

# Remembering the Amersham rescue 10 years on

In January 2008 we joined forces with colleagues from fellow welfare organisations to rescue almost 100 horses and donkeys found living in horrific conditions at Spindle Farm in Amersham, Buckinghamshire.

**This was the worst case of neglect we had ever seen, and what followed was a lengthy court case to ensure the safety of the animals, here's what happened...**

## The Amersham rescue timeline...



4th January 2008

RSPCA inspectors first visit Spindle Farm, Amersham, following the report of a dead horse.

The site was littered with carcasses, including a trailer of bones. Eight horses were identified as in a state of severe suffering and four required euthanising on site. Fourteen horses are removed for urgent veterinary care.



5th - 7th January 2008

Return RSPCA visits revealed almost 100 horses and donkeys living on the site as well as over 30 carcasses of equines who had starved to death.



9th January 2008

Redwings staff arrive at Spindle Farm.

Redwings veterinary surgeon Nic de Brauwere finds the horses in such a severe state of neglect that he authorises their immediate removal on welfare grounds.

The multi-agency operation sees all 97 equines removed in less than 24 hours; 21 of those most in need, including pregnant mares and donkeys, are taken to Redwings' Norfolk headquarters for treatment.

8th January 2008

RSPCA contact Redwings for urgent help.



January - April 2008

Thousands of people contact Redwings to help by making a donation, and by sending messages of thanks and support.

April 2008

After a formal application by the farm's owner James Gray to have the animals returned, the Deputy District Judge decides to return some of the animals - including the donkeys and Shetland ponies - to the family, and to send the rest to public auction.

A petition organised by Redwings and the National Equine Welfare Council generates 19,764 signatures and the decision is overturned, with the judge granting a temporary 'stay' for the animals pending a High Court appeal from the owner.



4th June 2008

Donkey Leah gives birth to Cain. There are now six foals born since the rescue, two donkeys (Timothy and Cain) and four Miniature Shetlands (Tinkerbell, Doc, Peter Pan and Belle).

May 2010

The family appeal. James Gray, his wife and daughters all have their convictions upheld. James Junior is acquitted of two offences.

James Gray absconds court during his sentencing appeal and goes on the run. He is later arrested during a random road check. He receives an extra two months on his sentence, which begins on 31st May.

12th June 2009

James Gray and his family are sentenced.

James Gray receives a six month prison sentence, ordered to pay costs of £400,000 and given a lifetime ban from keeping horses. His son, James Junior, was served an 18-month supervision order and a 10-year ban on keeping horses. His wife Julie and two young daughters Jodie and Cordelia also received 10-year bans and community service orders.

December 2008 - May 2009

A tense and lengthy court case ensues.



August 2008

The first of 39 Amersham horses and ponies originally rehomed to other charities are brought into Redwings' care to help with their long-term needs, including Yogi and Marley who need specialist help with their handling.



November 2011

The first Amersham horses are rehomed through Redwings Guardianship Scheme, Aladdin and Ali Baba.

March 2013

James Gray loses an appeal to the High Court against the costs of his conviction.

January 2018

The 10-year anniversary of the Amersham rescue. Redwings took in 60 horses and donkeys with another six foals born at the Sanctuary, and today 58 of those still remain in our care - 46 of which are at the Sanctuary and 12 in Guardian homes.

It is a testament to the dedication of our veterinary, rehabilitation and care teams that so many of these survivors are still enjoying happy lives 10 years on.

**Can you help us care for our survivors for the next 10 years?**

**Head to page 18 to find out how.**

“ Amersham was a momentous rescue that not only left a mark on Redwings, but the wider public too. Never before had people's eyes been so opened to the suffering of equines in this country.

I remember meeting the horses and donkeys when they arrived at Redwings and it wasn't just their appalling physical state that shocked me, but their eerie quietness and sheer sadness. It wasn't until weeks later when we heard the donkeys sing for their breakfast for the first time that we knew we had turned a corner in their recovery and they finally felt safe. ”

*Lynn*

Lynn Cutress,  
Redwings Chief Executive