Iron small finds

Sheila Raven

The Marcham iron small finds assemblage, excluding definite iron slag finds and all types of nail (see Roman Nail Report on this website), consists of a total of 869 finds across all three zones of the site. The largest proportion of this comes from the MF zone (*c.*778 finds); followed by the MFP zone (51 finds); and lastly the MFNA zone (40 finds). This total however includes various fragments of probable nail/bolts that cannot be securely defined as nail fragments. Over 50% of the MF iron assemblage was x-rayed, which allowed for some more precise identifications. However, the categorization of the various iron finds, apart from a few more complete and undamaged objects like the brooches, cannot be seen as definitive simply because of the corroded and fragmentary nature of most of the finds. The figures and numbers described below for each of the main type groups are general but informed suggestions only. Precise calculations of specific types of objects are impossible when dealing with so many corroded and incomplete objects.

MF Zone

Included in the large MF iron assemblage of 778 items, aside from the definite nails that are listed separately and have their own report, there are many more uncertain shaft fragments, which are also probably nail, bolt, or hobnail fragments as well as a few later horse-shoe nail fragments. These constitute some 62 finds which are all possible nails shafts of some type. If we exclude these then the number of definite 'non-nail' fragments and objects comes down to *c.* 716 finds or so. In terms of the distribution of the MF iron assemblage across the whole site, the pattern is very different from that of the copper-alloy assemblage. For the copper-alloy MF assemblage, Trenches 24 and 8b held a very large proportion of the whole assemblage, followed in a smaller way by Trenches 2 and 18. Looking at the distribution of the MF iron assemblage, it is Trenches 2 (136) and 18 (121) that produced the most quantity, followed by Trenches 15 (62) and 24 (55). Figure 1 shows the comparative data on all trench assemblages which contained at least twenty or more iron small finds. Seventeen other MF trenches also produced some iron finds but only in very small numbers ranging from one to16.

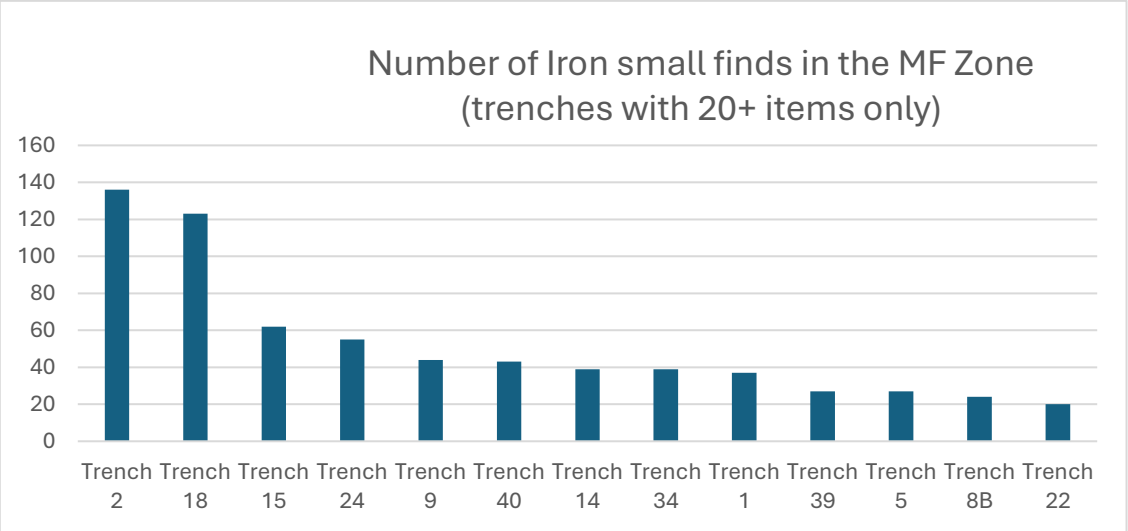


Figure 1. The distribution of Iron small finds in MF trenches

The high numbers of iron small finds in Trench 18 and Trench 15, both in the area around the temenos entrance, might suggest the sale of smaller iron objects as religious offerings to temple visitors. The area around Roman temple precinct entrances have long been seen as the place where stalls were often set up to supply pilgrims with a numbers of goods. The reasons for the concentration of iron small finds in the large rectangular shrine building in Trench 2 is also probably indicative of the deposition of offerings, but the situation is more complex in this case as this building burnt down and was repurposed in some way soon after. It is possible that at some point in its post-fire phase, this reduced structure was used as a sort of sacred dumping ground for votive material cleared away from various shrines on the site. The extremely high number of hobnails found in this building certainly suggests this (see Roman Nail Report, this website). Trench 24 does have high numbers of copper-alloy finds as well as iron finds, so clearly this was a focus for votive deposition, but because of its proximity to the Trench 2 building, there may also have been some ploughing activity spread from the Trench 2 area.

If we discount the already mentioned probable nail or bolt shaft fragments, we can break down the remaining 716 iron small finds into groups. As with many Roman iron assemblages, the bulk of the items (*c.* 473 items) fall into the 'General Fragments' category, which is made of up of sheet/plate fragments, pin/wire fragments, rod or bar fragments and flat strip fragments. The second largest category (*c.* 156 finds) are objects (both partial or near complete), which can be identified as 'Fittings', whether domestic or more industrial/agricultural. This category can be broken down further into structural or other 'Large Fittings' (such as large loop-headed spikes, door studs, door hinges, large washers and large staples or dogs, at *c.* 26 finds) and 'Smaller Fittings' (such as smaller cleats, link rings of various sizes, hooks, washers, collars, small studs and rivets, at *c.* 130 finds). There are at least 45 cleats or 'dog' clamps in this group, the larger ones used in wooden building construction or furniture and the smaller probably on leather objects.

The third largest category are those objects which fall into the category of 'Functional Equipment' at *c.* 47 finds. This category includes possible and probable tool fragments (*c.* 26 finds), knife fragments (*c.* 16 finds), ox-goads (three finds) and styli fragments (*c*. 6 finds). Identifying iron tools is very difficult as many have lost their working ends and their original handles and there may be many more tool fragments that are simply unrecognisable.

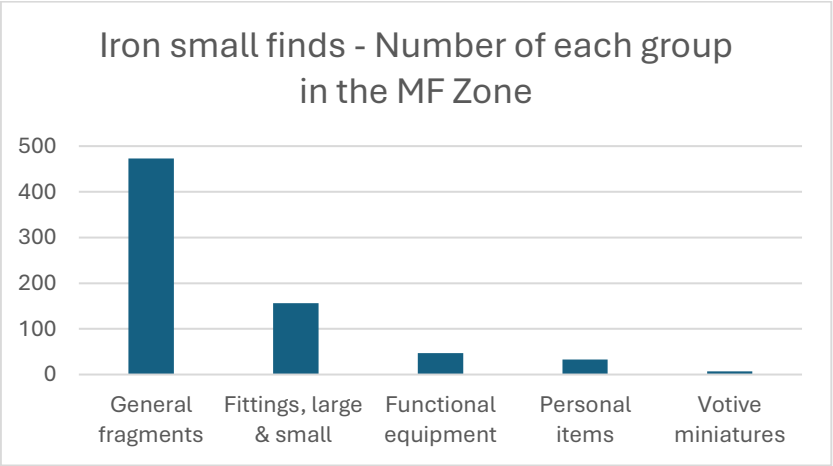


Figure 2. The range and number of each type group in MF zone

A fourth group encompasses a very small number of objects (*c.* 33) that can be classified as 'Personal Items' such as iron jewellery (brooches, finger rings, dress/hair pins, and bracelets) and iron personal equipment (dress accessories like buckles, lace ends, and grooming implements such as tweezers). This category includes one surprising post-medieval find, namely an articulated purse bar (SF1656, context 18026), which would have been attached to a person's belt and had a leather pouch attached. This 16th or 17th century object must have been accidently dropped in the field and testifies to the fact that occasional post-medieval metalwork is included in the metalwork assemblage. Eleven iron brooch fragments were found in the MF zone, and these are fully catalogued in the Brooch Report on this website. Most of these are fragmentary and difficult to define precisely. However, most seem to be simple sprung bow brooches of some type, and it is likely many of these are the late Iron Age/Early Roman Nauheim-derivative brooch type. One example (SF5791 from Trench 14) is a definite La Tene1 'Swallowcliffe' native type dated to the Middle Iron Age. The areas where these iron brooches were found are focused either in the area just inside the temenos or at its entrance (Trenches 18 and 14) or the votive-rich central area of the site (trenches 8B and 24). There are *c.* eight iron finger rings (SF6, SF1458, SF1640, SF4291, SF4304, SF4695, SF5465 and SF5970) - most too corroded to be certain of their original form but many seem to have central bezels. Three of these derive from Trench 8B, and then one each from Trenches 9, 15, 24 and 26 and 39. There is also one possible iron bracelet fragment (SF188) and three decorative iron dress/hair pins. One of these pins, a fragment of swan neck or ring-headed pin (SF5194 from context 36028), is an Iron Age type dated to either the early or mid-Iron Age and more often found in copper alloy. The two other pins are much simpler, one with a squarish head (SF1498) and the other (SF3736) with a more globular head. Both of these are more likely to be Roman in date. It is worth also mentioning here that some of the 65 or so small pin or wire fragments may also have originally derived from decorative pins or brooch pins, but they are too fragmentary to support any specific identification. The potential 'personal items' group also includes four possible buckle fragments and one lace end, Finally, there are five fragmentary grooming implements, which includes three tweezer fragments.

The last and smallest category is that of 'Votive Miniatures'. In this category there are potentially seven finds (SF193, SF2653, SF2704, SF3796, SF4397, SF4643, SF4764). Because of the corrosive state of most of the iron assemblage, definitive identifications of these small items are not possible and there may well be more fragments of iron votive miniatures that are simply not identifiable at all. The potential votive items were not focused in any specific area of the site. Just as with the copper-alloy assemblage these 'custom-made' votive objects are very scarce at Marcham. The assumption is that existing small items, not specifically made for votive deposition, were the most common types of offerings at the temple site. Most of these potential specially made iron votive items are miniatures of tool or weapons. One of these, SF3796 from context 15083, appears to be a miniature curved knife or sickle blade with a thin tang attached. It measures *c.* 62mm long with a maximum blade width of *c.* 8mm. Such an offering may well be linked to prayers for agricultural prosperity. Another unusual miniature item is SF4397 from context 22029, which seems to be a tiny version of an iron penannular brooch. The diameter is only *c.* 13mm and there still seems to be a corroded pin attached.

In terms of the dating of the iron MF assemblage, because of the trenches and the areas in which most were found, it is probable that most are Roman in date. Certainly, the more

recognisable and diagnostic pieces like the finger rings, the styli, the grooming implements, the votive miniatures, and the cleats are clearly Roman types of artefact. Even the iron brooches, though not precisely dateable because of their common sprung form and their corroded condition, are probably Late Iron Age or Early Roman in date. However, the many undiagnostic and more fragmentary and corroded pieces are impossible to date.

MFNA Zone

Of the six trenches in the MFNA zone only three are situated over the Romano-Celtic temple area and these are very small, and the remainder are situated over prehistoric features. Therefore, it is not surprising that only 40 iron items were found in this area. Of these, at least 11 items are probably fragmentary nail/bolt fragments, which were too fragmentary to be identified as such in the first stage of nail cataloguing (see Roman Nail report on this Website). Therefore, the total of 'non nail' iron finds from this zone was only *c* 29. Only four of the six trenches produced any 'non slag' and 'non nail' iron small finds, namely Trenches 1, 2, 6, and 7. In quantity order, Trench 7 produced 15 iron small finds; Trench 6 produced eight iron small finds; Trench 1 produced five iron small finds; and finally, Trench 2 produced only one iron find. So, the largest percentage of iron small finds were found in Trenches 6 and 7, which were in the immediate vicinity of the temple building within the temenos. However, five of the iron finds in Trench 7 were from topsoil and were mostly undiagnostic finds like rod and link fragments so could be post-med/modern in date as easily as Roman.

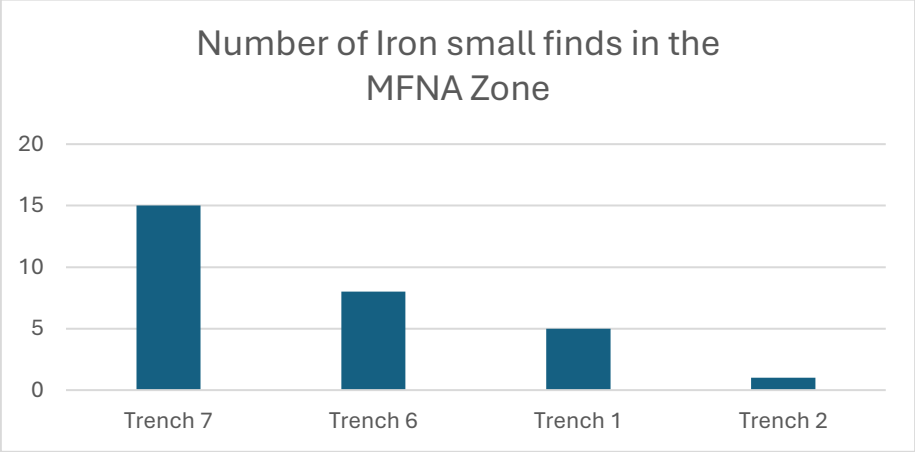


Figure 3. The distribution of Iron small finds in MFNA trenches

In this small group of iron small finds *c.* two thirds (28 finds) fall into the unidentifiable fragments and possible fittings group. This is made up of sheet fragments, rod or wire fragments of varying thicknesses, washers, link rings, and other possible fitting fragments. The reminder (12 objects) consists of three probable knife or blade fragments, four cleat/staple fragments, two possible tool fragments, one large door hinge fragment (from topsoil, so could be non-Roman) and two pin/wire fragments that may or may not be part of jewellery items. There were no definite items of 'personal equipment' like jewellery, dress accessories, or grooming items etc. Many of the iron finds in this zone probably belong to the Roman period, but very few are complete or diagnostic enough to be dated by their style. As nine of the non-nail items are from topsoil contexts some of these may be post-medieval or modern in date.

MFP Zone

The six trenches in the MFP zone produced 46 iron small finds. This is not a large number but most of these trenches contained largely prehistoric features, although the upper layers did contain some Roman material as well. Trenches 2 (14 finds), 3 (15 finds) and 4 (11 finds) produced the majority of the iron small finds. Trenches 1, 5 and 6 only produced two iron small finds in each trench. As with the two other Marcham zones, the majority of items in this assemblage consists of unidentifiable fragments of sheet/plate, bar/rods, strips etc. There was also a handful of fragmentary fittings such as a strap hinge and possible knife fragments (four), plus 'pin/wire' fragments (four) which could represent anything from jewellery pins and grooming implements to needles etc. The most interesting iron small finds from this zone were the seven jewellery items. These were a mix of Iron Age and Roman pieces. These include a single swan neck Iron Age dress pin fragment (SF226 from context 3114); four possible brooch fragments (SF28, SF47, SF312, and SF214, and two possible iron finger ring fragments (SF118, context 2269 and SF215, context 3133). The four brooch finds are fragments only but most seem to be of the sprung bow type and may be LIA/ERoman in date. The single penannular brooch fragment is very corroded and may be Iron Age or Roman, and the two possible iron finger ring fragments are more likely to be Roman in date. The only definite Iron Age jewellery find in this zone is the swan neck pin SF 3114, which is probably mid Iron Age.

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