

# Farewell – Making the Right Decision

*My life and health I give to your safe keeping  
And when I am old  
And have served you well;  
Pray, Oh my master,  
Do not sell me to slavery and to a cruel end.  
But send me to my rest with tenderness and  
kindness  
And my gratitude will be your reward.*

*Anne Bullen*



## **Anne Bullen**

Anne Bullen was a professional illustrator of ponies and horses and a co-owner of Catherston Stud which bred Welsh, Exmoor and Dartmoor ponies during her ownership. Anne Bullen died in the 1960s but is remembered for her striking drawings and her co-authorship of the book *Darkie, the Life Story of a Pony*.

## **Introduction**

The majority of owners will one day be faced with the inevitable situation of needing to have a horse put down and when the time comes it can help to know exactly what options are available. It is important to prevent the horse suffering any unnecessary pain or distress and it is the owner's responsibility to ensure that they are fully informed about this.

In deciding how to proceed your veterinary surgeon is likely to be able to provide helpful advice. The owner needs to make the final decision, but the veterinary surgeon is able to offer expert advice as to whether the time has come for humane destruction. In these circumstances it is generally comforting to have the support of a professional opinion.

This booklet sets out the various questions which you need to consider in order to reach the right decisions about where, how and by whom the horse should be destroyed, and how to dispose of the body. In the interest of your horse's welfare, it is very important to give the issue some thought before distressing decisions are forced upon you.

## Making Difficult Decisions

Owning a horse or pony can be a highly rewarding experience giving many years of enjoyment and you may not like to think of the time when your companion is seriously injured, diseased or ill, or when you may be unable to provide it with a good quality of life in retirement. However, it is important to be prepared and think ahead, because in an emergency the horse may have to be destroyed immediately to prevent further suffering. It will be vital that you are able to make informed, rational decisions to protect the welfare of your horse.

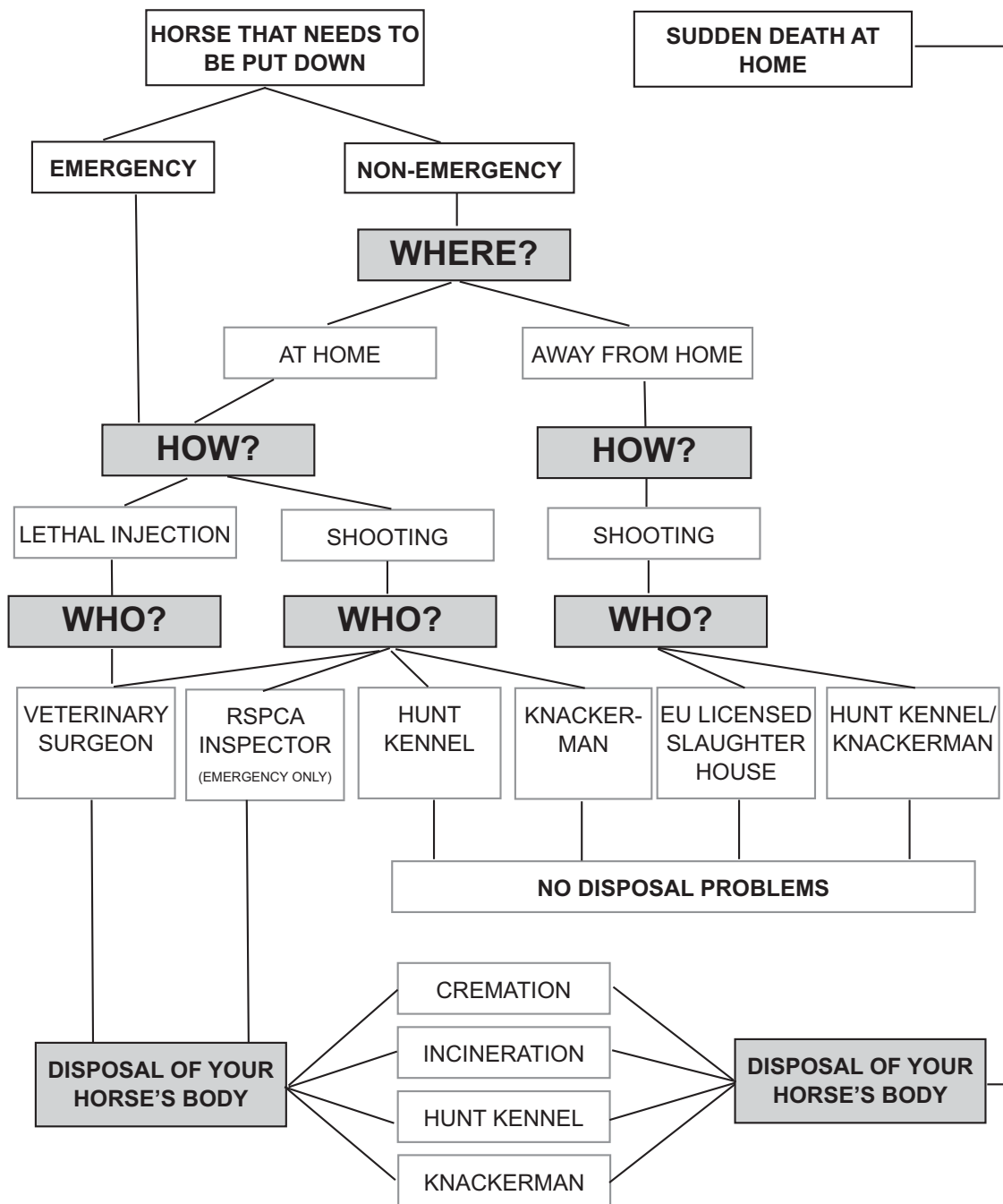


There may be occasions when decisions are taken out of your hands, such as an accident whilst out riding. However, it is still far better to plan ahead and be aware of all the options available, in order to minimise the distress caused by the death of your horse and the subsequent removal of its body.

There are four main questions that you will need to consider:

1. *Where should your horse be put down?*
2. *How should your horse be put down?*
3. *Who should carry out the task?*
4. *What arrangements are needed to dispose of the body?*

The flow diagram below suggests how you might arrive at the answers, and the subsequent sections deal with each question individually, helping you to make an informed choice based on your own particular circumstances.



See section on Burial on page 9

## Where – Choosing a Suitable Location

In an emergency such as an accident or sudden illness, your horse may need to be put down without delay. This could mean humane destruction on site or by your veterinary surgeon, an RSPCA Inspector, a knackerman or a hunt kennelman. If immediate destruction is needed, you may not be given the choice where to have your horse destroyed. In a non-emergency situation, you must think carefully whether it is best to have your horse destroyed at home or away from home.

### 1. At Home

If your horse is elderly, or has a chronic illness or recurring condition, rather than a sudden problem, you will have time to consider where you would prefer to have it destroyed. In most cases it is much kinder to keep the animal in familiar surroundings; your most important consideration must be what is best for the horse's welfare.



On a much more practical point, if you decide to have the horse destroyed at home and there is time to plan, make sure that access to the field or stable yard is good, that is, suitable for a collection service. Move other animals away from the place where the horse is to be destroyed and, if necessary, tell neighbours what is happening and when. This will ensure that the procedure is carried out quickly, quietly and easily.

### 2. Away from Home

If it is not possible to have your horse destroyed at home, you must decide if your horse is fit to travel and if so, that the distances involved are not too great. If you are not absolutely sure whether your horse is fit enough to travel you should seek the opinion of your veterinary surgeon. Remember, under the *Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 2006* it is illegal to transport an unfit animal.

If the horse is fit to travel you may be able to get your local knackerman or hunt kennelman to transport the horse to their premises. Alternatively, you may consider transportation to a local, licensed horse slaughterhouse. It is important to consider that horse slaughter is not commonplace within the UK meat industry and only five operational slaughterhouses in England are currently licensed to handle horses. This may well mean a long journey time for your horse which has the potential to compromise welfare. Whilst this may appear an unattractive option for some people, all UK horse slaughterhouses are governed by EU legislation which requires veterinary supervision to ensure high standards of welfare and hygiene.

### ***Horse Passports***

All horses now require a passport under the *Horse Passports (England) Regulations of 2004*. If an owner decides to use a licensed abattoir for slaughter and disposal, the horse's passport will need to accompany the animal to the slaughterhouse. If the horse is to be slaughtered for human consumption, the Meat Hygiene Service will need to see the horse's passport when it arrives at the abattoir premises and the horse will be subject to ante-mortem inspection. The reason for this is that passports detail all medicines administered throughout the horse's life and act as a record of any medicines not authorised for use in animals entering the food chain. To obtain a horse passport, contact one of DEFRA's authorised Passport Issuing Organisations listed on the DEFRA website.

**REMEMBER – YOUR HORSE'S WELFARE MUST COME FIRST**

## How – Selecting an Appropriate Method

You must consider whether your horse should receive a lethal injection or be shot. Your decisions will be governed by who is available to perform the task, the circumstances and whether the horse's welfare will be compromised if immediate destruction is delayed.

### **1. Lethal Injection**

Your veterinary surgeon is the only person to possess, and is qualified to practice the administration of, the drugs used for lethal injection. The horse may first be injected with a sedative, which is followed by a lethal overdose of anaesthetic drug intravenously. Depending on the method used, after losing consciousness, the horse may take a few minutes to die.

When an animal has been killed by lethal injection, residues of the euthanasing agents render the carcass unfit for human or pet consumption. Hunt kennels are likely to charge more for removal of injected carcasses.

### **2. Shooting**

There are two methods of shooting available; both can be performed by your vet, a knackerman, a hunt kennelman, a licensed slaughterman or, in an emergency, an RSPCA Inspector.

- A humane killer in the form of a 'free bullet' pistol is the most frequently used method. The muzzle of the gun is placed against the horse's forehead and a bullet is discharged into the brain, killing the horse immediately.
- A captive-bolt stunner can be used where a free bullet pistol would be impractical for reasons of safety, for example within an aircraft. The stunner fires a retractable bolt into the brain which irreversibly stuns the animal, rendering it immediately unconscious. A rapid death is then ensured by pithing (physical destruction of the brain by insertion of a cane or rod through the bolt-hole) or exsanguination (bleeding out by severing the major blood vessels of the neck and thorax). Both these procedures may be distressing to watch.

When a horse is shot by either method it falls immediately to the ground. If a free bullet is used there may be some involuntary movements of the legs but the body is generally quite still. There is likely to be bleeding from the bullet hole and nose.

Many owners are not sure whether they should remain with their horse when it is destroyed. Whatever your feelings are about this, it is important that you listen to the person who will perform the euthanasia. Bullets and drugs are very dangerous. Unless you are calm and clear about what you are doing you could unsettle your horse and make the whole process much more difficult. You should give the professional a chance to do his or her job properly and quickly, without having to worry about you, your feelings or your behaviour.

**REMEMBER – YOUR HORSE'S WELFARE MUST COME FIRST.**

## Who – Identifying a Skilled Person

The 'right' person to put down your horse will be a veterinary surgeon, knackerman, hunt kennelman or licensed horse slaughterman, who will all charge for their services. (In an emergency an RSPCA Inspector may also be called out). All are professionals and your final decision will depend upon where the horse is to be destroyed and the method chosen. If a lethal injection is to be used your vet is the only option.

### **1. Veterinary Surgeon**

The vet will be the first person called out if your horse is involved in an accident or emergency, to advise if destruction is necessary. In an emergency, either a lethal injection or shooting may be used to destroy the animal immediately and avoid any further suffering. In a less urgent situation you may still need to involve your vet, particularly if the horse is insured.

You should remember if asking your vet to destroy your horse, that it will be your responsibility to make arrangements for the removal of the carcass, although the vet should be able to help and advise you.

### **2. Knackerman**

Knackermen have long provided a disposal service whether horses have died in the field, had an accident, or are old or ill. The knackerman may be able to come out to your premises, often at short notice, and will also remove the body.

The knackermen are licensed by law. In order to locate an experienced knacker in your area you should talk to other horse owners and your vet. Alternatively you can contact your Local Authority or the Licensed Animal Slaughterers and Salvage Association (LASSA) (see Appendix).

### **3. Hunt Kennelman**

Hunt kennelmen may not always be licensed slaughtermen but they are likely to hold a firearms licence. They are often experienced in handling horses that need to be destroyed and their services are available to all, not just hunt members.

### **4. Licensed Horse Slaughterman**

The idea of sending a horse to a slaughterhouse is not one that appeals to many people, although this is an option which may be considered. In particular, it is often kinder to send an older horse directly to a specialist slaughterhouse.

The slaughterman must be specifically licensed to shoot horses and should be competent and sympathetic. After being shot, bled and dressed, the carcass will be inspected and, if it is passed, you can expect payment according to the carcass weight.

The options available when deciding who should destroy your horse are summarised in the table below:

<b>WHO?</b>	<b>TO CONSIDER</b>	<b>COST</b>
Veterinary Surgeon (shooting or lethal injection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- will come out in an emergency</li> <li>- prior appointments for old or terminally ill horses</li> <li>- problems of carcase disposal, you must make arrangements, although most vets will help</li> </ul>	Normal call out charge plus disposal costs
Knackerman (shooting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- usually available in an emergency</li> <li>- prior appointments for old or terminally ill horses</li> <li>- will remove and dispose of body</li> <li>- will charge for a diseased or injected carcase</li> </ul>	Will vary across the country
Hunt Kennelman (shooting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- usually available in an emergency</li> <li>- prior arrangements for old or terminally ill horses</li> <li>- will remove and dispose of body</li> <li>- may take an injected carcase at an additional cost</li> </ul>	Will vary across the country
Licensed Horse Slaughterman (shooting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>only an option if horse is fit to be transported</b></li> <li>- prior appointments</li> <li>- will make payment for carcasses which pass inspection</li> </ul>	Payment made by slaughterhouse, usually by prior arrangement, dependent on current horsemeat price. Can be donated to charity

### **Insurance**

All insurance companies require confirmation of the need for destruction. With a loss of use policy, the insured's position will be prejudiced if the horse is put down without the agreement of the insurer. With a humane destruction policy (All Risks Mortality Cover), insurers should be advised immediately, during office hours, or as soon as possible.

With either policy a veterinary certificate will be required and a post-mortem may also be needed.



## Arrangements for Disposal

In the event of a sudden death, or if your horse is put down at home by your vet, you may have to arrange for the disposal of your horse's body. It is a good idea to find out what facilities are available in your area for cremation or incineration and then consider the costs involved. If your horse was suffering from a disease, or was put down by lethal injection, this may limit your disposal options.

### **1. Knackerman/Hunt Kennelman**

The knackerman and hunt kennelman have traditionally provided a service to owners needing to destroy a horse and then have the body removed. The knackerman will usually provide a collection service, at a cost. The hunt kennel may take your horse's body free of charge, but a diseased or drug treated animal will incur a charge.

### **2. Animal Cremation**

Cremation for horses and ponies is a relatively new service and companies will accept and usually collect most bodies of horses which have been shot, received a lethal injection or died of disease.

Private cremation can be very expensive for large animals, often several hundred pounds. A sample of the ashes can be returned in a casket or may be scattered on a memorial ground. If considering cremation you must be realistic. There are a few places offering this service and, whilst most offer to collect the body, it may take some time depending on the distance to be travelled and it may be distressing to have the body of your horse remaining on your premises.

The Licensed Animal Slaughterers and Salvage Association (LASSA) now offer a nationwide service through its members (see Appendix). A LASSA member will pick up the carcass and have it delivered to a LASSA approved crematorium. The cost will vary according to where you are.

Alternatively, contact the Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria Helpline for information on private cremation or burial (see Appendix).

### **3. Incineration**

Compared with cremation, incineration provides a more commercial service and you will not be able to have your horse's ashes returned. Most carcasses will be accepted and, in general, incineration is likely to be cheaper than cremation. Costs can still vary, however, depending on the size of your horse. If collection is involved, charges depend on time, day and distance. Look under "Pet Services" in your telephone directory to locate your nearest incinerator.

### **4. Burial**

All horse carcasses must be disposed of in accordance with the European Union's Animal By-Product Regulations, 2002. Horses' carcasses must be delivered to/collected by, and disposed of at approved premises ie knackeryards, hunt kennels, incinerator operators or a licensed slaughterhouse, either under membership of the National Fallen Stock

Scheme, or by private arrangement. The private burial and burning of horse carcasses is banned due to the risk of disease spread via watercourses or air pollution (but see below). Your Animal Health Divisional Office will be able to advise you of approved operators located in your area and the Defra website also lists approved animal by-product premises.

Burial may be permitted under very specific conditions and with approval from your local authority and the Environment Agency. Under the *Animal By-Products Regulations of 2005*, competent local authorities have the power to grant burial of pet animals. In some European countries, horses are routinely farmed for human consumption, but in the UK they tend to be considered as companion animals. If your local authority grants you permission to bury a horse on your land they will provide guidance and advice regarding the conditions under which this will be possible. The burial site must be a prescribed distance from any watercourse to prevent leeching of infectious organisms and must not be accessible by carnivorous livestock.

### **5. The National Fallen Stock Scheme**

The National Fallen Stock Scheme provides its members with advice about complying with legislation when disposing of their horse's body. Horse owners can join this scheme and for an annual fee of £28 for horse businesses owning multiple animals, or £15 for owners with a single horse looking for a one off service, it will provide details of local fallen stock collectors and approved disposal premises plus a list of fixed prices for collection and disposal services.

The National Fallen Stock helpline can be contacted on **0845 054 8888**. Alternatively an application form can be completed, obtainable from the National Fallen Stock Company website, <http://www.nfsco.co.uk>.

### **Conclusions**

The death of their horse or pony is not a subject that most people like to think about. However, it is important to consider what you will do and plan ahead so that you are able to cope with any eventuality. Always remember that the horse depends on you to make rational, informed decisions, often in difficult circumstances and you must ensure that the horse's welfare is always put first.

**Send me to my rest with tenderness and kindness and my gratitude will be your reward.**



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### **Humane Slaughter Association**

The only registered charity committed to the welfare of animals in markets, during transport and at slaughter. The HSA takes a responsible approach to animal welfare, believing real, practical improvements can be achieved through education, research, development and training. If you would like further advice or information on how you can support this unique organisation please contact:

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