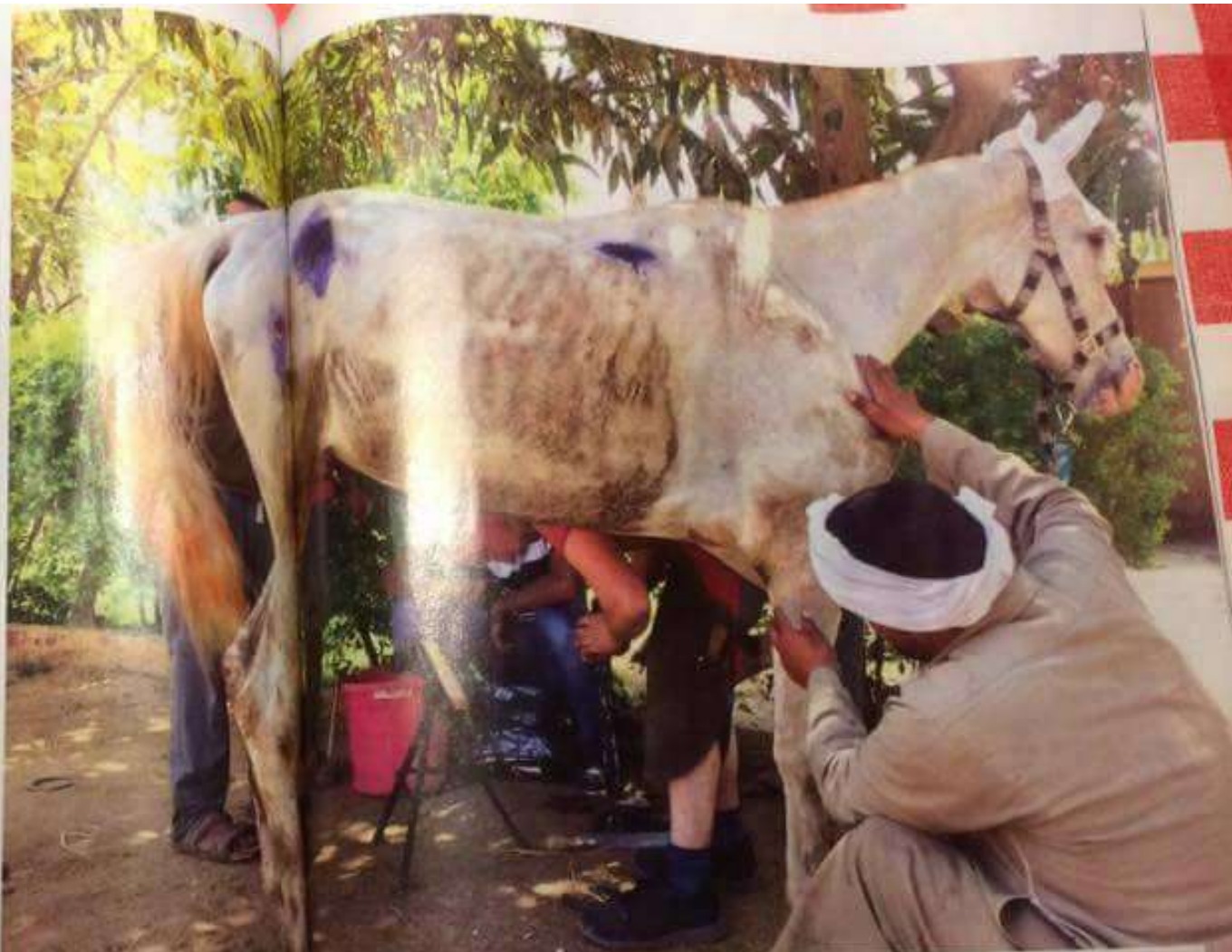


# From Cymru to Cairo

Discover how a farrier from Wales has helped improve the lives of working equines in Egypt through volunteering his time and expertise



Gareth found the experience hugely rewarding



As well as poor farriery, horses suffer from injuries caused by badly-fitting tack

**W**hen an equine charity in Egypt put out an appeal on social media for a UK farrier to assist them in Cairo, and give hoofcare training to the local community, 25-year-old Gareth McWhinney stepped up and made it his mission to help.

The charity, Egypt Equine Aid (EEA), was founded by Jill Barton and her husband, Warren, after a trip from their native Australia to Cairo in 2013. Jill was so struck by the plight of the working horses and donkeys – some descendants of the Australian horses left behind after the First World War – that she abandoned plans of semi-retirement in her homeland, found some stables and created a hospital for working animals.

Since then, EEA has become a much-needed resource and often houses 60 or more equine patients at a time. Its dedicated team works 24/7 to treat sick and injured animals before returning them to the owners who rely on them for income. Treatment is provided for many conditions, including colic, tetanus and road traffic accident injuries.

Farrier Gareth is originally from Northern Ireland and moved to Wales aged 17 to begin his apprenticeship, qualifying four years ago. He works on the Isle of Anglesey and has a large client base ranging from Shetlands to Shires, and works on average 12 hours a day, six days a week. He also competes in shoeing competitions and gives demonstrations at public events, as well as trying to spend time with his young family.

Despite having a busy life and workload, he says he was keen to try and help the horses in Egypt and got in touch with Jill after seeing her Facebook appeal.

"I wanted to help improve the work of farriers in Egypt, and at the same time see if there was anything I could learn from the trip," he reveals. "I was also keen to visit Egypt as I'd never been there before."

### A grand tour

After exchanging messages with Jill and EEA supporter Helen Renshaw, who often takes

donations from the UK to Egypt, Gareth booked his flights.

"I booked extra baggage so I could take a lot of useful items for the charity," he continues. "My partner, Natalie, was brilliant, setting up a Just Giving page and calling in donations. We received a large box of headcollars and fly masks from Harry Hall and some of my clients donated spare tack. My mum held a tea party in Northern Ireland and showjumper Tim Stockdale gave us some light goods to auction. I used some of the money we raised to buy farriery tools to



Meeting the farm's dedicated staff





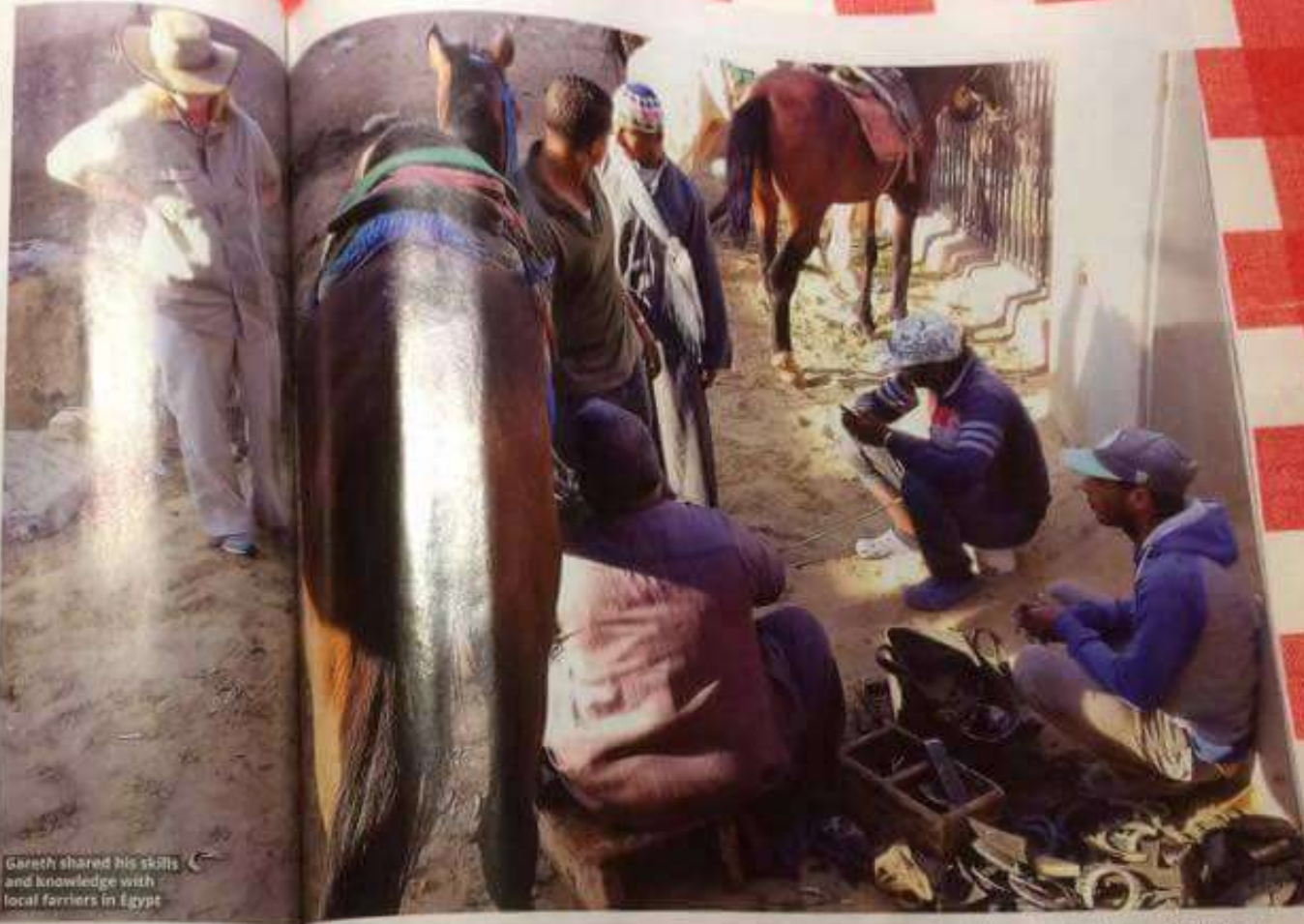
A job well done by Gareth



Local shoes are made from a variety of materials



Rubber insert shoes "destroy the hoof"



Gareth shared his skills and knowledge with local farmers in Egypt

take out to Egypt, and we were also able to make a cash donation of £500.

"By April 2012, I was on my way. When I arrived in Cairo it was swelteringly hot and sticky, even late at night, and the airport was busy. After slowly making my way through customs and passport control, I was met by EEA yard manager Hazem. We don't arrive at the farm until about 2am."

After a few hours sleep, Gareth was taken on a tour of the stables and met some of the equine patients.

"There is a large central pen which housed a mix of horses and donkeys, who were happily eating their breakfast of freshly cut barleem – the local equivalent of grass," he recalls. "The atmosphere was really calm and tranquil. I met the grooms, who came over to shake my hand, and then I was introduced to Jill, who is lovely. She showed me around the rest of the farm, which felt like a beautiful kept oasis in the desert, and a million miles away from the Welsh countryside. At the far end were two walls and beyond them just a sea of sand and three pyramids in the distance. It was very surreal."

As Gareth's first day was a Saturday, he soon found himself keeping busy.

"Saturday is a popular day for people to bring their animals in for treatment," he explains. "I met Abdel-Halem, the yard farrier, and watched him trim a few patients' feet, before getting stuck in myself."

"As more horses arrived, I began to see just how bad the local shoeing really was. Tyre inserts are commonly used as shoes. It's believed they give better grip, but in reality they destroy the feet. I even saw some cases where tin and plastic had been nailed to the hooves."

"It was shocking to see the state of the horses' feet, and also the condition of the animals – many were emaciated and covered in sores – and how bad their tack and equipment was. I saw broken saddles, harsh rusty bits and painful chains used instead of nosebands."

"On another day we travelled to the Pyramid area to see traditional farriers at

work. Their method seemed to consist of taking off the old shoe and replacing it with a new one of any size.

"The tools used were similar to those I'm used to at home, but much poorer quality. I saw one farrier trimming feet with a chisel and some kind of axe.

"Aside from having no training in shoeing, trimming and hoof anatomy, they are limited in what they can achieve due to poor quality tools, and very low quality shoes, which are handmade in Egypt. Horses are always old shod, so shoes can't be made to fit the hoof – the hoof is made to fit the shoe."

**Corrective farriery**

"One of the worst cases I saw was a patient who arrived at EEA to be treated," recalls Gareth. "He had painful, chronic abscesses and contracted tendons, so the heels on his back feet weren't even touching the ground"

**"It was shocking to see the state of the horses' feet, and the condition the animals were in"**

when he was standing still. His toes were excessively long and his shoes far too big.

"I removed the shoes and trimmed everything back but left the heel as otherwise the poor soul would be very lame. I checked the balance and shod him with support all round. I did my best, but it wasn't easy with the poor quality shoes available."

The EEA team also travel out into villages to offer treatment and care services to people who can't get to the equine hospital.

"One village we visited was desolate and seemingly empty, yet within minutes of our arrival dozens of animals appeared," recalls Gareth. "All manner of creatures, from

chickens, goats, 20 or more donkeys and a buffalo soon arrived for treatment. It was obvious to see just how valuable these mobile clinics are to the local people."

"Jill and the team receive support from all around the world, thanks to social media. They do a fantastic job with such limited resources, helping many horses and donkeys. They save lives on a daily basis and make working animals more comfortable."

"The training I gave EEA farrier Abdel-Halem was the foundation for a wider-reaching training programme, which is now underway. I'm very proud of what has been achieved so far and hope that I will make a positive

difference to many horses and donkeys in the future, as well as creating jobs for the local people who will benefit from the training.

"I'm planning to make a return trip to Egypt in early 2013, and will hopefully make three or four trips a year to help with the apprenticeship programme, offering training and tuition."

"I'm also going to continue fundraising, to help provide the EEA with much needed funds and equipment. The charity is such a worthy cause and, having seen firsthand what Jill and her team are faced with, I want to do all I can to help them and the horses and donkeys."

● To find out more about EEA, follow the charity on Facebook and Twitter. It posts daily updates, including pictures and videos, on social media and you can also get in touch to help with fundraising or collecting donations that will benefit working equines of Egypt.