Irish Water Spaniel
UK and AKC Standards, Height 21-23in (53-58cm). 20-22in (51-56cm)
Origin/history: As the name implies, the Irish water spaniel, of ancient lineage, was
developed in Ireland. The tallest member of the spaniel family and particularly good at
retrieving in water, the coat being naturally water-resistant.
Characteristics: Strongly built and compact, very intelligent, eager, and bred for work in all
types of shooting. Face should be smooth, and high-domed skull covered with long curls.
Muzzle squareish, eyes small, brown and alert. Back short, bend and level, barrel-shaped in
appearance. Coat composed of dense, tight and crisp ringless free from wooliness. Tail short
and straight, covered up to 3-4in (7-10cm) below root with close curls, the remainder with
straight fine hairs. Colour, rich dark liver.
Temperament: Very loyal and devoted to his master and family. A good sense of humour.
Drawbacks: Coat needs careful attention.
(The Complete Book of the Dog, 1985.)

Irish water spaniels are thought to have existed in the Limerick area for several centuries. It has been
suggested that they originated in the East and found their way to
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Whatever the precise origins, these dogs were popular with the fishermen of

The Barrington champion water spaniel, Tyrder Rustum, shown here on this 1983 Irish stamp.

The Barrington Dogs:
Irish Water Spaniels

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by Mary-Rose
Barrington-Manuel

the south-west for work with nets and also for catching rats. They were used
also in the Shannon Estuary for finding duck eggs and retrieving waterfowl.

During the last century, they were a common sight at Watergate in Limerick,
where the washenwomen found that the soap attracted rats to the banks of the
River Shannon. The dogs were used to
control the vermin.

The Barrington family has long been
associated with these dogs. In fact, local
people still often refer to them as 'Barrington dogs'. Family records, which
date them back to the early nineteenth
century, show that in the early days they
were used for vermin control and also for
informal sport, when they flushed and
retrieved game, such as hare and snipe.

References to these dogs exist in the
 correspondence of Sir Matthew (1788-
1861) and also in a journal of Sir William
(1815-72). As the Glenstal estate was
consolidated and landscaped, so the
sport and shooting evolved and became
formalized. The great rhododendron
plantations and woodland coverts grew
to form the basis of the Glenstal
woodcock beats, where record bags at
the turn of the century exceeded 200.
The family used Irish water spaniels
exclusively on the shoot, for both Sir
Croker and his son, Sir Charles, main-

Lady Mary-Rose Barrington, with 'Grouse' and puppies, 1908.

Captain C.E. Barrington and Miss G. M. Bligh, (later Barrington) with 'Skipper'
at Rainscar Moor, Yorkshire, 1931.
tained that 'the smaller land spaniels were of little use, having neither nose nor brain for woodcock'.

The dogs generally were bred and kept in the stable yard, and some with the keepers at the back lodge. During the last century they were, of course, not registered, and it is difficult to follow the respective keeper's pedigrees, for the names were usually repeated. The dogs that the keeper O'Neill kept were generally called 'Paddy' and 'Duchess', and the later ones that the keeper Verrent had were generally called 'Punch' and 'Judy'.

When Mary-Rose Bacon married Sir Charles, then one or two of the dogs began to play a larger part in family life. 'Grouse' was a family favourite in the early 1900s; she was a great worker on the shoot but also travelled extensively with the family, and my father (the late Sir Charles Barrington), regularly took her with him when fishing, for she was very clever at pointing and retrieving fish.

My cousin, the late Miss Florence Barrington, with her great Annagh dogs, is a name that has become almost synonymous with the breed. Although the family always had the dogs, the first that Miss Barrington actually owned was 'Paddy' (No. 1), who was bred in 1918 by Brian Day, the gamekeeper at Ballinagard and went back in time to Sir Charles' 'Paddy' of 1893, and John Barrington's 'Tweedie' of 1906.

Miss Barrington subsequently dedicated much of her life to the breed, and at one time had as many as sixty-four dogs in the kennels at Clonshavoy. Today, the legacy of her work features somewhere in a great many I.W.S. pedigrees throughout the world.

Her brother, Captain C.E. Barrington, also had several Irish water spaniels; he married Miss G.M. Bligh, who, although known throughout the world with her Brittas German shepherds, is also very well known internationally for her Brittas Irish water spaniels.

The most prominent kennel in the United Kingdom for over a decade has been 'Fynder'. It has produced a dozen U.K. champions, two Irish champions and two Canadian champions; it has produced also dogs that have surpassed many of the breed records established by the late Trench O'Rorke with his Breiffny dogs.

Fynder Kennel carries on the Barrington legacy, for it is founded on an outstanding dam, show champion Brittas 'Willow Wren', bred by Mrs. G.M. Barrington and whose sire was 'Slipper' of Annagh, bred by Miss Florence Barrington. 'Willow Wren' goes back directly in line to the great Barrington dogs of yesteryear.

Barrington dogs are indeed a small part of the family heritage and one that I feel will continue surely well into the future.