



Sue Burton (pictured with Clementine and staff member Charlotte) currently has 74 horses in her care



Sue spends hours in her office running Remus

Sue Burton

Founder of Remus Horse Sanctuary

How I make it work: With consistent determination, optimism and support from my amazing staff and volunteers

The recent recipient of a British Empire Medal for services to equine welfare discusses the founding of her charity and how the most deeply abused and traumatised horses she has rescued over the years always occupy a special place in her heart.

My job...

I run Remus Horse Sanctuary, which I founded over 40 years ago. As well as the day-to-day organising of my amazing team, dealing with the current welfare crisis is relentless, and it takes money. I'm constantly thinking of our finances and how we can raise more money, where best to spend what we have, and where we can make savings. Remus needs £500,000 a year to keep doing what it does, and so my team and I are continuously fund-raising, including hosting open days, afternoon teas, sponsor days, charity dinners, auctions and even Royal visits — we are honoured to have Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh, as one of our patrons.

How I got here...

I started my working life as a palaeographer, transcribing old birth, death and marriage certificates while studying for a history degree. I had every intention of spending my life as

a historical researcher until I attended an animal rights event in the early 1980s and the course of my life changed.

Several months later, in February 1983, I heard about the plight of nearly 100 horses left to die of starvation and cold on Essex's Rainham Marshes, and the case of Remus, an innocent horse, stolen and starved for three months due to a feud between two people. Many horses lost their lives on the marshes and we were too late to save Remus. From that day to this I have dedicated my life to rescuing neglected, abused and abandoned horses at the sanctuary I named in Remus' memory.

My horses...

I'm currently the proud carer of 74 horses and out of all of those I can't have a favourite as they are all so special. I admit, though, that the ones who have suffered the most, who had the most unthinkable pasts, do hold an extra special place in my heart. Their strength and bravery, their determination for survival, their ultimate forgiveness towards humans... it's inspirational. Holly is one of those. She's a beautiful, gentle 15.2hh, strawberry roan middleweight cob, who spent her entire life tethered until she was finally seized under the Control of Horses Act by Carmarthenshire County Council. She was emaciated, her

ribs, backbone and hips showing clearly through her thick coat. Her muscles were wasted due to deprivation of movement and she was heavily in foal. She was also completely blind, something our vets believe had been done to her intentionally. Holly was initially placed in a barn with other seized horses, but her blindness left her vulnerable to bullying. We heard of her plight and made immediate arrangements to take her in. It took many months of gentle handling, careful feeding, nursing and veterinary care to restore Holly's physical and emotional health. She gave birth at Remus to a gorgeous sighted filly who we named Bracken. Holly and Bracken remain together and now live alongside another blind mare, Grace, and her baby mule, Jess. This unusual little herd is extremely popular with our sponsors and visitors.

Minstral is another very special mare. Black and with unusual white circles around her eyes, Minstral was abandoned in a field in Braintree, frightened, traumatised, underweight and with a severely deformed undercarriage. When we first rescued Minstral we felt that it was unlikely she would survive, but we were determined to give her the best chance. Our vets confirmed that Minstral's linea alba muscle had torn and caused a massive rupture, most likely

PHOTOS: SUE BURTON

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Sue with Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh, who is patron of Remus Horse Sanctuary

Among Sue's favourite equine residents are the unusually marked Minstral and the blind Holly (below right), both of whom have survived against the odds



the result of her endless pregnancies. Since her arrival Minstral has surprised us all, and with the right care she has slowly but surely come out of her shell. She loves people, but she is still scared of horses, most likely from over-breeding. Thankfully, her insides work remarkably well, even though they aren't where you would expect to see them, and she enjoys her own paddock where she feels safe and she has made great friends with our donkeys and sheep.

My horsey roots...

I had never seen a horse up close before I was 16. After my first rescue I had to learn fast. Thankfully, I was surrounded by knowledgeable people and I listened to everyone, read everything and absorbed every bit of information from my vets, farriers and any other experienced equine people I could spend time with. Most importantly, I learned from the animals.

I now have over four decades of experience behind me, and as well as the 74 horses in my care, I also have nine donkeys, two mules, 25 sheep, 12 goats and eight cats. Even so, I still learn something new every day.

"I had every intention of [being] a historical researcher, but I attended an animal rights event and the course of my life changed"

Keeping motivated...

When I walk out of the main building at the end of the day and listen to all the animals munching contentedly, knowing that they are all safe for rest of their lives, that's all I need.

A busy schedule...

I'm up at 5am and I arrive at Remus by 6am, when I check every animal. I have my daily one-to-one with my yard manager, Alex Brown, to discuss new arrivals and the special needs and continued care of any sickly animals, after which I sit in the office sorting through emails and taking calls. Throughout the day I oversee the running of the sanctuary, which involves organising my team of dedicated staff and volunteers, ordering our huge supply of feed, medications and bedding, and arranging visits from our dentist, vets, farriers and holistic practitioners, plus everything else in between.

Concerned members of the public reach out to us daily about animals they've seen in distress. Other calls might come from responsible owners who have hit hard times, either financially or through ill

THE BACK-UP PLAN

Apart from the original plan to be a historical researcher, there isn't one, and my aim is to continue to work hard to ensure that Remus is here for animals now and long into the future.

health, meaning that they can no longer give the animals in their care what they need. Following these calls, I plan welfare visits and liaise with the local police, MPs, vets and other welfare groups. With big or complex cases we all work together to secure a safe outcome for all.

While I'm on call 24 hours a day, I do try to head home at around 4pm. I usually continue to work on fund-raising, Remus social media and my emails when there while also keeping a close eye on the animals via CCTV. Then, if I'm lucky, I get some much-needed sleep.

The great juggle...

None of this would be achievable without my loyal, hardworking staff, and our kind, generous volunteers and supporters. Together we make a life-changing team.

Hobbies...

I still love history, visiting historic places and taking walks in the countryside, ideally followed by a pub lunch. These treats are wonderful, but rare. Remus is my life and I'm OK with that. 🐾