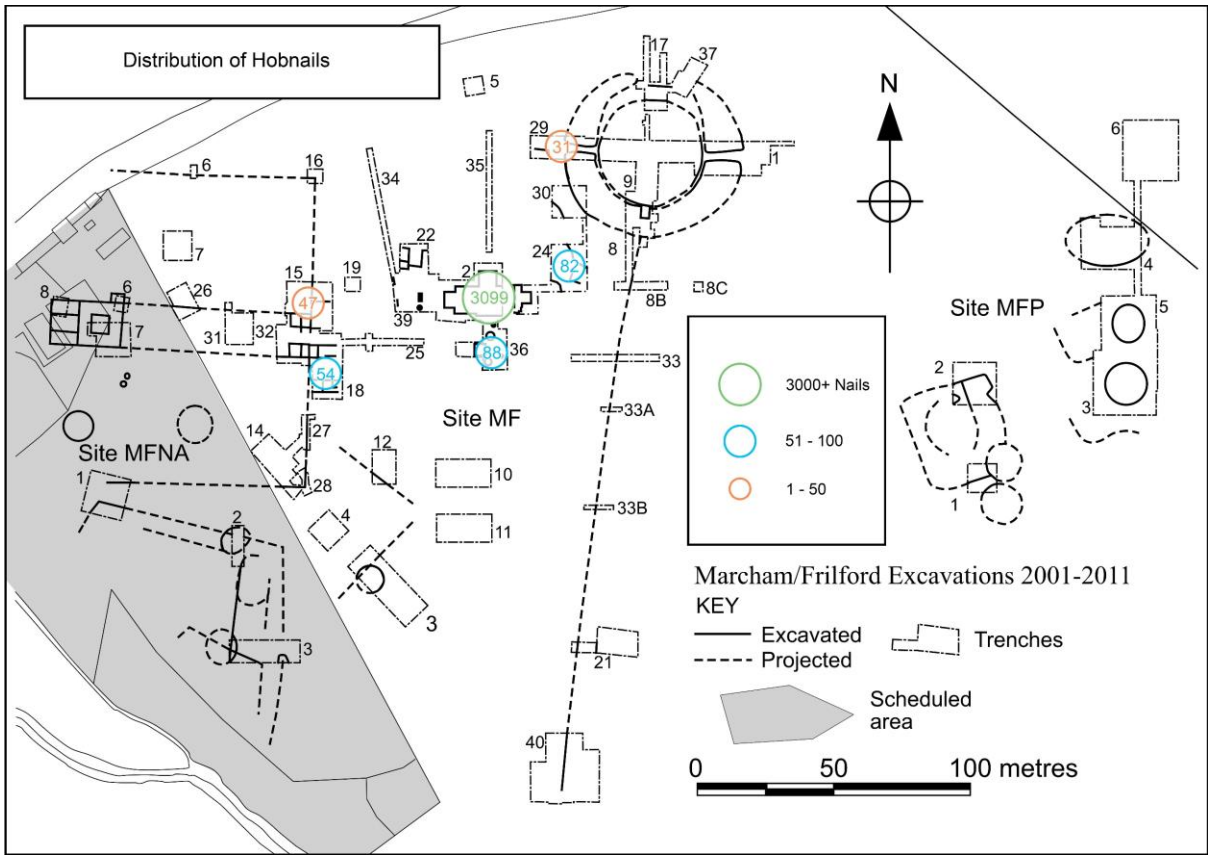
Roman nails

Sheila Raven

Iron Hobnails

This category of iron nail, used on hobnail boots and shoes, is obviously very different in function from the other categories of nail found on the site which are used in the construction of buildings and in the construction and decoration of furniture and other wooden objects. The latter are discussed in the section below. Also, on a religious site like ours, iron hobnails can have a function and significance beyond their original purpose of making the soles of shoes longer lasting. This will be discussed in respect of the site at Marcham and other Roman temple sites like Uley (A. Woodward and P. Leach, 1993).



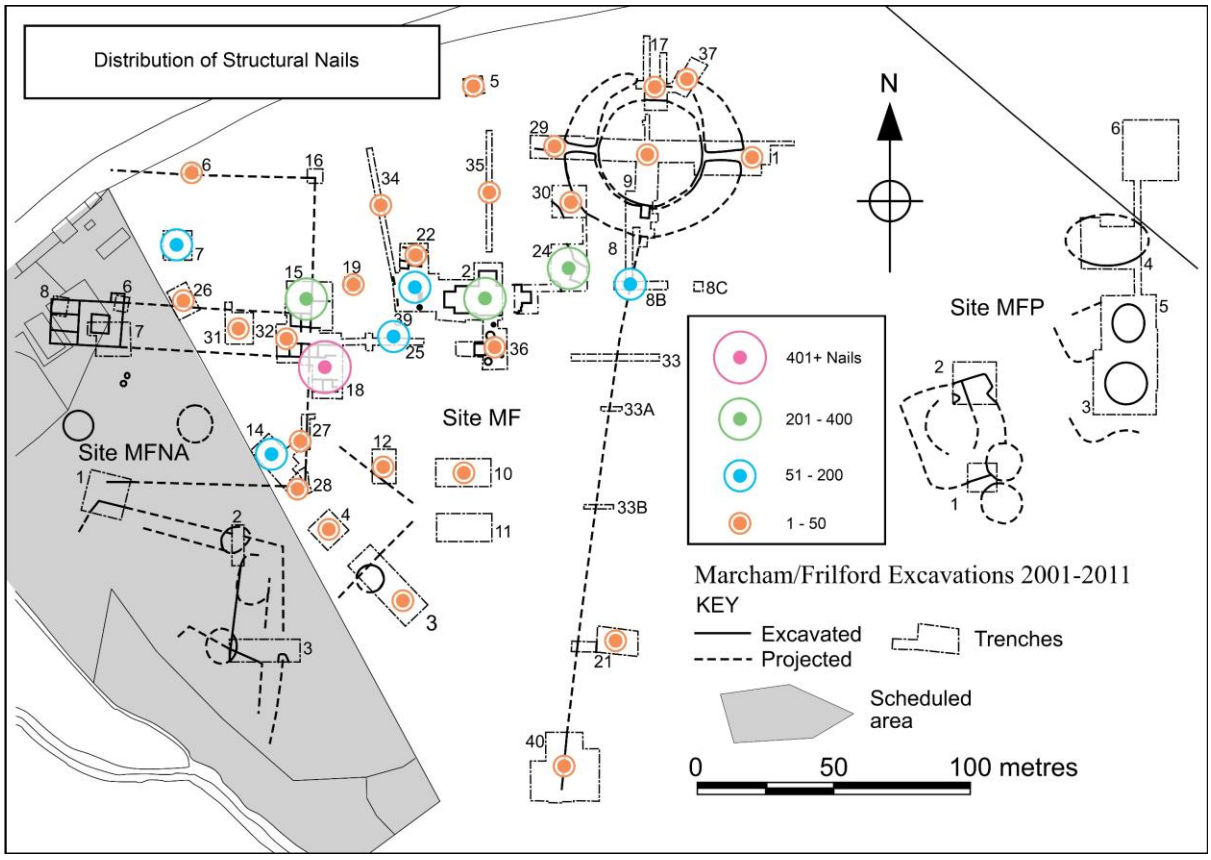
Approximately 3,642 hobnails are recorded from the Marcham site and of those, an astonishing 3,099 (over 85% of the total) were found in one area only, Trench 2 and its large rectangular building. All of these hobnails came from trenches in the MF zone, no hobnails were found in the MFNA or MFP trenches. The remaining 543 iron hobnails were scattered across a number of trenches but with higher numbers in Trench 36 (88x nails), Trench 24 (82x nails), Trench 18 (54x nails) and to a lesser extent also trenches 8, 15, 25 and 29. All of these hobnails are catalogued in the MF Hobnail Spreadsheet.

The focus of hobnails in the Trench 2 building and the Trench 36 shrine and ritual shaft are of particular significance. As discussed in the Trench 2 narrative on this website, there is a strong argument for the Trench 2 building with its high numbers of coins, hobnails and sheep/goat bones being linked to Mercury worship. Mercury as the god of travel and commerce and with his associated animals like sheep, has been linked to offerings of coin for

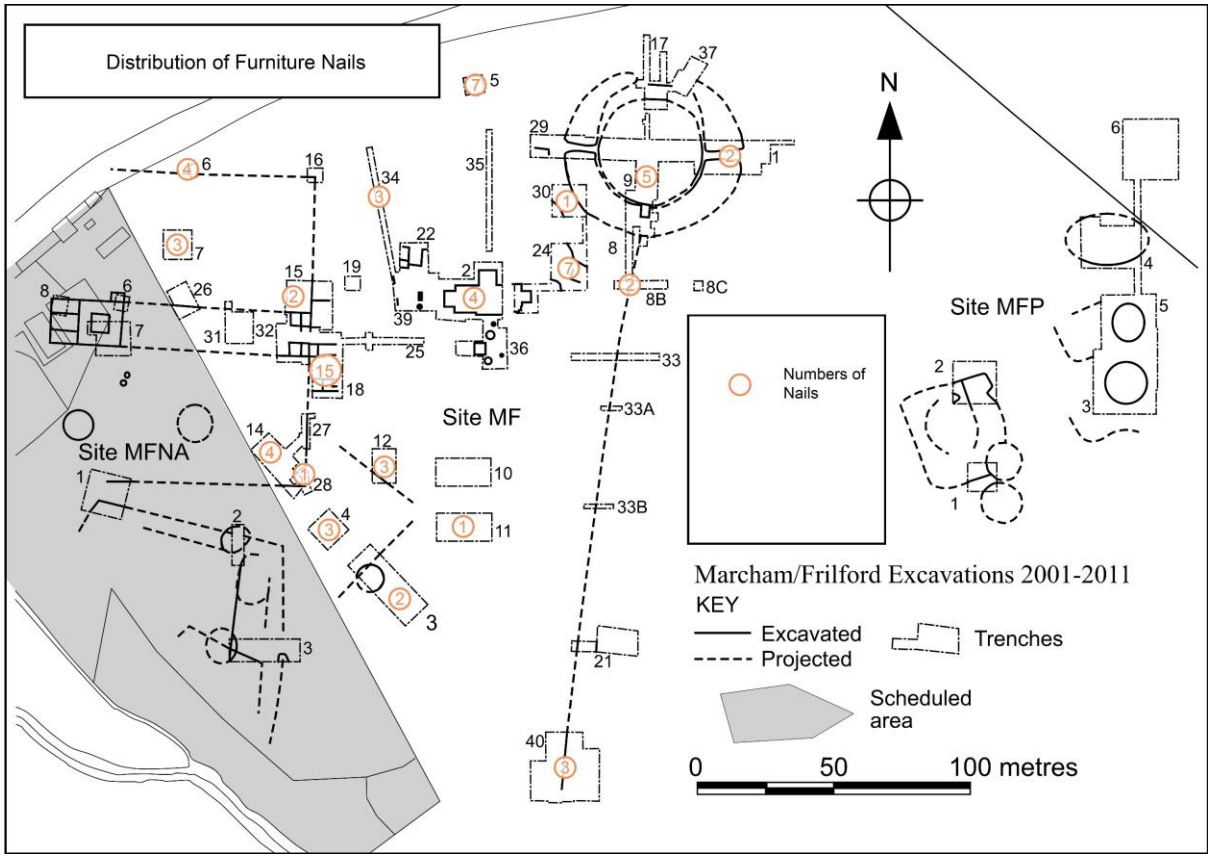
trade, and shoe/sandal brooches and shoe hobnails for travel amongst other things. The site at Uley, Gloucs., which had altars to Mercury and other strong indicators of the god's worship there, found clusters of hobnails in certain areas and the excavators "raised the question of whether boots and shoes might have functioned as votive offerings in connection with the cult of Mercury in his guise as messenger and traveller" (A. Woodward and P. Leach, 1993, p.184). The huge concentration of hobnails in this building, which are not common across the rest of the site at all, supports this contention of Mercury worship. Furthermore, another foci for hobnails (though admittedly much smaller) in nearby Trench 36 is in the area of a small stone shrine and ritual shaft full of coin offerings, is also probably linked to Mercury worship. Looking at two more of the areas producing decent quantities of hobnails, namely Trench 24 and Trench 8, these are both in fairly close proximity to Trench 2, so there may be some plough spread from the Trench 2 deposits. Equally the presence of the hobnails in these areas is probably linked to the high numbers of other potential votive offerings like brooches and hairpins etc in this part of the site, suggesting that just as in Trench 2 and Trench 36, iron hobnails may well have been deposited as votive offerings. The same may be true of their deposition in smaller numbers in the trenches around the temenos entrance and in Trench 29 in the Arena western entrance but with less statistical support.

Iron building nails, furniture nails, and rivet/studs

The excavations at Marcham also produced a total number of 3,406x fragments of Roman iron nails of all the above non hobnail types from the MF zone. Only 10x nails or nail stems were found in the MFNA zone, all in the areas close to the Romano-Celtic temple. No nails were found in the largely prehistoric MFP zone.



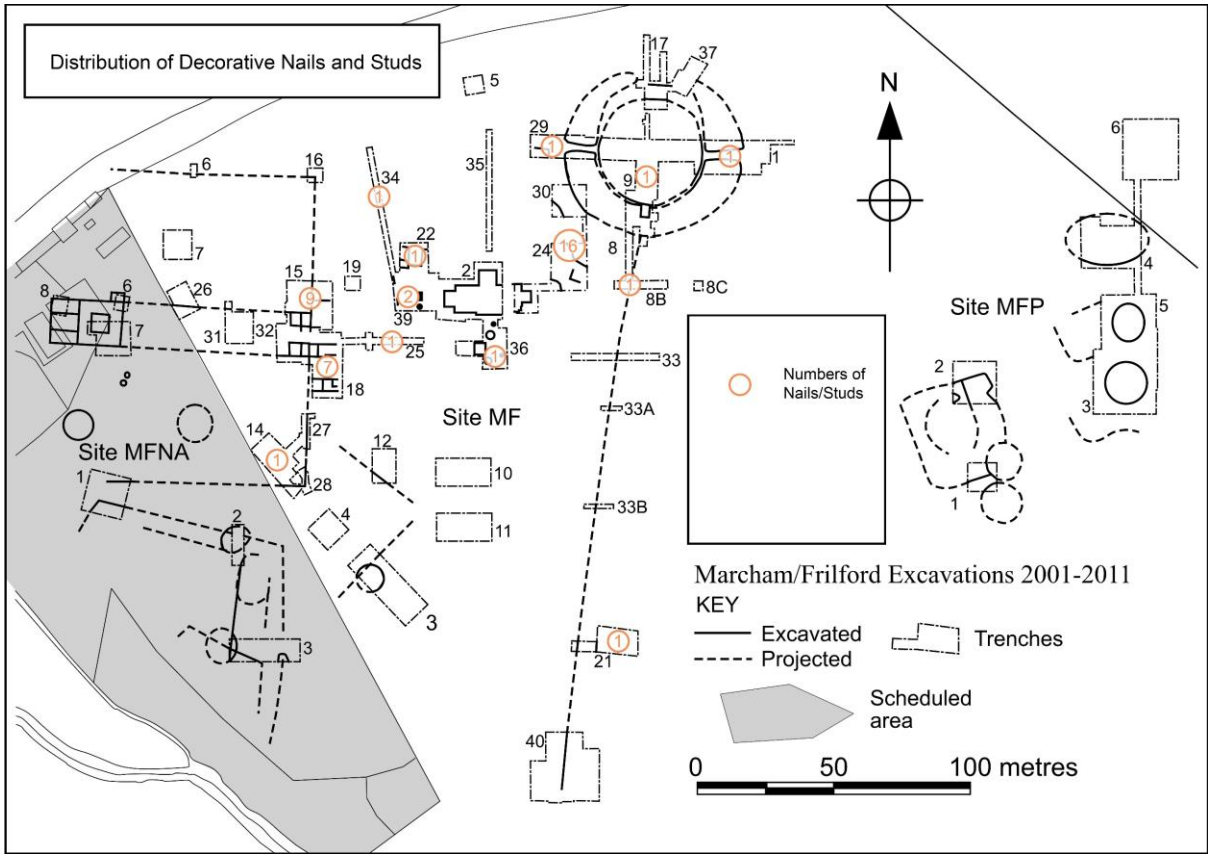
The discussion here is dealing with the large assemblage from the MF zone trenches. Counting only fragments recognisable from surviving nail heads, there are a minimum number of 2,596 nails in this assemblage (the 'minimal nail group'), plus c. 810 loose fragments of nail stem. The assemblage includes structural or building nails of two types (Types 1A & 1B); furniture nails of three types (Types 2, 3 and 4); decorative or large-headed rivets/studs of two types (Types 7 & 8); and finally, 2x unusual nails which may be rare masonry nails (Type 6). All of these nails are catalogued in the MF and MFNA Nail Spreadsheets together with descriptions of the Types.



As to be expected, the most common type of nail in this assemblage were the structural nails, Types 1A and 1B. There were 2,471 nails of this type across the MF trenches. All of these would most likely have been used in holding together structural timbers in buildings of various types. This makes up c. 95% of the whole 'minimum nail group'. The remaining 5% of the minimal nail group is made up firstly of 70x purely functional furniture nails, which differ from building construction nails, by their smaller size and by having more unobtrusive small T-shaped, L-shaped or triangular-shaped heads which are designed to be largely invisible on the surface. Secondly there are 52x decorative rivets or studs used on wooden boxes or leather objects and perhaps some furniture, and finally 2x rare round profile masonry nails. See Table 1 below.

Looking at the spatial distribution of different types of nail, there are some definite concentrations. For the building nail group, the highest numbers are found in Trench 18 (679x), Trench 24 (379x), Trench 2 (279x), and Trench 15 (254x). Some of these are understandable as they coincide with the location of sizeable Roman buildings. So, both Trench18 and 15 are in the area of a number of buildings at the key location of the temenos

entrance. Likewise, Trench 2 is the location of the largest Roman building on site, a rectangular structure which may have been a Mercury shrine. However, the large number of construction nails in Trench 24, which has only revealed a very small potential shrine structure, is more of a surprise.



It has become clear in the analysis of the incidence of certain small finds, that the area of Trench 24 had some ritual significance, despite the smallness of the building there, so the presence of large numbers of construction nails there may be linked in some way. Turning next to the few furniture construction nails found on the site, the largest clusters of those are also in Trench 18 (12x), and Trench 24 (7x) and also in Trench 5 (7x). Again, the finding of furniture nails in Trench 18, where some kind of service or hospitality building or buildings were housed is perhaps to be expected. Their occurrence in Trench 5, which revealed no structures is a puzzle, and once again a focus in Trench 24 points to it being an area of possible importance. Our final category of iron nail, the decorative large iron rivets or studs used to decorate wooden or leather objects, only occurs in very small numbers and the only clusters of those seems to be in Trench 15 and 24, once again either in the general area of the temenos entrance or in the finds rich central part of the site just to the south of the Arena. It is worth considering that though these more decorative nails may have simply fallen off their original objects in these area, they might also have been used as votive offerings. The preceding report on the hobnails makes it clear that hobnails at least may well have been used as votive offerings on various Roman temple sites.

MARCHAM - Distribution of Nail Groups across the MF zone

Trench	Types 1A & 1B	Types 2,3 & 4	Type 6	Types 7 & 8	
	Building	Furniture	Masonry	Deco.	Trench features
MF1	41	2		2	Arena entrance, to east
MF2	279	5	1		Large rectangular building or shrine
MF3	22	2			
MF4	6	3			
MF5	25	7			
MF6	39	4			
MF7	152	3			Romano-Celtic shrine inside Temenos
MF8	55	2		1	
MF9	43	5		1	Arena with central drain
MF10	2				
MF12	46	3			
MF14	72	4			Inside Temenos enclosure, large pit
MF15	254	2		10	Temenos entrance
MF17	11	1			Arena, northern section
MF18	679	12		8	Temenos entrance and buildings
MF19	3				
MF21	15			1	
MF22	46			1	Large workshop structure
MF23	10			1	
MF24	379	7		19	Small shrine
MF25	60			1	Path from temenos to shrine
MF26	13				
MF27	3			1	
MF28	5	1			
MF29	27			1	Building in west entrance to Arena
MF30	22	1			
MF31	14				Temenos
MF32	18				Temenos path and entrance area
MF34	29	3		1	
MF35	12				
MF36	8			1	Mercury shrine and ritual coin shaft
MF37	2				Arena Bank
MF39	53			2	
MF40	26	3	1		End of drain by river
TOTAL	2471	70	2	51	