

# Horseshoes

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## Introduction

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Horseshoes are worthy of study because of the light they shed on metalling of roads and extent of horse transport. Changes in their form and approach to their attachment can, in a broad sense, illuminate changes in horse stature. Some of the horseshoes recorded also have the potential to shine a sidelight on [animal care](#) (Clark 2004, 82).

This guide follows [Clark \(2004\)](#). This itself supersedes the some of the content, but, most importantly, the classification terms used in his earlier FRG Datasheet 4 ([Clark 1986](#)); for convenience both are mentioned here. Of course many metal-detected examples or casual finds are likely to be incomplete, and so will be very difficult to date and classify even with the use of X-rays.

## PAS object type(s) to be used

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Use HORSESHOE

Separate object type terms exist for Roman 'shoes' ([HIPPOSANDAL](#)), and shoes specifically for donkeys ([DONKEY SHOE](#)) or oxen ([OX SHOE](#)). [SHOEING NAIL](#) also exists for recording nails found separately.

## PAS object classifications to be used

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Where possible, for late early-medieval and medieval horseshoes, Clark's ([2004](#)) type can be added to the Classification field in the following form: *Clark type 2B*

## Terms to use in the description

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Horseshoes are formed of an iron plate with the *toe* at one end at the *heel* at the opposite end (see figure). They were fixed to the hoof using 'clenched' *nails*, which were set in circular or rectangular *nail-holes* located in the *branches* and generally avoiding the *toe*. Medieval *nails* of the *fiddle-key* form have large semicircular *heads*. Often the *nail-head* protruded for grip but was protected from undue wear by either separate *countersinkings*, in the late early-medieval and medieval period, or by a *fuller* (a more continuous groove near the edge), in

the post-medieval period. Further grip could be provided by *calkins*, projections at the *heel*, which could be formed by thickening or bending the *heel* (for different forms of *calkin* see [Clark 1986](#), 1; fig. 2; [2004](#), 81; fig. 59). The *toe-clip* (not shown) is a post-medieval trait.



Horseshoe terminology: ground surface shown. Images – left, medieval horseshoe (BH-AAFF1B); right, post-medieval horseshoe (HAMP-D34F92). Copyrights: The Portable Antiquities Scheme; Winchester Museums Service; CC-BY-SA licence)

Useful measurements to take (where possible) are: **Length** – taken perpendicularly *toe* to midpoint between *heels*; **width** – taken at the widest point perpendicular to the length; **thickness** – for thoroughness specify where this is taken; the **web** – the width of the *branch*, conventionally taken between the last two *nail-holes* before the *toe* (see figure) so as to avoid any expansions (caused primarily when making *countersinkings*), or state if taken at the widest point of the bar present; **weight**.

## Date

Nailed horseshoes are first attested in the 9th and 10th centuries ([Clark 2004](#), 94), and have been used to the present day.

## Early-medieval horseshoes

One of the earliest attested nailed horseshoes was found in Winchester in a late 9th-century context ([Clark 2004](#), 94). It may be classified as Clark **type 1** (formerly ‘Pre-Conquest’), a form otherwise documented from contexts from the 10th century to the 12th century ([Clark 2004](#), 94-95). These horseshoes are thin (2-3 mm), have fairly wide webs, very few have calkins, and the nail-holes are circular within rectangular countersinkings, usually three within each *branch* ([Clark 2004](#), 114; fig. 80 for illustrated examples).



Late early-medieval to medieval horseshoe of Clark type 1 (LON-D0A687). Copyright: The Portable Antiquities Scheme; CC-BY licence)

## Medieval horseshoes

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Horseshoes of Clark type 1, discussed above, persisted into the medieval period.

Clark's **type 2** (sub-divided into 2A and 2B, formerly 'Norman') is dated to the late 11<sup>th</sup> to late 13<sup>th</sup> century. They have thicker (5+ mm), narrower webs than type 1, and the countersinking has caused a **wavy** or 'lobate' edge (Clark 2004, 115-116; figs 80, 81 for illustrated examples). The sub-types are distinguished by nail-holes within the **countersinking**, and this seems to have a chronological significance: in **type 2A** they are circular (late-11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century); in **type 2B** they are rectangular (mid-12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century). About 90% of this type have calkins. Both sub-types tend to have three nails in each branch, though there are exceptions. Nails generally have a **'fiddle-key'** head.

Clark's **type 3** (formerly 'Transitional') is heavier, but continues the rectangular holes within **countersinkings** of type 2B. It has a wider web and a smooth, not wavy, edge (Clark 2004, 117-119; figs 83-85 for illustrated examples). About three-quarters of them have calkins, and there are three or four holes on each branch. These date from the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century. Nails can have a 'fiddle-key' head, or a new form, broadly trapezoidal, expanded at the base of the head.

Clark's **type 4** (formerly 'Later Medieval', also sometimes referred to as 'Guildhall' or 'Dove') has a wide web and **no countersinkings**; the nail-holes flare towards the ground surface (Clark 2004, 120-123; figs 86-89 for illustrated examples). Some shoes within this type have a distinctively **angular inner profile** at the toe end (e.g. Clark 2004, 121; no. 222). There are three or four holes on each *branch*, and about half have calkins, sometimes only one on the outer *heel*. These date from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, continuing into the 16<sup>th</sup> century.



Medieval horseshoes: of Clark type 2 (left, SOMDOR198); of Clark type 3 (centre, PUBLIC-D24EF7); of Clark type 4 (right, HAMP-F0EA17). Copyrights: The Portable Antiquities Scheme; All rights reserved; Winchester Museum Service; CC-BY-SA licence)

## Post-medieval horseshoes

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Shire Album 19 ([Sparkes 1989](#)) should be disregarded for the medieval period, but it is useful for the post-medieval period from which most horseshoes brought in for assessment will probably date.

In general, 17<sup>th</sup>-century and later horseshoes are large and heavy, and have more nail-holes, now for often spaced right around the shoe including the toe. The holes are often punched through a **fuller**. Sometimes the internal aperture has a 'keyhole' shape. Very modern slender shoes with fullers date from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Post-medieval horseshoes: c. 17th century (left, SOM-EC2884); c. 18th century (right, SUR-C85352). Copyrights: Somerset County Council; Berkshire Archaeology; CC-BY-SA licence)

## Examples

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Search for all examples of horseshoes

## **Key references**

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Clark 2004 (1995)

Clark 1986

Sparkes 1989 (1976)