



EXPOSED: THE EVIL

An undercover operation by The Sunday Times exposes the extent of cruel 'sport' that leaves badgers to die agonising deaths. **John Mooney** reports

The cry of the terrified badger as it fights for its life is heart-rending. The animal screeches in terror as it attempts to defend itself against the terriers, which have been set upon it by a gang of badger baiters in a field in Co Down.

One of the dogs, a cross between a lurcher and a pit bull terrier, moves forward and locks its jaws around the badger's head and pulls it from its underground sett. That allows the other dogs to join in the attack. Frenzied, they latch on to the badger's rump and rear legs and begin tearing it limb from limb.

Nothing is off limits in this illegal blood sport. One of the spectators rushes forward and urges the dogs to bite harder in order to kill the quarry.

He is careful not to get bitten by the badger; it could inflict a serious injury were it to lock on to his leg.

Another pit bull-type dog begins to shake the struggling badger, while the other dogs continue to pull and tear at the creature's rear legs.

Outnumbered and injured, the badger falls limp and offers no resistance. It is dying from internal injuries, an horrific end for a species supposedly protected by law.

Its death throes are filmed by the dogs' owners as a keepsake of the day's "sport". Their cheering and laughing is the soundtrack to its slow and agonising death.

When the animal is dead, more terriers are released into the sett to locate another badger to be baited and killed.

Hardcore terrier men regard the badger as the only creature that can put up a fight against their dogs, even if the battles are hopelessly one-sided contests with inevitable outcomes. Foxes succumb easily when attacked by terriers. A badger will fight, especially if it is a nursing female trying to defend its young.

The scene is from footage obtained dur-

ing the course of a six-month undercover investigation jointly organised by The Sunday Times and the Ulster Society (for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Uspca).

Until now, the existence of organised badger baiting was considered something of a myth, but not any more.

The Sunday Times has amassed hours of taped evidence, photographs, footage, and pages of transcripts secretly recorded by a

journalist who infiltrated a network of blood sports enthusiasts in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, France and America.

The inquiry has also revealed an international trade in terriers, specifically bred for use in the blood sport, and the growing use of websites dedicated to the practice.

BADGER baiting was introduced into Ireland and Britain in the 1700s. It was once considered to be a legitimate sporting activity, with fights between terriers and badgers staged in the back yards of public houses on Sunday mornings and at country fairs to be enjoyed by all.

The revival of the ancient blood sport, which was outlawed in Ireland and Britain in 1835, has been driven by working terrier enthusiasts. They have set up underground clubs and networks which breed terriers whose character traits include an ability to kill wild animals that can fight back.

The dogs, muscular, agile and willing to enter fox burrows and badger setts, are usually Patterdales, which stand 12in high. Although not a recognised breed, hardened terrier enthusiasts prefer them.

Robert Booth, a Patterdale and jack russell breeder who lives in the south of France, is perhaps the most notorious. He has developed the breed into one ideally suited for badger baiting.

Booth is connected to Irish "badger diggers" through a network of contacts he made while living in Co Tipperary in the 1990s. He then moved to France and opened a kennels there, which he named Blaireau, the French name for badger. "You can dig badgers here [France] legally. So I'm not looking over my shoulder or doing anything wrong. There is (sic) plenty of badgers here, like there is (sic) in Ireland," he told an undercover journalist.

Booth's word carries weight among hardcore blood sports enthusiasts who regard him as an expert on how to train dogs for badger baiting. When asked at what age Patterdale terriers should be trained to bait, he replied: "You know it's illegal where you are [Ireland] but to be honest with you, where it is legal, we wouldn't dream of putting them on anything like that till they are about 14 to 15 months old. If you get a dead one [badger] and let [puppies] have a shake of one, it will do them the

world of good, because they are not going to get hurt."

In France, Booth's Patterdale terriers are used by hunters to flush out wild boar because larger hounds are too scared to approach the wild animals, which are capable of killing grown men.

In Ireland, a secretive network of enthusiasts breed terriers from Booth's bloodline and sell them to baiters. This ad hoc network moves its prized fighting terriers from one country to another in order to continue the bloodline. The Patterdale puppies they produce sell for up to €200 each.

Despite their lineage, the terriers require special training to prepare them for "working" badgers. Most are "blooded" or trained to kill rats, rabbits, foxes and even mink.

Pat Maloney, a badger baiter from Palskenry in Co Limerick who breeds Booth Patterdales, told an undercover journalist of his preferred training methods, which is to pit puppies against wild animals trapped in fields close to his home.

"I will try them on a rat or a mink in a cage," he said. "I then bring them on to a fox. I will work them on a couple of foxes first, to get them used to it. If I slap the old cage, and show them an old dog, they can see what's going on and won't be long latching on."

Feral mink put up a "good show" when pitted against a young terrier, he said. "They are lively inside the cage. They will give a good screech and bite the terrier. He will bite back," said Maloney, who guarantees the killing ability of all puppies that are bred at his kennels.

"If you buy two pups from me, and if you give that dog a fair go, and he doesn't work, you bring him back and I'll give you another pup. That's what I tell fellas," he said.

Maloney is a fan of dogs from Booth's bloodline. A visit to his kennels, which are situated at the rear of his home, reveals that he has a Patterdale bitch with scars on its face, the tell-tale signs that the dog has been used to bait badgers.

Asked if this was the case, Maloney said: "Oh yeah. She is as good as you'll get. I'll be digging a badger with her this weekend. There is no problem there."

Offering more advice on terrier training, he said: "The only thing that you wouldn't work on badgers is a small handy-sized dog, the likes of jack russells. I wouldn't put them against badgers. You are only blackguarding the dog. You need a dog with a bit of power."

Terriers that are released into setts regularly sustain serious injuries, usually to their faces and lower jaws.

Like other badger baiters, Maloney is sometimes forced to administer veterinary treatment to his dogs when they are seriously injured in fights.

His dedication to the illegal blood sport is remarkable. In conversation, Maloney

talks about Booth's terriers as if they are champion fighters. One dog, called Booth's Bruiser 2, was sold for €10,000 in January to Barnburner Patterdales Kennels in Iowa, America. Before that, it was moved to Ireland to breed with a Patterdale bitch to continue its bloodline, then flown out from Shannon airport.

"The first time that dog was dug [baited] I was there," Maloney said proudly. "It was a burrow just up the road from me. The dog went in, banged on. We dug down to him in about two hours. He was just lying down beside a dead badger, locked on under his jaw. The badger lay down and the dog lay down. There was not a sound. Nothing. Robert Booth was there. That dog was bred in Ireland."

THE killing ability of Patterdale terriers, especially if they are puppies which carry Booth's bloodline, makes them much sought after among terrier men and blood sports enthusiasts around the world.

There is a vibrant, if not particularly lucrative, trade in working terriers between Ireland, Britain, France and America. Patterdale dogs are used to kill raccoons, possums, bobcats and groundhogs in America in much the same way that badgers and foxes are baited in Ireland. US laws on baiting and hunting vary from state to state.

Mick Sheedy, another associate of Booth's who lives near Middleton in Co Cork, has exported many Patterdale puppies to American terrier men. "Booth's dogs are in a class of their own," Sheedy said. "He's very famous in America. I get two or three phone calls a week looking for dogs."

In another conversation, he said he had sent 26 Patterdale terrier puppies to America. "The fellas in America have loads of money. They seem to pay mad [money] for what they want. I have sent 26 [Patterdale terriers] over to them. I sent one bitch and she didn't work, because they tried her too young. But I could say nothing, so I said 'kill her', and I sent them another one instead. That's the story with them," said Sheedy, who observes that terrier work gets into one's blood.

Sheedy's claims to have sold dozens of Patterdale puppies to enthusiasts in America do not seem to be an exaggeration. Todd Fulford, a Patterdale breeder who operates Deadgame Kennels in West Virginia, has imported terriers used in badger baiting in Ireland, according to his website.

"Some of my dogs have been worked on badgers in Ireland, before they were shipped to me. I have shipped dogs that are worked on badgers and wild boar in Korea, raccoon dogs in Finland, raccoon dogs in the Czech republic," states the website, which has images of Booth in hunting fatigues and combats.

A former drug addict and alcoholic who

claims he reformed his life after he asked "Jesus into his heart", Fulford describes Booth as "a good man".

Fulford is not the only American terrier breeder to have established contact with Irish enthusiasts.

Jeff Rowe, a terrier breeder who runs Linruff Kennels in Tennessee, also produces "working terriers" for baiting wild animals. His website has images of terriers attacking wild animals including raccoons, and has a photograph of Rowe in Europe holding up a dead badger.

Though he says he has never visited Ireland, he admits to knowing Irish badger baiters. Some of these have travelled to America to judge at terrier shows.

Desmond Mackin, a dog club official from Banbridge in Co Down, is a notorious figure among animal welfare inspectors in Ireland.

In October 1997, he became the first person in Britain to be prosecuted for illegally transporting a live badger. It was found tied up in a sack, hidden between wooden pallets in the rear of a lorry he was driving from Northern Ireland to England. He was selling the animal, a pregnant badger, to baiters in Britain when he was caught.

"I have threw (sic) back a few pints with him over here," said Rowe in an e-mail.

BADGER baiting is practised in almost every town in Ireland, both north and south. Although the blood sport is organised in the utmost secrecy, the sale of the dogs used is organised over the internet, by word of mouth, and in Buy & Sell, a weekly newspaper that carries classified ads. In some cases, advertisements which offer Patterdale dogs described as "working strain", are dogs that are being used for badger baiting. References to "dogs from working lines" are other clues.

Other advertisers mention their dogs' bloodlines to attract baiters. A man who calls himself John McQuillan, and who purports to be a terrier breeder from Co Armagh, placed an advertisement in Buy & Sell offering Patterdale puppies for sale.

When approached by an undercover journalist, McQuillan spoke freely of his involvement in badger baiting, how he treated his terriers for the injuries they sustained in illegal fights, and how he often travelled to Co Meath to bait badgers with his friends.

In a recent conversation, he admitted digging out a sett last week and finding a nursing badger and her cubs.

"They were only wee cubs and the dog killed one of them," he said. "I dug two on Saturday. They were two, nice, handy ones. The dogs just sat back and barked."

He admitted to feeling uneasy about digging out the species while they were rearing their young.

McQuillan's advice to would-be baiters is to subscribe to websites dedicated to the blood sport. One is www.freewebs.com/gonedigging, a website that shows pictures of badger baiting in Britain and Ireland. Another is Digging for Life, a blood sports forum hidden within an internet site.

"[Digging for Life] are very careful about who they let in. They will check you out before they get back to you. They want to know your name and address," McQuillan said. These websites, some depicting horrific scenes of cruelty to animals; the production of badger baiting DVDs, and the sale of Patterdale terriers through classified ads in newspapers, are all signs that the ancient blood sport has established a new following in the 21st century.

Other factors are also encouraging the growth in badger baiting, despite its illegality. In Ulster, the species is protected under the Badgers Act of 1973. In the republic, it is safeguarded under the 2000 Wildlife Act.

But in Northern Ireland, the blood sport has grown in popularity since the end of the Troubles due to the significant reduction in police patrols in rural areas. Until the mid-1990s, a group of people seen digging in a field would have quickly attracted the attention of the army or the police.

South of the border, there appears to be little or no enforcement of animal welfare and wildlife laws. Responsibility for protecting badgers and prosecuting those who train dogs to fight falls between the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the gardai.

The NPWS has secured just 10 convictions for the illegal persecution of badgers in 20 years. Despite repeated requests from animal welfare organisations, the garda force has refused to establish a wildlife protection unit, or even to appoint liaison officers to prosecute cases for animal cruelty uncovered by welfare societies.

Wildlife enthusiasts would also argue that the Irish government has failed to introduce adequate laws to curb illegal blood sports and to protect animals from cruelty.

"It is not a top priority for law enforcement in this country," said Aileen Yourell, a spokeswoman for the Irish Council Against Bloodsports.

"We have in the past called on the garda commissioner to set up a Wildlife Crime Unit to tackle such issues as badger baiting but to no avail, so these thugs are pretty much operating in the Irish countryside with impunity."

Stephen Philpott, chief executive of the Uspca, said: "The authorities in the republic are not interested in protecting wildlife or preventing cruelty to animals. That is a fact. The issue is not even on the agenda."

"Last year, we ran an undercover investigation into dog fighting which revealed that it was happening south of the border.

What did the Irish government do about it? Nothing. They said they would introduce laws after the [Stormont] assembly asked them to take action but nothing happened.

"The Irish authorities ignore cruelty to animals. Take puppy farming. They promised the sun, moon and the stars, but haven't done one thing to outlaw it. The truth is they don't care. Ireland is seen as a safe haven for illegal blood sports and those who wish to engage in animal cruelty."

"I personally wouldn't hold out for the Irish government to take action on this issue. The Irish authorities will do the usual, they will promise to do something about animal cruelty and illegal blood sports, then do nothing."

The Department of Agriculture, which is preparing new animal welfare laws, said the planned legislation would include measures to stop animal cruelty and unnecessary suffering.

For video of the baiting, see www.timesonline.co.uk/uknews

Baiting on the net

BADGER baiters are increasingly using the internet to trade information, post pictures of their most prized hunting dogs, and to defend their "sport".

Even though badger baiting is illegal in Britain and Ireland, websites dedicated to the blood sport are clearly being used by people in both countries. Freewebs.com/gonedigging, one of several websites that endorse badger baiting and other forms of animal cruelty, is among the most popular. It has been accessed more than 17,000 times since it went live in 2006.

The website purports to be "dedicated to the working terrier" but it is used by enthusiasts to upload images of injured terriers and wild animals they have killed. Images of animal cruelty can be accessed by using search terms such as "gone digging", "Patterdale" and "badger".

"The internet is helping medieval blood sports to flourish once again and establish a new following," said Stephen Philpott, the chief executive of the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

"In years gone by, people involved in badger baiting had limited access to like-minded people. Terriermen would meet at game fairs or dog shows, maybe once a year. Now they communicate by e-mail and instant messenger. The internet has made it easy and safe for them to trade information on dogs and puppies for sale, but it has also helped them to make new contacts and establish networks while remaining anonymous."

Philpott believes these websites are contributing to the resurgence of badger baiting. "The internet has changed the underground blood sports scene. It is the only public forum where badger baiters can promote their activities without fear of arrest, exposure or public ridicule," he said.

The dog trade

A badger baiter from Carlow town, known as PJ, sold a Patterdale puppy to a Sunday Times reporter and was offering to sell more. This is part of their conversation

PJ: I have a bitch coming on in a few months.

Sunday Times: Would she be good on badgers?

PJ: Oh yeah. She's a bit small but she'd be well able for it. She's very well bred. I'll get something for you that is starting to go [hunt]. To get a dog that is f***** working, or to get a dog with good potential, is hard.

ST: The pup you sold me is gamey.

PJ: Yeah, I had the mother out Sunday there and she went in [to burrow]. Her tail was going 80 miles an hour.

ST: Did you use her on foxes?

PJ: No, the black and white fellas. I won't be able to do anything for the rest of the year because she is too hard.

ST: What do you mean?

PJ: She is too severe. There is no yapping out of her or nothing. She just goes in and locks on. She'll be there when you dig down.

ST: Was it one badger or two that

you got?

PJ: Just one.

ST: How long did it [the bait] last?

PJ: My bitch was down there for an hour by the time we dug down. The sooner you get down the better with these lads [Patterdale terriers] because there is no holding them back. They are as gamey as you get.

The following is an edited transcript of a conversation with another badger baiter from Cavan called Sean. He was discussing the injuries sustained by terriers during badger baits.

Sean: If you have a dog well marked it's hard to go to vets with them.

ST: But no one cares?

Sean: No one cares. I could show you dogs I have. I wouldn't keep a dog that would come off [a badger].

ST: Are there many good breeders in Ulster?

Sean: A lot of them are half crooks. You would wonder about them.

ST: Do you kill the badgers yourself?

Sean: No we let them go. We wouldn't bother. A lot of lads hit them with a bar or spade but we let them off. There's a lot of them about. Something else to dig.



Still alive: Medieval blood sports

Cock fighting

This illegal blood sport is still practised in parts of rural Ireland, most notably in the border counties and midlands. It involves a contest between two cockerels, sometimes with steel spurs on their legs.

Fights are organised on a regional basis with winners entering the "Irish Cock Fighting Derby" every Easter. The location of this event is a closely guarded secret.

Dog fighting

Pit bull terriers are matched against each other in warehouses and farm sheds. Referees judge the fights and award prizes of up to €50,000. The dogs can suffer horrific injuries and owners often kill them if they lose. In so-called "cajun dog-fighting" animals fight to the death.

Members of some dog-fighting clubs in Ireland and Ulster are thought to include armed robbers and drug dealers. Pit bull terriers are banned in Northern Ireland and Britain but the Irish government has not banned the breed, nor has it increased fines for animal cruelty to curb the practice.

Fox baiting

Foxes have no legal protection in Ireland which enables blood-sports enthusiasts to subject them to horrific cruelty and kill them using terriers and hounds.

Foxes and their cubs are usually dug from their burrows, also known as earths, and thrown to dogs which maul them to death. Vixens and their cubs are sometimes tortured and fed to dogs.