

DORKINGS



This is a comprehensive article on Dorkings based on the books I have. The texts have been told according to the scope in terms of facts (exaggerations omitted) what is in those books. Books are from 1852 to 1921 - English, German and American chicken books. Plus looked up some more background on the internet mentioned in the books. While not everything is always true what was written and published 'whenever' at some point, there is a line in it. Only the

American books seem to be a contest of who can boast the most about how unique and fantastic their super purebred and original chickens are (we know better, read on). Back in the days of Hen-Fever, everything had to be yelled in superlatives to be heard anyway. It was mostly about utility rather than 'beauty'. Well, then, read the story of the Kesusu aka Dorking.

In literature is mentioned the Romans took the Dorking to South-England where they are bred like the birds they are today. This thought is based on Columella's writings some 2000 years ago, he described the red Dorking, multiple spurs, five toes and a stocky build with medium length legs. Whether the Roman occupiers took these birds from home or picked them up in France cannot be told, and it actually doesn't matter for the story. Throughout time five toed chickens were quite common. Chickens had or had not a beard and/or leg feathers and they had both four and five toes, just like Faverolles and Houdan. In Italy are no Dorkings. Whoever these 'roman' chickens were, they were brought to South England and became there the birds we know today, or at least some of them. We're talking of



Horsham, The Black Horse - hotel in 1920. In 1827, The Black Horse was the poultry market. On the left the corn market.



Dorkings by Weir, 1854. From: Elisabeth Watt's *The Poultry Yard*.



Top: Dorking on a map of 1800.
Insert: the counties in 1086, Domesday book.

events from a relatively recent date, compared to the Romans. Till the beginning of the 19th century (1800-1900) no Dorkings existed (or Darkings as Rees and Moubay described them).

There were poultry markets since the early middle ages.

A market in Horsham, West-Sussex, described in 1295 and one 15 km north in Dorking, Surrey which was near to London.

'Barnyard fowl' from The Weald (a large wood running all the way to Kent) was brought to the poultry market in Horsham on Saturdays. There they were sold to farmers who fattened them.

Kent and Sussex were well known for their capon fattening farms. The fattened fowls, dead or alive, found their way to the Dorking market where they were sold to London dealers.

In Dorking one could find the fattest geese, chickens and capons. The alive ones came via Horsham to be fattened at Dorking. Breeding happened in Sussex, there were no chickens bred in Dorking. Dorking was only the place to fatten poultry. Breeding happened in Sussex, there were no chickens bred in Dorking. Dorking was only the place to fatten

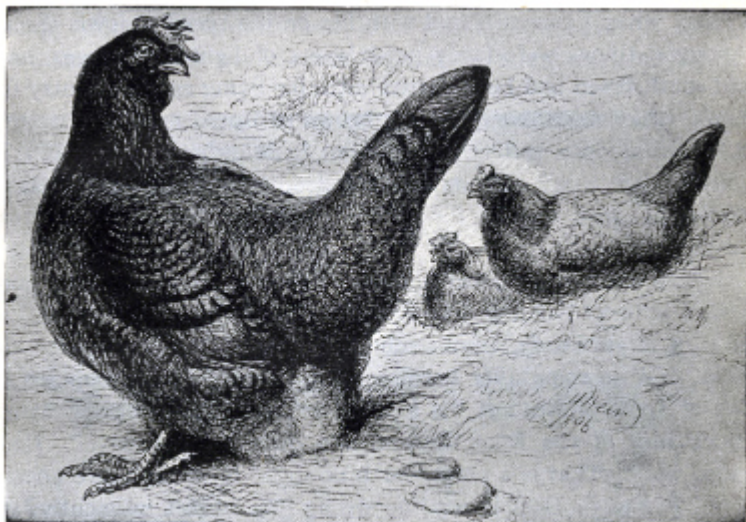


Old Kent cock with five toes, a local chicken from Headcorn, Kent which contributed largely to the Dorking poultry market's fame. Weir 1854.

Old Kent chickens, the one on bottom page dark red, I don't know whether dark is dark as in opposed to light, or silver duckwing. A red Dorking is a melanised red duckwing s+ gold based. Extra black results in dark feather tips in the hens. Weir 1896



OLD KENT FOWL



OLD KENT DARK-RED HEN AND TWO OTHERS



Old Sussex cock and hen, almost identical to Old Kent. Below right: white spangled (mottled) red duckwing Old Sussex/Old Kent with pinched tail from Old English Game origin.

poultry, just as in Kent and Lincolnshire. The chickens in Dorking came from elsewhere, and were dead or almost dead and they were known for their superb table quality, the juiciest and most white meat. These superior chickens came from The Weald, the large forest in the South of England and chickens from Kent were called Old-Kent fowl. From these the best capons could be bred/ made, they were mouth watering fowls to the Londoners.

Merged into Dorkings

The *Old-Kent* breed doesn't exist anymore and the reason(?) Old-Kent has become Dorking because they were sold at the Dorking market. Barn- and Farmyard fowls from Sussex came to the market in Horsham and after fattening or slaughter they went to Dorking and from there to the pot.

The *Old-Sussex* also doesn't exist anymore. This local chicken became Dorking too. It can be said there was no distinct (as distinctions are today) physical difference between Old-Kent and Old-Sussex they were Dorkings.



Tweak for juice and flavour

To keep the local farm chickens of large size and good health with a lot of meat on the breast (breast was most appreciated at that time), juicy and with a fine structure and tender, the farmers used the services of an *Old English Game* cock with white legs now and then. The feather colours of the chickens were not of real importance, a dressed chicken has no other colour

than white or pink. Feathers are plucked, they were talking clean carcasses at the time. Farmers however, did like uniform groups of chickens in build and in lesser degree of colour and because the OEG was used to enhance the local chickens now and then, identical colours as the OEG could be found in the local breeds in the South. Colours which still exist today. The Speckled Sussex was once Old-

Sussex and Old-Kent'ish, and the other family members were the greys and reds without 'white spangles' and called Dorking since shows started for beauty.

The *Surrey Fowl*, of which is thought to be one of the ancestors of the dark Dorking, could be found in Sussex and Berkshire, actually in all districts where table fowl was bred.

By 1905, almost all of them had disappeared. At shows 'beauty' became more and more important, table fowl qualities still too of course. The Old-Kent, Old-Sussex and the Surrey Fowl were swept on one pile, colours were numerous and similar to Old English Game and everything sort of similar in palette, most important was their meat. Lots of the colour varieties disappeared, everything had to be sorted by colour and that is how the limited amount of colours of the Dorking came about.

The Dorking is still a meat chicken, egg production is less important. A meat chicken needs strong wings, because the breast is the wing muscles, and a deep breast was preferred over a long breast. The Dorkings need to have tight



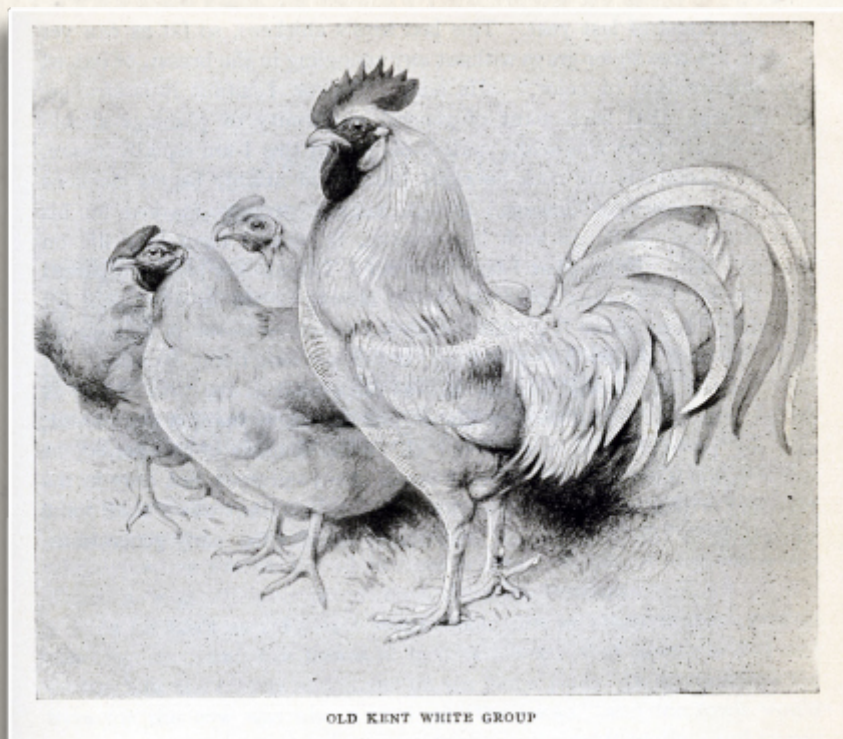
COCKEREL AND PULLET, OLD-STYLE PRIZE DORKING OF 1853

*Dorking chickens from 1853, Old-Kent & Old-Sussex.
De hen looks quite gamey and the cock has a white ear.*

DORKING IS A FUSION CHICKEN



PRIZE-WINNING WHITE DORKING COCKEREL



OLD KENT WHITE GROUP

*Above: White Dorking (Old-Kent) single comb 1853, white ear.
Left: white Dorking rose comb.*



Drawn by Elizabeth Weir from a picture in Rees's "Cyclopaedia"
A PAIR OF WHITE DORKINGS

Right: white Dorking from 1812, with five toes and a little crest, after Rees's Cyclopaedia by Weir.

feathering, this comes from the Old English Games. Loose and soft feathers originates from Shanghai, Brahma, Cochin. During the *Hen Fever* (1854-1860) the meat chickens in the South of England fell prey to the Asiatic chicken madness and were crossed



MODERN ROSE-COMB WHITE DORKING COCKEREL
A prize winner

A modern 1890 white rose comb Dorking by Weir.



Old Kent & Sussex 5-toed grey fowls, 1854.

White Dorkings by Ludlow, 1873



MR JOHN MARTIN ROSE-COMBED DORKING COCK
"CHAMPION"
CUPS AT STROUD AND NEWPORT; INTO: CHELTENHAM, SOUTHAMPTON AND CRYSTAL PALACE (1871); DUBLIN 1872

Rosecomb grey Dorking by Ludlow, 1872



MISS FAIRHURST'S PAIR OF
WHITE DORKINGS



Ludlow's
Dorkings
1870.

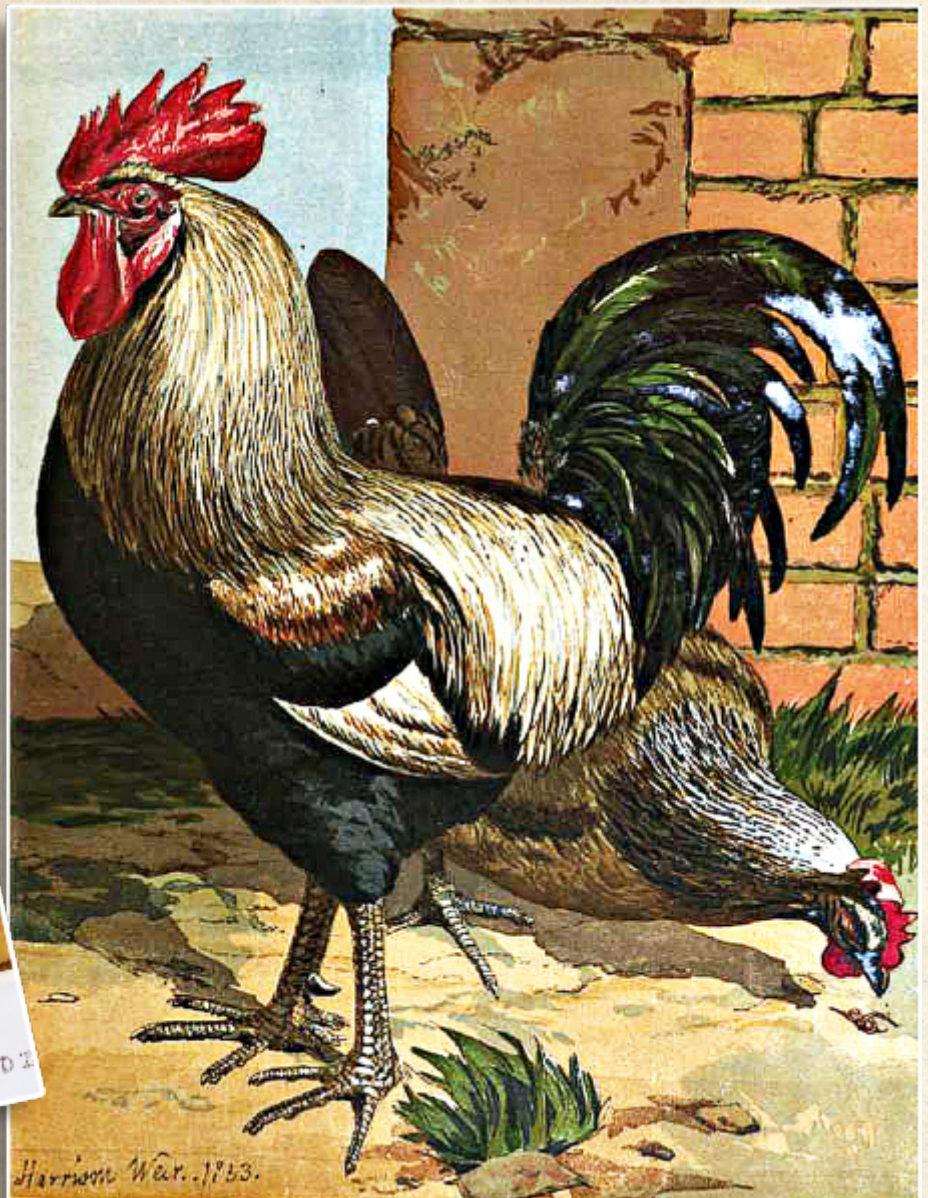
Dark Dorkings note the red with white ear, Weir 1863

to these yellow skinned, leggy, boney giants.

This was not particularly appreciated, the English wanted white, not yellow meat in the kitchen. Yellow meat was something Americans wanted.

The white Dorkings are a story of their own, although coming from the same neighbourhood and having a rose comb, but single comb too. Before they were baptised as Dorkings, they were white Sussex and Kent fowls. The white colour is believed to have come from Old English Game, a single comb was seen too. This varying comb type happened in the coloured Kesusu's too. The rose comb was not the sole exclusive right for white Dorkings. They acquired this right later when 'marketing' became more and more involved, chickens were branded to 'breed'.

The real date is always a bit obscure, same plate...



Decline and Asiatics

Dorkings were first and foremost meat chickens as said and when the first shows appeared, the 'regional' farm or barn-yard chickens disappeared. Colours were described according to the most common occurrence, avoiding the Shanghai (Brahma) and Cochin colours.

These Asiatics were the favourites of the shows (new, hot) and over the years the heavy original English 5-toed meat chickens almost disappeared from the chicken stage. What was left was mostly bastardised with Asiatics.

Some breeders stood strong and were loyal to the Dorking tribe, although, they were pretty much screwed up due to crosses to Asiatics. Nevertheless breeders succeeded to get rid of long legs, heavy bones and soft loose feathers, yellow skin and completely red ears. The original heavy table fowl could be almost bred back identically to the first descriptions.

Almost... because someone wasn't quite bright and awake when writing down that the ears of the Dorking should be red (this comes from Shanghai, Brahma) and a bit white was allowed only some time later. The ears of the 'Kesusu' (Kent, Sussex, Surrey) fusion chickens aka Dorkings are white tinted red in origin. See illustration on the previous page.

Old Kent and Sussex black-breasted red 'barn-door' cock, Harrison Weir, 1890.



Interesting caption: Old English black-breasted red Dorkings, once owned by Mr. Weir, 1890.

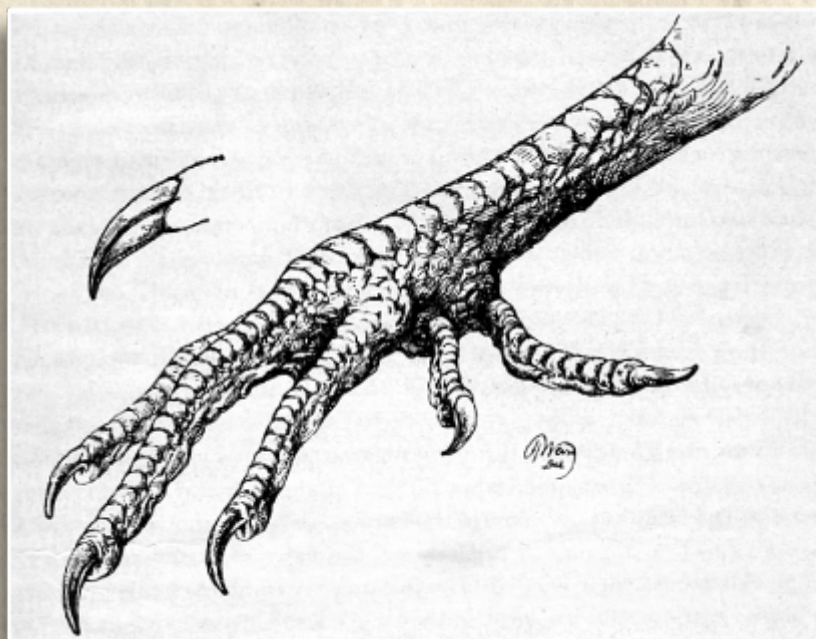


Grey Dorkings, 1890, Weir.



Prize Dorking 1885, Weir.



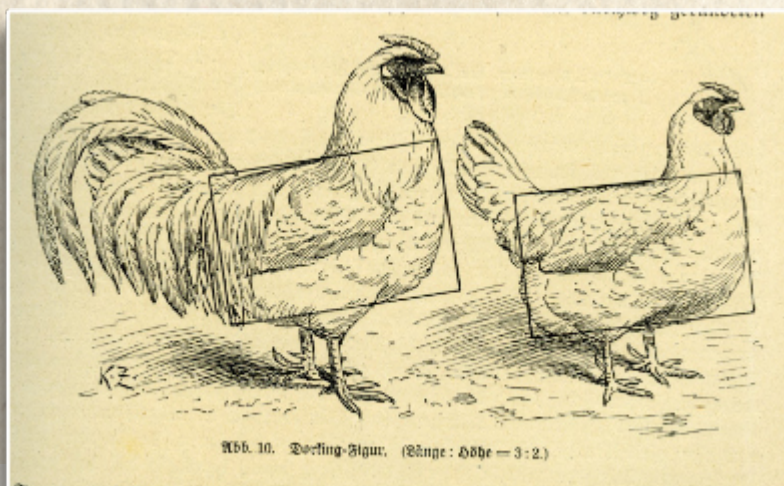


Cross-bred pullet between Dorking hen and Cornish Indian cock.
Age 4,2 months; Leg white stained with brown between the scales;
Weight of fowl 6,5 lbs.; Inside fat 2 lbs. First prize Dairy Show 1892.
Weir, 1897.

Front view of Tawny Old Kent Hen's leg.
Observe the breadth of the toe nail.
Above: bone showing first joint of toe without nail covering. Weir 1897.

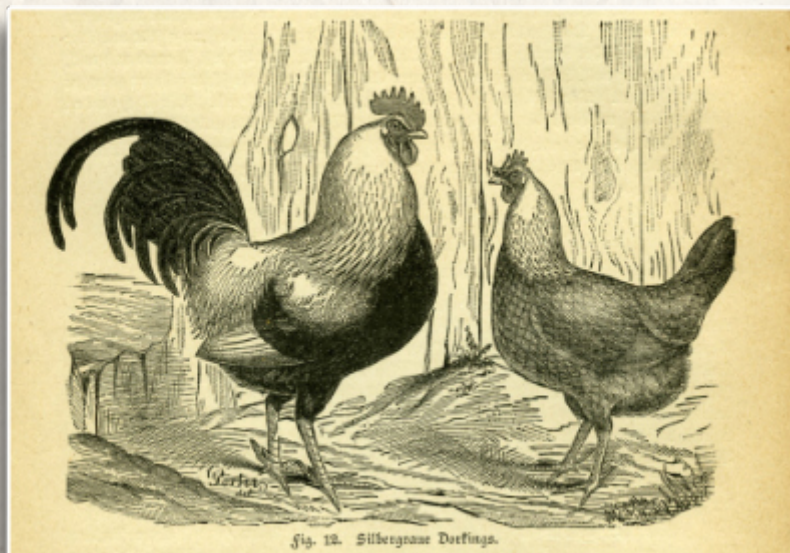


German Dorkings from 'Geflügelzucht' by Dürigen, 1921.
Very primitive drawing. The tail carriage problem of the hen is solved in a creative way.
In the past around the 1860s they were not particularly liked in Germany because of the high price (60-85 Thaler or 200-240 Mark for a trio) and the climate is soon too harsh, writes Dürigen in 1886 when Dorkings are there for decades. They are merely zoo birds. Cuckoo coloured were not bred at the time in Germany. Some wanted to eliminate the fifth toe as breed characteristic because it didn't inherit strong enough. They let this idea go.



Dorking shape: length : height = 3:2.
1921.

Silver grey Dorkings, 1887.



Dorkings in Germany

The Germans took in 1860 some Dorkings from England, they had to be 'improved' a lot, Dürigen wrote in his book (1886-1921). After two world wars there were zero Dorkings in Germany. After the war someone took eggs from England with him. In the 1960s eggs were smuggled to the other side of the iron curtain (former DDR), and from those one cock was born. He was crossed to a mix of Faverolles x Sussex. A logical choice knowing Sussex and Dorking is the same, only a bit different in shape. In Western Germany they continued to breed with the English Dorkings and more colours came from the Netherlands and England. In East Germany someone made cuckoo colour (again).

Dorkings in America

The Americans were in love with the Dorkings since 1854. First they were called Surrey Fowl. Two pages of T.B. Miner's booklet on the next to pages show how breeders updated each other of what happened in the chicken world. Communication with England went via Ireland mostly, from there a steamer between Cork/Liverpool/New York went up and down. That's how the Brahma came to England (via a contact in Ireland) and British chickens went to America

by boat. For a long time the Dorking breed was confusing, whether the Dorking was actually Surrey fowl. However, the Surrey had four toes and the Sussex and Kent had five toes, well, sometimes four too.

In the text of 1852 is mentioned the white Surreys were top of the pops meat chickens for twenty years. Of course they bragged about the amount of eggs too, historical version of alternative facts, but they started brooding early and the first chicks could be expected early February. For breeding 'stags' were used, these were two year old cocks. When a cock was three years old he became too weak, the most vital ones were two years of age.

The hens had to be at least three years old before they could provide good breeding eggs. (This is something unthinkable today).

A hen could be used sooner when she was bulky, of heavy build. The fusion Dorkings were known for slow maturing, being mature at the age of two years, they grow slowly to maturity but because of their large size and weight they could be eaten at the age of one year or sooner. The colours were never much of a discussion in England according to the Americans, because they were sub to usefulness. Therefore Kesusu

were not seen at shows at the time, although there were classes reserved for them, but no entries came. Not sooner than when people gained interest in the concept of 'breed', around 1850 and shows had their start-ups, rules were made, the Kesusu disappeared and the fusion chickens: Dorkings invented, interest grew.

The Dorkings can be seen as a marketing concept of the chicken farmers from Kent, Sussex and Surrey, to market their meaty farm chickens, which were bred for one thousand and eight hundred years without a standard or colour description.

As Dorkings, they were a brand to keep in mind. The Dorking is, given the history from a Roman till the farmer's daughter of South-England, which became one of the favourite foods of the Londoners during the industrial revolution during Queen Victoria's reign, is sure a chicken that inspires and tickles the imagination. Also because the history is much clearer, opinions on evolution aside, because it is described through time.

Germany, Dürigen
1886 dark grey
Dorking hen and
cock.



Dunkelgraue Dorking, Henne.



Dunkelgraue Dorking, Hahn.

1852 Miner's Domestic poultry book USA -
THE SURREY FOWL

The Surrey fowl is an improved variety of the Dorking, but lacking the fifth toe. They are bred extensively in England, but not to much extent in this country. The above cut is from Nolan's work on Domestic Poultry, published in Dublin, but it was furnished for this Treatise by Jno. Giles, Esq., Providence, R. I., as a representation of his Surrey fowls.

In that work this cut represents the speckled Dorking with the fifth toe, but in applying it to the Surrey fowl, as bred by Mr. Giles, the fifth toe is missing. This explanation is given to disarm critics, who may cavil at the fact, that Mr. Giles has selected Mr. Nolan's cut to represent his Surrey fowls. I presume that it is as true a representation of Mr. Giles' Surrey cock as if he were to have a portrait drawn from life, because no portrait, except it be from a daguerreotype, is perfect in all respects. The following is Mr. Giles' description...

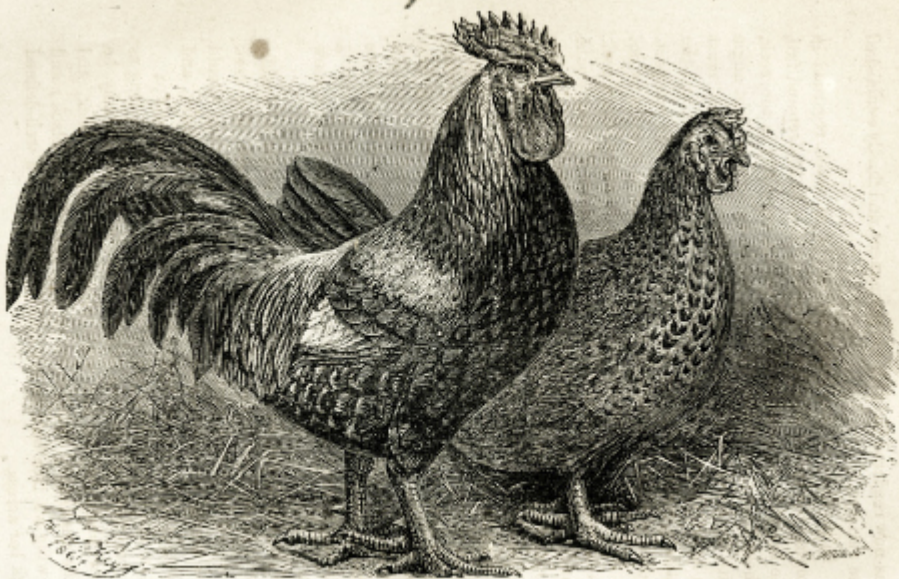
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GREY DORKINGS.

Grey Dorkings,
Practical poultry 1867.



THE DORKING FOWL.

THE fowls here represented are accurate likenesses from life, from stock imported by John Giles, Esq., of Providence. This stock was selected personally by Mr. Giles, in the town of Dorking, in Surrey, England, and are undeniably the best specimens of that breed ever imported into this country. Their color is a perfect white, without any shade whatever. The legs are white, and they have five toes, which marks are invariable characteristics of a pure breed. These particular fowls are now in the possession of Mr. Stephen Perkins, of Plymouth, who has the reputation of being a very careful breeder. Mr. Giles says that fowls of this breed average from six to eight pounds each.

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1854 Bennet's The poultry book USA
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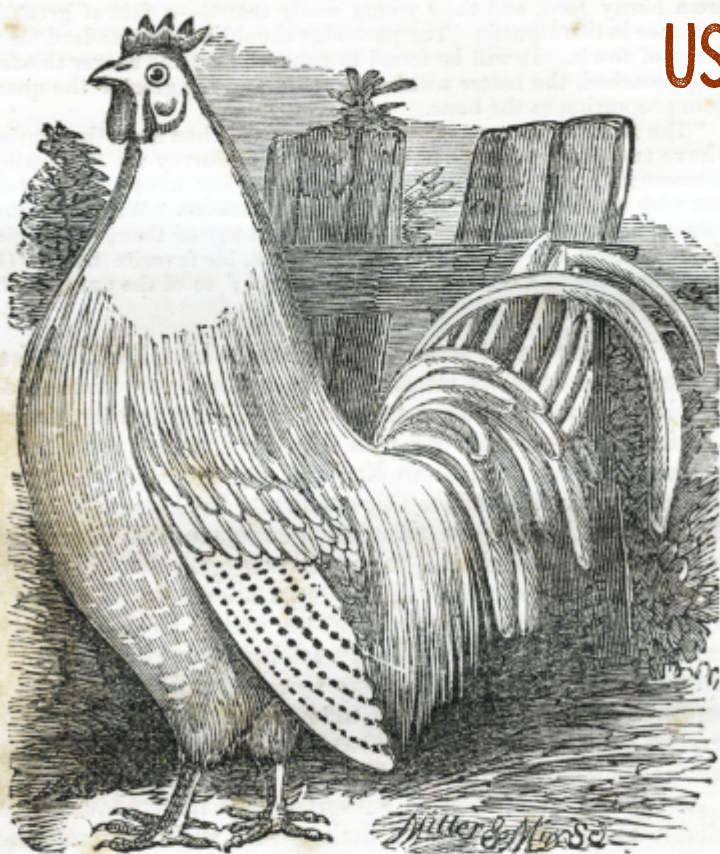


Right: A champion Dark Dorking. Photo is from 1902. Note the pinched tail, a result of OEG blood. (UK)

Left: Champion Dark Dorking, note the long loose feathers, photo: 1903.



USA



Mr. Newell, the owner of the Dorking fowl here represented, in a subsequent communication, writes as follows :

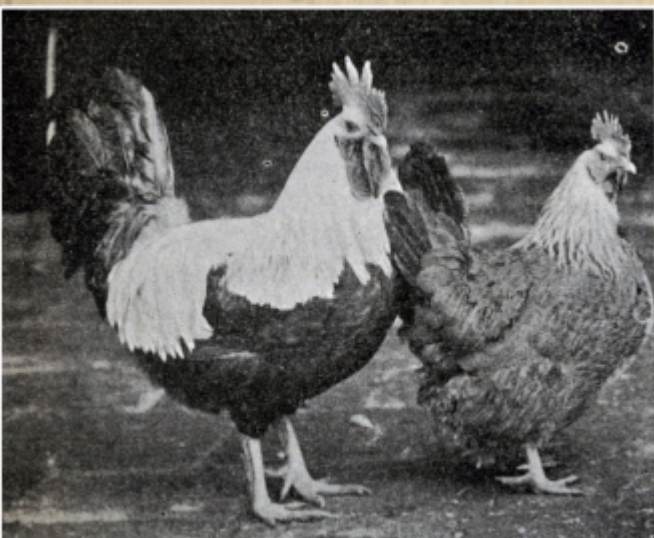
"The above portrait was drawn from life, and is a correct representation of my pure white Surrey Dorking rooster: these fowls have long, round and large, plump bodies, with a broad, full chest, like a partridge. Both the crower and hen are invariably white, from bill to toe. Abundant proof is furnished by Mowbray, W. B. Dickson, and others. They have been the choice market fowl in England for the last twenty years, and in this country they hold the same rank among poultry which the Durhams do among cattle. They will produce more weight in eggs and flesh, and of a better quality, than any other variety on the same amount of food; and as sitters and mothers cannot be surpassed by any other breed of fowls. Dr. E. Wight, of Mas-

1852 Miner's Domestic poultry book
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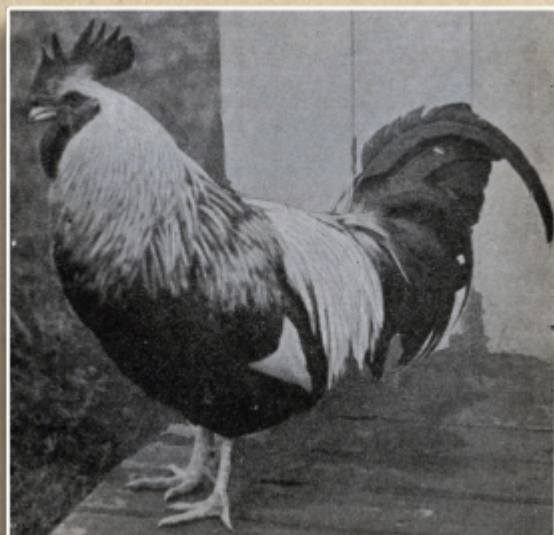
Speaking in superlatives could always be
better, one topped the other.



Dark Dorking pair
1902. A problem
was white at the tail
base into the sickles
of the cock,
mentioned in early in
literature.

After a cross to dark
Shanghai (Brahma)
hens were silver
pencilled next to
duckwing.

Right: Dark Dorking
cock, 1902 from
Reeves.



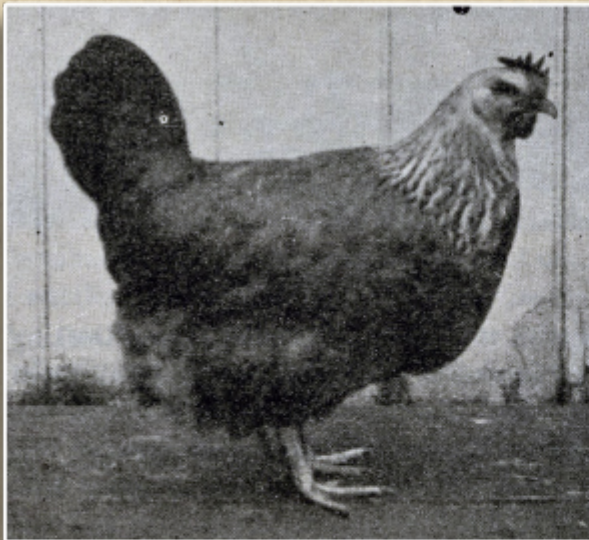
*Champion Silver
Dorking cock 1902.*



Silver-gray Dorking hen 1902.



*Prize Silver-
gray Dorking
hen, 1902.*



*Prize Silver-gray Dorking cock
Crystal Palace show 1902.*



**THE DORKING IS THE REFLECTION OF DEVELOPMENTS
IN SOCIETY OVER THE CENTURIES**