



CONFESSIONS OF A COLLECTOR

*A Mastiff maven shares her  
treasures*



By Gabrielle Simmonds  
Marstenmoor Mastiffs

When Paul and I moved into our first home in 1993, Paul was one step closer to fulfilling his dream of owning a Mastiff. Just by chance, we mentioned this to one of our tradesmen, and, unbelievably, his neighbor owned a Mastiff. It was fate that six weeks later we brought home our bundle of joy. Little did we know that this fawn bitch would be the start of a passion for the breed that has continued to this day.

But it is not just about the dogs ... it is *everything* Mastiff.

It is true that this breed is addictive, and the same can be said about collecting Mastiff items. Being a very old breed, there are just so many antique and historical items, as well as new items being released every day.



*Confession: We are addicted to collecting, having spent a fortune on our collection and are broke because of it!*

At least the Mastiff collection doesn't cost money to feed or for veterinary care. But have no illusions that building up a collection or ensuring that you are the winning bidder of that rare trade card, the only Mastiff one you are missing, costs any less.

Paul first started collecting Mastiff ephemera – stamps, trade cards, cigar bands, playing cards, postcards, cabinet cards, beer coasters, Victorian cut-outs. From the late 1800s, it was standard marketing for trade cards to be included with many goods sold, particularly with cigarettes. Individual cards would be collected to make up a set and sometimes an album would be provided to display the complete set. Often, the same picture would be used by numerous companies or in different releases by the one company. An example of this is the head pictured: both number 8 from a series of 20, it was issued by Wills, as well as Three Castles and Vice Regal cigarettes. The same head was also printed by Players on a rectangular-shaped card.



Paul Keevil wrote in an article for the Kennel Gazette (UK) in 1990: "As one would expect for such an old established British breed, the choice of cigarette cards is huge. The Mastiff has been one of the most represented breeds in this medium with issues from all the major tobacco companies, such as John Player & Sons, WD & H O Wills, Ogdens, Gallahers etc."



However, many of the paper trade cards have not lasted. Of those that have, obviously the older a card is the more valuable it will be. As far as Paul is aware, he is missing only one or two Mastiff cigarette cards (so if you think you have a very rare

card and want to part with it, please let us know).

It would seem that the earliest card was issued in the United States in 1890 by Goodwin & Co. and given away with their "Old Judge" brand. Taddy and Company issued the first British card in 1900.

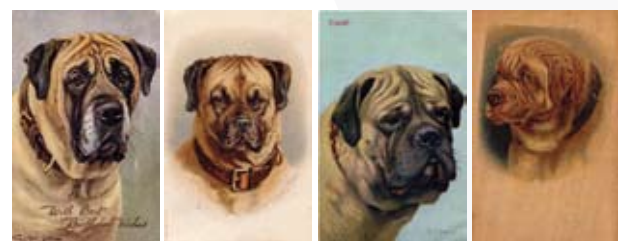


Australia was not left out with its "Tailwaggers" series. However, this was not given away with cigarettes but breakfast cereal. Around the world, cards were given away with tea, sweets and even issued from weighing machines.

The Mastiff name has been used and the Mastiff picture has appeared on many goods to promote brands, such as Wells Mastiff Shoes; Shapleigh's Mastiff Twisted Linen Cuttyhunk; J.B. Pace Tobacco Company Mastiff Plug Cut; Samuel Gawth & Co. Ltd with "Sam's Own" Mixture of tobacco; and Abbot Grocery Co. which had a "Mastiff brand" that included a wide range of products.



As with trade cards, there is a plethora of postcards to collect with many showing fine artwork by artists such as F. T. Dawson, G. Vernon Stokes and Dorothy Travers Pope. Often, the same picture is used on numerous releases but with different wording, and of course, the avid collector needs to have at least one of each! A particularly interesting postcard in our collection is one from Russia that is made of balsa wood.



*Confession: We are obsessed to collect every version or release of an item!*

Victorian die-cuts or cut-outs can even be found depicting Mastiffs. However, the nature of what they were used for means that it is quite difficult to find them in good condition. The colorful embossed reliefs originated in German bakers' shops where they were used to decorate cakes. Later they were used as decorative additions to Christmas cards and valentines and to illustrate historical as well as popular events of the time. In the Victorian home, a popular pastime was to use cutouts to cover the folding screens that the draughty living rooms required.

I first started collecting historical information – kennel adverts that appeared in magazines, as well as litter registration and champion title notifications, exports, etc. Basically anything that related to our breed that was published in the state canine journals around Australia. But my interest is not restricted to Australia and I have many kennel adverts and magazines from overseas, including non-English speaking countries, as well as pages from newspapers in the late 1800s where the winners of dog



shows would be sketched. Many of these pages are framed and adorn the walls of the bar (a room that is predominantly off limits to the dogs and where many of the special items in the collection are displayed).



I am particularly interested in publications that include a Mastiff breed feature or a Mastiff on the front cover. Of course, you cannot have just the relevant pages from the magazine but must have an intact edition. It is due to this collecting obsession and realizing the importance that

publications and adverts play in recording a breed's history that I just *had* to advertise in the inaugural edition of *Modern Molosser*.



*Confession: We want to feature in our own collection!*

Over time, through necessity (lack of space and funds), we have become more selective about our purchases. These are now mainly restricted to antiques or limited-edition releases. Paul is very proud of his bronze by Charles H. Valton, one of the French animaliers.



Two other special bronzes were purchased in 1995 from the UK artist Sylvia Evans. We value these pieces not only for their artistic quality, genuine representation of the breed and collectability due to the small number produced of each piece, but also our association with the artist and the knowledge of her passion for the breed. We recently donated another of Sylvia's bronzes to the

Mastiff Club of Victoria that has been made into a perpetual trophy in memory of our dog "Mungo," BISS/BIS (O) Aust. Ch. Marstenmoor First Chapta.



Earlier this year, we were fortunate to be given the opportunity to purchase the only pieces that Staffordshire (UK) made depicting Mastiffs. These are a pair of spill vases that were used not for flowers, but tapers in pre-match days. They were made in 1875 and considering the age, they are in excellent condition and still as a pair.



Another area of collecting that has particularly interested me is jewellery. I have been selective in the items that I have purchased and have mainly included brooches as these can be worn on my tailor-made show suits. Paul has also been very generous and shown good taste in the Mastiff jewellery that he has given me!

At the first MCOA National Specialty that we attended, I was given a commercially produced, but "better" quality brooch that the dogs back home in Australia bought me for Mother's Day. At the same event, we were also introduced to Damara Bolte, who is well known as a Mastiff breeder/owner/handler. However, I do not think that she is so well recognised by current Mastiff people as an acclaimed artist who is exhibited in the American Kennel Club Museum in St. Louis. I was delighted to be able to add a very stylish belt buckle to my collection that I wear frequently.



Since then, I have purchased another one of Damara's pieces – a rather large pewter full-body Mastiff in profile. It is designed to be worn as a necklace, but I confess I have never done so to date. I might if I ever have the opportunity to handle at an MCOA National Specialty so that Damara can see it as she sits ringside.

The pendant that I choose to wear almost daily is a smallish, three-dimensional, full-body Mastiff made of solid gold. One of Paul's selections, his gift positively lifted a disappointing day (of course, a not-so-good result at a major dog show!).



*Confession: Many of the items in our collection hold significance and sentimentality, and recall mostly great memories.*

Some, but not many, of the pieces that we have in our collection are kitsch. The statue of a rugby player with a Mastiff head and paw feet sticking out from his shorts so that he looks like a dwarf immediately comes to mind. However, the piece de resistance is a highly glossed, bronze-colored plastic phone in the shape of a Mastiff. Made in Japan, the dog's eyes flash red when the phone rings and the back of the dog is

the handle, which can be lifted up to use the phone. And it actually works!

A very pertinent question is “Where did you get all of your stuff?”

For most readers, eBay will immediately come to mind. The first item sold on eBay in September 1995, only 14 years ago. We were active in the early years of eBay and found some bargains but not as many as Mastiff owner Virginia Wind. The nature of Virginia’s work meant that she sat in front of a computer for many hours waiting for data to be sent, so while she waited, she surfed the net and eBay and bought Mastiff items! We bid against each other for some time, and Virginia even registered a pseudonym because other bidders were tracking what she was bidding on and following her bids as a recommendation of a worthwhile item. We cursed “Augusta” many times for outbidding us, and I know that she has a lovely Cauldron plate that she outbid me on that I hope to own one day!

Through this online meeting, we eventually swapped items from each of our collections. I will never forget that day when the first parcel arrived – it was better than any Christmas I had ever had! I arranged to meet Virginia when I attended the 2003 MCOA National Specialty. I was in awe of some of the amazing objects that she had in her collection – the fire fender was just incredible. Since then, Virginia has been selling much of her extensive collection on eBay and we have been successful in securing a number of pieces that are significant to us, as well as a few things that are affordable and when the postage is all bundled together are worth bidding for and will ensure that they remain in safe hands.



Obviously, the UK is a great source. Paul returns there every couple of years to visit his family. Over the years, he has purchased a number of items when he has attended all-breeds championship shows, but last time his visit coincided with a major antique fair. I remember him phoning me in the middle of the night and saying that “There are all these fabulous pieces available, they cost this much, and how much is left on the credit card?” Paul did what we consider some serious and

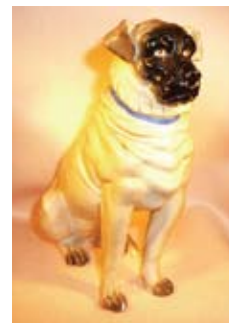


worthwhile negotiating and arrived home with some really unique pieces that we have never seen offered on eBay.

Paul’s interest in our breed’s memorabilia led him in the direction of the Canine Museum Foundation of Victoria. Fortunately, the curator of the museum, Keith Prior, is there at the crack of dawn at every antique market in Melbourne, as well as overseas when judging appointments take him there. Keith has found some wonderful pieces for us in the last few years, including the Staffordshire spill vases, as well as some surprising finds in New Zealand.



Once people know that you are a collector, you can expect that many of your birthday and Christmas presents will form part of your collection. One of the first valuable pieces in our collection was given to us by a friend who could not leave it in



the cabinet at a country antique store. She apparently negotiated a very good price for this late 1800s German bisque. With Paul’s family living in the UK, over the years, they have sent some wonderful items, such as the pictured match striker, which was given to mark a “significant” birthday. A former employee even commissioned an oil painting of one of our dogs, which is very special to us.



*Confession: We encourage gifts that can be included in our collection!*

Last year, an unexpected parcel arrived from Svetlana Golnikova of Mastiffhills Kennels in Moscow, Russia. Svetlana and her husband, Roman, had visited us in 2006, and I had subsequently arranged for a Mastiff pup to be sent to her from Australia. As I carefully unwrapped the babushka dolls and removed each doll from inside another, I noted that each doll was painted with a different Mastiff, and that the quality



of the Mastiffs really appealed to me. So often, poor specimens are used, which is disappointing. It was only when I was down to the third-smallest doll that I realized that the dogs looked familiar and in fact were painted with pictures of my own dogs! For me, these two



sets of babushka dolls, one set depicting heads and the other full body stances, are the most treasured items in our collection. Not only are they skillfully painted, they are beautifully colored, unique and were specially commissioned just for me with my own dogs featured.

I don't think that it comes any more special than that.

Paul and I realize that we have a responsibility to the breed and the art world to ensure that our collection will be preserved for future generations. As Paul is a trustee and committee member of the Canine Museum Foundation of Victoria (there are only two canine museums in the world – the lavish AKC museum in St. Louis and the one here in Melbourne, Australia), our entire collection has been bequeathed to the Canine Museum. However, we do laugh though that we would probably need to donate the rest of our estate to the Canine Museum Foundation also so that a new wing could be constructed to house this large Mastiff acquisition. I confess that we do hope that we will live quite a lot longer to enjoy our collection before it ends up with the Canine Museum.

Living in an extremely high-risk bushfire area, the preservation of our collection (apart from our own lives and those of our dogs!) was foremost in our minds this February. As bushfires devastated our state of Victoria and more than 100 lives were lost, along with more than 3,000 homes, we packed up our valuables in preparation to evacuate. Our valuables did not include the usual childhood photos and mementos or clothing, but instead the Mastiff collection. We had a duty to ensure that this was safe, as much of it is irreplaceable and far more important to us than photos that we haven't looked at for 10 years. It is amazing how your priorities change. I have to confess that there was one piece of clothing that I packed, and that was my favorite tailor-made dog-showing suit, which also is irreplaceable!

I have only skimmed the surface of topics that could be covered when talking about collecting everything Mastiff. I am confident that many of you have items that I would love to include in our collection. Actually I know that you do, as you have outbid us on eBay.

I think that many of you could confess to being a collector!

Should anyone be visiting Melbourne and would like to see our collection at first hand, please let us know and we will also double it up with a trip to the Canine Museum.

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## About the Author

*Gabrielle Simmonds, together with her husband Paul, has owned Mastiffs for 17 years and bred Mastiffs under the Marstenmoor prefix. Travelling the world to broaden their knowledge of the breed (and their Mastiff collection!) resulted in the first frozen semen litter for this breed in Australia. This was a joint venture with Debbie Hobbs of Yangerdook Mastiffs, and the resulting litter was registered under a new co-prefix Yanoor.*

*Marstenmoor and Yanoor Mastiffs have been awarded highly in the show ring in this country, as have other dogs owned by them and of their breeding. Marstenmoor and Yanoor dogs are now appearing in pedigrees around the world. They are extremely proud of the achievements, considering the small number of litters that they have produced. It is about quality, not quantity.*