

# Letter from Chawton House

Angie Spensley tells us about her work caring for our four rescued shire horses.



From the first day of my new job at Chawton House Library, I could not believe how lucky I was to be working in such a tranquil place. Along with the other Horseman, Keri Cairns, I look after four Shire horses. The horses are part of the charity's aim to run a working estate using eighteenth-century methods and we use them to work the land carrying out activities such as logging and chain-harrowing. This is an effective way of teaching people about England's agricultural history and it also demonstrates how we can learn from our ancestors, using the land in a way that is more environmentally-friendly.



The horses have very unique personalities. There is Harry, a fourteen year-old gelding who always looks sad but is a very loving, hard-working horse. He has only just got over his fear of men after lots of patience and kindness. He usually works with Clarence as a pair but recently we have used him to extract fallen trees from the dell which he took to with ease. We hope to sell these off as firewood to raise funds for the library.

Clarence is a thirteen year-old gelding. He is a cheeky, nosy lad who loves his food and lots of afternoon siestas. Clarence and Harry regularly chain-harrow the land and we are also training them in the hitch-cart so that eventually we can take passengers around the estate. Triumph is our eldest Shire and at the grand old age of twenty, he still has boundless energy. He loves to be ridden but he has never been broken for harness.

Finally, there is Saracen. He is our most recent rescue. A seventeen year-old, he has been with us for about a year and a half. He was quite emaciated when he arrived and needed a lot of feeding. He also has arthritis, we believe from an old injury, and he suffers from sweet itch, which a lot of horses get in the summer months. It is caused by an allergy to the saliva of midges, which causes itching and is then exacerbated when the horse scratches. If you have visited us in the Summer, you may have seen Saracen in his fly sheet to protect him from the midges. One of the remedies we have tried is marmite sandwiches. Saracen loved these and we did notice the difference. We tried them on the other horses and the 'love it or hate it' slogan is definitely true. Harry hated it and pulled lots of faces – perhaps we should write to the manufacturers and let them know!

Throughout the year, we attend local shows to promote what we do here on the estate. Our last event was at the Weald & Downland Museum at Singleton. We took Harry along with our zigzag harrows, which we used to harrow after the land had been ploughed. Harry worked brilliantly – we were all very proud. Our next event will be at the Portsmouth Parade which is held on the first bank holiday of May every year. This is a spectacular show of heavy horses parading around the seafront at Southsea.



We have recently obtained a plough and I'm looking forward to using this next year with the horses. We aim to plough a section of the estate so that the gardeners will be able to grow more organic produce. Please do come along and see the horses at one of our open days. The Shires love the attention they receive on these days. We also hold long-lining demonstrations and give people the chance to have a go – it's a great experience for all ages.