

THE MAN WHO BRED THE FIRST GOLDEN RETRIEVERS

THE MOST THOROUGH RECORDS of the origins of the golden retriever were kept in Scotland by nineteenth-century dog breeder Dudley Marjoribanks, who is commonly regarded as the man who bred the first litter of golden retrievers. As a teenager in the 1830s, Marjoribanks developed a strong interest in breeding dogs—a then-fashionable hobby—and continued the practice throughout his lifetime. For fifty years, he maintained detailed records of his work—documenting the various breeds he crossed along with each dog’s parental lineage and physical features—and these records, which are currently housed at the Kennel Club in England, provide great insight into his role in developing the breed now known as the golden retriever.

Around 1865, as Marjoribanks was attempting to breed a gundog adept at retrieving waterfowl, he acquired a wavy-coated retriever named Nous, a sporting dog that had originally belonged to a local nobleman. As the story goes, the nobleman had given up the dog because of its gold coloring. Black sporting dogs were the popular trend at that time and considered superior hunters, and the less common gold-colored retrievers were considered less valuable.

In 1868, Marjoribanks crossbred Nous with his dog Belle, who was a Tweed water spaniel—a now-extinct breed known for its affinity for water. The product was a gold-colored retriever that excelled at swimming and retrieving waterfowl from streams and rivers. As was his custom, Marjoribanks meticulously recorded the details of this crossbreeding, and based on the information in his documentation, many historians consider Belle’s litter of puppies to be the foundation litter of the golden retriever breed.