

Oxton's Pekingese Connection

Oxton was the home of two people from very different backgrounds and with different interests, whose lives wove together and led to the introduction of the Pekingese breed of dogs into the UK. Henry Loftus Allen was born into a prosperous family in Templetown, County Wexford. His grandfather also named Henry Loftus worked in the mid 1850s as a Lloyds Surveyor in Dublin. His father Anthony Pierce Allen clearly had ambitions for his son to have a nautical career as Henry Junior, born in 1858, attended a naval college and gained his Mates Certificate in Dublin in 1877. His career took him to all points of the compass but particularly to the United States and to China. After achieving his Masters Certificate he captained a number of ships and was for a time the Captain of the SS Ningchow, which regularly sailed to the Orient.

It may have been the American connection that brought Henry and Minna Georgina Murphy together. Minna was born, into a similarly prosperous family in New York in 1868, her mother being a Jamaican born British subject. By 1881 the whole family were living in Tranmere, first in Dingle Road, and ten years later in Brandon Farm on Church Road.

Henry's naval appointments saw him sailing principally from Southampton and Liverpool and it is possible that one shore leave he met Minna, as they married at St Catherines Church, Tranmere in 1882. Henry returned to sea, setting sail for China in 1893 and returned, perhaps as a present for Minna, with a little dog of a breed rarely seen in Britain. It was a Pekingese dog, which was named Pekin Peter. A small number of Pekingese dogs had come to Britain before but were exclusively owned by royalty or the aristocracy. They were not shown nor bred. Queen Victoria was given one such dog looted by naval officers from a royal palace and given the appropriate name of 'Looty'.

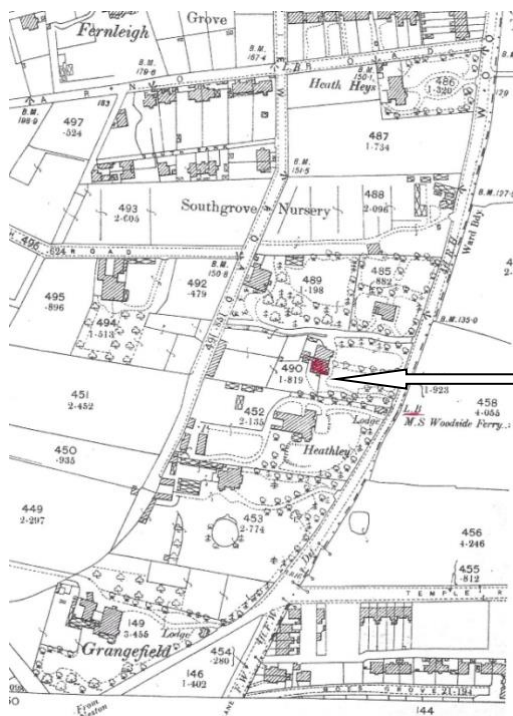
Pekingese dogs had a long history in China, again owned exclusively by the wealthy and privileged. The dogs were highly prized and regarded with reverence, and by many considered sacred. There are many instances of the dogs depicted in paintings and carvings in China, some many centuries old. Pekingese dogs were jealously guarded and all efforts were made to keep them from falling into "the wrong hands", especially it seems into the hands of foreigners and invaders, such as the British. During the Boxer Riots around 1900 dogs were reported to have been executed to achieve this.

Minna later wrote that it was clear her husband had bought Pekin Peter from a taxidermist. The dog was only to be placed on the ship at the point of departure to avoid discovery. Henry was convinced that the dog had been stolen from "a palace in Peking" (Beijing). Minna, who was clearly a canine expert, caused a sensation

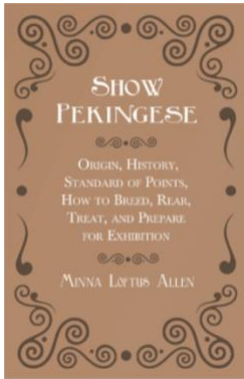
when she showed Pekin Peter at the Chester Dog Show in 1894, as the first of the breed to be exhibited in Britain. Pekin Peter had been entered in the *Pug & Spaniel* group and he won First in Class and the event was widely reported in dog breeding circles. It didn't stop there though, as in 1896 Henry returned with a breeding pair Pekin Prince and Pekin Princess. Minna tells the tale, in her book "Show Pekingese", that this pair of dogs was stolen from a royal palace by one of the resident eunuchs and taken to be sold to an English racing pony dealer, then hidden in a cart carrying their hay and taken to where they were sold to Henry Allen, who did the smuggling back to England. Minna went on to enter them at the Ladies Kennel Association Show in Holland Park in 1896. And thus the dynasty was laid down and Minna wrote, with pride no doubt, that "every Pekingese championship breed in England is descended on one side at least from Pekin Peter or Pekin Prince".

The Allens became a well to do family in their own right and lived in substantial villa on the Oxton side of Woodchurch Road in a house named "Carlton". They had a son George, who had a distinguished career in the railways both in civilian life and in the army. Minna wrote the seminal book on the breed titled "Show Pekingese" and she is still considered a figure of historical importance in present day Pekingese clubs.

Henry died in 1919 after having moved to a house that the couple again named "Carlton" in Upton and Minna died in 1937.



Carlton between Woodchurch Road and Fairview Road



MRS LOFTUS ALLEN.



An Edwardian girl with Pekingese. A postcard typical of the interest in the breed in Edwardian Britain

Minna Allen's Book is still available online

Bob Knowles