

EVSA Report, 2020 – Alice Elgar, 6th Year, University of Cambridge

I was delighted to receive the 2020 Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Studies Award for Cambridge University and back in the autumn of 2019 had organised my week for June 2020 to fit around my final year rotations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my final year has yet to start, but luckily I was still able to spend time with Guy Reynolds BA(Hons) BSc(Hons) DipWCF. Living locally meant I was able to return home each evening and the outdoor nature of the job ensured we could comply by the relevant regulations of the time. I am very grateful to Guy, his wife Amy (an equine vet) and her parents for juggling childcare and home schooling to ensure that I still got the full experience in the four days I was with them.

The first day was spent on the road seeing a variety of horses and their feet, which gave us the opportunity to discuss different foot conformations and how different breeds or ‘types’ tend to have certain types of feet. Guy was brilliant at explaining each step as he went and at pointing out certain features of the foot he was working on. During the day I had the chance to remove a few individual shoes and practice using the buffer and hammer on either side without feeling too back-to-front!

Guy had a WCF Court Zoom meeting alongside some more home schooling on Wednesday morning, so I arrived at lunchtime ready to help shoe his own horse. Having assessed the horse’s conformation in general and his feet in particular, we agreed that he is fairly typical of his breed (thoroughbred) and discussed how that tends to affect how you approach trimming and shoeing. We had managed to pick the hottest afternoon of the week and by the time I had removed all four shoes (I struggled somewhat with the hinds), I was rather hot and sweaty! Guy then drew on one of the front feet to help demonstrate what he had previously explained about foot balance and where the centre of the foot is.

It was then down to me to select the size of shoe based on his feet and the factors we had discussed when assessing his conformation. Having watched Guy trim and nail on one front foot, it was my turn to trim and rasp before nailing on and turning the clenches. Unfortunately I managed to prick Malou with one nail, but it was a good learning experience and useful for Guy to talk me through especially as Malou did not go lame in the following days.



On Thursday morning we saw three thoroughbred foals for their first trim and having watched them all walk up we agreed that they all had a small degree of carpal valgus. Guy explained that this is not uncommon in foals and can be easily corrected in young foals with rasping when only mild. It was very interesting to watch Guy interact with the foals and the balance he struck between giving them time and being firm with them; both vets and farriers have a role to play in the upbringing of a foal and it is important to give them a good experience while also ensuring they understand what is expected from them. Even after just a brief rasp the difference in the angle of the leg was noticeable and with a few more visits these foals will all have beautiful straight legs.

The rest of the day was spent back at Guy's house firstly in the forge and then sat in the garden discussing shoeing for particular injuries or confirmations, including laminitis and suspensory ligament injury. Spending time in the forge was a brilliant experience and a good insight into another aspect of the job. While many farriers use pre-made shoes for routine feet, anything a bit 'different' will need to be handmade, and it is important for vets to understand the work that goes into the remedial shoes they've asked the farrier to make. Guy and I made a shoe each simultaneously, with him demonstrating the next step and me then taking twice as long to try and copy! After a lot of bashing and reheating metal I had a slightly uneven shoe and a burnt thumb from a flying flake of hot metal! It was a great experience and proved to me not just how physical it is, but also how difficult it is to make a symmetrical shoe.



We spent the final day on a yard of polo ponies, re-shoeing six ponies in preparation for the resumption of play over the coming weeks. This was a great opportunity for me to practice shoe removal, and I was noticeably quicker and more confident by the last one. Like most polo ponies, they were all thoroughbreds and had fairly stereotypical flat thoroughbred feet, although there were clear differences between some of them and Guy took the time to talk through each horse and their foot confirmation. Among the ponies there was one who had previously had a keratoma removed, while another had some significant cracks and poor lateral hoof growth. Seeing multiple horses on one yard was a great opportunity to assess and compare feet and was a chance for me to use what I had learnt during the week.

I would like to thank Guy Reynolds and his family for being so welcoming all week and his horse for being so patient while I shod him on one of the hottest days of the year! I have gained so much from these four days and I know Guy's words of wisdom will be invaluable once I am out in practice. I would also like to thank The Worshipful Company of Farriers, Dr Lydia Brown and Cambridge University for offering and coordinating this wonderful opportunity.