

# Judy Parker-Tucker and the Uniquecottage Cairns

by Fiona Cameron



Photo by Graham Peers

Judy Parker-Tucker  
Patron of the Cairn Terrier Club

The Cairn Terrier Club were proud to announce in 2009 that Judy Parker-Tucker had accepted our invitation to serve as Patron. Judy's contribution to the breed over the past 65 years has been immense and there cannot be a Cairn breeder or exhibitor in the world who has not heard of her and her kennel. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to visit Judy last October and to talk to her about her life and her dogs.

Judy always wanted to have a life in dogs, having been brought up with them as family pets. Born and educated in Devon, Judy was sent to London during the war to care for her grandparents but at the end of the war the opportunity arose for her to return to Devon to go as a pupil to the kennels of Hazel Longmore and her mother.

So, on 15 August 1945, Judy returned to Exeter on the train, and cycled out to Mellands at Powderham where the Longmores lived, revelling in the glorious Devon countryside after the grimness of wartime London. She started work at the kennels, on VJ Day – August 17, and it was then that she met her first Cairn. She fell in love with the breed and, as we know, she has never looked back.



Mellands, where it all began.

I visited Mellands with Judy. It is a charming house, surrounded by farmland with wide views over the surrounding fields where Judy used to ride. Although we arrived unannounced, the present owner was most welcoming when Judy explained that she used to live there. He showed us around and Judy pointed out the room above the stables which had been hers, and the area behind there which had been the kennels. The kennels are no longer standing although the framework is still there, covered in greenery and a haven for birds and other wildlife. The gardens have changed a little from the way Judy remembered them, a little more formal than in those earlier times, with more trees, including walnut trees bearing a plentiful crop.

We were taken into the house which Judy remembered vividly – there have been few if any changes to the structure. *“There was a green baize door over there that no one was allowed to go through!”* There was the former nursery – *“We used to be summoned here for tea”!*, and the room where the oil lamps were filled, and the location of the water pump in the back kitchen.

So began Judy's partnership with Hazel which was to span over 40 years.

There were several influences at that time which provided valuable experience and helped to shape Judy's future in dogs. Firstly, there were the Mercia Cairns of Miss Vickers which had been sent to Mellands during the war, and eventually were merged into the

Mellands lines. Judy's own first Cairn was Excel of Mercia. Then she spent some months with Mr & Mrs Leigh of the Thistleclose Cairns at Hanley Swan – *“It was great experience – there could be 40 dogs in the kitchen at one time!”*

One of Judy's tasks while at Mellands was to get Mrs Longmore's herd of Jersey cows in, morning and evening, for milking (the cowman having died just before she arrived there!).

And, soon after returning to Mellands after her time at Thistleclose, Judy again left, this time to run the Endeavour Kennels which she and Hazel set up at Sherborne Castle, along with the owner, Mrs Winfield Digby of the Zaandam Keeshonden.

For several years, Judy ran the boarding kennels and rode with the hunt. She had her own flat in the castle and her own Cairns there. Her experience with Mrs Longmore's herd stood her in good stead as she also tended the cows at Sherborne.

I asked Judy where she got the idea for her affix – Uniquecottage. *“Ah well,” she said, “Unique was the name of my favourite Jersey Cow, and Cottage – well, I knew I wouldn't always live in a castle – it was much more likely to be a cottage!”*

After the Endeavour Kennels were given up, Judy returned to Mellands and she and Hazel continued their very successful partnership.

Judy's first CC winner was Goldust of Uniquecottage, a son of Excel of Mercia. The partnership of Judy and Hazel made up their first champion in 1954, Ch Uniquecottage McAilenmor and there were many more subsequently. I've counted 41 champions with the Uniquecottage affix, some of which were, of course, made up by Judy after the partnership with Hazel was dissolved in 1968.

After Hazel's marriage in 1958, when her husband became interested in the dogs, they eventually registered the Avenelhouse affix in their name. Judy married George Parker-Tucker in 1962 and, after the dissolution of the partnership with Hazel, she kept the Uniquecottage affix in her name only.



Judy's favourite was U Sir Frolic. (See members' advertisements) He was one of 3 champions in the same litter, bred while in partnership with Hazel, the others being U Black Gold and U Miss Muffit. This record is still unbroken in the breed.



Judy at Sherborne with her pony, 'Wish', and her first Cairn, 'Demon'. She saved the money to buy 'Wish' by making dog leads which Hazel sold through a shop in London.



Six champions owned in partnership with Hazel in the 1960s. Left to right: Ch Uniquecottage Terrible Twin; Ch Warberry Wild Honey; Ch Uniquecottage Powdermonkey; Ch Uniquecottage Gold Rouble; Ch Uniquecottage Gold Moidor; Ch Uniquecottage Gold Goblet



Silverton

Judy and her husband searched for 16 years to find their ideal location for Uniquecottage, finally finding the property in Silverton where she still lives. Judy bought the property at auction, with

Hazel beside her all the time repeating, not too quietly *"You can't afford it. You can't afford it!"* which wasn't exactly ideal behaviour in the circumstances! Judy's husband, George, when he saw the property said simply *"I suppose it has possibilities"*. Well, indeed it had.

It is a special place. George, who was a landscape gardener, created the wonderful gardens, planting many trees and shrubs to give the right amount of shelter and colour, and building the kennels and runs which any dog would love to have. Never have kennel dogs had so much space and freedom, with extensive grass runs and kennels, each with its own "veranda" for shelter when required. The whole property is surrounded by a high stone wall, surely any Cairn owner's dream! The wall is so high that Judy built a "look out point" so that she can see out over the rolling countryside (*"that there's life beyond the wall!"*) and it is also possible from here to see over the kennels and lovely gardens and orchard. There are still about 20 dogs at Uniquecottage, but at one time Judy ran 50 or 60.

I asked Judy if she thought it was difficult in these days of small kennels and a limited choice of stud dogs for breeders to continue to breed good dogs. She said: *"There are many different types of dog in our breed, so what you need to do is to try to fix the type you want in your mind. Breeding close will help you to fix this type, although the Kennel Club is trying to put a stop to close breeding. You need to be aware, of course, that by breeding close you will also double up on faults. It is very important to know the dogs behind your breeding."*



Ch U Bright Gold



U Storm Bird who won 1CC here before going to Betty Marcum of the Cairnmar Kennels in the USA



Ch U What-A Lark, a great favourite of Judy's

Often a difficult decision for a breeder is what to look for when selecting a puppy from a litter.

I asked Judy her views.

*"In the old days we used to keep a lot of puppies – we had to cover ourselves for illness, because of course there weren't the drugs and veterinary advances that are available nowadays. But keeping a lot is not so practical for most people nowadays. So really it depends what you are choosing a puppy for. If it is to be a show dog it must have character. I look for the basics. I may know at 8 weeks, but it is better if you can run them on longer."*



Puppies by Tjeps Oineus Euros at 10 weeks: Uniquecottage Gold Lark, U Bright Lark, U Gold Crofter



Uniquecottage-bred puppies out of U Grey Tarka, owned by Mrs Alona Newbolt-Young, doing what puppies love to do!

Photo by Tracey Elliot-Reep

Judy's daughter, Ruth told me a little about being brought up with the Uniquecottage Cairns.

"My mother lived in Tiverton when I was born and when I was about 4 years old we moved up to Exminster to a house with a garden of about an acre. My father was a landscape gardener so the gardens were absolutely beautiful – I mean, I was brought up in a park! At that time my mother only had a few kennels. Every year we used to go to the Isles of Scilly on holiday, and the Cairns came with us – everyone there knew us because of the Cairns!"



On holiday at St Agnes in the Scillies I to r Pookie (U Gold If) who won the last CC awarded by Mabel Drummond, Badger (U Grey Badger) and Perkie (Ch Warberry What a Girl)

"Another great delight was to go up to the Avenel House. It was a real country gent's residence, with formal gardens, vegetable gardens, a coach house and stables. Hazel and my mother used to walk down the "range" of show dogs, two to a kennel. At each kennel they would stand and talk, discussing each dog. As a child, I thought it was very boring. To me the Avenel House was just another playground, but looking back on it I was very lucky indeed to have been there and experienced it all.

“When I was about 10, my mother got a job again, and she had a few litters. We were allowed out of school at lunchtime, but only for a short time, and I used to run the half mile home to feed the puppies! It must have been very good training because eventually I competed in long distance running for the County.

“I can remember by the time I was 14 or 15, it was home from school very quickly on a Friday, pack up the car, and off up the motorway to a show. We spent the night in the car, did the show, and back home again.



Ruth with her sons Jack and Liam

and hours and hours standing holding dogs while my mother picked out one hair at a time! But that is how I learned how to trim a Cairn and I am very very grateful now. Nobody can trim a tail like she can! But trimming is a dying art and I'm so glad I learned how to do it. I feel privileged to have been involved with the breed in its heyday and to have had, and still have, the benefit of all my mother's knowledge and experience.”

Judy has had an extensive judging career, awarding CCs 32 times in this country, the most recent being in May 2008. She has also judged many times overseas, including in the USA, Canada, Australia, and Scandinavia.



Judy judging in Canada

**“Sadly nowadays there is so much emphasis on winning groups that this is sometimes altering a judge's view on which dog should be awarded BOB. They select a dog that ‘will look good in the Group’. Judging shouldn't be geared to winning Groups or BIS. The greatest prize should be to win the CC and the Best of our Breed.”**

“I was so fortunate to be brought up in an era when there were so many top kennels. I think the 1980s were probably the heyday. I recall going to Blackpool round about 1986. Mother went with a team of six Cairns. She won with all of them and all the big kennels were there.”

“One memory I have from my youth was spending hours

The influence of Uniquecottage breeding is also evident abroad. Robert Bartram of the Craigend Cairns in Australia, had this to say:

“The flurry of imports from this world-famous kennel over the past couple of decades makes it easy to forget that its influence in this country goes back much further – over 50 years in fact.

“The importation of Uniquecottage Cooe by Dibs Russell and Bren Gurner (Kirriemuir) in 1957 proved a most valuable acquisition, as not only was she the top brood bitch on the Victorian Breed Club's Breeder's Criterion twice, but she continues to this day to provide through her descendants a steady stream of Family 3 winners.

“It was not until 1975 that the next import came but from then on a number of local kennels have benefited from a steady flow of imports. It is impossible to mention them all in these very brief comments but among the dogs, pride of place must go to Mr Smudge, Grey Strike (the sire of two English Champions) and, more recently, Rifleman. All three sired BIS winners at breed club shows who went on to produce well.



Aus Ch Uniquecottage Rifleman

“Ch Uniquecottage Gold Wren imported into Western Australia by Peter and Wilda Tallentire was an immediate success upon her arrival both as a show bitch and as a brood. Her Family 2 descendants continue to win well in a number of significant modern kennels.

“Other kennels to benefit from a number of imported bitches have been Margaret Hill's long established Rawhitis, the Wards' Achnacones, Jill Saulbrey's Koteranas and Joy Wangler's Kalans. The latter two kennels have had a significant number of imports which they have woven together skilfully to produce their competitive team.

The latest import is in fact Ch & Aus Ch Uniquecottage Glengettie who, since she arrived at Kalan, has had a most successful show career including a couple of breed club BISs.



Ch/Aus Ch Uniquecottage Glengettie

Her only litter to date, by Craigend Wiradjuri (a descendant in tail male from Grey Strike and in tail female from Grey Chat) has met with considerable success and has certainly justified Joy's faith in bringing her out.

"We have been extremely lucky to have had Jo here on no less than three occasions to judge. I hope she understands just how much many of us appreciate the help and guidance she has given over so many years and thinks that we have made a reasonable use of the valuable stock that she has entrusted to us."

Another country where the influence of Uniquecottage has been felt is the United States. The Tidewater kennel of Charles (Chuck) Merrick produced the top-winning Cairn of all time in the USA, Am Ch Tidewater Master Gold, who is the only Cairn ever to have won the Terrier Group at Westminster. Master Gold was out of Am Ch Uniquecottage Phainopepla, a daughter of Ch Early Bird of Uniquecottage. Chuck Merrick imported other Uniquecottage dogs, the best known being Ch/Am Ch Uniquecottage Gold Grouse who left his stamp on the US scene before returning to Judy in the UK.



*Ch/Am Ch Uniquecottage Gold Grouse*

Letisha Wubbel of Kyleakin Cairns in the US said: "Uniquecottage Cairns have had a major influence on our breeding. Our first litter in 1990 was by Gold Grouse and all three of the pups became Champions. We also bred two litters by Ch Uniquecottage Bright Gold one of which produced a Best of Breed winner, Ch Kyleakin MacAlister, at the Montgomery County National Specialty. In the second litter we bred Ch Kyleakin Scotsman Invasion, a Group winner, multiple specialty winner and number one Cairn in the US for two years in a row – 2001 and 2002.

"The influence continues with Ch Ashwood Kenric's American Idol, bred and owned by Joe Vernuccio and the late Judy Sheer, a grandson of Bright Gold, winning BOB at Montgomery County in 2006; and another grandson, Ch Dogwood's Love Affair, owned and bred by Pam Davis, has had multiple specialty and group wins, being the number one Cairn in the USA for the past two or three years."

At home in the UK Judy continues to breed although on a smaller scale than previously, and to attend shows whenever she can. Her enthusiasm for and love of the breed never wains, and she is never more in her element than when she is at a show. At the World Show in Sweden in 2008, overseas exhibitors were honoured when she accepted invitations to "go over" their dogs and there is no greater accolade than to be awarded a place by her when she is judging. Uniquecottage several decades on is still producing top quality Cairns, prepared for show in the traditional manner with no artificial aids – an example which we should all be striving to follow. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to visit Uniquecottage and talk to Judy about her life and her dogs, and I look forward to more such occasions in the future.



*Ch U Tidy Shoes, who won first in Veteran Dog at Crufts in 2009, so named after the horse of the same name, winner of the Cheltenham Gold Cup, trained by Judy's sister, Daphne.*

