

## **Worshipful Company Of Farriers Equine Veterinary Studies Award 2021**

### **Maisie Parsons, University of Bristol, Fifth year**

I was delighted to be awarded the 2021 Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Veterinary Studies Award. I was very fortunate to spend a week in September with Paul Horner FWCF BSc (HONS), his apprentice Lewis Sutor and Buster the Boxer! Due to the Worshipful Company of Farriers award being so accommodating, I was able to remain local and travel to and from Paul's house each day in Bristol.

Paul had recently returned from working with the Olympic horses in Tokyo as part of the Olympic Committee team, so I felt very privileged to be able to spend a week with Paul, despite his busy schedule! We had a very hectic, but fun week, due to the bank holiday weekend, so we had to fit the week of work into four days. We started with the police horses, which Paul visits every Tuesday for a routine visit, to do regular trimming and shoeing, as well as assessing any horses which have been having any lameness issues or general shoe problems. It was fantastic to be able to visit the police horses with Paul and Lewis and to be able to see how they handled such strong horses so calmly and with great care.

Paul took the time to revise the anatomy of the horse foot with me, identifying the important structures, specifically the pastern bones, hoof wall, joints, tendons and ligaments. Paul carefully explained why we shoe horses, how often they are shod, and the benefits of shoeing. He explained that once the shoes are removed, the feet are picked out and brushed prior to assessing the foot conformation and analysing the gait. Regardless of the case, it is always important to consider any clinical signs the horse may be showing, such as lameness, and the unique conformation of each horse when deciding which shoes to fit, and any additional support which may be needed. When assessing foot conformation, it is important to hold the foot up, and look down the leg and cannon bone to assess symmetry of the hoof and identify any asymmetry or imbalance of the hoof surface.

Paul explained to me the different types of shoes available and their specific uses. This included the standard bar shoes, heart bar shoes, egg bar shoes and spider shoes, as well as many more. Interestingly, Paul uses copper nails to secure the horse shoes, which are slightly more expensive than the standard steel nails but have great antibacterial properties, to prevent the risk of infection or damage to the foot and underlying structures.

The majority of Paul's work is with competition horses, although he does have a wide array of clients across Somerset. Due to Paul being qualified in remedial work, as well as regular trimming and shoeing, he does a lot of referral work for local veterinary practices, working closely with both the vets and the clients working up cases. It was lovely to be able to see what a great relationship Paul had with the vets and made me realise the importance of this, especially for the benefit of both the horse and client. Paul explained to me that with lame horses, it is important to analyse their gait, to specifically cater to their lameness and be able to resolve the problem with specific shoeing. We would always trot up the lame horse with the shoes on, discuss the lameness and the origin of the lameness, and place the shoes and anything additional accordingly. It is important to always trot the horse up again to assess if the horse is still lame, which hopefully in most cases the shoeing has resolved the issue. Throughout the week I saw plenty of interesting cases. For example, a horse which had recently had a keratoma removed, whilst another had fractured their pedal (P3) bone right through to

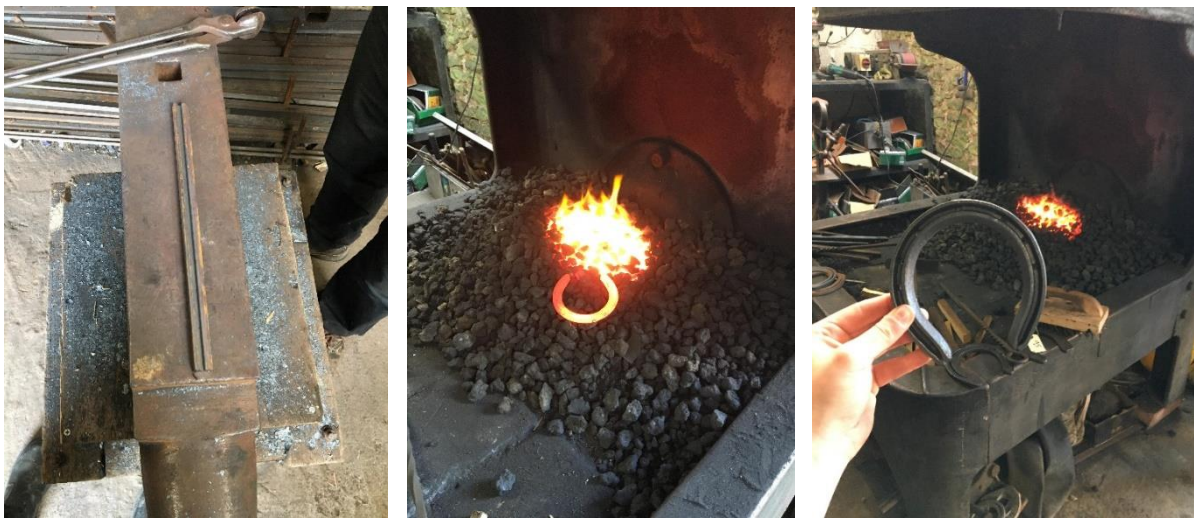


*Figure 1. A radiograph showing a fractured pedal (P3) bone which has gone through to the centre of the joint and continued into P2.*

the centre of the joint which continued into P2, as shown in Figure 1. It was fascinating to see how Paul worked up each case and treated them appropriately.

Throughout the placement, Paul let me remove several horse shoes. Paul took the time to explain to me how to take off shoes safely, yet efficiently. He explained that it is always best to remove each nail from alternating sides of the shoe, before removing the whole shoe. This is essential to ensure that if the horse does decide to slam their foot down on the ground, there is no risk of the horse injuring itself by a nail penetrating the foot. Before the placement, I did not feel confident with removing horse shoes, despite it being an essential skill for an equine vet. However, I would now feel confident going out to visit a horse on my own with the knowledge that I know how to safely remove shoes. This skill made me realise just how physical the job of a farrier is. With me only holding the leg up for a short amount of time to remove the shoe, I came away feeling like I had spent the afternoon doing squats at the gym!

On my final day of the placement, I was fortunate enough to be able to make my own shoe. Paul showed me what to do each step of the way, and I followed behind him. Paul explained that a shoe tends to be made in three “heats”, with a heat being each time the metal is placed in the forge to be heated up. My shoes took several more heats than this, due to me being an amateur! It was fantastic to be able to learn how a shoe is made and what is involved in each step. It really made me appreciate how much skill and precision is involved. Paul tends to buy in most of his shoes, but Lewis does make shoes for Paul, in between working and practising for shoeing competitions!



*Figure 2. The different stages involved whilst making my own horse shoe*

A really essential skill I have gained from this week is client communication. It was great to witness how Paul discussed his cases with his clients, explaining the origin of the lameness and what shoeing he was going to do to fix the problem, putting the client at ease. It was also great to see how he communicated with the vets, and how both the vet and farrier gave each other advice and helped each other on each case. This reiterated the importance of this good relationship.

Overall, this placement has made me really appreciate the work that farriers do, how demanding and physical the job is, and how knowledgeable the farriers are. Before this placement, I didn't realise the extent of training farriers have to do (four years minimum). It is a fantastic job and I am thoroughly looking forward to working closely with farriers throughout my career, and hoping to gain even more knowledge from them in the future.

I would like to thank the Worshipful Company of Farriers for this brilliant opportunity, which I am extremely fortunate to have experienced, as well as Lydia for being so accommodating and organising my placement with Paul, and last but not least Paul for his patience and expertise throughout the week. I have gained so much theoretical and practical experience and I am truly grateful.

*Maisie Parsons*  
*Final Year Veterinary Student*  
*University of Bristol*