

The original Fred Basset

In 1963 I was living with my family in Bransgore near Christchurch; my father was a chartered surveyor and spent much of his time travelling the south of England looking at different properties. One day he came home and announced that he had surveyed a house in deepest Dorset where the owners had many animals and needed to find new homes for some of them. Amongst these was a feisty young basset hound called Fred and Dad was eager for us to have him; Mum was not so keen but she kept dreaming about him so after several days of resistance she gave in, much to the delight of us girls (then aged 11 and 9).

Fred duly arrived and it's safe to say that our household was never the same again – we quickly realised that having a basset hound as part of the family was a way of life rather than just having a dog. He was a complete character, preferring to drink from the cold tap in the bath upstairs rather than his water dish; the signal was persistent barking at the bottom of the stairs until someone escorted him up there and turned the tap on! He also worked on our front hedge for days with his nose and big bulk until he made a hole big enough to squeeze through – we spied on him doing this after one too many unexplained disappearances. He would then make his way down the hill to the central crossroads in Bransgore by the Crown Inn pub, lie in the middle of the road and bark at all the passing cars making detours around him. Mum would eventually be summoned by a phone call from the pub landlord – “Mrs Curtis, your dog's here again!” and have to run down the road to retrieve him. In those days Bransgore was a small rural village with not much traffic, otherwise Fred would have doubtless met a sorry end outside the pub.

A few months after we got him, my Auntie Barbara came to stay with her new husband – one Mike Randall who had just taken over the editorship of the Daily Mail. He was enchanted with Fred and told us about a new cartoon series which was about to be launched in the paper. It was of course Graham's now famous stories based on his own basset hound but the cartoon had yet to be named. Mike went back to work the following Monday and announced that he had met an amazing basset hound called Fred, therefore the new cartoon character should be named after him. Graham agreed and that is how Fred Basset came to be called after our delightful dog. Naturally we love telling this story but quite often people think we must be making it up; I can assure you every word is true and we're extremely proud that our Fred Basset became famous by proxy. He certainly did many of the things that the cartoon dog did and I know that all basset hound owners can strongly identify with and therefore immensely enjoy the tales of Graham's Fred Basset.

I hope you enjoyed the above – please do pass on the story to your members if you think they would like to hear it.

Kind Regards,
Charlotte Murphy