

Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Veterinary Studies Award 2021

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I was pleased to be awarded the Equine Veterinary Studies Award and thoroughly enjoyed the week I spent in Dorset with farrier Guy Reynolds. Although I have owned and worked with horses for many years it wasn't until this week I developed a real understanding of both the practical skills farriers possess as well as the wealth of knowledge. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to learn from Guy throughout the week as we visited a range of different horses and ponies.

At the beginning of the week Guy helped me revise the anatomy and function of the horses foot and we discussed how pathology in the foot will change the way it is able to function. For example in cases of sidebone, where ossification of the ungual cartilages is seen, expansion of the digital cushion will be prevented and therefore its shock absorptive properties reduced.

Guy explained to me how to assess a horse both statically for conformation, and dynamically for how they move, and was able to show me how he put this into practice when we met two of his new clients later in the week. During visits we made on my first day we discussed the landmarks used for trimming the horses foot and looked at the differences in trimming a barefoot compared to a shod hoof. I learned how to assess the quality of a hoof to decide if the horse was likely to be a successful barefoot candidate including the quality of the frog and making sure that the foot was trimmed in a way that the frog was functional.

Opportunities to start testing my practical skills started in the first few days when I learned how to remove a front and a hind shoe. Guy showed me how to position myself for safety and how to hold the leg effectively. After a lot of patience from Guy when I wanted to give up, and from the horse who had to hold his leg in the air for a lot longer than usual, I was successful! I knew that farriery was a skilled profession and that farriers spent many years training, but this experience really nailed that home.

On my second day with Guy we visited a horse who's owner suspected he may have an abscess. This was a great opportunity for me to experience this condition from a farriers point of view as it is a common first opinion equine veterinary problem. Guy showed me how to use the hoof testers to assess for areas of pain. We didn't localise pain to a particular area, and the horse's symptoms had improved without signs of an abscess having ruptured, making an abscess unlikely. We left the owner with the advise that there was nothing for us to do, but that they should get in touch with their vet if the lameness persisted. It was useful to consider how the roles of the vet and the farrier overlap and support each other, in simple cases such as abscesses, as well as more complex cases.

Our next patient that day was a longstanding client of Guys with proximal suspensory desmitis in the hind legs, and navicular changes at the insertion of the deep digital flexor tendon (DDFT) on the front feet. This was an interesting case to consider as the shoeing in front and behind had opposite aims. In the hindlimbs the aim was to increase the loading of the DDFT in order to reduce the strain on the suspensory ligament, whilst in the forelimbs the aim was

to reduce the forces exerted on the DDFT. In the front legs this was achieved by rolling the toe and placing the breakover point further back to have less leverage as the foot left the ground. In the hindlimbs conversely the toe was left at the longer limits of normal and the heel branches of the shoe were made narrower than the toe causing it to sink deeper on soft ground, loading the flexor tendons. It was interesting to consider how fairly small adjustments to the shoeing could support horses with pathological changes.

In the middle of the week I was fortunate to have the opportunity to practice some more practical farriery skills. The morning included shoeing one of Guy's own ponies who acted as a willing training partner provided he had a constant supply of hay! I was able to apply the trimming knowledge I had gained earlier in the week and trimmed the pony's feet before choosing a suitable replacement shoe. After Guy shaped the shoe I used the hot shoe to burn an imprint of it onto the hoof. Guy explained how this process can be used to assess the trim and the shape of the shoe. We talked about problems that could be caused by a badly fitted shoe, for example one that was set too far back causing pressure on the toe. Under Guy's careful guidance I then nailed on the shoe, tightened and rasped the clenches.



That afternoon Guy introduced me to his workshop and forge where I was once again to be impressed by the practical skills farriers possess. Guy explained that shoe making was still a large part of a farrier's training and examination process. Although a lot of shoes are bought pre-made, it is important to be able to adapt these effectively to create shoes for different cases. Guy guided me through the process of making a shoe, heating, bending and shaping the steel before creating nail holes. I found it challenging to hold the metal still whilst hammering, hit it hard enough, or with enough accuracy, so was very pleased to produce something that strongly resembled a horse shoe by the end of the process!

Later that day Guy showed me some of the specimen shoes he had made during his training, as well as some other interesting shoes he had collected. We talked about how different shoes could be used to aid with different pathologies. One thing I found particularly useful was

talking about both the positive and negative impacts of remedial shoes. For example although bar shoes can offer additional support, atrophy of the frog may be seen following long term use. We looked at imprint shoes and discussed how they can be used in laminitis cases.

At the end of the week I was starting to feel confident putting into practice all the new knowledge I had gained. We visited a yard to trim and shoe several horses ranging from a pair of impressive driving Friesians to an elderly Welsh pony. I was able to effectively assess and pass comment on the horses with regards to their foot confirmation and movement, and apply this to a farriery setting. I also surprised myself by removing a total of eighteen shoes, a feat I would have never thought possible at the beginning of the week!

I would like to thank The Worshipful Company of Farriers for providing me with this opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the farriery profession. The knowledge and practical skills I have developed will be invaluable to my future career as an equine vet and are not things I would have had the opportunity to gain elsewhere. I would also like to thank Dr Lydia Brown for co-ordinating and organising the placement, and Guy and his family for making me feel so welcome in their home.