

Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Veterinary Studies Award 2019

Freya Wood, University of Liverpool

As the recipient of the 2019 Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Studies Award for Liverpool University I spent a week with the Army School of Farriery at the Defence Animal Training Regiment, Melton Mowbray. I was placed with Master Farrier WO2 Chris McCabe and joined Military Farrier apprentices in the forge, working with the horses of the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment. I was made to feel very welcome by everyone in both the forge and vet teams, Chris had scheduled his diary so that he could give me one to one tuition throughout the week while another senior instructor worked with the apprentices.

My first day began with a tour of the base and meeting the forge and vet hospital teams, giving me an understanding of the role the centre plays in training personnel and looking after the welfare of military horses. Chris explained that the army takes the approach of a vet and farrier attending together when assessing horses. I experienced this close working relationship between the farriers and the vets from the very start of the week. In my first case I observed the shoeing, using hand forged shoes, of a horse with a diagnosis of laminitis secondary to weight bearing related to another injury. This enabled me to gain an appreciation for how veterinary diagnostics and treatment plans can be complimented and enhanced by the knowledge and expertise of a farrier who can assess and correct foot balance and advise on shoeing strategy for the individual horse.



Assessing foot balance and conformation of a horse prior to shoeing

I found this placement extremely valuable. In addition to experiencing both a training and working environment, everyone I met was keen to share their knowledge and expertise. Throughout the week I was able to learn and practice the tasks I will often be performing out in equine practice. This included investigation of foot pain using hoof testers, applying a foot poultice and draining foot abscesses. Access to the school's resources, such as a freezer full of cadaver limbs, meant I was able to practice removing a shoe on both front and hind feet, improving my technique. This enabled me to gain confidence in this skill and translate that to successfully removing a shoe from a (live) horse that was to be re-shod by the farrier. The opportunity to nail shoes onto cadaver feet allowed me to



Bar shoe created using a factory shoe and an old rasp

get a feel for the task when done correctly and to compare the difference in the feel and sound of the nails going into the foot when placed the correct way and placed incorrectly. This allowed me to appreciate the fine margins which farriers are working with and how this would be made even more difficult in horses with a thin hoof wall. I was also able to have a go at trimming a foot and gained an appreciation for just how tough a task it is! It highlighted to me the importance of technique, even down to the positioning of my body in relation to the horse.

Observing a demonstration of the modifications that can be made quickly and easily on factory shoes using the furnace in the farrier's van for a number of conditions, including relieving pressure on corns, creating lateral support and producing bar or rolled toe shoes, showed me the range of possibilities available without requiring custom made shoes. We discussed the ease by which these modifications can be made by a skilled farrier and the options available to treat and support horses with a variety of orthopaedic conditions.



Lateral extension on a factory shoe

Throughout the week I was given tutorials on a variety of topics including looking at the different types of shoes and when it is appropriate to use them, the effect of different surfaces on the shoe, considerations when shoeing and shoeing cycles. A classroom tutorial on foot balance allowed me to expand on what I have learned from university lectures and gain a better understanding of the landmarks to assess for foot balance and the points around at which the foot is balanced. This was followed by a visit to the yard to look at the balance of the feet of some of the regiment's horses which allowed me to immediately transfer what I had learned in a classroom setting into the practical setting by applying it to horses with differing conformations.



Demonstration of a repair of a quarter crack on a cadaver leg

My time spent looking at different shoe types, their uses and how they work enabled me to consider the variety of alternatives available. This ranged from looking at commonly used shoes to the more recently developed shoes that are marketed for particular conditions. I was able to discuss with the farriers about when it would be appropriate to use these variations which was very informative. An afternoon was given to learning about other materials used by farriers, such as plastic glue on shoes and using glues to repair quarter cracks and create extensions for use in contracted tendons in foals. I gained practical



Toe extension on a cadaver leg

experience of working with these modern materials and knowledge of the factors that would be considered when using them.

I gained an appreciation for the art that goes into creating a custom shoe while observing Chris at work. He talked me through his actions and thought process in first assessing foot balance and conformation, then trimming and dressing of the foot, followed by the forging and fitting of a custom shoe. I was amazed how the individual shape of the foot could be translated into alterations to the classic round shoe, so the shoe would truly fit the foot it was going on. I was impressed by how shoeing to support the foot could change how the foot looked despite imperfections to shape and angles, improving the appearance of the shoeing.

Observing both the apprentices and the experienced farriers creating shoes I was able to gain an understanding of the process and to see the care they take over their craft. I was particularly impressed by the detailed knowledge of anatomy that the apprentices possessed even though they were early in their training. A highlight of the week was learning to forge a shoe myself. I gained a useful insight into how custom shoes are created. It was a very rewarding experience when by

forging a piece of metal that looked nothing like a horseshoe, I created something that appeared like it could have gone onto a foot.

During the week I was able to draw on the wealth of knowledge that the farriers possess. The farriers and vets I met throughout the week all highlighted the importance they placed on assessing the horse holistically rather than focussing solely on the feet. The time I spent looking at a variety of horses both static and dynamically allowed me to improve my ability to assess conformation and begin to appreciate more subtle parts of the stride cycle and foot placement.

Having been selected for this placement and looking forward to it for many months I can admit that I was also feeling slightly intimidated as I drove up to check in at the security gates of the Defence Animal Centre. However, by the end of my busy first day I had declared it to be the most fun I have ever had on an EMS placement. Chris McCabe, the Master Farrier I was allocated to had designed a programme of learning for me that would make the most of my week with him. In addition to acquiring technical ability and knowledge he and his colleagues encouraged me to gain practical experience of the craft of farriery. I was given every opportunity to apply my newly acquired skills in a setting where I felt able to ask for help when I needed it.



The shoe I created during my placement

Working in the forge was a physically challenging and unfamiliar environment so achieving my learning goals during this placement gave me a real sense of achievement. The instructors were excellent at teaching and ensured that I enjoyed the process! I would highly recommend an opportunity to work with the army farriers to any vet student intending to pursue an equine career.

I would like to thank everyone at the Army School of Farriery for making me feel so welcome and particularly my thanks to Chris McCabe for sharing his knowledge and for his tuition throughout the week. Also, to Dr Lydia Brown for everything she does to organise these placements, and to the Worshipful Company of Farriers for providing vet students with the opportunity for this valuable experience.