed for four years having bought her first Flatcoat from Will Phizacklea (Atherbram) in 1944.

This year her foundation bitch Claverdon Jet was made up to Champion. In those days of course, there were no Sh. Ch.s - with three Challenge Certificates a Flatcoat had to qualify in the field to be classed Champion - and Jet had no trouble in this respect; she was a genuine dual-purpose bitch winning both on the bench and in the field. Her daughter Ch. Claverdon Powderbox, also a dual-purpose bitch by Colin Well's Ch. Waterman, produced Ch. Claverdon Jorrocks of Lilling, one of Nancy's most outstanding successes. A biggish hard-going dog, he won impressingly on the bench and in the field and, against the top any-variety competition, at the C. Game Fair Working Test in 1961. He came within an ace of a dual-champion title. His blood comes down to present day dogs through the Rungles line and from a union with Ch. Pewcroft Prop of Yarlaw (another near dual Champion) through Heronsflight Black Bell of Yarlaw to Heronsflight Tercel which was used to effect on the Exclyst, Tarncourt, Casuarina and Torwood lines.

Claverdon Turtledove, the next in Nancy's bitch line, excelled in the winning of an Any-Variety non-winner stake in 1961, followed the next day at the Flatcoated Retriever Society Open Stake, amongst other awards. Her two litters, sired by Bob of Riverglade, produced Claverdon Beaujolais, Bronté, Clipper, Cindy, Skipper and the prepotent dog Ch. Claverdon Comet, all great gamefinders. This blood comes down to us through Courtbeck Mercury, Belsud Courtbeck Taurus and Kenstaff Mulberry.

The strong Claverdon bitch line continued with Claverdon Flyer, Claverdon Kiss, Claverdon Ladybird (which, sadly could never be bred from) Lucretia through which the Wemdom line continues to produce excellent workers. Claverdon Rhapsody also produced C. Gaff, a good hard-going worker which sired, amongst others, Fenrivers Ling, F. Nuphar and the useful field trial dog Penmayne Pepper.

The female line, which Nancy so painstakingly established, is of the utmost importance to the breed being a dominant line consistently producing good-looking workers.

Although she trained most of her dogs herself, Nancy had help from time to time. In the early days Bill Tansy (H. Reginald Cooke's handler) took some of her dogs for extra training. I remember calling at his house near Kidderminster and being shown two eight month old puppies retrieving tennis balls pitched far out into eight inch high corn. They both showed excellent marking and delivery to hand. These were from the Bob of Riverglade ex C. Turtledove litter. I was most impressed.

Colin Wells, too, worked in close cooperation with Nancy, sometimes handling her dogs, as did Alan Mason, Frank Clitheroe, Ron Dukes, Eric Baldwin and Harry Stangoe. Stanley O'Neill of Pewcroft fame, the great dog trainer from Northern Ireland Major Harry Wilson and Wilson Stephens also contributed to Nancy's expertise in the breed.

Always keen on good dog work, Nancy worked and trained a number of golden retrievers which did well at field trials. She also owned one or two English Springer Spaniels. A keen and successful shot, she has been a member of several local shoots over the years, always accompanied by her dogs, and was still picking up last season in her ninety-first year.

Claverdon dogs have been used in America on some of their flourishing lines, Claverdon Duchess being sent over to Mrs. Sally Terroux in 1959 when there were few, if any flatcoats on that continent. Claverdon Gossamer also featured there in early days.

Although very selective in her breeding, Nancy has bred a number of litters over the years emphasising good gundog work but keeping in mind soundness, type and temperament. She has always maintained that the capacity for work should be checked on at least every other generation. This is reflected in her elevation to the Kennel Club Field Trial Judges 'A' Panel and to the Judges List to award C.C.s on the show bench: a true dual-purpose attainment.

In writing about Nancy it is impossible not to include a word about her staunch companion Gwen Knight. Her support and friendship for Nancy has been combined with a talent for training gundogs in her own right. Amongst others, Claverdon Ladybird was in her special care. She took on labradors and goldens with style, winning with the best in Any Variety stakes.

In the Society Nancy has risen from Committee Member through Honorary Secretary and Chairman to President. She is now one of our prestigious Patrons, adding integrity and distinction to the Flatcoated Retriever Society.

*Amelia Jessel*  
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