

NIGER

The Basenji in the Royal Kennels

BY JAMES JOHANNES

On the north and east sides of Windsor Castle is Home Park, which covers a circumference of four miles. It is there, near Adelaide Lodge, that the Royal Kennels are located. During Queen Victoria's reign, the kennel had been the home to both local and foreign dogs that were presented to her. Looty, likely the first Pekingese dog to arrive in Britain, was presented to the Queen in 1861. Looty was not unique in being "a first" of a breed to show up in Britain and reside in the Royal Kennels; before Looty's arrival, and just five years into Victoria's reign, she was presented with an African Dog. The 1846 Kennel's List of Dogs records "Niger, African Dog," arriving at her kennels in 1842 from the Niger Expedition.

How did Niger come to the Royal Kennels? For that answer, we must look back two years prior Niger's arrival. In 1840, Prince Albert had recently married Queen Victoria and was aiming to establish a public role. Representatives of the Society for the Extinction of Slavery—made up of Missionaries and anti-slavery activists with the goal of repealing slavery in West Africa through treaties, Christianity, and commerce—visited the Queen to ask if she could say a few words at their meeting. She decided she could not do so, but would send them a subscription. Prince Albert asked them to return to meet with him and said he would like to give a speech to open their meeting. He became President of the Society for the Extinction of Slavery and chaired their meeting in June 1840 attended by at least 4000 people. An expedition, later known as the African Colonization Expedition, was proposed at this meeting and the Society received funding from the government. Three steamers were used, the *Albert*, the *Wilberforce*, and the *Soudan*. The vessels left Britain in 1841 for the west coast of Africa, off present-day Nigeria, and went up the Niger River. Land was purchased on the confluence of the Niger and Benue River at Lokoja and treaties were made with local people opposing the slave trade. The *Albert* traveled just north of Eggan before turning back. The expedition had difficulties and was not as successful as hoped. The lack of willing local labor led to problems in attaining wood for



the steamers while traversing both directions of the river. Local chiefs were also reluctant to end slave trade without guarantee of new trade. The Expedition was called off early and returned to England in 1842 due to the death of 42 of the 150 Europeans from illness.

It is most likely because of Prince Albert's support of the expedition that the Queen was presented Niger as a gift. However, this is not the end of Niger's story. In 1843, Niger was portrayed in a painting commissioned for the Queen. Created by Thomas Musgrave Joy, the painting also included an Eskimo dog and a Poodle. Joy created several paintings of both the Queen's and Prince Albert's dogs; they are part of the Royal Collection. According to the archivist at Windsor Castle, Niger lived for five years. It would not be until the 1980's that four Basenjis would be again exported from Nigeria, this time to Germany.

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