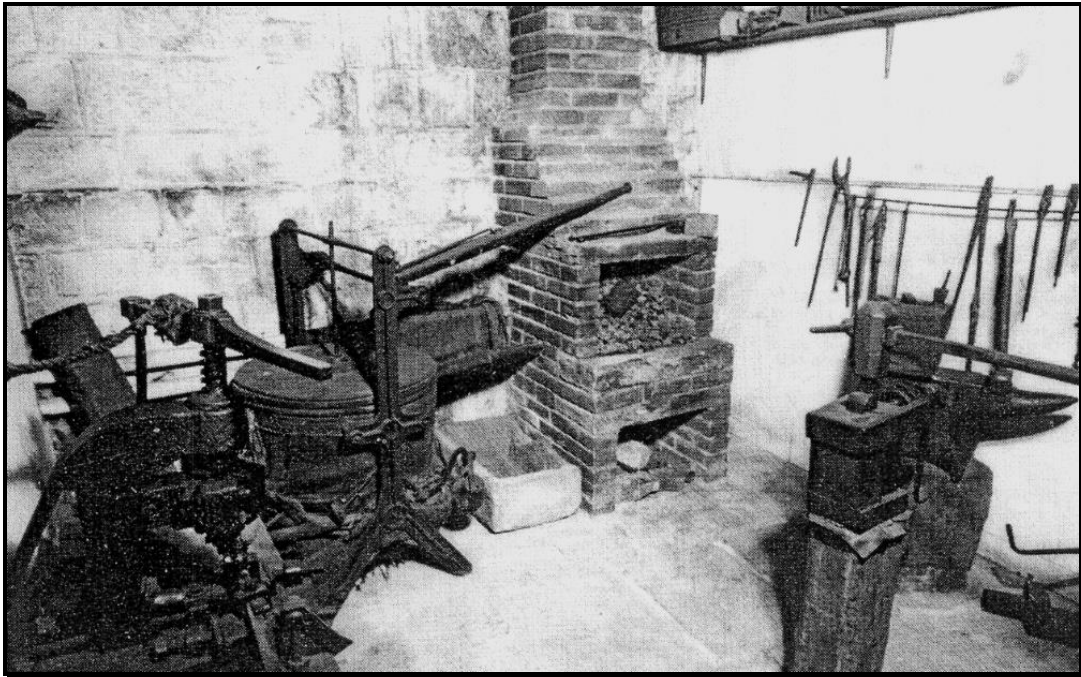


JAMES & CHARLES MARSON - NAILMAKERS IN GELSMOOR



A photograph of a reconstructed 19th century nail shop at Abbey House Museum, Leeds.
This contains a forge, bellows for the forge, a cooling trough, oliver, anvil and tools.

© Abbey House Museum

BY SAMUEL T STEWART

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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The readers need to be aware, that James Marson and his son Charles are not, as far as the author is aware, related in anyway to Charlie Marson, the Coleorton master nail maker, and great grandfather of the author, but there would have been some competition between the two no doubt.

The only record we have of James Marson is in the 1841/51/61 census records for Gelsmoor, in which his occupation is given as "Nail Maker". The author currently has no idea where his nail shop and forge was situated unfortunately, but he would have manufactured hand made nails. He was born in Newtown Linford, Leicestershire, and his age in the 1841 census is given as 60, in the 1851 census as 73, and in the 1861 census as 84. He clearly gained 4 years in a period of 20 years!

James was living with his second wife Mary during this period. James's first wife Sarah died Aug 10th 1835, at the age of 64 and is buried in [Griffydham Wesleyan Methodist Chapel Graveyard](#), where her gravestone still exists. That provides conclusive proof that they would have been in the area at that time, and were obviously non-conformists, most likely attending the [Wesleyan Providence Chapel](#) on Gelsmoor Road.

According to the 1851 census, he had a son Charles working for him as a nail maker, and he was a widower, aged 40. By 1861, Charles was in Castle Donington and was remarried to Elizabeth, his occupation was still given as nail maker, and he had an apprentice Henry Tate working for him.

It would be reasonable to assume that James Marson may have established his business in Gelsmoor at the time of the building of the [Coleorton Railway](#), which would have provided an outlet for his nails, as would the Beaumont estate. We are fortunate to have copies of bills for nails supplied to Sir George Howland Willoughby Beaumont, 8th Baronet, by James Marson for the Coleorton estate (see extract from bill and receipt on the next page). This was for the period between June and November 1844 to a total value of £10.9s.9d. The bill gives an insight into the price and type of nails made at that time, and it states that the nails were ordered by, and delivered to Thomas Lord.

The various types of nails supplied were as follows:-

Railing, Clout, Singletens, Lath, Round, Gate, Double tens, Brags, Clasp, Pailing and Slate.

Examples of sale prices:-

24 lbs weight of railing nails at 4d per lb -	total £0.8s.0d.
20 lbs weight of doubletens at 3 ½ d per lb -	total £0.5s.10d.
20 lbs weight of singletens at 4d per lb -	total £0.6s.8d.
13 lbs weight of round nails at 4 ½ d per lb -	total £0.4s.10 ½ d.
6 lbs weight of gate nails at 4d per lb -	total £0.2s.0d.

500 off No 10 nails -	£0.3s.4d.
500 off No 2 nails -	£0.0s.10d.
500 off No 4 clasp nails -	£0.1s.7d.
1000 off No 5 lath nails -	£0.3s.2d.
2000 off No 3 clout nails -	£0.4s.8d.
1500 off slate nails -	£0.1s.0d.

A copy of the actual invoice / receipt for the above is shown on the next page. This is signed by Mr. Frederick Edward Knight who took over as Sir George Howland Willoughby Beaumont 8th baronet's land agent from Edward Butt Knight who had died in the previous year. Sir George died in 1845 and was succeeded by the 9th baronet of Stoughton, Sir George Howland Beaumont.

£10. 9. 9

July 8th 1845. Received of Mr. Thos Knight
 the sum of ten pounds, nine shillings and nine pence
 the amount of the annexed bill for Nails, due
 from Sir Geo W Beaumont Bart.

£10. 9. 9

J. Ann's Marson

	2 ^{1/2} 3 Clout Br	2/4	3 8
16	1 1/2 3 Do	4/4	3 6
	2 1/2 round nails	4/4	7 10/4
19	1 ^{1/2} Clout Do		2 4
20	1 ^{1/2} 4 Clasp		3 2
	3 1/2 Gate nails	2 1/4	1 0
July 2	20 1/2 Squablers	4 1/4	6 5
3	1 ^{1/2} 4 Clasp		3 2
13	20 1/2 Doubletens	5/4	5 10
17	1 ^{1/2} 8 Clasp		5 0
24	20 1/2 Meas	5	5 0
Aug ¹ 2	2 ^{1/2} 3 Lath nails	5/2	6 4
27	1 ^{1/2} 8 Clasp		5 0
	500 10 Nails	6/8	3 4
	500 4 Clasp	4/4	1 4

(6)
 J. Ann's Marson

Bill for Nails
 to Thos 1845

£10. 9. 9

Recd 8th July 1845
 * 9/4

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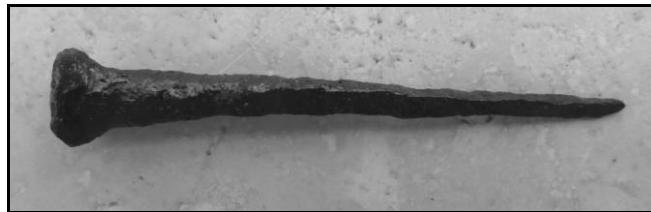
The Nail Making Process

At the time nails were being made in Gelsmoor and The Woolrooms, they would have been produced one at a time, and this is confirmed in an old newspaper article by Mr William Stacey of Gelsmoor, where he stated that Charlie Marson in the Woolrooms, made boot nails and larger nails for farmers and carpenters, and when he could, he persuaded the local youngsters to operate the forge bellows for him.

In the larger towns and cities, the nail makers were controlled by nail masters, and the nail maker had to sell his nails to a middle man / agent called a "Fogger". Charlie, being a one man band, appears to have sold his nails directly to the end user, and being a remote country cottage industry, he was probably better placed and protected, than if he had worked in the large towns and cities. Automatic cut nail machines were introduced c.1810 and factories grew up around them which of course the domestic nail maker could not compete with. The hand making of nails lingered on into the 20th century, mainly associated with the making of boots and shoes by hand, for cobblers preferred handmade nails for the soles. By the 1920's, the centuries-old craft had gone. There were many boot makers in and around Coleorton, and no doubt Charlie was a supplier to these.

The nailer would place three or four iron rods into the fire. When a rod was sufficiently heated, he began forging the sides and end into a point on a small nailer's block. The pointed end was then cut off to the required length (measured by a gauge) by being placed upon a fixed chisel called a hardy. It was then inserted into a bore, point down. The bore was made to fit the thicker part of the nail, and was countersunk to form a mould for the nail head. A few blows with the hammer formed the head and a spring called a "whimsy" was touched with the hammer to release the finished nail. This process continued until the rod was exhausted. The celerity with which this process is effected almost surpassed belief. It is recorded, that one nailor undertook to make seventeen thousand large nails in a week for two consecutive weeks, a task which he successfully completed.

A domestic nailer could make at least four nails a minute or over 250 an hour. In the towns, women were expected to produce as many nails as men, though of smaller sizes. Children were allowed 3 months to learn the trade, and were then expected to make a thousand nails a day. They were often cruelly treated, by their parents rather than by anyone else, and only the coming of compulsory education after 1870 rescued them.



A TYPICAL HAND MADE / FORGED CLOUT NAIL

In the beams of what was Benson's old cottage in the Woolrooms (Worthington Parish) there are a number of hand made nails hammered into a beam which are impossible to remove, which were most likely made by Charlie Marson, as he had his nail shop close by. The beam has almost turned to stone over the years