

I am extremely grateful to have received the 2023 Worshipful Company of Farriers Equine Veterinary Studies Award. My placement was with James Coburn AWCF and his team, located in Newmarket, the home of horseracing - a place close to my heart having spent my teen years working on a racing yard every weekend and school holiday! James looks after four trainers, as well as multiple TB stud yards, a yard of endurance horses, and several other yards of both sport and non-performance horses.

Prior to starting university, I had spent a lot of time shadowing the farrier on the yard I worked at, and so always had a good understanding of just how important a farrier's work was in keeping a horse sound and at the top of their game. I was especially pleased to receive the WCF award which would allow me to spend a week with James Coburn, giving me the opportunity to really get to know the details of the work a farrier carries out with the context and knowledge I have gained over the last 5 years of vet school.



The majority of James and his team's work consisted of shoeing racehorses. We discussed the use of race plates (lightweight aluminium shoes) compared to the use of steels. I learnt that an important aspect of deciding when to re-shoe a horse isn't just looking at the growth of the hoof, but also the level of wear on the shoe and the timing of reshoeing with any future runs the horse may have. The level of wear on the plates was especially evident when comparing two different yards - one situated at the base of the heath (the infamous Warren Hill where the Newmarket training gallops are located) and one requiring a 10-15 minute road hack to the gallops. Those hacking on the road were needing shoes replaced on average 5-7 days sooner than those not doing any roadwork.

I was in awe at just how quickly James, Liam, and Frazer could replace an entire set of race plates considering it took me nearly 5 minutes to remove a single shoe alone, working at an incredible pace even in the summer heat the week I was with them! Despite just how quickly they all worked, I noticed they never once failed to treat each horse - and even each foot - individually. They checked each and every foot thoroughly, always analysing the foot balance before replating even in cases where the set was only replaced the week before. Both in farriery and veterinary medicine, I feel it can be easy to fall into a trap of recognising common patterns and simply "auto-piloting" through your day, but watching how James and his team really took their time on every foot and shoe reminds me to take the time to treat all of my future cases as a vet independently and not rely on pattern recognition or "auto-pilot".

Another big part of James' work involved foal work at various thoroughbred studs. It was eye-opening to me to see just how early these foals are having their feet worked with. It was a great opportunity to see lots of foals walking up and down, getting used to looking at their conformation and getting to look at them through a farrier's eyes. As a comparison, we also looked at a group of yearlings, starting prep for the sales in October. James described each of the yearlings' conformation as foals to me, and explained the work he'd undertaken in the last year to get them to the point they were at now. It was incredible to see how just the smallest change in the balance of the foot could have an immediate effect on the overall conformation of the foal and yearling.



I had the opportunity to get practical during my placement, getting the chance to remove shoes and even have a go at making a shoe myself. It took me 2.5 hours of sweating over a kiln and anvil to make a steel shoe but I was so proud of myself after the fact. Frazer helped me along the way, explaining to me that all farriers' work starts at the toe: from making shoes, to fitting them, and reshaping and balancing feet, it is always important to start at the toe and work back towards the heel. Having this drilled into my brain over the course of the week is something I can take into my career going forward, remembering whenever I am working with feet to start at the toe and work from there!

Overall, my time with James and his team was invaluable in furthering my knowledge and understanding of both the role of farriery in the equine world and the anatomy and pathology of the equine foot. There is a famous quote in the equine world: "No hoof, no horse". It has been made abundantly clear in my week on this placement just how vital proper care of the foot is to a horse, really solidifying this quote for me! I am so grateful to James, Liam, and Frazer for taking the time to teach me their work, and for putting up with my incessant chatting about the racing world (I finally found a crowd who understood my love for the discipline and ran with it... pun intended!). I would also like to say a huge thank you to the Worshipful Company of Farriers for providing me with this opportunity, and in particular Dr Lydia Brown for coordinating everything for me.