



FORGE

THE MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH FARRIERS AND BLACKSMITHS ASSOCIATION



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Farriers appointed to FRC Council

Farriers elected to FRC Council (three-year appointment)
Tom Smith FWCF GradDipELR
Chair of the Council
Toby B. Daniels DipHE DipWCF
Derek T. Gardner AWCF

BFBA farrier on FRC council

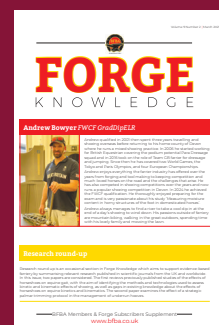
Jason Sim AWCF
Daniel Harman AWCF GradDipELR

WCF farrier on FRC Council

Robin P. May AWCF

The March 2025 issue of *Forge Knowledge* contains the articles:

- Measuring moisture content in keratinised horny structures of the equine foot
By Andrew Bowyer FWCF GradDipELR
- Research round-up



CPD Committee

Chris Linssner (Chair), Ben Benson, Abby Bunyard, Aaron Myall, Phoebe Colton, Daniel Harman, Alex Mercer, Stephen Britten, Jamie Hughes, Dan Stern, Iain Nixon, Jason Brown, Merv Allen and Doug Campbell.

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Contributions in the form of articles, reports, letters and photographs are welcomed.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

On the 14th of January, we hit the ground running. Phoebe Colton, Aaron Myall, and I spent the day at Headquarters in Stoneleigh, taking time to reflect on the past year and engaging in a dynamic brainstorming session to shape the year ahead. We also checked in with Holly and Claire in the office, ensuring they know just how much we appreciate their hard work and dedication.

The diary is already filling up with some fantastic CPD events!

We're bringing back the business day (date TBC), where top professionals will be together under one roof - solicitors, HR specialists, mortgage advisors, medical insurance experts, and pension consultants - to give you everything you need to run your business, protect yourself, and secure your future retirement.

This is your one-stop opportunity to gain expert insights, safeguard your success, and plan for the years ahead. Stay tuned for the date - you won't want to miss this!

February saw an incredible turnout for our four-part Donkey Webinar Series, packed with expert insights and invaluable knowledge.

Kicking things off was Marta Ferrari, delivering a deep dive into multiple case studies that captivated the audience. She was then joined by Emily Buckley for an essential discussion on managing donkeys on box rest due to orthopaedic issues.

Next up, lead behaviourist Ben Hart took the stage, sharing his expertise on donkey behaviour and safe handling - crucial for effective hoof care.

The grand finale tackled donkey nutrition and metabolic syndrome, rounding off an outstanding series that left attendees informed and inspired.

By the time this issue reaches you, we'll have held a two day course on 21st and 22nd February on MIG & ARC Welding, back for the second time due to demand and a weekend not to be missed!

On 22nd March, there is an Apprentice End Point Assessment Preparation day led by EPA examiners Rob Shave FWCF and Stephen Hill FWCF. This is a fantastically run day, aiming to leave apprentices prepared and ready for their End-Point Assessment.

Aaron, Phoebe and I poured a huge amount of time and effort into January, reaching out and cold-calling as many ATFs as possible. We saw it as our duty, as your Association, to make sure that when the Trailblazer Meeting came around on the 5th of February, the lecture room at Stoneleigh was bursting at the seams. A grand total of 66 educational providers arrived.

That day, David Hall hosted the Farrier Apprenticeship Trailblazer Meeting at Stoneleigh, and as the British Farriers and Blacksmiths Association, we made it our absolute priority to bring as many educational providers (ATFs) to the table as possible. Understanding the government guidelines we need to follow is crucial - because without that clarity, we risk losing the funding that keeps our industry moving forward.

I feel strongly about shutting down rumours and ensuring that every ATF has the facts. Only with the right information can we make truly informed decisions and protect the future of farriery education.

Saturday 8th February saw the first in-person EC meeting of the year, with 100% attendance from all over the country including Jason Sim driving down from Scotland. We all travelled the length and breadth of the country, and we smashed out a multitude of topics.

The Focus Lecture Theatre speakers for this year are all signed up, and I can honestly say it's an absolutely fantastic line up. The demo area is becoming a bun fight for space, with people wanting to showcase skills, methods of farriery, tips and tricks to make our lives a little easier. Having trialled the breakout

room last year, we will be hosting some hot topics and current discussions from both speakers from the main stage and a few extras thrown in.

We are taking the BFBA to the National Equine Show, along with a couple of apprentices to showcase the farriery industry at its best. This provides the BFBA with the chance to engage with the wider equestrian public, including potential apprentices. We are taking industry information, including flyers from all three colleges and a screen streaming recent lectures, as well as the opportunity for those attending to discover more about hoof care and have a go at removing a shoe. We will also be taking time to interact with other equestrian professionals to promote collaboration to educate the equestrian world and at the same time encouraging traders that would benefit our industry to attend and showcase their products at focus.

From April 3rd-5th, Jason Sim and Holly Flack will proudly represent the BFBA at The Werkman Spring Games, expanding our presence in the European market and welcoming more international members into our growing community.

Why it matters to be there: strengthening global connections, promoting top-tier farriery education and enhancing the equine industry through shared expertise.

By bringing our first-class education to an overseas audience, we're shaping the future of farriery, one hoof at a time. Stay tuned!

The BFBA are also hosting the European Farriery Federation Association (EFFA) Educational Weekend at Stoneleigh! This massive event is dedicated to European apprentices, providing an unparalleled opportunity to sharpen both theory and shoemaking skills with some of the best in the industry.

What's in store?

- Dissections with Stephen Hill FWCF, offering deep anatomical insights
- Hands-on shoemaking to refine your craft
- Intensive theory sessions to elevate your knowledge
- A weekend of learning, networking, and skill-building

This is more than just education - it's an investment into the future of farriery. This is promising to be an unmissable weekend for the EFFA delegates.

We're preparing content for Farriers' Week; hints, tips and tricks. Any pictures would be gratefully received! Last year's farrier's week hit an all-time for high engagement and public interaction reaching over 200,000 views, helping to educate our clients in turn making our day-to-day work easier enhancing animal welfare.

Finally, after years of shaping ideas (and probably a few heated debates), Ben Benson is officially stepping down from the EC. While we're sure he'll miss the emails, meetings, and occasional bureaucratic nightmares, we suspect he's secretly looking forward to fewer spreadsheets and more time with the forge and a proper cup of tea.

Ben, your dedication, wisdom, and ability to make farriery discussions unexpectedly entertaining will be sorely missed. But don't think you're getting away that easily—we'll be keeping a close eye on you to make sure you don't sneak off to a beach somewhere with a cocktail in hand.

From all of us—thank you for everything! Now go enjoy the extra time (but don't get too comfortable, we might need you back soon). Good luck in your next adventures.



**Abby Bunyard AWCF,
BFBA President**



N o w a v a i l a b l e i n t o e c l i p



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SEEN ON FACEBOOK...

This month, a thought-provoking post regarding the costs of training apprentices and declining farrier numbers has been widely circulated amongst the equestrian community.

While the post is anonymous and an opinion piece containing certain figures that have not had references provided with them to ascertain whether or not they are correct, it raises some important points that we feel members may have an opinion of their own on.

To the right, we have republished the Facebook post in its entirety. Below are some comments which have been left on the post from farriers and horse owners getting involved in the debate.

We are all well aware of the challenges facing the future of our industry and as your professional

association, we are making it one of our priorities to be involved in ensuring the apprenticeship is fit-for-purpose. Read Dave Hall's update on page 16 regarding the recent Trailblazers Committee meeting held to engage ATFs on this topic.

If this post and topic resonates with you, we want to hear what you think and explore this further in a future article.

How can we, as farriers, make this better? Are horse owners aware of the difficulties facing our industry - would this help? Maybe you're a farrier who's looked into training apprentices, and has decided against it. Maybe you're passionate about continuing to train apprentices regardless of the costs.

Email us on forge.bfba@gmail.com and get involved in the conversation.

“

Seeing lots of posts 'looking for a farrier'...

Do you know why so many are looking for a farrier??

There are now less farriers in the UK than the last 20 years.

2 out of 3 farriers are over 55 years old.

No one is wanting to train as a farrier.

There were four farrier colleges. Now one has closed and one didn't have enough interest to take an enrolment this year.

That's two colleges with less than eight in a class. And it takes four years to train...

Farriery prices will rise dramatically in the following five years. Parts of Europe already pay €300 a set regularly.

Supply and demand unfortunately.

Love your farrier, respect, support and be the best client you can be.

To become an apprentice, you need GCSEs A-C including English and Maths.

It's also very expensive to train apprentices now. A 21 year old apprentice (3rd and 4th year) can take home £24k in wages, costs about £5k in extra insurance, PPE, tools etc.

So that's £29k a year out of the boss' pocket. Actually resulting in the training farrier (who needs to sit more exams to take on an apprentice, taken at his own costs of c.£5k), taking home less money than the apprentice.

So... training farriers take on more work, to cover costs, end up in the VAT... charge more, lose work.

Apprentice goes to college as a resident for four weeks twice a year... the boss is then left alone to shoe double the amount of horses as his help is away...

Result is... apprentices are not worth the effort or money, resulting in even fewer farriers coming forward.

It's believed that Wales only has one training farrier now.

Scotland is believed to only have eight apprentices.

”

COMMENTS ON THE POST

"Another issue is that a DipWCF farrier is no longer allowed to do the ATF course and take on an apprentice... learning isn't cheap... there is no incentive at all for any farrier to have an apprentice."

"There's no lack of people wanting to be a farrier, there's just a lack of farriers wanting the hassle and expense of training them."

"I'd love to be a farrier and even looked into it but you have to travel away for education."

"Let's hope this isn't another nail in the coffin of horse ownership. Treat your farrier with respect and encourage today's young ones to consider becoming one."

"My friend in Australia can no longer keep horses at home as there are no farriers left in her district. Be warned..."



Forge Magazine has republished this Facebook post in its entirety to spark debate - we take no responsibility for the figures or facts shared in this anonymous Facebook post.

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SHARING KNOWLEDGE ACROSS THE POND

Representatives from the BFBA have recently made two trips to the United States: the first to join the American Farrier's Association at the American Farrier's Association 53rd Annual Convention held in Chattanooga in November 2024, and the second to the International Hoofcare Summit in Kansas City.

Both events were a fantastic opportunity to strengthen the special relationship between the BFBA and the AFA even further, share best practice and learn from one another to enable us to benefit our members.

THE 2024 CONVENTION

BFBA President Abby Bunyard and Holly Flack from Head Office travelled to Chattanooga for the four-day convention, joined by Frosty and Chris who worked tirelessly on behalf of the Association at the event - huge thank you to them for their dedication.

After setting up the BFBA stand on the first day and catching up with Hank Chisholm, President of the AFA, Vern Powell, Chairman of the AFA's Cultural Exchange Program and Martha Jones, Executive Director, Abby hosted a roundtable event for the attendees during the evening.

Well supported by Vern, Abby's first question for the group was on the topic of legislation - UK farriers are governed by legislation and regulation, and the US aren't - is that a good thing or a bad thing?

The debate went on for about an hour and ten minutes with lots of interesting points made within the room.

The feedback from the delegates was fantastic and many said how great it was to have the opportunity to talk about such topics and get the facts on what regulation really means. Abby and the team came away feeling that while regulation and animal welfare can only be a positive thing, it puts more emphasis on you knowing your own worth - while US farriers are able to charge different prices depending on whether or not they are qualified, for UK farriers it's about understanding what you are worth and being confident to charge your clients accordingly.

The second question in the debate was around therapeutic (or remedial) shoeing, and whether there is such a thing or whether we should just be shoeing the horse in front of us at the time.

Lasting more than an hour once again, this part of the debate led to a brilliant, healthy conversation with lots of open-minded individuals keen to learn and benefit from a different viewpoint.

Wednesday was the start of the trade show, with delegates being lured in by a "proper brew" with Yorkshire tea and tea cakes consumed like they were going out of fashion! It was a great opportunity to network and get ideas to bring back for Focus 2025, to make this even better for our members.



Abby also took part in some interviews for the next Cultural Exchange, again sharing best practice and making the programme an even better experience.

The networking days were a chance for us to build our relationships with the farriery industry in America, the fruit of which you'll see at Focus 2025! We're very excited to say that Yukon Forge will be donating BFBA and AFA branded hammers for the International competition winners at Focus 2025, demonstrating the strength of partnership between our two organisations.

Abby then delivered a talk on collaboration between the BFBA and the AFA, which was incredibly well received - we'll be sharing the content of this talk in an upcoming article in a future issue of the magazine.

The competition at the AFA Convention was fantastic to watch, with a lot of UK farriers travelling over to compete. Struggling to stay on the wrong side of the fence, Abby has now been invited to take part in the competition next year as a duo with Hank - the Presidents of the BFBA and the AFA competing together. Roll on March 2026 - we're hoping we've set a trend which will be continued by the two Associations' Presidents for years to come!

The final element of the Convention was the auction and awards prizegiving dinner. Abby presented the prizes for the shoeing and shoe making competitions along with Hank, recognising the immense talent of the individuals who had come out on top.

The BFBA donated a historic picture of the BFBA outside of a pub in Birmingham back when it was first created, some new BFBA hoodies and tickets to Focus 2025, which raises a total of \$1,625 in the auction.

The BFBA would like to thank Hank, Vern and Martha for hosting us and making the team feel very welcome throughout the Convention.



HOOF CARE SUMMIT

This year, the Hoofcare Summit took place in Kansas City rather than Cincinnati where it's usually held.

The BFBA had a stand at the Summit, and it was great to sign up some new members, network with some exhibitors and invite them to join us at Focus, as well as have discussions with some potential new sponsors - all very exciting!

The Hoofcare Summit is a fantastic opportunity to network with US members, and look for potential ideas and new products and businesses to get on board for Focus, helping to make it even better.



BFBA MEMBERS' DISCOUNT

BFBA members get an AFA members' rate to the Convention - check out next year's convention and make the trip if you can. It's definitely worth it!



Abby took part in an interview for Equus TV, who asked some fantastic questions! They also kindly donated these gilets to the team.



FOCUS 2025 SPEAKERS CONFIRMED

Preparations for Focus 2025, the UK's largest farriery and blacksmithing event, are well underway. Taking place on Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th September at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, you can expect:

- A huge farriery and blacksmithing trade fair
- Lectures from world-class clinicians
- Live demonstrations

Focus is a highlight in the farriery and blacksmithing calendar with the event being valued and enjoyed by blacksmiths and equine professionals including vets, physiotherapists, nutritionists and barefoot trimmers.

We're also delighted to bring you both the BFBA International Bladesmithing Competition and BFBA International Team Blacksmithing Competition on Sunday 29th September.

Lectures, demonstrations and trading will take place on the Saturday and Sunday, enabling the International Team Horseshoeing competitors to enjoy the Focus event once the competition is complete.

The BFBA team has been working hard to curate another fantastic speaker line-up for this year with esteemed professionals keen to share their knowledge and experience. We're very pleased to be able to announce the confirmed lecture speakers for the weekend, and tell you a few details about them and their areas of expertise.

Early bird tickets are on sale until 30th April 2025 - make sure you get your tickets before the offer runs out to secure the best rates!





DOMENICO CELLARO

Domenico is a third-generation professional Italian farrier who graduated in 1999 from the Military Farrier and Veterinary School in Grosseto, Italy.

He is regularly involved in helping horses with pathologies and lameness. His farrier goal is to continually work on improving his knowledge in the field of equine podiatry and locomotion, travelling in Europe and USA.

His curiosity about horse locomotion induced him to design, develop and create a special device that reproduces the equine musculoskeletal forelimb with its functional and physiological position and body weight, during the different stance phases of gait, using standardised and repeatable scientific protocols.

Domenico is an International Speaker and Educator, and a developer of new educational methods which are useful for the daily farrier and veterinary approach.

ROBBIE MILLER AWCF, CJF

A professional farrier for over 35 years, Robbie qualified as an Associate of the Worshipful Company of Farriers (AWCF) in 2018, an AFA Certified Journeyman Farrier (CJF) and an Advanced Skills Farrier (ASF) through the Farrier International Testing System (FITS). As well as being Chief Examiner in South Africa for FITS, he is the first South African to examine farriers in the USA and Australia.

In 2023, Robbie was the first African ever to be inducted to the International Horseshoeing Hall of Fame. He has represented South Africa numerous times in International Farriery/Blacksmithing competitions, including the Calgary World Championship Blacksmiths' Competition (WCBC) and the World Championship Blacksmiths (WCB) in the USA.

Robbie owns and manages a very successful multi-farrier practise in Cape Town, South Africa.



ANDREW BOWYER FWCF, GradDipELR

Andrew qualified in 2001 then spent 3 years travelling and shoeing overseas before returning to his home county of Devon where he runs a mixed shoeing practice. In 2006 he started working for British Equestrian covering the podium potential Para Dressage squad and in 2016 took on the role of Team GB farrier for dressage and jumping. Since then he has covered two World Games, the Tokyo and Paris Olympics, and four European Championships.

Andrew enjoys everything the farrier industry has offered over the years from forging and tool making to keeping competition and much-loved horses on the road and the challenges that arise. He has also competed in shoeing competitions over the years and now runs a popular shoeing competition in Devon.

In 2024 Andrew achieved the FWCF qualification. He thoroughly enjoyed preparing for the exam and is very passionate about his study "Measuring moisture content in horny structures of the foot in domesticated horses".

Andrew always manages to find a river to take a cool dip in at the end of a day's shoeing to wind down. Passions outside of farriery, are mountain biking, walking in the great outdoors, spending time with his lovely family and mowing the lawn.



PAUL HORNER DIPWCF, AWCF, BSC (HONS), FWCF

Paul Horner trained with Ian Lindsay AWCF based in North Somerset and passed his diploma in 1997. Paul then went on to become a training farrier and to date has had 7 apprentices. Paul attended many shoeing competitions with his apprentices which proved very successful. In 2009, Paul enrolled in Myerscough College where in 2014 he gained his BSc (Hons) with a 1st in farriery and also won the "Caldwell Cup" for the best practical job. He then went on to gain his Associate of the Worshipful Company of Farriers (AWCF) in 2012 and Fellowship of the Worshipful Company of Farriers (FWCF) in 2019.

Paul currently runs a successful business in Somerset and has 2 apprentices. He has a particular interest in the veterinary aspects where he has been resident farrier at the University of Bristol for over 20 years and also carries out referral work for other local practices. The majority of his work is competition horses, which mainly consists of event horses of all levels. He also attended Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 where he was part of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) farriery team.



DR JENNY HAGEN DVM, PHD, CF

Dr Jenny Hagen is a veterinarian, specialising in equine orthopaedics, rehabilitation and training, as well as an associated professor at the Leipzig University and a certified farrier. After her study of veterinary medicine, she did her doctoral thesis and post-doc thesis at the Leipzig University, where she established the research group "Equine biomechanics and orthopaedics". From 2011 to now, she and her group examined several practical relevant topics about the effect of trimming and shoeing on the biomechanics of the distal limb and the equine gait pattern.

From 2003 to 2018, Jenny also did her farrier education and was employed at the farrier school at the Leipzig University. During the latter years, she specialised in different manual therapy techniques, gait analysis and rehabilitation training of horses. Since 2020, Jenny has been self-employed in her practice for equine orthopaedics and rehabilitation in the middle of Germany. In addition, she is a professional speaker at national and international congresses, symposiums and workshops.



FOCUS 2025:
SATURDAY 27TH AND SUNDAY
28TH SEPTEMBER 2025

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A GUIDE TO INVESTIGATION AND DISCIPLINARY HEARINGS

Cliff Barnes AWCF was on the FRC and Disciplinary Committee between 2008 - 2014. Since then, changes have been made and the Investigation and Disciplinary Committee members are no longer linked to the FRC. Here, Cliff shares some practical advice about what you'll need to be aware of if you find yourself in this situation.

Words by Cliff Barnes AWCF

What to do if you receive a complaint letter from the FRC

We all dread the thought of a letter arriving from the FRC informing us that a complaint has been made about us. The first letter will lay out the complaint that has been made against you and ask you to respond, usually within two weeks. It will also inform you that the complaint may be put forward to the Investigation Committee. If this happens the Investigation Committee will decide if this complaint needs to be referred to the disciplinary committee or if there is no further action required.

Ideally, write back immediately to acknowledge receipt of the letter and let the FRC know that you will respond to their request for information within the two weeks from the dated letter.

It is advisable to send all correspondence through the Post Office registered mail so it has to be signed for. This allows you to prove that they have received your correspondence.

You need to put together a timeline of events from your prospective. Try and recall all conversations regarding the allegations including before and after the complaint.

At this stage, depending on the complaint, you may wish to have a conversation with a solicitor. All BFBA members get a free half hour consultation with Morrish and Co solicitors. Whoever you talk to may help you with your response to the FRC.

Hopefully at the next meeting of the investigation committee you will receive a letter saying that no further action will be required.

If you're unfortunate to be going forward to disciplinary proceedings then it's time to select a solicitor to work on your behalf. You don't have to but it is advisable as they understand the court proceedings and can help you through what is a stressful time.

The Disciplinary Proceedings are held to the same standards as a court of law. The decisions made are legally binding.

Your solicitor will help to prepare your defence. You will need to gather character reference letters from; clients, fellow farriers and any veterinarians you have worked with.

Most of this information will need to be presented prior to the hearing so that the committee have the opportunity to read through all relevant material.

Remember the disciplinary is a court of law and you will need to behave in a professional manner as you would in front of a magistrate or judge.

What to expect on the day of your disciplinary hearing

The disciplinary committee will be made up of at least 6 people. Ideally it will be two farriers and four laypeople. One of these people will already have been elected as chairperson and will run the hearing.

The committee will also have a legal adviser, a high ranking solicitor or barrister. This person's role is to help the committee make a decision that would be legally binding in a court of law but also one that is fair and just. The legal adviser has no vote in the final decision.

On one side of the room you will have the FRC's solicitor. They may have a member of the FRC with them to hand them paper work. The FRC's solicitor's role is try and convince the committee of your guilt by presenting their evidence.

You and your legal team will be on the opposite side of the room. Your legal team will help you to defend yourself.

Positioned at the back of the room there should be seating available for general public to attend, just like a court of law.

The chairperson will start proceedings by introducing themselves, the committee, the legal advisor and explaining how the proceedings will take place. The FRC's solicitor should then set out the nature of the complaint and any evidence they have gathered.

You will then get to defend yourself against that complaint, and put forward your defence.

"THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THESE DAYS ARE STRESSFUL, AND PASSIONS CAN FLARE. A GOOD SOLICITOR WILL KEEP YOU GROUNDED AS THIS IS THEIR CHOSEN ENVIRONMENT TO WORK IN."



As farriers we tend to be very passionate - I would urge you to remember at this point that your behaviour and passion need to be calm, collected and professional. There is no doubt these days are stressful and passions can flare. A good solicitor will keep you grounded as this is their chosen environment to work in - they may even talk on your behalf unless you're asked a direct question.

Usually once both sides have had their opportunity to put their views forward, the committee will ask questions on certain aspects they want clarification on. It's not unusual for all members to ask one or two questions of either the FRC or yourself.

Once the committee have asked their questions, either they or everyone else will leave the room to allow them to confer in private. During this time they will decide if they believe you to be guilty or innocent. These decisions are made by the committee with advice from the legal advisor.

When the decision has been made everyone will return to the main room and the chairperson will read out a statement which will include their final decision.

If innocent you will be informed that the complaint will stay on file for no longer than three years, just in case a similar complaint is made during that time.

If guilty they will then inform you of any sanctions they intend to impose.

MOST COMMON OUTCOMES

- **No action at this time.**
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SCOTTISH LEGAL SUPPORT

One of the many benefits offered to members of BFBA is access to legal support and advice from our solicitors, with an initial free consultation and subsequent preferential rates for ongoing services

The challenge with this is that Scottish and English Law are two completely separate entities and when Scottish Members have tried to access this in the past they have been left disappointed.

The BFBA has managed to resolve this issue and have partnered with a Scottish Legal firm - Balfour and Manson, who have agreed to offer members a free initial consultation with a 12% discount on any chargeable work and are able to deal with a variety of issues from employment law through to professional disciplinary hearings.

If you do find you are in need of legal advice, you should contact BFBA Head Office in the first instance and they can give you the relevant contact details for your needs.

CATCH UP ON THE DONKEY SANCTUARY'S MINI-SERIES

We recently teamed up with the Donkey Sanctuary to run a series of webinars covering a large range of topics all related to the donkey.

Marta Ferrari, Head of Veterinary Services (Clinical Director) at the Donkey Sanctuary joined us once again after successful delivery of her previous webinar last August.

The topics covered were:

- Case studies
- Managing donkeys on box rest
- Behaviour
- Donkey nutrition and metabolic syndrome

BFBA members can catch up on the webinars via the Members' Area of the BFBA website.



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- **Bi-monthly Forge magazine**, keeping you up to date with the industry, and farrier science **Forge Knowledge**, bringing you educational content with technical articles, research articles and case studies, enabling you to gain CPD points
- Online access to American Farriers Association's **No Foot, No Horse magazine**
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- **The Edward Martin MBE Cultural Exchange:** unique opportunity to represent the Association on an educational 3-month trip to the USA. Travel and expand your farriery knowledge and skills whilst working with some of the most highly regarded farriers (for Graduates only), or the opportunity to be part of a growing list of hosts for an AFA American student on their visit to the UK
- **10% discount** at Federation of Small Businesses
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- **Subscription discounts of between 12.5 - 25%** with Hoofflix.TV
- **Two free months** of access to the paid podcast 'Brian Mullins Farriery Podcast'
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APPRENTICE END-POINT ASSESSMENT PREPARATION DAY

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APPRENTICESHIP TRAILBLAZERS COMMITTEE UPDATE

Words by David Hall

On the 5th of February at the BFBA Headquarters in Stoneleigh, we had a Trailblazers Committee meeting, which was attended by over fifty ATFs.

They were supported with technical advice from representatives of the WCF, FRC, BFBA, the Army, three colleges, an EPAO and IFATE, with two from each organisation. The meeting was Chaired by myself, David Hall and co-presented by my IFATE line manager Dean Jones.

The main aim of the day was to get the "Standard" approved which we did. The Standard, although it's not called this anymore, is the National Syllabus that covers all the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) from which the apprenticeship is taught and assessed.

There was much lively debate and discussion about the apprenticeship, its positives and its problems. Guidance to the questions raised and points made were given by those who had specific technical knowledge of education, apprenticeships and assessment processes.

The meeting was hugely productive, informative and thought provoking. Work is ongoing and further consultation is in progress as we speak.

All that remains is for me to thank all those who attended and the members of the BFBA who hosted and promoted the event.



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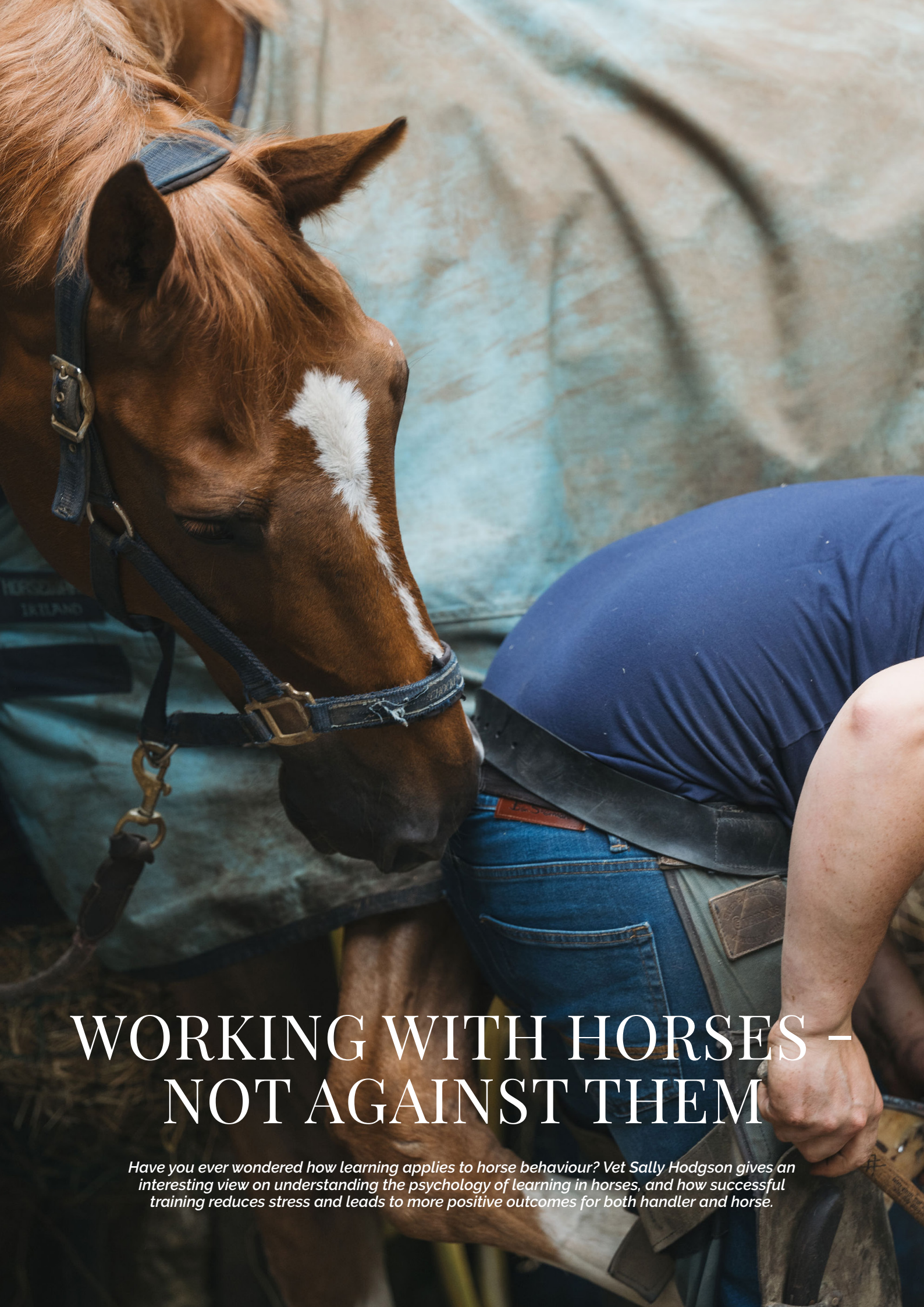
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WORKING WITH HORSES - NOT AGAINST THEM

Have you ever wondered how learning applies to horse behaviour? Vet Sally Hodgson gives an interesting view on understanding the psychology of learning in horses, and how successful training reduces stress and leads to more positive outcomes for both handler and horse.

The modern horse has evolved over millions of years as a prey species, watching for potential threats from any direction and at any time. Failure to fear new or suddenly moving objects has potentially fatal consequences, so horses are primed for fear as a first response. This underpins all equine behaviour and learning. We know that the modern environmental threats of wheelie bins, tractors and flapping plastic bags aren't actually dangerous – but millions of years of fighting for survival says otherwise!

The behaviours horses show in response to different stimuli may simply be undesirable, such as spooking at a bollard. Other behaviours present a significant danger both to humans and to the horse itself. Examples of this might be rearing and boxing when presented with a vaccination needle, or bolting in traffic.

By understanding what drives these behaviours and how we can influence them, we can reduce our horse's stress levels and facilitate their training, so that the time we spend with them is as safe and rewarding as possible – for us and for them!

It is very easy and natural to attribute human characteristics and thought processes to equine behaviour, but to do so can be counter-productive. The horse's brain does not have a large pre-frontal cortex – this means that they are not able to have abstract thoughts about the past or the future, so they live purely in the present moment. Memories may be triggered by environmental stimuli, but horses cannot plan or problem-solve. This means they cannot 'decide' to be 'naughty' or 'silly' – their behaviour is a result of their reactions to stimuli.

None of this means that horses are not intelligent! They have a tremendous capacity to learn by trial and error, and a fabulously good long-term memory. However, their short term memory is very poor.

There are two broad kinds of learning, both of which are very relevant to how we train our horses.

Non-associative learning is the simplest form of learning, and includes habituation and sensitisation. Non-associative learning happens as a result of exposure to a single stimulus, and happens without us interfering! The result of non-associative learning is either the reduction or intensification of a behaviour that is already present.

Habituation is a pre-requisite for all other forms of learning, because in order to learn, horse must be able to filter out unimportant stimuli and focus on important signals instead. Habituation means that the horse stops responding to a stimulus after repeated experiences. The stimulus must be presented frequently for habituation to occur.

During the backing process, we need horses to habituate to tack and pressure on their backs. Later on in their training, we also need them to habituate to such things as traffic, potential predators such as dogs and unfamiliar objects. Habituation will also happen when we don't want it to, for example becoming unresponsive to nagging leg aids.

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT TYPES OF LEARNING

NON-ASSOCIATIVE LEARNING

- The simplest form of learning
- Includes habituation and sensitisation
- Happens as a result of exposure to a single stimulus
- Happens without us interfering
- Results in either the reduction or intensification of a behaviour that is already present

ASSOCIATIVE LEARNING

- Also known as conditioning
- Happens when events are experienced in close association
- Learning to avoid pain and discomfort happens by associative learning
- When links are made between two or more signals, we describe the learning process as classical conditioning

Habituation can be transmitted between horses! Foals show reduced fear responses to handling if they are allowed to observe their (habituated) dam being handled 1-5 days after birth. A habituated mare facilitates foal learning – but a fearful mare promotes fearfulness in the foal.

Similarly, a naïve horse paired with a habituated horse will show reduced fear reactions to suddenly moving object, and the reduction in response remains when given the same stimulus three days later without the habituated companion present. In a group, the ratio of unhabituated to 'demonstrator' horse is important and so is the age of the demonstrator – naïve older horses can re-sensitise a young, previously habituated horse! This suggests that we need to be careful in our choice of 'nanny' horses to accompany young horses in training.

Habituation to one novel object does not transfer to objects that are a different shape AND colour.

Sensitisation and desensitisation occur as a result of training by humans – DELIBERATE OR INTENDED! Horses are innately fearful of new objects, as a result of millions of years of avoiding predators, so it is very easy to increase sensitisation instead of desensitising! When training a horse we must be alert for signs of stress – fear and stress inhibit learning.

Sensitisation means that after repeated exposures, the response to a stimulus becomes faster and/or more intense. Often an increased response to a whole class of stimuli is seen, as well as to the original one. This means that exposure to a frightening or painful stimulus increases sensitivity to other stimuli as well as the original one.

Desensitisation techniques are methods used to achieve habituation and include systematic desensitisation, counter-conditioning, over-shadowing, flooding, approach conditioning and stimulus blending. These techniques overlap, and are not always appropriate to use – it is very easy to get it wrong!

Behavioural responses can be affected by:

- Motivational factors, such as food or the intensity of the stimulus
- Sensory adaptation/fatigue
- Physiological factors such as pain

Associative learning, also called conditioning happens when events or stimuli are experienced in close association. A foal finding the udder for the first time comes to associate the udder with food.

Learning to avoid pain and discomfort also happens by associative learning – even 'simple' animals such as flies and slugs show advanced learning in these situations. When links are made between two or more signals, we describe the learning process as classical conditioning.

The best known example of classical conditioning is Pavlov's dogs – Pavlov rang a bell whenever he fed his dogs; after a while, when the dogs heard the bell ringing they began to salivate in anticipation of food arriving.

Classical conditioning is the association of two events. The one most useful to us in training horses is the association of the sound of a clicker and being given a treat. Sadly we also see the result of classical conditioning in a horse that flinches when a hand is quickly raised near their head.

Operant conditioning is learning that occurs when links are made between signals or the horse's actions and the outcome – the horse learns how its behaviour can influence an outcome.



Operant conditioning signals are divided into reinforcement and punishment. Reinforcement signals make the horse more likely to repeat that response in the future, e.g. if given food when fidgeting, the horse will learn that fidgeting produces food. Punishment signals make the horse less likely to repeat that response in the future e.g. if touching an electric fence results in getting a shock, the horse is less likely to touch the fence again.

Reinforcement and punishment can be positive or negative!

Positive reinforcement – adding something nice which makes the behaviour more likely to be repeated, e.g. food or neck scratches (not patting!)

Negative reinforcement – taking away something aversive/pressure release, e.g. tension on leadrope.

Positive punishment – adding something aversive which makes behaviour less likely to be repeated.

Negative punishment – removing something pleasant after the undesired behaviour which makes that behaviour less likely to be repeated.

Successful training reduces stress and fear and increases the safety of animals and people. It often allows us to perform procedures that benefit the animal – my personal favourite example is the elephants that have been trained to swill saline around in their trunks and then blow it into a collection bag to be tested for infectious agents.

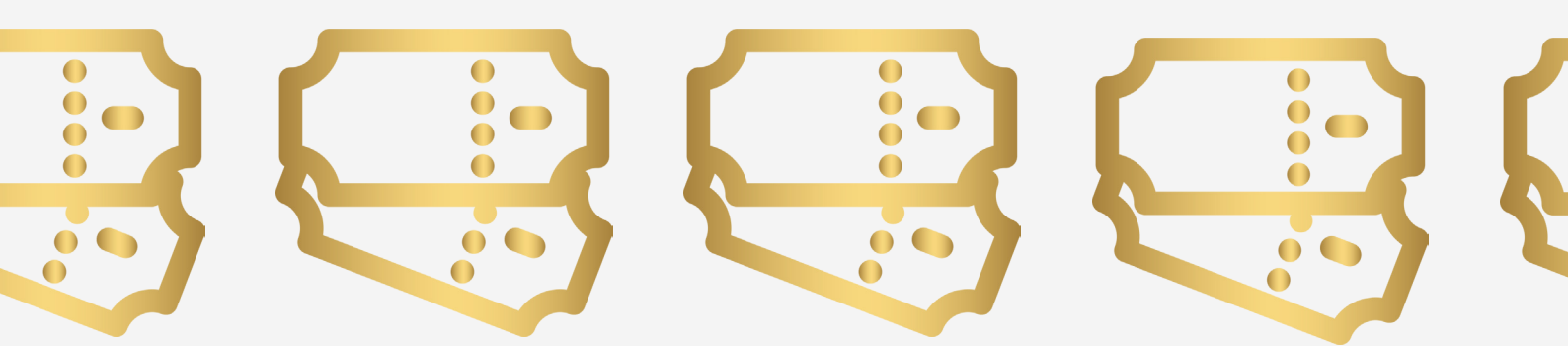
When we are faced with a behaviour we don't want, we should be asking ourselves 'why is this behaviour happening?' Is it in pain, fearful or stressed? Or is there a gap in the horse's training that means it is not prepared or able to respond as we want it to?

THE PROBLEM WITH PUNISHMENT

Punishment is very problematic!

- The timing is absolutely critical, and most of the time punishment is applied much too late to have any meaning at all – this includes whipping a horse for stopping at a jump
- It doesn't help the horse learn the 'right' answer
- The horse can become desensitised to punishment – this then becomes a welfare issue as often the application of punishment is increased, to no effect
- Punishment causes fear and anxiety, which inhibit learning and can make the horse dangerous to handle
- Punishment very easily becomes associated with a particular person
- Fearful horses will often trial hyper-reactive behaviour, leading to inadvertent pressure release which reinforces that behaviour.

For these reasons punishment should be avoided whenever possible.



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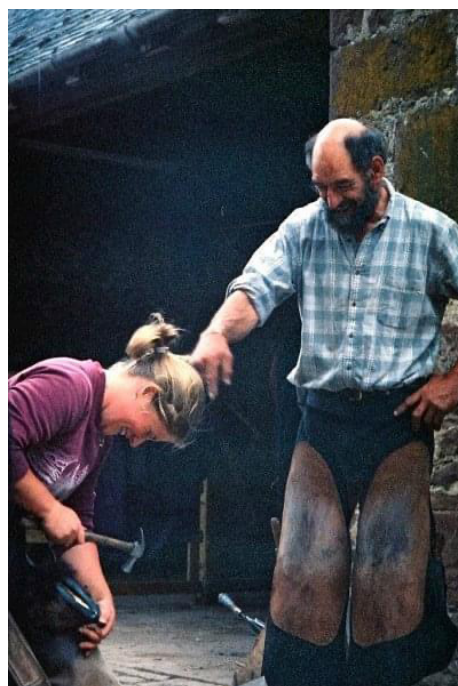
BESIDE THE FIRE

WITH SARAH LOGIE FWCF

Sarah Logie grew up travelling abroad and within Britain, finally ending up just outside the village of Beaulie in the Scottish Highlands in 1997. She made her second home at Lower Farley making herself useful (or just not going away) with the horses and dogs belonging to Val Pape, the then wife of Robin Pape. She spent every spare hour on the croft, also becoming involved with the cattle and general crofting activities.

As Sarah approached the end of her school years, she considered most of the equine careers but discounted them all for one reason or another. She still remembers the conversation with Ian Davies, Robin's apprentice at the time, who asked why she hadn't looked at farriery. 'I told him all the reasons why it was a stupid idea as I was well used to hearing about the negatives – rain, pain, people etc. etc.' However, the idea stuck and farriery ticked all the boxes that she wanted in her life, fulfilling her love of horses, art, biology, travel, the chance to be self-employed, prospects for career advancement and the chance to earn a good living.

On Robin's advice she went off to Warwickshire to do the pre-diploma course in 2000 and got a great start under the guidance of Pete Holberton. Having completed the course with the top student award, the task of writing a lot of letters to all the ATFs in the country started. She had spent her work experience month with Huw Dyer in Yorkshire and also went back to Lower Farley for a trial with Robin. He offered her the apprenticeship, but it was a close call as one of the other candidates was also considered. In the end it came down to horse experience – the other lad was better in the forge, but Robin reckoned 'it was easier to teach someone to handle a hammer rather than to handle a horse'. Her placement in the Highlands had come down to a matter of 24 hours though, as Huw had phoned Robin for a reference the day after he offered Sarah the place, only to be told "You're too late! I've just given her the job."



Sarah qualified in 2006 with Honours, then went on to spend a year travelling. The American exchange program was the start to a whirlwind of visiting farriers which covered the USA, NZ and multiple forges in the UK. It was a great way to gain a mass of experience before committing to her own business.

In 2007 she started her own round but still worked for Robin 3 days a week helping him train two further apprentices. She went on to pass her AWCF in 2012 with Distinction and then her Fellowship in 2017, making her one of only two women to hold the qualification (so far!)

She started tutoring with an invite from Jay Tovey FWCF to be part of Farriery Tuition Ltd in 2019 and has since developed a complete course to guide students from both the UK and abroad through the theory part of the AWCF exam. With the course came the requirement to publish the study guide which came out in 2023 and 'Advanced Farriery Knowledge' has now been sold in 16 countries.

Between shoeing, tutoring, and being involved in joint business ventures with Dan, her husband, life is rather all-consuming but when the chance arises heading to the mountains to walk or ride is her way of relaxing and appreciating the stunning part of the world which is home.





Q+A WITH SARAH LOGIE FWCF

Tell us about your most difficult/challenging/ puzzling case?

It has to be a little Welsh cob called Jazzy who I took on not long after I started up in 2007. I was presented with a 'plod' where the soles of the front feet had dropped through the shoes (3/4 x 7/16 concave) to the point they were on the floor when stood on flat concrete. It was obviously chronic laminitic and I was just a bit shocked with what I was seeing – the owner had only just got her, and I think was rather surprised by my expression as the mare was plodding about 'happily'.

The best I could do at the time was get as broad a shoe as possible to spread the load – I used a natural balance shoe – to just try get everything off the floor. We then got x-rays! Two shoeings later the owner called me: 'What have you done to my horse?!' My heart sank assuming that the changes had tipped her over the edge, but the next sentence was 'I can't stop the b***y thing!' The owner was a star and is still a good friend. She went with me every step of the way, letting me try everything possible to try get her mare to grow normal feet, we did wall resections, heartbars, imprint – you name it.

I went to every mentor I could with those x-rays and asked every vet at any conference I could, what to do and everyone said the same – PTS, it's done – and on the x-rays they were right, but Jazzy was not for quitting! They were going out doing endurance rides and passing the vet even though the owner had to sprint to keep up on the trot ups. The only thing I insisted on was the day she was off colour or sore then the vet was to be called because what was left of her pedal bones had nowhere else to go. The owner agreed but she had some fun rides over the next number of years.

That little horse taught me that if you hit a brick wall, try another way and keep trying, but do not forget to look at the horse – are they in the fight too? If not, don't play God.

What do you still want to achieve?

Apart from finishing building our house and feeling like all the other aspects of life are under some sort of control? I am working on another course aimed at the Diploma for overseas candidates, as the change to the fast-track system means many can't now go straight for the AWCF. So, to finish writing that and probably a book to go with it is enough of a goal for now – along with enjoying finding out where Jay is sending me off to with Farriery tuition!!!

Of all the farriers/blacksmiths from all time (dead and alive), who would you wish to spend an hour with?

I'm really lucky to have spent time with so many amazing farriers particularly in the year I qualified. I'd have loved to have met Edward Martin to hear his stories, but if I'm 100% honest I'd give anything for another day working alongside Robin. Losing him to cancer in 2023 put a massive hole in life and it's been a very hard few years adapting businesses and life to the change. I was so lucky to have had him as a mentor and best friend.

What's your top tip for shoeing a horse?

Stand back and use your eyes. Look at the whole picture, decide on an achievable goal, make a plan, communicate it to the owners, and get on with it.

If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

Ooh that's difficult – I could write a list!! I keep saying it would be good for folk if the internet was turned off for a while – just so they remembered what it is to be human – but that's probably problematic.. so, lets just say that everyone treated people in the way they would like to be treated.



THE LIES WE TELL OURSELVES

As farriers we spend most, if not all, of our time after we qualify working alone. As a group, we are solitary workers who are, by default, defensive about the quality of our work - as we should be. But is this healthy? Should we take criticism on the chin and move on? Should we determine whether their perspective differs from ours? Or should we open a dialogue with our critics, discuss the opinions of others, and consider them?

Words by Mark Humphrey AWCF

Continuous Professional Development

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Tell me and I forget; teach me and I remember; involve me and I learn."

CPD courses enable farriers to learn everything from refreshers on essential shoe making to multi-day in-depth courses on a single facet of farriery. However, is this all we need to do to improve our skills and knowledge?

While courses and CPD provide updates, new knowledge, and skills, we should all start closer to home and look at our daily work. Self-awareness and personal critique are not just beneficial but essential to professional growth.

With this thought in mind, I will direct you towards the point of this article.

Personal techniques and rationalisation

Many personal techniques we develop over our careers are just habits; some are good, and some are cheats or shortcuts. The problem is that we start to rationalise what we do somewhere along the line; we begin to tell ourselves that there is a good reason we have done whatever we did. The problem with this is that once we start to believe our reasoning without the input of peers, we begin to close ourselves off from new techniques and professional development.

"THERE IS NOTHING IMPOSSIBLE TO HIM WHO WILL TRY."

- ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Common Justifications in Farriery

Below is a list of some of the statements I know we have all heard (and most likely uttered some ourselves) at some point, in some form, which have been used as reasoning to justify a technique or as justification as to why our reasoning is better or more valid than someone else's:

- I've been shoeing since.....so it must be right
- The basics of shoeing horses haven't changed since the 1800s
- It's just a fashion....
- All shoeing goes in cycles
- High nails make horses lame
- It's meant to be that way
- A low nail protects the hoof from damage
- It's just what it needs...
- Shoeing with length crushes heels
- Hunter shoeing causes lameness
- Rasping the dorsal wall shortens toes
- Heartbar shoes cure everything
- I don't believe in quarter clips
- Cytek shoes are the only way forward
- Toe clips are bad
- Side clips restrict the hoof
- Bar shoes cause the heels to contract.

The statements above are not wholly incorrect (except maybe the Cytek one), as all techniques can be detrimental if applied too infrequently or less than ideal. However, they are often used as blank reasoning or justification of choice when dealing with a client who does not have the level of education in farriery that we do, as a deflection for our shortcomings.

Addressing Common Justifications

As we all know, there is a negative for every positive in every technique, and the path is rarely linear. David "Slim" Symons FWCF used to give a lecture (more of a talk than a modern lecture) on nailing bicycle rims on horses' feet. The crux of the lecture was that if the justification was correctly thought out and the task achieved the requirements for the horse to perform its role, it wasn't incorrect, but that doesn't mean that with further reflection, the job couldn't be improved upon in a subsequent visit.

The Role of Feedback in Professional Growth

We all require feedback on our work, from Apprentice to Fellow; all of us can and should constantly strive to improve all facets of our craft, and feedback from other farriers, vets, and customers is all part of that. However, we must be discerning and aware that all feedback is unequal. Feedback from clients must be taken with a pinch of salt. The knowledge and experience of a client must be weighed against the critique we receive. While the adoration of a client is always well received, as we all know, it isn't always the most objective and sometimes downright misplaced.

The Influence of Mentors and Lecturers

My example of a good mentor takes me right back to my days at Hereford College when it was still an old-fashioned "tech" on the edge of an industrial estate, and the aforementioned David "Slim" Symons was the Head Lecturer during that period. For those who missed his tenure or have never seen him speak, his lectures were more of a sermon on farriery theory and well ahead of his time in his thought processes. The lockdown podcast interviews with him are part of his legend's series. All of them are well worth listening to (and are easy CPD points).

It's essential to be cautious and considerate in our professional relationships. Seeking positive mentors to educate and stimulate professional growth at any stage of your career is admirable and should be encouraged by all.

A mentor doesn't have to be a high flyer; they could be someone who encourages your growth or stimulates your mind to reach new heights.

The Evolution of Farriery Techniques

Farriery has evolved significantly with technological advancements and a deeper understanding of equine anatomy and biomechanics. Modern farriers have access to many tools and materials unavailable to their predecessors. This evolution has led to the development of new techniques and approaches to hoof care, which can benefit horses' health and performance. Sadly, these advances are either not widely used as many farriers choose not to evolve (or see no reason or need to) or these advancements are so widely used but without the underpinning knowledge of correct usage and fitment protocols.

A historical example would be the use or incorrectly applied overuse of egg bar shoes for navicular horses. The Eggbar has always been a tremendous caudal support shoe. Still, as many of you know, there was a point during my apprenticeship when it was so widely prescribed as the go-to navicular shoe that people eventually stopped using it because of all of the "failures."

"WE CANNOT BECOME WHAT WE NEED TO BE BY REMAINING WHAT WE ARE."

- OPRAH WINFREY



The Impact of Technology on Farriery

Technology has played a crucial role in the advancement of farriery. From digital radiography to 3D printing, modern farriers can now diagnose and treat hoof problems with greater precision and efficiency. Digital radiography allows farriers to take detailed images of the horse's hoof, which can be used to identify issues such as fractures, abscesses, and laminitis.

3D printing, on the other hand, enables farriers to create custom-made shoes and orthotics tailored to each horse's specific needs. You can even scan horses' feet with your phone and order shoes made to measure. There is no denying that farriery is evolving rapidly, and it is our job, as professionals, to embrace these new advances to expand and deepen our understanding.

The Importance of Collaboration in Farriery

Learning from other professionals is essential in farriery, as it allows farriers to share knowledge and expertise and learn from one another. By working together, farriers can develop new techniques, whether modern or traditional, to hoof care and provide better care for their clients' horses. Collaboration can take many forms, from attending conferences and workshops to participating in online forums and social media groups.

In recent years, there has been an increase in memberships to the BFBA branches and the BFBA membership. This can only be a good thing, and I would strongly encourage anyone who isn't a member to contact the head office and find the details of their local branch. Branches will have meetings, competitions, and CPD days throughout the year, all at a discount to members.

"LEARN FROM YESTERDAY, LIVE FOR TODAY, HOPE FOR TOMORROW. THE IMPORTANT THING IS NOT TO STOP QUESTIONING.."

- ALBERT EINSTEIN

Right: Attending conferences like BFBA Focus is a great way to expand your knowledge and learn from other professionals

The Role of Farriers in Equine Welfare

A definition of a farrier is found online; "Farriers play a vital role in ensuring the welfare of horses. Proper hoof care is essential for horses' overall health and well-being, and farriers are responsible for maintaining the health of the horse's hooves. This includes trimming and balancing the hooves, fitting and applying shoes, and addressing any hoof-related issues that may arise. By providing high-quality hoof care, farriers can help prevent lameness and other health problems and improve horses' performance and longevity".

In my opinion, only by staying up to date, sharing ideas and embracing new advancements can we, as a profession, keep fulfilling this role.

The Future of Farriery

The future of farriery looks promising, with continued technological advancements and a growing emphasis on education and professional development. As the field continues to evolve, farriers will need to stay up-to-date with the current techniques and tools and to seek out opportunities for learning and growth continually. By doing so, they can ensure that they are providing the best care for their client's horses and can contribute to the ongoing advancement of the profession. As the social license to operate becomes more relevant to us, we have to accept that we must evolve as a profession if we wish to continue as we are and acknowledge that in a future where there are fewer horses, we must become more skilled and provide an irreplaceable skillset to the equine world.



REFERENCES

Farrier Accessories: Equipping the Hoof Care Professional for Success | In2 Gardens: <https://www.in2gardens.com.au/farrier-accessories-equipping-the-hoof-care-professional-for-success/>

A FAREWELL LETTER FROM BEN BENSON

Dear Members of the British Farriers and Blacksmiths Association,

As I step away from my role on the Executive Committee, I find myself reflecting on what has been an incredible journey since joining in 2012. It has been an honour to serve alongside so many dedicated individuals, and I am deeply grateful for the experiences, challenges, and progress we have shared.

When I first joined, the Association was a small but determined organisation with an Executive Committee that, while well-intentioned, was somewhat disconnected from the industry. We had yet to fully engage with our membership or demonstrate our relevance.

Now, we are a thriving, influential body representing Farriery at every level. We have become the go-to organisation for anyone seeking knowledge about our profession and a respected voice within the wider equestrian sector.

It's incredible what a small but determined team has achieved. Membership has grown from 450 to nearly 1,000, and Focus has transformed from a handful of gazebos and a small marquee by the old Forge, with 150 attendees, to filling a huge show hall at Stoneleigh with over 1,000 attendees in a single day, making it the largest farriery event in the world. From just a handful of people on the Executive, we now have multiple committees with dedicated individuals all working to strengthen our industry.

I am immensely proud to have played a part in this journey, but none of it would have been possible without the collective passion and commitment of those around me from the EC to the CPD, Craft Committee and Forge Editorial Committee. Though I step away from my role, my support for the Association and the Farriery profession will always remain unwavering.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of this incredible journey and your dedication is what makes this organisation great.

With my deepest gratitude and respect,

Ben

Ben Benson, AWCF
BFBA Executive Committee 2012 - 2025
Past President of the BFBA, 2022 - 2024



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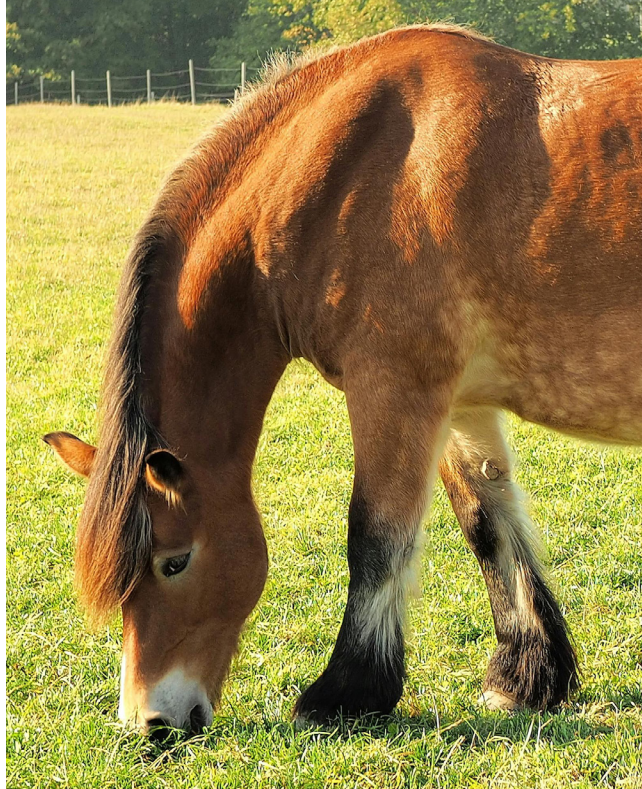
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MY LAMINITIS JOURNEY

Words by Tom Ryan FWCF



Twenty seven years ago on 1st March 1998, I woke up in bed with a startling new idea about what was really happening in laminitis, but this idea was so different from everything I had ever been told about laminitis that it made me question was this new idea correct? Over ten years earlier I had been measuring hoof growth in normal and laminitic ponies and the results of this were still playing on my mind. I knew that in normal hoof growth, the heels grew slightly slower than the dorsal wall, which could be observed in the dorsal wall which had a slight convex curve and hoof stripes had a slight downward curve. In contrast to this laminitic hoof growth was the reverse of the normal pattern with the heels growing much faster than the dorsal wall, which resulted in a concave dorsal wall and hoof stripes which curved forward. The hoof growth measurements had also shown that laminitic hoof growth was an acceleration of growth at the quarters and not a reduction of hoof growth in the dorsal hoof wall.

It was reflecting on the knowledge that laminitic heels were growing much faster which made me consider if it could be a cause of pain. I wondered if separating the two areas of growth with a vertical groove would allow each area to grow at its own rate. I tried this on three struggling chronic laminitic ponies and asked the owners to let me know how they got on, but none of the owners called me! It was six weeks later that I went back to the first pony I had grooved, trying not to influence the owner, I asked casually "how are things?" The owner replied that about two weeks after being grooved the pony improved and was walking more comfortably. The following week I saw the second pony who also showed a similar good response, I could not wait until my visit to the third pony, so I rang the owner who said that the pony was no better. To me, two out of three was a positive result, finally I had something which could help the laminitic pony which reduced some of its pain. It was over the following weekend I woke up with my eureka moment!

In grooving the three ponies I had gained knowledge, this time that there was a relationship between laminitic hoof growth and pain. It was while thinking about what could be taking place within the hoof capsule as the pattern of growth changed from normal to laminitic, that I realised this would be a painful process and would be an explanation for the acute phase of laminitis. The idea

that a hoof capsule changing shape could not be painful seemed impossible to me. As the heels continue to grow at a faster rate, each quarter would be deflected forward and would exert forces of extension onto the dorsal laminae, this process would commence at the ground surface of the dorsal wall and as distortion continued would progress up the dorsal laminae in a peeling process. The idea that the dorsal wall was being peeled away from the surface of the distal phalanx in this way sounded excruciatingly painful. I was later told by an engineer that peeling is the most mechanically efficient way to separate two bonded surfaces, as it only acts on a small part of the bond at any one time.

So my idea about letting each hoof area grow at its own rate was partly right but more importantly it was the way the hoof capsule was distorting that was at the centre of the problem. It seemed that there was a causal area at the heels and an affected area at the dorsal surface, this destructive process was independent of the weight of the horse.

The best way of describing what was happening to other people was that the dorsal wall was being lifted as the heels continued to grow more rapidly projecting each quarter forward, as this was a theoretical model and not yet proven I felt the best title which explained what was happening was 'The dorsal wall lifting theory for equine laminitis'.

I took these ideas to equine vet Peter Green and asked him if I was missing something 'really stupid' which would undermine the whole concept, but after about an hour and a half of discussion, he confirmed that the theory explained several unexplained experiences he had had with past laminitic cases. I asked if he would me to help write a paper on the concept, to which he agreed. Unfortunately the paper did not pass scientific peer review due to the theoretical nature of the topic, the small number of ponies measured and the concept of vertical grooving worried the reviewers. Considering the paper also discussed dorsal wall resections, which to my mind was more invasive and commonly practiced at the time, grooving to me was more conservative and had the advantage that it could be practiced at the acute stage, with almost immediate positive results, as I was about to find out.



A few weeks later, I was with a client whose pony was overweight and at high risk of getting laminitis, I told him that the pony was at risk of laminitis and to call me if this happened. He did call me but to cancel his shoeing appointment as the pony was acutely laminitic, I told him emphatically that I was still coming! In preparation for my visit I called his vet and explained my recent experiences with the three laminitic ponies and asked how he would feel about the possibility of cutting vertical grooves into a first time acute case. The vet said he would approve the use of this 'novel procedure'. I arrived to see the pony and the owner immediately offered me this proposal - "Get us out of this mess and there will be a good bottle of wine in it for you!"

The pony was on full box rest and showing all the signs of acute laminitis, this was to be the first acute case that I was to groove. A week later he telephoned me saying the pony was walking quite comfortably but sending him crazy as it was constantly box walking around its stable. The pony continued to make a full recovery back to full driving work, and I also got a bottle of Rioja!

The vet's use of the term 'novel procedure' has important connotations in this situation, as it covers situations which could be considered outside of normal veterinary practice. I have stated on many occasions that it is vital for a farrier to get veterinary approval before proceeding with the vertical grooving procedure, to keep within ethical rules.

With a clearer understanding that the hoof capsule was now at the centre of laminitis, I was able to observe that the qualities of each hoof capsule influenced how it changed shape. Narrower hoof capsules mostly distorted at the dorsal surface, with the distended laminae orientated parallel to each other in the toe and in the worst cases the distal phalanx would rotate. Conversely in round hoof shapes the distended laminae would extend over a larger area from the toe around towards the widest part of the foot, with distended laminae orientated in a more radial pattern and in the worst cases the distal phalanx would sink as the hoof capsule 'belled' outward. Once one understands that hoof capsule shape has a role in pedal rotation or sinking, I find it difficult to understand why this connection wasn't made sooner.

A factor which seemed to be associated with thicker hoof walls was that rotation or sinking of the distal phalanx was more common than seen in thin hoof walls with flaring heels. Hooves with heels flaring outwards medially and laterally did not exert a lifting force towards the dorsal surface, giving this type of hoof a diamond shape. Over time this type of hoof can gradually become narrower and the abnormal heel growth will start to have an effect on the dorsal wall. Continuous rapid heel growth ultimately results in a straight sided hoof capsule with diverging growth rings at the quarters and a concave dorsal wall - in other words, a chronic laminitic hoof.

A few years later our own pony became laminitic and I asked our own vet to approve the grooving procedure for our pony called Iona. I videoed the whole process of grooving and the use of Styrofoam pads and have used the video in many of my presentations. On seeing the video, some question if she really had laminitis as she recovered so quickly, but three months later a wide laminar wedge became visible, it was bigger than I was expecting, as I hoped my early intervention would prevent a laminar wedge forming, but it confirmed that she had without doubt suffered acute laminitis. I'm happy to say that this was the only episode of laminitis she ever had and lived to be over 30 years. If you want to view this video go to: www.equinehoof.co.uk/grooving_video_lona.php

Between March 1998 and until I retired in 2020, I grooved approximately 250 ponies and horses, with generally good results. Mostly cases were post acute or early chronic stage, I would have liked to have grooved more at the acute stage as I felt this would have been more beneficial to the affected animal, but frustratingly referrals from vets at this stage were not common. If I was involved with an animal from the start I would ask for permission to groove the animal, which was approved in almost every case.

I did encounter problems while grooving one subgroup of laminitic cases, those who had a history of flexural deformity of the distal interphalangeal joint. This predominantly foal problem can still be present in adult equines and in my view can be a cause of mechanical laminitis on its own. The accepted method of trimming this type of foot is to lower the heels, but this can place greater loading onto the deep digital flexor tendon and dorsal wall. Unfortunately, grooving a hoof with this underlying condition is not advised, as the grooves prevent transfer of loading toward the quarters, only a few cases have been adversely affected but it's important to verify the absence of this condition before considering grooving a hoof.

One of the very first three ponies I grooved was continuously re-grooved for the next seven years until he moved away, the reason for this was due to the pony becoming lame as the groove grew down the hoof wall, rendering the groove less effective and the pony's stride would shorten, but by simply extending the grooves upward the pony's stride length would return to normal. Extending the groove upwards was used quite frequently on a number of cases, with good affect.

Stride Length Assessment

Walking a laminitic case is a basic method of assessment. It can give good information on how the animal is placing it's foot to the ground and an idea of how much pain the animal is experiencing, but it's not a very practical method when trying to give a written account of what is being observed. I had made videos of these basic walk-ups but from this was not able to give a quantitative written assessment.

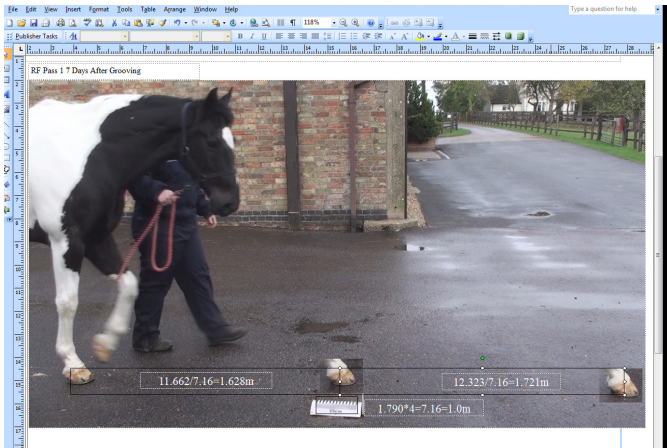
I worked out a way of measuring the stride length of the animal I was videoing by using a simple and inexpensive method. I placed white stickers with a black vertical line on each hoof, then placed a reference marker with 25cm markings on a line 3 metres away from the video camera. A short length of video was taken with the reference marker in place, which was then removed and the animal was walked with the limb to be measured on the line on the ground where the calibration marker had been. Using this method I was able to record one or two foot placements for each pass.

Screen shots of calibration marker and each foot placement were then imported into Adobe Photoshop editor and layered one picture above each other, by making the area of the top most picture transparent in the position of the underlying hoof below made the hoof visible.

The composite picture was then imported into MS Publisher which has a tool to measure the size of objects on the screen. Using the screen value of the calibration marker (25cm X 4) each individual stride length of the animal was able to be calculated, as shown to the right.



Above: Foot with Groove and Stride Length Marker



Below: Screenshot from MS Publisher

STRIDE LENGTH MEASUREMENTS FROM MS PUBLISHER

Horse: X	Pass 1	Pass 2	Average of all steps	Increase in stride length from Before Grooving
02/11/2011 - Before Grooving				
LF step 1	1.708	1.509	1.47m	0.00m
LF step 2	1.363	1.178		
RF step 1	1.58	1.559		
RF step 2		1.421		
After Grooving				
LF step 1	1.509	1.597	1.52m	0.05m (5cm)
LF step 2	1.178			
RF step 1	1.655	1.616		
RF step 2		1.573		
09/11/2011 - 7 Days After Grooving				
LF step 1	1.643	1.562	1.58m	0.11m (11cm)
LF step 2				
RF step 1	1.628	1.316		
RF step 2	1.721	1.619		

Stride length values recorded in the picture above are shown in the shaded boxes. The horse's average stride length immediately after being grooved was 5cm longer and seven days later had increased to 11cm.

This method gave me a reliable way for measuring the effectiveness of the grooving method, and confirmed that the grooving procedure did provide an immediate improvement in stride length and again seven days later. It was a time consuming method but was worth the effort.

The measurement of the horse above was at a veterinary practice which the horse was not very familiar with. Using this technique at home premises was more problematical, one box rested pony had a longer stride length when walked towards his turnout paddock and a much shorter stride when turned back toward his stable, which was not very helpful!

But grooving for laminitis didn't really get accepted

As far as I can tell, the grooving procedure has not been generally accepted as a viable procedure for treating laminitis, which is understandable as grooving has a dubious past history as a treatment for navicular disease and contracted heels with little to no success. Grooving a laminitic only makes sense if you understand the dorsal wall lifting model. If you have used the grooving procedure for laminitis I would welcome your feedback via: tom@equinehoof.co.uk

In his book, 'Diseases of the horse's foot', published in 1906, H Coulton Reeks¹ described a grooving procedure which he called 'Smith's operation'. I think it was this account that inspired Burney Chapman to develop the dorsal wall resection. Coulton Reeks states that "Almost immediate relief is afforded the patient". It was only after I had grooved the first three ponies, that I recalled seeing something about grooving in one of my collection of old books on farriery, so I went back and reread the section. It's easy to dismiss accounts in old books but I can confirm that Coulton Reeks was not exaggerating with his statement 'Almost immediate relief is afforded to the patient'.

Grooving is not the solution to laminitis, to a skilled farrier it's a quick and easy intervention to reduce immediate pain. The solution to laminitis lies in understanding what is causing the pain in the first place and in my view is an increase in hoof growth at the heels.

I was fortunate to meet Ramzi Al-Agele while visiting Nottingham Vet School and as a result of our conversations about laminitis, Ramzi decided to investigate the keratin producing cells in coronary tissue and include his results in his PhD thesis². He collected coronary tissue from dorsal and quarter regions and conducted in-vitro experiments on how the horn producing keratin cells reacted to high levels of insulin. His results from cells extracted from hooves which had a straight dorsal wall (non laminitic) showed no response to the higher levels of insulin, cells extracted from the quarters of hooves with a concave dorsal wall (laminitic) divided more rapidly when exposed to higher levels of insulin, but similar cells from the front of the hoof did not react in the same way. This could be an indication that the keratin cells at the quarters in laminitic hooves were 'activated' in some way, prior to becoming reactive to insulin.

Combining Ramzi Al-Agele's observations with a greater understanding of equine metabolic syndrome (EMS) which is known to have an undefined relationship with laminitis, raises an interesting possibility - could EMS be affecting at a very early stage how the hoof capsule grows?

Diverging hoof rings are gaining interest

There has been a huge body of research into what leads to the dorsal laminal bond becoming traumatised and fail, but evidence has been hard to find within the laminal tissues of the dorsal wall.

Hoof capsule distortion was previously seen as a consequence of the acute phase and therefore not worthy of investigation, this view is changing. Recently a paper has been published which records the presence of diverging growth rings at the quarters prior to a diagnosis of first time acute laminitis.

The presence of diverging hoof growth rings prior to the onset of laminitis was one of the assessment criteria in a recent paper by Edward Knowles³ which followed

374 ponies at 6 monthly intervals for 4 years. The results reported that the presence of diverging growth rings at the heels "supports the hypothesis that divergent hoof growth is a preclinical/subclinical laminitis indicator that may progress to clinically apparent disease". This information represents a big boost to the dorsal wall lifting theory as it documents the presence of diverging growth rings at the quarters before the onset of acute laminitis.

Coulton Reeks, over a century ago, published an account of a procedure that provided pain relief to laminitic equines. It seems that this account was ignored by all except Burney Chapman. I'm not sure how many dorsal wall resections are performed today but I found the procedure beneficial for many chronic laminitic ponies, particularly when haematomas or seroma were causing problems under the dorsal wall. Sometimes a dorsal wall resection would disappointingly not expose any entrapped fluids making it seem a waste of time, but frequently the owner would report that the pony was more comfortable despite having a portion of its hoof wall removed. This was puzzling prior to the dorsal wall lifting theory being conceived but easily explained after, as the removal of the lifting dorsal wall could be enough to give pain relief in itself.

I'm hoping that veterinary science is now moving closer to a better understanding of laminitis with the interest shown by Ramzi Al-Agele and his work on keratin cell division, while Edward Knowles' observation of divergent hoof growth rings prior to a diagnosis of acute laminitis shines a light onto the underlying events of abnormal hoof growth at the quarters and the subsequent changes in hoof capsule shape gives me optimism for a better future for the long suffering laminitic equine.

The problem yet to be resolved is how and why the coronary tissues in the quarters are stimulated to grow abnormally quicker, with a better understanding of this process, perhaps a way can be found to interrupt this situation and thus prevent the commencement of abnormal hoof growth at the quarters and avoid laminitis before it can start.

Finally, I would like to give thanks to vet Chris Colles. I mentioned my intention to measure normal hoof growth to him and he suggested that I should measure not just the dorsal wall area but also the quarters and while I was at it 'chuck in a few laminitics'. These few words of advice changed my life forever and I would like to thank him for his mentoring on the hoof growth measurement project and all the insights it has subsequently provided.

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HANDS UP IF YOU WEAR SAFETY GLASSES?

After two issues in one week, Liam O'Hara AWCF shares why he does now!

It's a bad habit to have gotten in to. "I won't wear them", "They get in the way", "They steam up", "They're never where I left them", "I can barely see through them anyway!"

It's easier to just squint my eyes, or look away when the danger of an eye injury is imminent. That will stop the problem. Well, not quite...

The first incident occurred shoemaking on Tuesday. In the forge, a bean of coke spat straight into my eye socket. However with lightning reactions, I closed my eye lid in time - just in time, for the bean to stick to my eye lid and socket. It was bright yellow, straight from the heart of the fire, and glued itself to my skin. I picked it out, and carried on shoemaking, like a true farrier. With a well forged burn upon my face.

The very next day I was cutting a piece of Aluminium with a jigsaw to make a hospital plate. Now, why would I wear glasses? It's not as if I'm using a linisher or an angle grinder, with sparks flying everywhere. Anyway, I'll just squint to save an injury.

Now I'm not entirely sure when or how the inevitable happened. I didn't feel it at first, but maybe I brushed my eye, maybe some swarf was on my sleeve, or maybe as I was working outside the wind blew it. I began to feel some discomfort in the same eye I burnt yesterday! I looked in my wing mirror to see (through my remaining good eye) a red swollen, weeping injury!! My hands were filthy, so no point trying to rub the swarf out, like farriers normally would!

I drove home, with some difficulty, and great discomfort from the headlights of oncoming traffic. I probably shouldn't have driven!

I thought I was out of the woods, as the inflammation seemingly decreased. However, by 9pm the discomfort was unbearable and it became apparent that a trip to A&E was necessary.

This complicated matters, as the kids were asleep in bed, and my wife and I obviously couldn't leave them! I had to phone my mum to babysit, so by the time we got to A&E it was 10pm. I can't describe the agony of sitting there, with my eye streaming and that unbearable scratching feeling us farriers can all relate to, and literally blinded by the light!

Finally at 2am I was called in, and it took the nurse two minutes to remove the tiny splinter, and a saline was administered. I got home at 3:30am, with the horror feeling of knowing just first appointment was 7:30 am!

Now for the (eye)-rony!! That morning, I received an email from BFBA secretary Claire Whitehouse, forward to "Chair of the Editorial Panel". (That's me). The email describes; "I'm dismayed by farriers and blacksmiths hammering hot metal without any safety goggles. My father lost the sight in one eye working on the forge and let me tell you it's a game changer."

Well, since the above series of events, I can say that my new safety specs have not left my eyes! And after a couple of days, I've felt more comfortable than ever wearing them, potentially even naked without them!!

And let me tell you, a pair of Dewalt safety glasses on Amazon, cost less than overnight parking at A&E!!!

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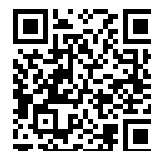
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SPILLERS BRAND'S ENDOCRINE RESEARCH PRESENTED AT GLOBAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

SPILLERS™ was the sole UK feed brand to be represented at the prestigious Global Equine Endocrine Symposium (GEES) earlier this month. The brand was linked to more than 25% of the research papers presented, showcasing the latest pioneering work on endocrine disease.

The SPILLERS brand, via the WALTHAM™ Equine Studies Group and international collaborators, was involved with 10 out of the 37 research papers presented, thereby helping to advance its quest to better understand Pituitary Pars Intermedia Dysfunction (PPID; also known as Equine Cushing's Syndrome), insulin dysregulation (ID) and laminitis.

"We are extremely proud of our contributions to GEES this year," said SPILLERS Product Manager Sarah Nelson. "Undertaking and sharing our important research is part of our ongoing mission to help senior horses and ponies live happier, healthier lives, and to help prevent as many horses and ponies as possible from developing laminitis."

The 6th Global Equine Endocrine Symposium, hosted by Boehringer Ingelheim, took place at the World Equestrian Center Ocala, Florida from 7th – 9th January 2025. The event brings together eminent researchers and equine vets to share research and findings about equine endocrinological disease.

The 10 SPILLERS-associated papers were presented by researchers from around the world including the SPILLERS brand's director of science, Dr Pat Harris.

The presentations included:

- Research on the decrease of alpha cells and increase of beta cells in the pancreas, which may contribute to high insulin levels and laminitis risk (Presented by Simon Bailey, University of Melbourne).
- How levels of non-structural carbohydrate (NSC) or 'starch and sugar' in grass change (morning vs afternoon as well as day by day) and how this can affect blood insulin levels in insulin dysregulated horses. High intakes of NSC and insulin dysregulation are known risk factors for laminitis (Presented by Morgan Askins, University Kentucky).



- Research on the production of cytokines (proteins that play a role in inflammation) and the stimulation of insulin production after eating starch rich diets. It has been speculated that there is a link between insulin dysregulation (ID) and inflammation. (Presented by Simon Bailey, University of Melbourne).
- How levels of NSC (starch and sugar) in grass change throughout the day in spring vs late summer and how this can significantly affect blood insulin levels in horses with and without insulin dysregulation (Presented by Morgan Askins, University Kentucky).
- How blood concentrations of certain, key catecholamines (hormones involved in the body's stress response) were lower in horses with PPID compared with horses of a similar age without PPID. This could help to explain some of the clinical signs typically attributed to PPID, such as alterations in demeanour. (Presented by Nicolas Galinelli, University of Melbourne).
- Results of an international survey investigating horse owners' knowledge of PPID, which showed considerable scope for education of horse owners regarding PPID, since almost half of respondents self-declared an incomplete understanding of this condition and dietary changes were not always appropriate. (Presented by Pat Harris, SPILLERS). Full details of the survey are due to be published.
- How pasture-induced obesity affects insulin sensitivity and total adiponectin concentrations in the blood. The work highlighted the variability between ponies and the importance of monitoring individual animals especially those considered at increased risk of laminitis. At the end of the study all the ponies had lower levels of adiponectin than they started with, indicating a potential increased risk of laminitis. (Presented by Nicola Menzies-Gow, The Royal Veterinary College).

"The SPILLERS-associated research that was presented at GEES is an important part of our work to improve the health and welfare of horses and ponies with endocrine disease and an increased risk of laminitis," said Sarah. "Building our knowledge and understanding of PPID and ID and its effects on horses and ponies, enables us to continue to improve our ability to predict which ones may be at greatest of laminitis, help us to minimise risks and manage them better."

The SPILLERS brand is committed to improving the health and welfare of horses and ponies. For the past 22 years the brand, via the WALTHAM™ Equine Studies Group, has been involved with numerous research collaborations which bring together world-leading equine veterinary, nutrition and research experts to support the wellbeing, performance and longevity of senior horses and ponies. By translating their science and sharing highlights and practical take home messages the brand endeavours to give the owners of seniors the extra support they need to help keep their horses in the best possible health.

THE BLACKSMITH'S FUEL: KEEPING TRADITION ALIVE WITH ANVIL FORGE COKE

In the blacksmithing world, few fuels hold the reputation and reliability that British coke once did. For generations, the UK's own Monckton coking works in South Yorkshire had supplied blacksmiths, farriers, and solid fuel merchants with some of the finest blacksmith's coke available.

But in 2014, this era came to an end, as Monckton ceased operations, marking the close of a legacy that left many in the trade searching for an alternative fuel source to match its quality and consistency.

Since then, the UK's fuel suppliers have had to look beyond their borders to meet demand. Sourcing blacksmith coke now means turning to European producers, particularly in Poland and Italy.

Thankfully, CPL - a historic name in solid fuels since the 1800s - was ready to adapt to this changing landscape. With a network of reputable partners across Europe, CPL moved swiftly to provide British smiths and farriers with a premium-quality coke that lives up to the legacy of Monckton's fuel. Enter Anvil Forge Coke, a product that has quickly become a mainstay for blacksmiths seeking a reliable, clean, and high-performance fuel.

Anvil Forge Coke is well-regarded for its high consistency, low ash content, and hard, compact clinker. This means blacksmiths can enjoy a fire that remains clean and hot for extended periods, without the fuss of frequent clean-ups. Size has always been a key focus, with many customers requesting a more uniform, smaller product. We listened closely, and since launching our improved, consistent sizing, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. This refined size offers better temperature control and enhanced heat transfer, delivering a more efficient and reliable performance every time. Its quality has earned it high praise across the trade, with many blacksmiths and farriers now considering it the go-to fuel for their forges.

Anvil has been part of several showcases across the UK, which have been great for highlighting traditional craftsmanship and innovation in blacksmithing. CPL contributed by donating their Forge Coke, providing superior quality and consistent sizing for optimal forge performance.

The production of blacksmith coke, also known as metallurgical coke, involves a process called dry distillation. Bituminous coal undergoes heating in the absence of air, driving off gases and liquids, which are then utilised in other industries like gas, oil, and power generation. What remains is a solid material—coke—that serves as an invaluable fuel source for industries reliant on high-heat, clean-burning fuel.

Though global efforts to reduce reliance on fossil fuels are ongoing, CPL's suppliers have invested significantly in meeting rigorous environmental standards, ensuring that Anvil Forge Coke can continue to meet demand for years to come.

Established working relationships with producers ensures the long term supply of Anvil Forge Coke. Whether in convenient 25kg bags or full, loose loads, Anvil is readily accessible for collection or delivery throughout the UK.

Ready to place an order? You can receive a 5% discount on your order placed before 30th March 2025.

Just call our Heritage Fuels Team on 0345 450078 to place an order and enjoy reliable, high-quality fuel at a competitive price.

For blacksmiths, farriers, and traditional craftsmen across the UK, Anvil Forge Coke represents the best of both worlds: a premium fuel with the legacy of the past, made ready for the future.



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