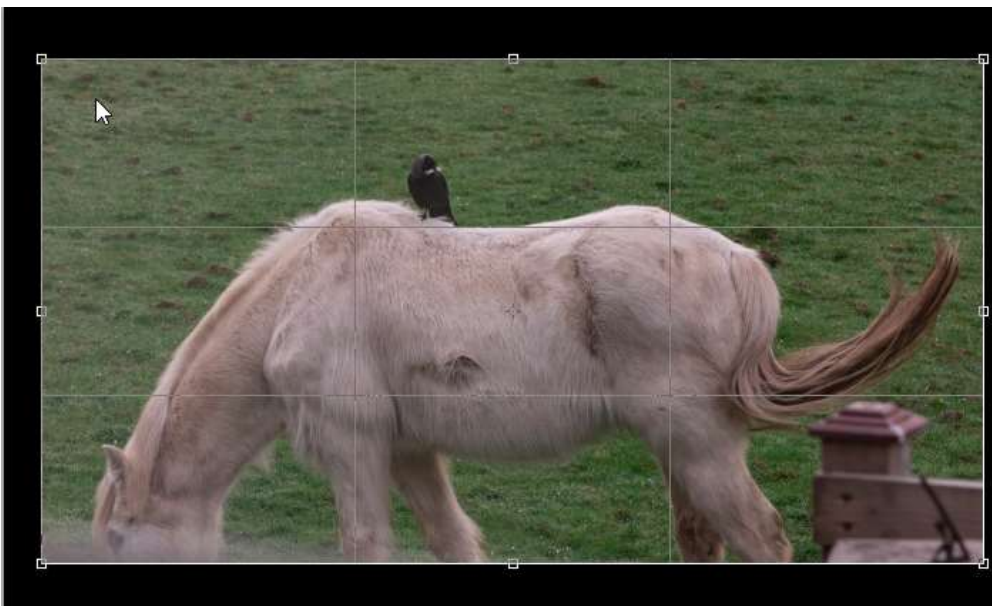# Picture perfect. 3 Brightness and Contrast

This is a shot that Nick Burton has kindly allowed me to play with.

Where do we start?
As always, take a few minutes to assess what can be done.
In this case, overall, the picture is a bit dull.

The fence in the foreground interferes with the image.

First things first – look at the *cropping*

Perhaps remove some of the grass and crop out that fence as much as possible without losing the horse's eye.

Now, to deal with some of the smudging that still remains. It's there because the fence was so much out of focus.

The *Clone Stamp* is the tool for the job here.

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That's better. The composition is a bit tighter and the fuzziness at the bottom has (almost) gone.

It is worth doing the cropping and cloning at the outset in order to be sure that they work satisfactorily to give a real improvement. Otherwise its to easy to spend ages working on other aspects, contrast, colour etc. only to find, eventually that the picture won't work anyway.

Now to deal with the contrast (tonal range) and the brightness (light or dark).

There are several possibilities here, listed under "**Image>Adjustm**ents (Elements **Enhance>Adjust Lighting**). These are also available as *adjustment layers* (my preferred option)
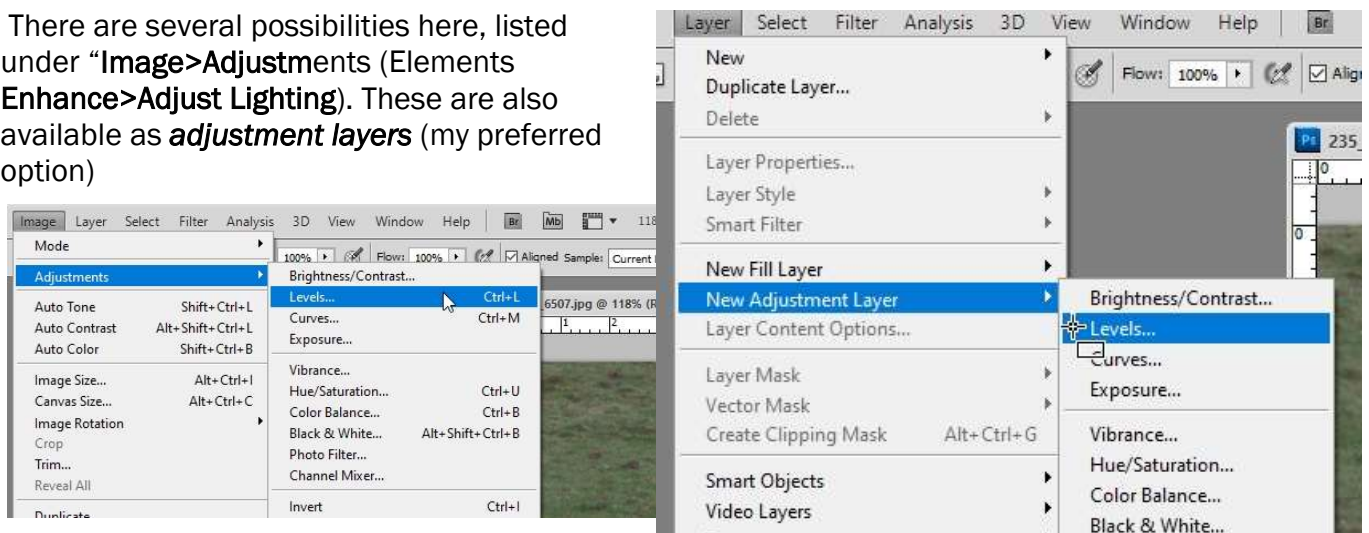

The 'Brightness/Contrast' operation is pretty crude and allows little control. Avoid that one if possible. Here, we're going to use the much more useful 'Levels'.

The **Levels** dialogue box will open and show the a **histogram**, which represents the distribution of pixels from black on the left to white on the right. We can see

that this picture has no white and few very light pixels and not many black or very dark ones either.
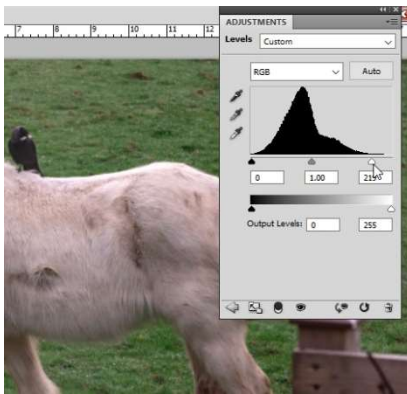
Drag the left slider to the point where the first pixels have registered, and similarly use the right slider to achieve the amount of contrast you want.
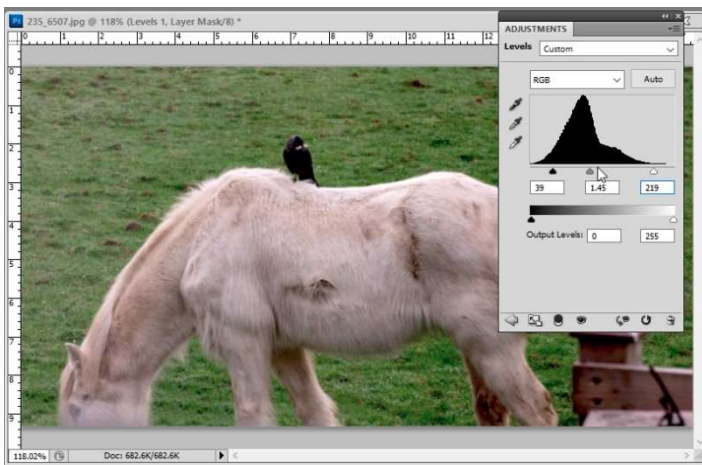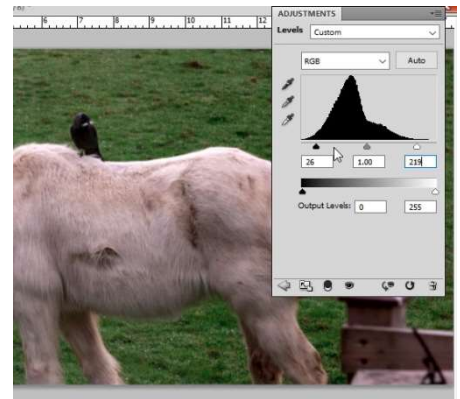
Now moving the centre slider left or right will brighten or darken the whole picture.

The golden rule when moving sliders is not to be too cautious – keep moving them until you've clearly gone too far and then pull them back a bit.

So, job done ………

Before   After

…………. well almost.

There is still a rather fuzzy area around the horse's eyes.
But we will sort that out next time when we look at changing selected parts of a picture.