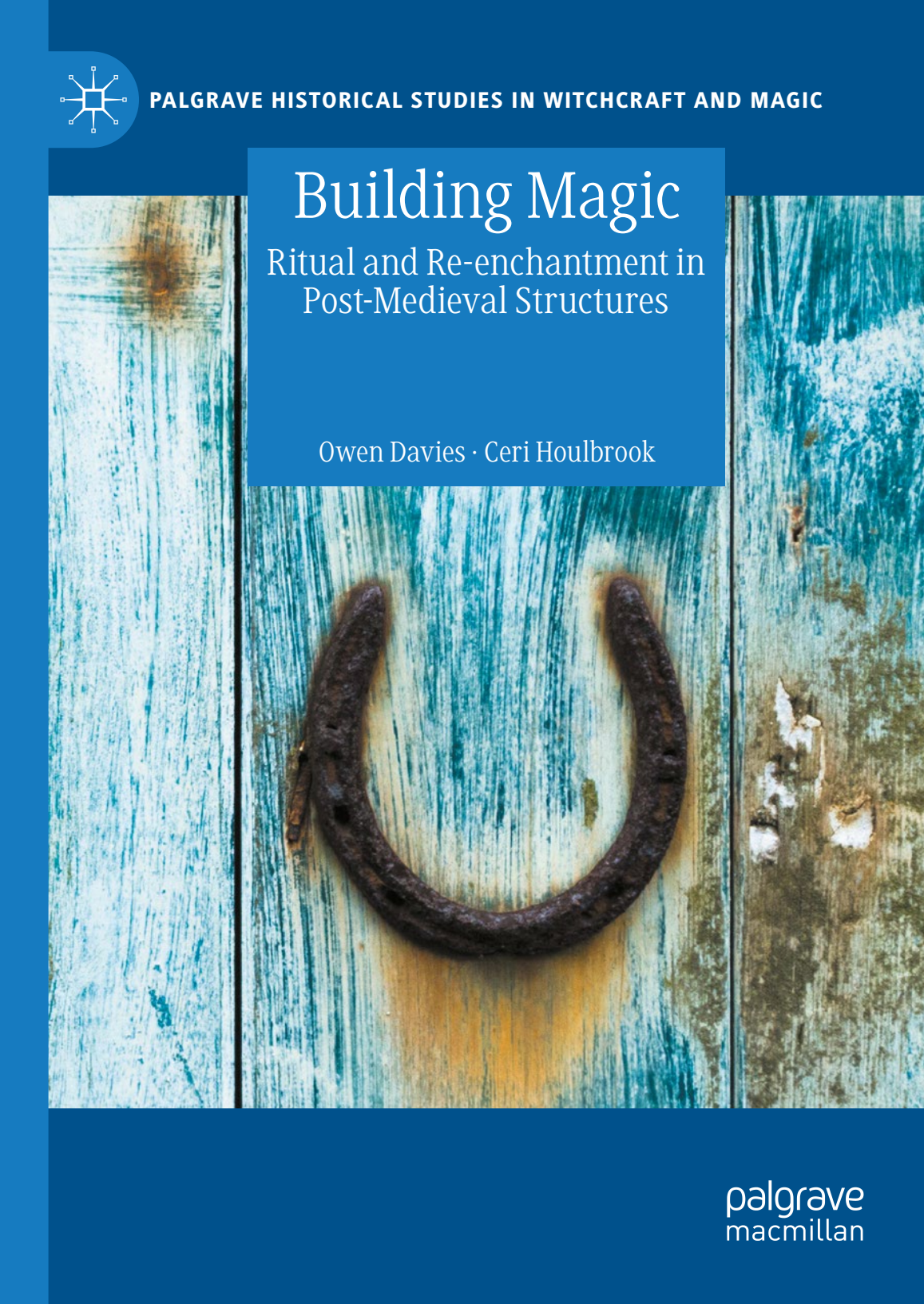
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Ritual and Re-enchantment in Post-Medieval Structures
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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Buildings contain many secrets and hidden histories concealed from the human eye. We may think we know our homes intimately and then one day renovations, the cleaning of an old chimney, or the investigation of an obscure corner of the rafters reveal objects that intrigue, raise questions, and sometimes unsettle. Old clothes, shoes, bones, desiccated animals, human bodies, money, figurines, bottles, playing cards, books, newspapers, old documents, knives, horseshoes, animal hearts, holed stones, bits of old iron, and prehistoric stone tools have all been found over the centuries. Some were intended to be recovered by their concealers, some were left for posterity, some were never intended to be revealed again, and some were merely accidental losses. In the past some such finds were considered curious enough to be deemed newsworthy, particularly with the rise of regional and local newspapers from the mid-nineteenth century. In 1921, for instance, the *Lancashire Daily Post* reported that during the renovation of the now Grade II listed Admiralty Cottage, Broadstairs, workmen found under the floorboards some coins of George III, some old visiting cards, a pack of playing cards, and an old military pike head.[1] A few items found their way into the curio collections of the numerous local museums that sprang up across the country, but many such finds went unrecorded or were thrown away as household rubbish.

[1] *Lancashire Daily Post*, 20 May 1921.

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During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Irish, British, and Scandinavian folklorists began to take an interest in certain types of concealed objects, namely thunderstones (prehistoric stone tools), coins, horse skulls, and dried cats. They seemed to be evidence for archaic ritual practices. Then, in the 1950s, attention also turned to the many old shoes, mostly dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, found in buildings during demolition and building work. The pioneer here was June Swann, Keeper of the Boot and Shoe Collection at the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery, who set up a systematic, long-term recording programme from the late 1950s onward. At the same time, Ralph Merrifield (1913–1995), a Roman archaeologist who spent much of his career at the Museum of London, was taking an interest in a range of post-medieval building concealments, particularly late seventeenth-century 'witch bottles', on which he first published articles in the mid-1950s. Merrifield's original approach to the inter-connections between ritual deposition practices over millennia were set out in what became the foundation text for building concealment studies, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (1987), which he wrote and published during his retirement. Swann and Merrifield were joined in their endeavours during the 1970s by artist and vernacular buildings researcher Timothy Easton, who began a long-term research project on symbols and marks found in Suffolk churches, houses, and historic farm outbuildings. In 1989 he also coined the term 'spiritual midden' to describe caches of objects in voids close to chimneys that could be accessed from upper levels, which seemed to result from a long-term depositional practice, as distinct from one-off concealments.

By the late 1990s, university academics were finally starting to take an interest in the work of these pioneers. Inspired by June Swann's endeavours, in 1998 Dinah Eastop set up The Deliberately Concealed Garments Project, based at the Textile Conservation Centre, which was then part of the University of Southampton. With the project receiving significant funding from various sources, including the then Arts and Humanities Research Board (the AHRC today), the subject of concealments was finally being recognised through academic peer review.[2] Over in America, the historian and ethnographer Robert Blair St. George's book *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture* (1998) made a significant theoretical contribution by considering concealed finds

[2] https://www.concealedgarments.org/.

in relation to the venerable idea of the home as analogous with the human body, with its openings and vulnerabilities to external threats. Around the same time the anthropologist and historical archaeologist Amy Gazin-Schwarz published important reassessments of the archaeological interpretation of everyday ritual and methodological approaches to folkloric material culture.[3] And, in 2004, the initial results of Brian Hoggard's postal survey of over 600 British museums, archaeology units, and builders firms were published in an academic collection of essays that emphasised the importance of the continued belief in witchcraft and magic beyond the era of the witch trials.[4]

The third wave of research was defined by the first raft of PhDs and postgraduate dissertations to emerge on the topic between 2010 and 2015.[5] Those by Ian Evans, Cynthia Riley Auge, and M. Chris Manning shifted the parameters significantly by looking at the migration (or not) of British concealment practices to Australia and North America. While colonial era American sources had long confirmed the use of witch bottles and other British apotropaic practices like horseshoes, awareness of the material evidence was limited.[6] Australia was a blank canvas until Evans' extensive and ongoing fieldwork generated a wealth of material finds that mirror most of the British evidence of building deposits. In 2014 the first PhD

[3] Amy Gazin-Schwartz, Cornelius J. Holtorf (eds), *Archaeology and Folklore* (London, 1999); Amy Gazin-Schwarz, 'Archaeology and Folklore of Material Culture, Ritual and Everyday Life,' *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 5, Issue 4 (2001) 263–80.

[4] Brian Hoggard, 'The archaeology of counter-witchcraft and popular magic', in Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt (eds), *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, 2003). See also, Hoggard, *Magical House Protection: The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft* (New York, 2019).

[5] Jonathan Duck, 'The Profane and the Sacred: Expressions of Belief in the Domestic Buildings of Southern Fenland, circa 1500 to 1700 AD', PhD thesis, University of Leicester 2015; Ian J. Evans, 'Touching magic. Deliberately concealed objects in old Australian houses and buildings', PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, NSW, 2010; V. Lloyd, 'The ritual protection of buildings in East Anglia, 1500–1800', MA thesis, University of Durham, 1997; Freya Massey, 'Ritualisation and Reappropriation: Special Deposits and Ritual Activity in Domestic Structures in Early Modern England', PhD thesis, Sheffield University, 2014; M. Chris Manning, 'Homemade Magic: Concealed Deposits in Architectural Contexts in the Eastern United States', MA dissertation, Ball State University, 2012; Cynthia Riley Auge, 'Silent sentinels: Archaeology, magic, and the gendered control of domestic boundaries in New England, 1620–1725', PhD, University of Montana, 2013.

[6] As well as Robert Blair St. George, Christopher C. Fennell has been a pioneer here. See his, *Crossroads and Cosmologies: Diasporas and Ethnogenesis in the New World* (Gainesville, 2007).

study of English concealments, Freya Massey's 'Ritualisation and Reappropriation: Special Deposits and Ritual Activity in Domestic Structures in Early Modern England', produced the most extensive and methodologically rigorous survey of the data since Merrifield's book, with a focus, like Auge, on the relationship between objects, homes, and their inhabitants in early modern society. In the same year a thematic issue of the journal *Historical Archaeology*, guest edited by Christopher Fennell and M. Chris Manning, and dedicated to Ralph Merrifield, brought together a series of papers on material aspects of domestic magic in colonial and modern America that included an article by Tim Easton on spiritual middens. The following year Ronald Hutton put together a state-of-the-field edited collection on British concealments and building marks that reached across the three waves of British researchers.[7]

After an early flurry of interest in the first half of the twentieth century, research on the European continent has been slower and more sporadic. The work of Rainer Atzbach in the early 2000s introduced a more rigorously critical archaeological approach to the interpretation of organic concealed finds in Central Europe, and Peter Carelli's 1997 reassessment of thunder stones as domestic deposits in Scandinavia gave new impetus to the deposition of prehistoric stone tools in historic contexts.[8] A flourishing body of original research on European material has been appearing over the last few years, though.[9] Baltic scholars have been particularly active,

[7] 'Manifestations of Magic: The Archaeology and Material Culture of Folk Religion', *Historical Archaeology* 48(3) (2014), 1–200; Ronald Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain: A Feeling for Magic* (London, 2015).

[8] See the collection of essays in Ingolf Ericsson and Rainer Atzbach (eds), *Depotfunde aus Gebäuden in Zentraleuropa: Concealed finds from buildings in Central Europe* (Berlin 2005); Rainer Atzbach, 'The concealed finds from the Mühlberg-Ensemble in Kempten (southern Germany): Post-medieval archaeology on the second floor', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 46 (2012) 252–80; P. Carelli, 'Thunder and lightning, magical miracles. On the popular myth of thunderbolts and the presence of Stone Age artefacts in medieval deposits', in H. Andersson, P. Carelli, L. Ersgård (eds), *Visions of the Past: Trends and traditions in Swedish medieval archaeology* (Stockholm, 1997), pp. 393–417.

[9] See, for example, Marion Dowd, 'Bewitched by an Elf Dart: Fairy Archaeology, Folk Magic and Traditional Medicine in Ireland', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 28 (2018) 451–73; Iris Nießen, 'Building Sacrifices and Magical Protection: A Study in the canton of Grisons (CH)', in Christiane Bis-Worch and Claudia Theune (eds), *Religion, cults & rituals in the medieval rural environment* (Leiden, 2017), 325–36; Morten Søvsø, 'Votive offerings in buildings from rural settlements. Folk beliefs with deeper roots', in Bis-Worch and Claudia Theune (eds), *Religion, cults & rituals*, pp. 227–47; Beatrix Nutz, 'Peasants and Servants': Deliberately Concealed Garments, Textiles and Textile Tools from a Rural Farm Building',

and most recently the archaeologist Sonja Hukantaival has pushed forward the study of building concealment traditions with a detailed survey of the rich literary and material evidence in Finland. She makes a welcome call, echoing Gazin-Schwarz, for historical archaeologists to be more sensitive to expressions of folk religion and its rituals in the material record of the past.[10]

In the meantime, the spread of the internet has proliferated public knowledge about and engagement with the subject through websites such as those maintained by Brian Hoggard, the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project, and the History Pin Concealed Revealed virtual museum. Back in the 1970s and 1980s most of the limited body of published research was in specialist newsletters that have now been digitised and made freely available.[11] In recent years social media platforms have also enabled the regular dissemination of finds shortly after discovery by professionals and members of the public. But the democratisation of knowledge enabled by the internet has also generated new challenges to those researching in the field. Informed suppositions developed over the decades are now bandied around as accepted facts. The theory of survivals, which will be discussed in the next chapter, permeates online discourse about building concealment traditions. Since 2004 the term 'witch mark' to describe various incised marks found in wooden and stone structures has become pervasive in digital and print media, even though the leading experts on the subject dislike the term.[12] The viral spread of misleading terms with regard to popular 'tradition' is not a new phenomenon. We see it with the term 'witch post', and as will be discussed later, with the popularity of 'witch balls'.[13] We do not see such cultural issues as necessarily

in Milena Bravermanová, Helena Březinová and Jane Malcolm-Davies (eds), *Archaeological Textiles – Links Between Past and Present NESAT XIII* (Liberec-Praha, 2017), pp. 207–16; Lenka Uličná, 'Modern Genizot: "Sacred Trash" Reconsidered', *Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo* 7 (2019), 143–154.

[10] Sonja Hukantaival, *'For a Witch Cannot Cross Such a Threshold': Building Concealment Traditions in Finland c. 1200–1950* (Turku, 2016); Sonja Hukantaival, 'The Goat and the Cathedral – Archaeology of Folk Religion in Medieval Turku', *Mirator* 19 (2018) 67–83.

[11] Timothy Easton has, for example, helpfully made digitised copies of his articles available: https://independent.academia.edu/TimothyEaston.

[12] Matthew Champion is the leading researcher on graffiti and 'ritual marks' in medieval contexts, and is highly critical of the term. He is currently producing major revisionist works on the subject. See his *Medieval Graffiti: The Lost Voices of England's Churches* (2015).

[13] On the problem of 'witch posts' see Owen Davies, 'The Material Culture of Post-Medieval Domestic Magic in Europe: Evidence, Comparisons and Interpretations', in

problematic, though, but rather as an aspect of ethnographical and historical processes that need recording and study. The invention and reinvention of traditions regarding building magic and ritual are ongoing and central to this book. Interpretations and terminology need to be challenged but not necessarily as a censorious, debunking mission.

Rise of the Modern Home

The house is the most central building to our lives in the post-medieval past and present, and the location for most of the recorded finds. The idea of a 'Great Rebuilding' of rural British houses between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries was proposed by the pioneering landscape historian W.G. Hoskins in the early 1950s. While his thesis has been rightly critiqued and qualified over subsequent decades, particularly with regard to his chronology and in relation to urban and regional building traditions, there is little doubt that, in terms of surviving houses, the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a key period for establishing the permanence of British homes.[14] The houses of farmers, artisans, professionals, and the gentry were increasingly built to last. The homes of the poor began to undergo the same process later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Renovation, adaptation, and extension, rather than rebuilding, became the norm. Stone, slate, and brick began to replace medieval wattle and daub in some regions. In those areas where thatch and wattle and daub, or clunch, remained significant building materials the timber structures became much more resilient compared to most medieval houses. There were, of course, poor, relatively impermanent rural houses across the country that changed little in structure and living conditions over the centuries.

The fabric of the interior of houses, as well as the structure, also undoubtedly changed significantly for many. To begin with, the removal of central open hearths and the adoption of lateral wall fireplaces began in the fourteenth century in London and had become widely adopted by the

Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (eds), *The Materiality of Magic* (Paderborn, 2015), pp. 402–3.

[14] W.G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570–1640', *Past & Present* 4 (1953) 44–59; R. Machin, 'The Great Rebuilding: A Reassessment', *Past & Present* 77 (1977) 33–56; Matthew H. Johnson, 'Rethinking the Great Rebuilding', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 12 (1993) 117–25. For a good overview of recent work see Massey, 'Ritualisation and Reappropriation', pp. 45–77.

seventeenth century, giving rise to the age of chimneys in domestic architecture. As interior spaces became increasingly divided up from the old open hall structure, fireplaces multiplied in homes, heating different parts of buildings with different functions, such as cooking and sleeping areas. The hearth and chimney provided new social and psychological focal points as well as potential concealment spaces and entry points. The creation of first and second storeys in domestic buildings began in urban areas in the late medieval period to maximise space and create rentable living quarters, though many rural homes remained ground floor structures into the modern era. A second floor required the addition of stairs and this, again, created new domestic spaces, while living and sleeping quarters moved closer to the roof.

Floors in early medieval homes were generally of beaten earth and clay or compacted chalk. The placing of flag stones and tiles (under which things could be buried) began to spread during the sixteenth century. While wooden planks had long been used as flooring between ground and upper floors in multi-storey buildings, suspended timber ground floors began to proliferate in vernacular housing during the eighteenth century for damp-proofing.[15] Such wooden floors provided an insulation gap, but also a greater fire risk. Until tongue-and-groove joinery became a common flooring practice, the boards were nailed or pegged down to the joists and so they contracted and expanded due to heat and moisture. Gaps opened and closed between the boards for accidental and potential deliberate concealment and disposal on a seasonal basis. In some buildings attic boards were not nailed down at all. Investigations at a Tyrolian farmhouse dating back to the sixteenth century found that the space under the extensive attic floor had been used as a disposal and concealment site for centuries by simply lifting up the boards, which had never been fixed. Finds ranged from a late sixteenth-century pilgrim's badge to plastic hairpins and ice cream punnet spoons. Public refuse disposal in the area was introduced only as late as 1974 and the use of voids in the farm and its buildings was clearly part of domestic waste disposal activity—what Rainer Atzbach has described as 'inner-house middens'.[16] Beatrix Nutz, who has

[15] English Heritage, *Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings Insulating Suspended Timber Floors* (London, 2012).

[16] Nutz, 'Peasants and Servants', pp. 207–16; Atzbach, 'The concealed finds from the Mühlberg-Ensemble', p. 275.

assessed the evidence from the Tyrolian farmhouse, observes well, though, that 'to throw something away is a conscious decision too'.[17]

For much of the period covered by this book, walls were usually solid structures until cavity walling become widespread in urban Britain and Ireland during the early 1900s. But during the early modern period wood panelling became popular in the homes of the prosperous. Panelling protected wall plaster and provided a form of cavity insulation. It also provided ample void spaces for the deliberate concealment of objects and also new opportunities for animals to live and move around houses. Windows made of mullioned glass panes began to spread in domestic buildings from the sixteenth century, replacing wooden shutters and skin and oiled canvas coverings. The introduction of a window tax in England and Wales in 1696, and in 1748 in Scotland, was a sign of how the window had become a sign of increasing prosperity reflected in vernacular architecture. With the repeal of the tax on glass in 1845 and the window tax in 1851 manufacturing innovation received a boost, and the development of cheap, plate glass production meant that glass windows slowly but surely became the norm in the houses of the poor as well as the wealthy by the early twentieth century.[18]

It was not only architecture and building practices that changed the way people experienced and interacted with their domestic environment. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also provide clear evidence of how Catholic devotion began to spread from church to the home. The rise of print, technical advances in ceramic production, and miniaturisation, meant that religious imagery, texts, and objects, once only found in religious establishments, were domesticated.[19] Piety was represented in the display of pipe-clay images of the saints, for example, and woodcut depictions of Biblical scenes and miracles. Household items were also inscribed with devotional legends such as 'Ave Maria' and the abbreviations for

[17] Nutz, 'Peasants and Servants', p. 214.

[18] See Michael Tutton, Elizabeth Hirst and Jill Pearce (eds), *Windows: History, Repair and Conservation* (London, 2007).

[19] David Gaimster, 'Pots, Prints, and Protestantism: Changing Mentalities in the Urban Domestic Sphere, c. 1480–1580', in David Gaimster and Roberta Gilchrist (eds), *The Archaeology of Reformation, 1480–1580* (Leeds, 2003), pp. 122–44; Alexandra Walsham, 'Domesticating the Reformation: Material Culture, Memory, and Confessional Identity in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Quarterly* 69 (2016) 566–616; Abigail Brundin, Deborah Howard, and Mary Laven, *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 2018).

Christ IHS, IHC, or INRI.[20] It has been suggested, furthermore, that in late medieval and early modern Catholic homes religious items such as pilgrim's badges, paternosters, and rosaries were placed in domestic spaces as items of protection as well as devotion. Pilgrim's badges and other devotional objects were also probably placed around farmsteads and in fields for the same purpose.[21] New mass-produced items and icons appeared in Catholic homes over the ensuing centuries in response to social, economic, and cultural change. One modern example is the red Sacred Heart lamps that proliferated in Irish homes with the widespread adoption of electricity in the 1950s.

Come the Reformation and Protestant populations were warned that such objects were pernicious Catholic 'superstition' and not to be tolerated. Still, in Protestant popular culture the private ownership of the Bible, which was encouraged by the Protestant churches in contrast to Catholic obscurantism at the time, became the preeminent and often only religious symbol in the home. It also became an important aspect of domestic protection. The Bible was considered to have talismanic properties. It was reported from nineteenth-century Wales, for example, that on the larger farms a Bible was locked in a chest to protect the house from harm.[22] Other pious literature served a similar purpose. Well into the nineteenth century, cheap, printed pious broadsides known as Heaven or Saviour's letters were pasted on British cottage walls for the protection of women in childbirth and more generally against witchcraft. They contained apocryphal legends, prayers, and a chain letter instruction that the text had to be copied and passed on to be efficacious.[23] But personal Bibles also held

[20] See Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, pp. 158–63; Sarah Randles, 'Signs of Emotion: Pilgrimage Tokens from the Cathedral of Notre-Dame of Chartres', in Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (eds), *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History* (Oxford 2018), pp. 43–58; Jean-Marie Blaising, 'Archéologie des pratiques apotropaïques entre Lorraine et Luxembourg', in Bis-Worch and Theune (eds), *Religion, cults & rituals*, pp. 350–54.

[21] W. Anderson, 'Blessing the Fields? A Study of Late-Medieval Ampullae from England and Wales', *Medieval Archaeology* 54 (2010) 182–203; Johan Verspay, 'Brabantian fields, blessed land – a study about the origins of artefacts found in arable land', in Bis-Worch and Theune (eds), *Religion, cults & rituals*, pp. 315–325.

[22] Elias Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore: A Collection of the Folk-Tales and Legends of North Wales* (Oswestry, 1896), p. 246. See also Kevin J. Hayes, *Folklore and Book Culture* (Knoxville, 1997), pp. 33–7.

[23] Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 126–9.

sentimental and emotional value, which might have led to their secretion rather than because they were thought to have protective properties. This is the more likely explanation for a curious cache reported in the 1820s. Builders pulling down a ruined building near Maidstone, Kent, in 1823, found in the wall a large earthen vase with a closed lid, wrapped in folds of leather and linen cloth. Opening the vase they found a Bible in old font, and on the blank pages various memoranda of a gentleman's travels that appeared to date to the mid-sixteenth century. There were also two coins, one Roman and the other a copper coin of Elizabeth's reign.[24]

So, what we think of as the 'normal' house today has its origins in the architectural, economic, and religious developments of the early modern era. But we also need to understand the development of the house in terms of cultural and inter-personal relationships.[25] Generational shifts in the lives of an ever expanding rural and then urban population were shaped as architectural developments and building practices transformed the domestic sphere and how inhabitants felt about their homes and each other—the ways in which they were negotiated as emotional, social, and gendered spaces.[26] The creation of separate bedrooms, for example, generated new geographies of privacy. As Irene Cieraad's work illustrates, the expansion of glass windows and the nature of their design changed women's domestic relationships with the public gaze.[27] In his influential essay 'Bridge and Door' (1909) the pioneering German sociologist Georg Simmel explored how house doors, and also their multiplication internally, created further levels of domestic decision-making as to leaving them open or closed. This was, in turn, revealing of social connectivity and the liminality of external and internal thresholds. Such developments also had an influence on relations with the supernatural or preternatural world. Relations with neighbours suspected of witchcraft, and the opportunities for bewitchment were determined, in part, by levels of access to parts of

[24] *The Cambrian*, 18 October 1823.

[25] See, for example, Matthew H. Johnson, *Housing Culture: Traditional Architecture in an English Landscape* (London, 1993); Matthew H. Johnson, *English houses 1300–1800: vernacular architecture, social life* (London, 2010); Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti (eds), *The Domestic Space Reader* (Toronto, 2012).

[26] Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 114–54; Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 39–75.

[27] Irene Cieraad, 'Dutch Windows: Female Virtue and Female Vice', in Irene Cieraad (ed.), *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space* (New York, 1999), pp. 31–53.

the home or related buildings.[28] The same developments likewise determined the focal points for external spirit threats, with any gaps, holes, or external visibility of the interior, however tiny, proving vulnerable entry points.

We have so far used house and home interchangeably, and we will continue to do so. But, the house can be more than a home and a home more than a house. The latter is a physical space, or combination of physical spaces, whereas the home is an emotional and psychical state related to a place. A house may not 'feel like home', for instance, and such sentiments have shaped domestic relations for many over the centuries. In her study of contemporary ghost experiences and the domestic uncanny Caron Lipman also talks about the differentiated spaces within the *home* mapped out in terms of 'micro-geographies, myths, memories and emotions', of 'spaces used and underused, hidden and revealed'. From this 'the home emerges as a singular entity, something with its own atmosphere, an agency in its own right. It is *more than* the sum of its parts.'[29] It is important to bear in mind, then, whether the practices and artefacts discussed in the ensuing chapters are related to house or home—or both. This book is not solely about domestic structures and places, though, as some processes and practices concerned buildings generally—and the craftsmen who built them. The builders, occupants, and cunning folk who were responsible for concealing objects are obviously as important as the finds themselves, and yet have received less attention than the archaeological remains.

Aboveground Archaeology

Over the last few decades the establishment of historical archaeology as a scholarly discipline has further enhanced our understanding of building deposits, complementing the work of vernacular architecture specialists. The 'above ground' archaeology of buildings or the 'archaeology on the upper storeys' has informed the growing interest in the material culture of everyday life and emotions, and inspired a closer attention not just to building structures, décor, and furnishings, but also the objects that found

[28] See Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 207–12.

[29] Caron Lipman, *Co-habiting with Ghosts: Knowledge, Experience, Belief and the Domestic Uncanny* (London, 2014), pp. 193, 196.

their way under floorboards, into wall cavities, roof spaces, and cellars.[30] The idea of garbology, the significance of waste or discard as an insight into the human condition, is appropriate here although we are talking more about the intimacy of personal lives in the past rather than societal consumption. Archaeology under the floorboards has spawned its own vocabulary—'loss objects', 'chance finds', 'void finds', 'sacred trash', and 'concealments' to add to the terminology generated over decades by below ground archaeology and folklorists with regard to depositions and their possible ritual purpose.

Under floorboard archaeology is now properly recorded and detritus redefined as assemblages. One of the major advances in the discipline was the Australian excavation of the Hyde Park Barracks in the early 1980s, which uncovered some 80,000 items from under the second and third floors of the main Barracks building, revealing the depositional variations from accidental loss and concealment, as well as the hoarding strategies of rats as unwitting curators of the past.[31] Work on various sites in Central Europe during the early 2000s has provided further important insights and approaches.[32] Excavation under the floorboards of the convent of the order of St Clare in Ribnitz, for instance, revealed around 7000 finds from the 'nuns' dust' dating mostly from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, including the usual loss objects such as pins, nails, book clasps, cutlery, rings, and textile fabrics, as well as food waste, rats, and mice. Several devout texts and personal prayers on pieces of rolled or folded paper were more likely deliberately placed in specific locations.[33] In England, more recently, the blog of the Archaeology National Trust Southwest, sub-headed 'discoveries from under floors and turf, stories of past lives, the ordinary and extraordinary', provides a vivid account of the finds recovered from pulling up floorboards at National Trust properties. Knole House, a National Trust property in Kent, and Oxburgh Hall,

[30] See, for example, Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (eds), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings* (Farnham, 2010).

[31] Peter Davies, Penny Crook, Tim Murray, *An Archaeology of Institutional Confinement: The Hyde Park Barracks, 1848–1886* (Sydney, 2013).

[32] Ingolf Ericsson and Rainer Atzbach (eds), *Concealed Finds from Buildings in Central Europe/Depotfunde aus Gebäuden in Zentraleuropa* (Berlin, 2005); Atzbach, 'The concealed finds from the Mühlberg-Ensemble'.

[33] Hauke Jöns, 'New Research Concerning the "Nuns' Dust" (Nonnenstaub) from the Klarissenkloster at Ribnitz, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern', in Ericsson and Atzbach (eds), *Concealed Finds from Buildings*, p. 125.

Norfolk, have been subject to extensive recent surveying of their historic graffiti, marks, and above-ground archaeological finds.[34]

This book mostly concerns ritual and supposed ritual concealments, but we need to be aware of the numerous mundane reasons why people hid things in buildings or things ended up being concealed from view. In the 1890s, an elderly British builder's foreman observed, for instance, that, 'all sorts of things are bricked up in walls "just for fun", and not because they have any charm or good omen about them. Newspapers, old boots, bottles, and such-like things are served in this way, and a favourite way of playing a joke on a "mate" is for a man to conceal his beer can in the wall, and build it in.'[35] We will unpick the underlying complexity of concealed newspapers, boots, and bottles later in this book, but this rare reference to builders' larks serves as an important cautionary reminder regarding our contemporary desire to read ritual into revealed concealments. Move on over a century and one of our correspondents in the building trade explained in a similar vein:

> When I did construction work, primarily panelling and dry wall, it was very common to wall up things as we worked. Mostly it was trash we did not want to have to take away. Soda and beer cans, empty grout and adhesive cans, used up caulk tubes, old messed up paintbrushes. Every once in a while something like a tool or box of nails would get walled up unintentionally.[36]

Try taking away the side panel of your bath, for example, and see what you find.

What may look like a ritual deposit of items in a wall cavity or void may just be a whimsical selection of rubbish left by builders or previous occupiers. The tinder box found bricked up a chimney of a cottage in Mortimer West End, Hampshire, was likely a lark or the result of an unintentional loss when builders modernised the property in 1900.[37] Such losses and

[34] https://archaeologynationaltrustsw.wordpress.com/category/under-the-floor/; Nathalie Cohen and Frances Parton, *Knole Revealed: Archaeology and Discovery at a Great Country House* (London, 2019); Anna Forrest, 'Between the Cracks: Underfloor Archaeology at Oxburgh Hall', *Current Archaeology* 367 (2020) 22–29.

[35] *London Evening News*, 11 November 1896; *Dublin Evening Telegraph*, 17 November 1896; *Yorkshire Herald*, 4 March 1899.

[36] Pers. Comm., Dennis, South Carolina, 06/07/2017.

[37] Museum of English Rural Life, object number 56/324/1-5. Our thanks to Ollie Douglas for this and other references to the museum's collections.

pragmatic depositions can appear quite bizarre at first. Several instances have been recorded over the last few years in Georgia, USA, for instance, where stashes of hundreds of human teeth have been found in the wall cavities of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century buildings.[38] This was not some macabre ritual of dark magic, however, but an insanitary if convenient means of disposing of human waste in buildings that were formerly occupied by dentists.

Some objects had structural purposes. A pitchfork found beneath the plaster of a cottage wall in Cheshire was used as a 'wall tie', that is a device for binding and strengthening two wall surfaces.[39] The parts of looms found embedded in the walls of an old house in Aughnamullen, Ballybay, presumably also served a structural and, perhaps, memorial function.[40] Animal bones were used for packing and consolidation in walls and floors.[41] Some concealments in voids were the result of activities that were deemed socially unacceptable to many such as stashes of pornography and the caches of bottles hidden by alcoholics. The desire to keep activities hidden from prying eyes probably explains the examples that have been reported of Ouija boards being concealed and revealed. One was found in a hundred-year old heating vent and the other during renovations to the Tenement Museum in New York.[42] Children no doubt hid dolls and prized objects as part of game-playing or pathological hoarding, creating secret caches that, in their composition, might cause puzzlement when revealed many years after.[43] Numerous items were concealed because of their high monetary value—which brings us to the issue of domestic treasure.

The Treasure Act of 1996 replaced the centuries-old law of Treasure Trove in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Scotland had its own variant statute covering the matter. Dating back to medieval times it was

[38] https://www.thrillist.com/news/nation/workers-find-human-teeth-in-building-wall-georgia?ref=twitter-869#. Accessed 28 October 2018.

[39] Museum of English Rural Life, object number 59/343.

[40] *Irish Press*, 23 June 1937.

[41] Philip Armitage, 'The use of animal bones as building material in post-medieval Britain', in Dale Serjeantson and Tony Waldron (eds), *Diet and Crafts in Towns: The Evidence of Animal Remains from the Roman to the post-medieval periods* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 147–60.

[42] https://uk.news.yahoo.com/builder-discovers-terrifying-secret-behind-160626821.html; http://gothamist.com/2015/06/24/inside_tenement_museum_walls.php#photo-1. Thanks to Malcolm Gaskill for these references.

[43] See, for example, Edward H. Plimpton, Randy O. Frost, Brianna C. Abbey, and Whitney Dorer, 'Compulsive Hoarding in Children: Six Case Studies', *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy* 2 (2009) 88–104.

the duty of coroners to hold an inquest over the finding in the ground or other hiding place of any old gold and silver in the form of coins, bullion, or plate where the original concealer was clearly long-deceased and unidentifiable. The role of the jury was to determine whether such gold and silver valuables were deposited with the clear intention of recovery. If so, then the treasure belonged to the Crown. If it was determined that the treasure was buried or concealed without any intention to recover it then the valuables belonged to the finder or the owner of the land or property where they were found.

Today we generally associate treasure troves with metal detectorists and farmers who plough up ancient hoards in fields, but newspapers had long reported coin hoards found concealed in buildings. In 1794, for example, workmen digging up the foundations of a house in High Street, Glasgow, found twenty-seven silver coins between two stones. They dated from the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth centuries.[44] When, in 1824, an old house on the site of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, was pulled down two earthen pots of coins were found, one full of gold coins and the other silver, dating to the reign of James I.[45] In 1848 workmen digging the foundations of an old house in Newborough Street, Scarborough, discovered under the hearth stone a bottle containing 400 silver coins dating from the reigns of Elizabeth 1, Charles 1, and Charles II. A written document included in the urn was destroyed as workmen scrambled to gather up the coins.[46] Forty years later, builders renovating an old half-timbered cottage in Great Shefford, Berkshire, found a small, earthenware, seventeenth-century jug containing silver and gold coins of the reigns of Elizabeth 1 and Charles 1 under the brickwork floor near the chimney. The handle of the jug had been deliberately broken off to ensure it fitted in its hiding place.[47] By no means all hoards dated from the early modern period. In 1907 a hoard of gold and silver coins dating to the mid-nineteenth century and worth some £300 was found in a wall of a house in Aughnacloy, County Tyrone.[48]

Builders sometimes got into dispute when finding such stashes. When Glasgow contractors tore down a tenement and took away £122 hidden in

[44] *The Sun*, 30 July 1794.
[45] *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 24 November 1827.
[46] *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 20 February 1848.
[47] *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, 3 January 1889.
[48] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 27 May 1907.

the chimney, the owner shadowed the builder day and night until it was returned to him.[49] The challenge of determining whether concealed gold and silver coins in houses were treasure trove is well illustrated by the inquest conducted by the coroner for the North Riding of Yorkshire in 1896. Four labourers on the huge estate of Lord Feversham were engaged with pulling down an old thatched cottage. Underneath the thatch they found thirty gold coins dating between 1509 and 1625. The place of concealment had been marked by a piece of white mortar. Lord Feversham's solicitor contended, therefore, that the evidence showed the coins were not hidden in a secret place: 'as men in those days could not avail themselves of savings banks they would naturally concoct some place to keep their money, and the mortar mark indicated where it had been placed for security'. So, according to this specious argument, there was no right of treasure trove as the coins had not been hidden per se, and the coins were merely kept as in a domestic safe in modern terms. He argued, furthermore, that the labourers had no claim as Lord Feversham merely employed them as simple workmen on his property. The solicitor representing the Crown made no great speeches and merely instructed the jury to use their common sense. After deliberating for a quarter of an hour the jury returned with the verdict that the coins were not treasure trove but that the finders' rights belonged to the four labourers.[50]

Lord Feversham's solicitor was quite right to point out that before the rise of popular deposit banking and personal insurance during the nineteenth century it was commonplace to conceal money and other valuables around the home to prevent them being easily stolen by thieves. Consider the South Bedfordshire carpenter engaged in splitting up old beams from farmhouses his boss had been commissioned to demolish in the vicinity of Park Street in 1886. In one he found two skilfully drilled holes covered with wooden plugs in which were hidden over a hundred coins from the reigns of Henry VI to Henry the VIII.[51] As well as to prevent thievery, there were other reasons to conceal gold and silver coins, such as fending off avaricious family members. In 1923 in the case of a marital dispute heard before the Southend Police Court, a woman unwittingly destroyed her husband's savings. Fed up with all her relatives staying in their crowded house and sponging off him, he was in the habit of hiding money up the

[49] *Wicklow People*, 3 December 1910.
[50] *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 18 March 1896.
[51] *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 23 February 1886.

chimney—until she lit a fire one day.[52] Some venerable concealed coin hoards were also, no doubt, the result of robberies in the distant and more immediate past.

As criminal trials show, many and varied stolen items were hidden in and around homes. Some were objects of little value and if never recovered would appear as accidental losses or perhaps even apotropaic. Chimneys were a favourite hiding place. Three youths from Stapleford concealed some stolen packs of cigarettes up a chimney in 1918. In 1904, three Burnley boys hid a stolen pair of trousers up a chimney. Items of greater value were periodically found by sweeps. One dislodged a few bricks from a chimney in Finchley in 1906 and found three watches and four silver rings. All sorts of stolen items have been discovered under the floorboards over the last century, including women's underwear in a house in Barrett Street, Old Trafford, in 1937, and the brass figure of a Buddha concealed under the floorboards of a property in Ivor Court, London NW1. Stolen goods were also concealed in the rafters or thatch. A labourer tasked with removing the thatch from the cottage of the murderer George Jacob Gilbert, executed in 1862, found the trinkets worn by his victim. In 1849 Irish police even found the carcass of a stolen sheep concealed in the thatch of a cottage.[53] What would have been made of the remains if they had lain undiscovered until recently: some form of sacrificial folk ritual? Thatch was also a good hiding place for illegal weapons. Indeed, in 1886 the Member of Parliament and Irish Nationalist William O'Brien spoke of the Irishmen who had a fondness for the 'weapon concealed in his thatch'.[54] In the summer of 1919 guns, rifles, and swords stolen by 'Sinn Feiners' were, indeed, found in the thatch of an old house near Newry.[55] One also suspects a criminal reason behind the curious find, in 1940, of several Boer War era rifles hidden behind boards in the disused fireplace of Dalston Methodist Mission Chapel.[56] Murder weapons were sometimes concealed around the home. In 1860, for instance, police found that the

[52] *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 26 November 1923.

[53] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 26 October 1918; *Preston Herald*, 19 March 1904; *Birmingham Mail*, 14 June 1906; *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 30 March 1937; *Kensington Post*, 29 September 1945; *Lancaster Gazette*, 6 December 1862; *Clare Journal, and Ennis Advertiser*, 3 December 1849.

[54] *Morning Post*, 21 May 1886.

[55] *Cornishman*, 4 June 1919.

[56] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 1 April 1940.

killer James Mullins (who some say was wrongly convicted) buried the murder weapon, a hammer, under the hearthstone of his lodgings.[57]

* * *

Things lost and stolen, things concealed as pranks or for waste disposal, things secreted as a result of hoarding and personal banking; if we are looking for ritual explanations for any concealments then there is a lot of background noise to eliminate before detecting evidence for ritual. The concealment of any object attracts multiple explanations that we cannot divine from the material evidence alone, unless there is a literary record of its deposition. Consider, for example, the two Bibles, one dated 1812 the other 1821, found in the thatch of a fisherman's cottage in Porthleven, Cornwall, during demolition work in 1940. Were they placed there to protect the home from lightning or evil spirits? Were they stolen goods stashed in the thatch and never recovered? Perhaps they were deposited there mischievously by children rebelling against a stifling religious household.[58] We just do not know, and a ritual interpretation is no more or less convincing than the others. In a recent assessment of approaches to building concealments three Australian historical archaeologists have provided a welcome take on the issue. They concluded that, 'the murkier middle ground—a space that allows us to accept that such beliefs might be possible, but also to question them critically—is a much more difficult locale to inhabit'. This is very true as interpretations have become entrenched and little questioned. They went on to suggest that, 'archaeology is perhaps the only means we have to explore this space, since it is one about which the documentary and oral histories remain frustratingly silent'.[59] As this book seeks to show, though, the documentary evidence is not as silent as has been assumed. There are ample archival sources to help contextualise and reappraise the material evidence, if you know where to look and how to analyse them. The aim of this book, then, is to re-assess the archaeological evidence, apply the necessary historical research, and cast a contemporary folkloristic gaze over the material. Such a multidisciplinary approach requires us to consider the terminologies used by different

[57] *The Scotsman*, 15 September 1860.

[58] *Western Morning News*, 7 February 1940.

[59] Heather Burke, Susan Arthure, and Cherrie de Leiuen, 'A Context for Concealment: The Historical Archaeology of Folk Ritual and Superstition in Australia', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 20 (2016) 45–72, p. 69.

disciplines, and to situate the different classes of finds in novel contexts.[60] We will think in terms of folk science as well as folk religion and folk magic, and explore the relevance of different registers of belief and emotion, such as luck, wellbeing, and memorialisation. The material finds will also be considered holistically in terms of their individual and collective object biographies, from their concealment to their uncovering and curation.[61] What these approaches reveal is an ongoing story of the reinvention and re-enchantment of the material past.

[60] See Davies, 'The Material Culture of Post-Medieval Domestic Magic in Europe', pp. 379–417.

[61] See, for instance, Ceri Houlbrook, 'The Concealed Revealed: The "afterlives" of Hidden Objects in the Home', *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018) 195–216; Ceri Houlbrook, '"The Stone Axe from Way Back": A Mutable Magical Object in Folklore and Fiction', *Folklore* 130 (2019) 192–202.

CHAPTER 2

Foundation Sacrifice: The Survival of a Problem in Archaeology, Folklore, and History

In his youthful scholarly days during the 1950s, while directing a long-term project of landscape surveying and excavation at Gwithian, Cornwall, the late archaeologist and historian Charles Thomas (1928–2016), one-time Professor of Cornish Studies at Exeter University, mulled over his theory on the evidence for ancient, sacrificial practices in Cornish folklore. 'A number of strange customs still linger on in a very tenuous form', he observed, 'and from these it is both permissible and inevitable that we should infer that our distant forefathers both believed in, and practised, sacrifices of various kinds'.[1] As explained in his book, *The Sacrifice in Cornwall*, people in the county continued, unwittingly, to practise annual sacrifices to the 'Corn Spirit' and an ancient sea-god, while the living tradition of wassailing was considered a 'minor sacrifice' to the presiding spirit of the orchards. The book ended with an appendix on 'Foundation Sacrifice'. Thomas believed he had found a crucial piece of evidence that it, too, was conducted in the county within living memory. The revelatory information was recounted by an unknown correspondent in a letter to the BBC Home Service following an episode of 'Country Questions' in which dried cats had been discussed. It found its way into the hands of Margaret Maitland Howard, an artist and draughtswoman working at the

[1] Charles Thomas, *The Sacrifice in Cornwall. Studies in the Folk-Lore of Cornwall* (Camborne, 1952), p. 4.

O. Davies, C. Houlbrook, *Building Magic*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76765-5_2

Institute of Archaeology. The letter told how, around 1890, a house was being built on the Helford River near Falmouth, when the builder downed tools. When asked what was wrong, the builder apparently replied, 'You see, 'tis like this. You've taken in some *outside ground* and covered it with a building, but you 'av'n't done nothin' for the *outside gods*: there must be a sacrifice'. The owner acquiesced, and apparently the sacrifice of a virgin hare, caught by a virgin boy, took place. Years later, during repairs, a little coffin containing the skeleton of a rabbit or hare was reported found in the top of a wall.[2]

Thomas had a long and valued career in archaeology, and made a considerable contribution to the discipline. Starting this chapter by referencing one of his earliest works is not to critique his intellectual acumen or disciplinary insight. At the time he wrote *The Sacrifice in Cornwall*, he was far from alone in archaeological and historical scholarship in seeking deep roots for what were considered the last remnants of pre-Christian belief systems in the more recent past. The likes of his contemporary, the eminent Oxford historian Christopher Hill (1912–2003), talked of a Church campaign against vestiges of pagan worship in seventeenth-century England.[3] Thomas was engaged in his hunt for survivals at the tail end of a period when imaginative, interdisciplinary explorations across archaeology, history, anthropology, and folklore were academically embraced. But deep, lasting disengagement would follow—with problematic consequences, as the history of the study of foundation sacrifice illustrates.

Definitions

The issue here is not with sacrifice related to state events, symbolic buildings, or ritual sites, but with the long history and prehistory of humans, animals, and other artefacts deliberately concealed or deposited in domestic buildings. 'Foundation deposit' and 'foundation sacrifice' are just two of the many terms littering the literature on such ritual activity that have ambiguous and often contested meanings.[4] What is meant by 'foundation

[2] Thomas, *Sacrifice in Cornwall*, p. 60.

[3] Christopher Hill, *Reformation to Industrial Revolution* (London, 1967), pp. 115–18; Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford, 1999), p. 276.

[4] Owen Davies, 'The Material Culture of Post-Medieval Domestic Magic in Europe: Evidence, Comparisons and Interpretations', in Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (eds), *The Materiality of Magic* (Paderborn, 2015), p. 385.

sacrifice'? How and why have scholars come to a range of definitions? In recent years, for example, Glenn Schwartz has described it as 'the killing of humans or animals for interment in building foundations', while Barry O'Reilly defines it simply as 'the burial of symbolic objects within the house'.[5] Miranda Aldhouse-Green offers the following:

> the deposition of human remains during the construction of buildings or other structures. The purpose of such burials was arguably linked with gaining approval from the supernatural powers, perhaps in particular those on whose territory the building was raised, together with magically endowing the structure, and its builders, with good luck, prosperity, and longevity.[6]

Such definitions highlight some issues that require unpicking.

First, a distinction must be made between the terms 'foundation deposit' and 'foundation sacrifice'. The word 'deposit' itself is relatively easy to define as something laid or thrown down. It is a more loaded term, however, when it is used in ritual contexts and equated with 'offering'. The prefix of 'foundation' to 'deposit' complicates definitions further. 'Foundation' can be an entirely empirical term, referring to the foundations (i.e. ground, base, or lowest part) of an architectural structure; in which case, a 'foundation deposit' is something laid in the foundations of a building. Richard Ellis, for example, in his work on Ancient Mesopotamia, defines the foundation deposit as 'a building deposit placed in the foundations or lower parts of a building—below floor level'.[7] This definition in itself poses problems, for as Ellis himself observes, 'Many objects have been called foundation deposits that have nothing to do with foundations'.[8] Deposits are found in many other parts of buildings—from

[5] Glenn M. Schwartz, 'Archaeology and Sacrifice', in Anne Porter and Glenn M. Schwartz (eds), *Sacred Killing: The Archaeology of Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, 2012), p. 7; Barry O'Reilly, 'Hearth and Home: The vernacular house in Ireland from c.1800', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature 111C. Special Issue: Domestic Life in Ireland (2011) 193–215, p. 200.

[6] Miranda Aldhouse-Green, *Dying for the Gods: Human sacrifice in Iron Age and Roman Europe* (Stroud, 2001), p. 166.

[7] Somers Clarke and Reginald Engelbach, *Ancient Egyptian Masonry: The Building Craft* (London, 1930), p. 61; Richard S. Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New Haven and London, 1968), p. 1.

[8] Ellis, *Foundation Deposits*, p. 1.

chimneys and fireplaces to spaces within the roof—and so the term 'building deposit' is viewed by Ellis as a more accurate descriptor.

Another problem is raised when 'foundation deposit' is not employed as a neutral and empirical term, but as an interpretive one, attributing a particular purpose to the deposit.[9] In these cases, the deposit is not viewed simply as something laid within a building's foundations, but as something deposited at (and *for*) the building's *founding*, for a number of possible purposes: to ensure a stable edifice; to gain approval from the supernatural powers on whose land the building is being constructed; or to ensure the luck and prosperity of the builders and the building's inhabitants. Sharon Moses, in her work on the Neolithic Near East, takes issue with the use of 'foundation deposit' as an interpretive term, arguing that 'as a descriptive phrase [it] should not be utilized as a one-size-fits-all application. … Such deposits were complex in that different contexts addressed different spiritual and ideological concerns.'[10]

Some scholars have viewed 'foundation sacrifice' and 'foundation deposit' as two contrasting phenomena. Moses, for example, distinguishes between sacrifice and deposit/offering via the application of an active/passive dichotomy; she construes deposits as evidence of a passive ritual act, lacking the immediacy, empowerment, and sense of personal loss which she believes characterises the sacrifice.[11] Jan van Baal, on the other hand, sees the sacrifice as a subcategory of offering/deposit: 'I call an offering any act of presenting something to a supernatural being, a sacrifice an offering accompanied by the ritual killing of the object of offering'.[12] To van Baal, ritual killing is central to a definition of sacrifice, but it cannot be defined by that alone. As Schwartz notes, 'a workable definition of sacrifice, as with other broad concepts such as ritual, can be difficult to achieve',[13] and scholars have given many varied—and, at times, contradictory—definitions. Etymologically, 'sacrifice' derives from the Latin

[9] Hans Georg Gebel, 'Walls. Loci of Forces', in Hans Georg Gebel, Bo Dahl Hermansen and Charlotte Hoffmann Jensen (eds) *Magic Practices and Ritual in the Near Eastern Neolithic* (Berlin, 2002), 119–132, p. 120.

[10] Sharon Moses, 'Çatalhöyük's Foundation Burials: Ritual child sacrifice or convenient deaths?', in Krum Bacvarov (ed.) *Babies Reborn: Infant/Child Burials in Pre- and Protohistory*: 45–52. BAR International Series 1832. (Oxford, 2008), p. 46, emphases in original.

[11] Moses, 'Çatalhöyük's Foundation Burials', p. 50.

[12] Jan an Baal, 'Offering, Sacrifice and Gift', in Jeffrey Carter (ed.) *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: A Reader* (London and New York, 2003), 276–291, p. 277.

[13] Schwartz, 'Archaeology and Sacrifice', p. 2.

sacrificum, which literally meant 'to make holy'. Sacrifice could therefore be perceived as a process of sanctification.[14] However, this is a very broad definition and not one that modern Western scholarship tends to follow; definitions today are often more specific.

'In modern western parlance', writes Aldhouse-Green, 'a sacrifice involves giving up something important to an individual or community for a reason perceived to be of greater importance in some manner than what is to be sacrificed'.[15] This 'giving up', or renouncement, is often enacted with the expectation of something in return: either the assurance of some positive outcome or the aversion of a negative one.[16] An offering or deposit would fit this description, but a sacrifice is distinct from these in that it is killed—either literally or metaphorically. In other words, it is intended to be irredeemable to the depositors. The sacrifice is therefore deliberately physically damaged, destroyed, or irretrievably deposited, allowing it to pass from the earthly realm into the spiritual, where it can be received by its intended supernatural recipient. One key word in the preceding sentence is 'deliberately'. It is the act of 'killing' itself that ensures the sacrifice's efficacy.[17] As Green asserts, 'Natural death, with subsequent treatment of the body, does not qualify for sacrificial status', a distinction that will be considered further below.[18]

For the authors, 'foundation' is taken as an empirical term, referring to the deposits' physical locations. It is used loosely, however, allowing for the inclusion of deposits placed anywhere within the fabric of a building at different stages of its lifecycle (in the walls, chimneys, roof space, etc.) rather than being limited to those within the actual, original foundations. Not all such deposits constitute 'foundation sacrifices' though; to be classified as such, a specific purpose must have been assigned to them: they should be assumed to have been deposited at the time of the building's construction and/or to ensure the building's stability, longevity, and the

[14] Jeffrey Carter, 'General Introduction', in Carter (ed.) *Understanding Religious Sacrifice*, p. 3.

[15] Aldhouse-Green, *Dying for the Gods*, p. 19.

[16] Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago, 1964), p. 35; Miranda Green, 'Humans as Ritual Victims in the later Prehistory of Western Europe', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 17 (1998) 169–189, p. 169; Aldhouse-Green, *Dying for the Gods*, p. 24; Carter, *Understanding Religious Sacrifice*, p. 3; Moses, 'Çatalhöyük's Foundation Burials', p. 49; Schwartz, 'Archaeology and Sacrifice', p. 4.

[17] Moses, 'Çatalhöyük's Foundation Burials', p. 49.

[18] Green, 'Humans as Ritual Victims', p. 170.

approval of the supernatural powers on whose land it is being built. As for our definition of 'sacrifice', we allow for Insoll's and Aldhouse-Green's inclusion of inanimate objects, in referring to something—animal, vegetable, or mineral—that is given up or rendered irredeemable either through destruction or irretrievable deposition.[19]

A Universal Practice from the Remotest Past?

There is a venerable tradition in scholarship to assume the prevalence of foundation sacrifice in ancient cultures. In 1894, the Freemason G.W. Speth, who avowed he was not writing *as* a Freemason, contended that it was 'universal: a rite practised apparently by all men at all times in all places'.[20] So confident was he in the anthropological theory and literary evidence that he was convinced that, 'Had we never found one single instance of the rite actually in practice, we might still have inferred it with absolute certainty from the legends, although these do not always give us the true motive'.[21] This was echoed a few years later, when the prolific author, Lewis Dayton Burdick, stated in his book, *Foundation Rites with some Kindred Ceremonies*, that the practice 'was an almost universal custom among primitive people', that had 'been almost universal in the world's history'.[22] Examples were also discussed in such studies as Perrot and Chipiez's *A History of Art in Chaldaea and Assyria*, and Clarke and Engelbach's *Ancient Egyptian Masonry*, though here objects and animals are identified as foundation sacrifices, not humans.[23] Speth provided close to twenty pages of examples of human and animal sacrifice from throughout history in locations that ranged from Polynesia, Turkey, and Japan, to Rome and Scotland.[24] Two years later, American clergyman Henry Clay

[19] Timothy Insoll, 'Sacrifice', in Timothy Insoll (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Ritual and Religion* (Oxford, 2011), 151–165, p. 153; Aldhouse-Green, *Dying for the Gods*, p. 22.

[20] George W. Speth, *Builders' Rites and Ceremonies: Two Lectures on the Folk-lore of Masonry* (Margate, 1894), p. 4.

[21] Speth, *Builders' Rites*, p. 11.

[22] Lewis D. Burdick, *Foundation Rites with some Kindred Ceremonies: A contribution to the study of beliefs, customs, and legends connected with buildings, locations, landmarks,* etc., etc. (New York, 1901), pp. 9–10, 14.

[23] Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez, *A History of Art in Chaldaea and Assyria, volume 1* (New York, 1884), pp. 311–22; Clarke and Engelbach, *Ancient Egyptian Masonry*, pp. 60–61.

[24] Speth, *Builders' Rites*, pp. 8–27.

Trumbull presented a similar list in his work on *The Threshold Covenant*, citing examples of humans being sacrificed at the foundations of bridges in China; of fowls or lambs being laid at foundation stones in Greece; and of cocks being interred in the 'upper corner' of new houses in Russia.[25]

While those engaged in global anthropological comparisons piled up the apparent evidence of universal foundation sacrifice from excavations and armchair observation of other cultures, adherents of the new discipline of folklore were convinced that they were also finding traces of this universal, ancient practice in the folklore and traditions of contemporary rural folk at home. They saw pagan origins everywhere in the customs, traditions, and lore of Europe, with a particular preoccupation for supposed survivals of pagan sun worship and sacrifice. Even the burning of Guy Fawke's effigy on Bonfire Night in England was claimed as an echo of human sacrifice.[26]

The case for this 'survival' of foundation sacrifices was established by the pioneering cultural anthropologist Edward Tylor (1832–1917) in his hugely influential book *Primitive Culture*, which was first published in 1871 and went through numerous subsequent editions. Tylor noted various early modern and modern references and legends to the burial of humans, mostly children, in the foundations of bridges and churches as an echo of primitive blood propitiation to the gods or spirits, including a reference to a modern Greek practice where masons killed a lamb or black cock on the foundation stone of a building. He then looked 'to less cultured countries' for similar practices with 'a distinctly religious purpose'.[27] Tylor's ideas were further bolstered and disseminated in 1883 by the folklorist George Laurence Gomme in his book *Folk-lore Relics of Early Village Life*. In a chapter on the subject he observed that, 'we find the foundation sacrifice among the lowest races of mankind, and in modern Europe'.[28] The existence of such survivals was further cemented in academic discourse by the social anthropologist James Frazer (1854–1941) in *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*.[29]

[25] Henry Clay Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant, or the Beginning of Religious Rites* (New York, 1896), pp. 48, 53–55.

[26] Hutton, *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts,* pp. 393–4.

[27] Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom, volume 1* (London, 1871), p. 96.

[28] George Laurence Gomme, *Folk-lore Relics of Early Village Life* (London, 1883), p. 24.

[29] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough.* Vol. 1. (London, 1900).

So, by the early twentieth century, it had become received wisdom that any ritualistic deposit of animals or animal bones in domestic dwellings was considered as a survival of pre-Christian practices. Noting recent builders' finds of cats concealed in walls in Dublin, and horse skulls found under the floors in several Irish homes, one folklorist concluded in 1911, for instance, that they could probably be considered as substitutes for the human sacrificial practices of the early Irish, and referred to the legend of the disciple of St Columba who was buried as a voluntary sacrifice under a new building.[30] The notion of foundation sacrifice survivals held firm in scholarship into the mid-twentieth century. In 1945, Sean O'Súilleabháin, Archivist and Registrar of the Irish Folklore Commission, published an article on the horse skulls found buried under a number of post-medieval Irish domestic floors. While acknowledging that the skulls, like pots, were known for their acoustic value in threshing and dancing traditions, he concluded that this was a recent rationalisation of the original sacrificial intention, though he later reconsidered this interpretation in the face of evidence from the Swedish folklorist and museum curator Albert Sandklef.[31] In the early 1950s, the aforementioned Margaret Maitland Howard published a pioneering study of all known mummified cats found concealed in early modern and later British houses in the anthropological journal *Man*. While setting out several theories for their concealment, she was convinced that some of them were vestigial foundation sacrifices to protect the house.[32]

The perspicacious folklorist Theo Brown, writing in 1958, observed that 'the tradition undoubtedly exists, but the pattern of foundation sacrifice exists just as much in the minds of modern men, including folklorists'.[33] She considered Howard's recent article in *Man* as suggestive rather than 'absolutely conclusive', but was rather more convinced by Charles Thomas's evidence of the builder's hare. Folklorist Christina Hole wrote a cautiously phrased Foreword for Thomas's *Sacrifice in Cornwall*, in which she observed that 'much accumulated debris has to be cleared away before

[30] Thomas J. Westropp, 'A Folklore Survey of County Clare', *Folklore* 22(1) (1911) 49–60, pp. 54–5.

[31] Sean O'Súilleabháin, 'Foundation Sacrifices', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 75 (1945) 45–52; Davies, 'Material Culture of Post-Medieval Domestic Magic', p. 393.

[32] Margaret M. Howard, 'Dried Cats', *Man* 51 (1951) 149–151, p. 151.

[33] Theo Brown, 'The Black Dog', *Folklore* 69(3) (1958) 175–92, p. 184.

we can come to the true roots of any time-honoured ceremony or belief'.[34] Still, in 1971, a full-blooded attempt to identify echoes of foundation sacrifice in European folksongs, legends, games, and folk dances was published in the German journal *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*.[35]

Archaeologists Reconsider

From the 1960s onward, archaeologists became much more cautious in their interpretations of the excavation contexts for supposed foundation sacrifice. In 1964, Roland de Vaux, for example, in his research into Old Testament sacrifice, was critical of Palestinian archaeologists of the previous generation who 'often spoke of "sacrifices of children" buried in jars with a few funerary offerings, or of "foundation sacrifices" whether of children or adults buried against or under the walls of a house'.[36] Such material evidence, de Vaux maintained, was not necessarily proof of foundation sacrifices. They may have been simple burials. He asserted that the first thing to establish was whether the inhumation was contemporary with the building, noting that stratigraphic indications in excavation reports were 'not always sufficient to settle the matter'. In the great majority of cases, he believed burials were not sacrificial foundation deposits.[37]

Richard Ellis, in his work on foundation deposits in ancient Mesopotamia, was equally cautious. He referenced much evidence for the foundation deposition of inanimate objects, and some for animals, but was unconvinced when it came to humans. In most cases whereby human remains were discovered within the foundations of a structure, Ellis believed this was just a result of the common Mesopotamian custom of burying the dead under houses.[38] Excavations at Gezer, for instance, a Canaanite city-state, yielded the bones of infants buried beneath floors, which had previously been interpreted as foundation sacrifices. Ellis stressed, however, that the presence of grave goods suggests they were normal burials and notes there was nothing to indicate the burials were made at the time of

[34] Thomas, *The Sacrifice in Cornwall. Studies in the Folk-Lore of Cornwall, volume 2* (London, 1952), p. 3.

[35] Paul Brewster, 'The Foundation Sacrifice Motif in Legend, Folksong, Game, and Dance', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 96(1) (1971) 71–89, pp. 71–89.

[36] Roland de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice* (Cardiff, 1964), p. 60.

[37] De Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*, p. 60.

[38] Richard S. Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New Haven and London, 1968), p. 35.

construction.[39] Even where there was evidence of humans having been interred within the fabric of a building at the time of construction (he details infants buried under walls and in the space between walls), Ellis still questioned whether they were foundation sacrifices.

Ian Hodder made similar points more recently in his work on Çatalhöyük, a Neolithic settlement in modern-day Turkey. He notes that burial beneath floors was a common practice in the prehistoric Middle East—to the extent that he describes Çatalhöyük as a necropolis as much as a settlement.[40] In his interpretation of infant interments excavated at building thresholds, he observes, for example: 'It is possible that in all these examples, infants were buried opportunistically—they happened to die during construction and burial in construction deposits was seen as convenient'.[41] They may have been foundation burials but they were not, therefore, foundation *sacrifices*. Hans Georg Gebel, in his work on the Neolithic Lavant sites of Ba'ja and Basta, likewise discounts evidence of foundation deposits as sacrifices. He proposes that intramural burials of figurines, animals, and infants may have been more commemorative than sacrificial: 'Their primary meaning is to maintain the kind of spatial relationship when the direct physical relationship terminated. "Offering" in the sense of sacrifice has to be excluded from this interpretive framework.'[42]

In her assessment of the Çatalhöyük foundation burials, Moses suggested archaeologists had become overly cautious in considering sacrificial purpose, as it was less problematic 'to leave the mode of death unaddressed'.[43] Her more liberal approach is evident in the scholarship on foundation deposits in Europe. Aldhouse-Green, for instance, cites numerous examples of human interments within buildings in Iron Age and Roman Britain, which she interprets as structures having been 'blessed by the deposition of bodies, who may even have been sacrificed for the purpose'.[44] At Wroxeter, for example, the body of a child was deposited in two parts under the floor in the corner of a new extension of a public bath-suite.[45] Aldhouse-Green does assert, however, that a distinction must be made between natural death and subsequent ritual treatment of the body

[39] Ellis, *Foundation Deposits*, pp. 39–40.
[40] Ian Hodder, *Çatalhöyük: The Leopard's Tale* (London, 2006), p. 124.
[41] Hodder, *Çatalhöyük*, p. 117.
[42] Gebel, 'Walls', p. 131.
[43] Moses, 'Çatalhöyük's Foundation Burials', p. 45.
[44] Aldhouse-Green, *Dying for the Gods*, p. 166; see also Green, 'Humans as Ritual Victims'.
[45] Aldhouse-Green, *Dying for the Gods*, p. 166.

(foundation deposit), and sacrificial killing (foundation sacrifice): it is a distinction she acknowledges is difficult to ascertain archaeologically.[46] Eleanor Scott, detailing animal and infant burials beneath the floors of Romano-British farmhouse buildings, argues that such burials may have had less to do with the structures' foundations, though, and more to do with fertility ideology.[47] Another example of the ambiguity of sacrificial interpretations concerns the remains of a twelve-year-old (probable) boy found buried beneath an Iron Age roundhouse at Hornish Point, on the Hebridean island of South Uist. The body must have decomposed before deposition, and so may, in fact, be evidence of an untimely death singling this child out for unusual ritual burial treatment.[48]

The Survival of Survivals in the Study of Post-Medieval Building Ritual

Despite being considered as problematic in the archaeological world, foundation sacrifices, and the notion of their vestigial survival in popular custom, continue to pepper the growing body of literature on ritual deposits of clothing, shoes, cats, animal bones, iron implements, and other domestic items in post-medieval buildings. This can be largely put down to the influence of Ralph Merrifield's *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, which drew upon a lifetime of note-taking regarding strange and unusual archaeological depositions and concealments from across several millennia.[49] He noted that similar patterns of ritual deposition were evident in the archaeological record from at least the Iron Age to the modern era, and concluded that there was a continuity of practice in many cases, if not a continuity of purpose. In a chapter entitled 'Survivals, revivals and reinterpretations' he suggested that many old practices continued as 'a matter of habit'.[50] It is no surprise, then, that the language of sacrifice appears in a way similar to that of Charles Thomas. Merrifield noted what he

[46] Aldhouse-Green, *Dying for the Gods*, p. 15. See also Schwartz, 'Archaeology and Sacrifice', p. 14.

[47] Eleanor Scott, 'Animal and Infant Burials in Romano-British Villas: A Revitalization Movement', in Paul Garwood, David Jennings, Robin Skeates and Judith Toms (eds), *Sacred and Profane: Proceedings of a conference on Archaeology, Ritual and Religion, Oxford, 1989*, Monograph 32 (Oxford, 1991), 115–121, pp. 117–18.

[48] Ian Armit, *Headhunting and the Body in Iron Age Europe* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 205.

[49] Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (London, 1987).

[50] Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, p. 107.

considered to be 'the close relationship between pagan sacrifice' and some of the counter-measures against witchcraft mentioned in early modern sources. So he described entombing a cat as a 'builder's sacrifice', though there are no records of such a practice, and the medieval and post-medieval ritual deposits of animal bones as 'a symbol of its sacrifice'.[51] Merrifield drew upon the earlier studies by O'Súilleabháin and Howard, and was supported in these views by June Swann's work on the shoes found concealed in buildings reported to Northampton Museum where she was curator. In her first published article in 1969 she suggested that the material evidence was suggestive of a customary survival of a sacrificial offering, with the shoe as an intimate representation of the wearer.[52]

Like Thomas, Merrifield was under the continuing spell of Margaret Murray's ideas regarding the survival of a pre-Christian fertility 'witch cult' into the early modern period in Europe. Murray (1863–1963) was a well-respected Egyptologist in her early career and lectured at University College London. She was also president of the Folklore Society from 1953 to 1955. In his *The Sacrifice in Cornwall*, Thomas fully subscribed to Murray's thesis that the ancient ritual slaying of a king survived into medieval times, and had echoes in various popular customs concerning the destruction of effigies. Thomas noted that, 'although not everyone will concede her the entire theory', her 'exhaustive analysis, demand acceptance of many of her points'. Merrifield, likewise, drew upon Murray's work *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*,[53] and while recognising the overwhelming debunking of her thesis by the 1980s, still thought 'the pendulum may have swung too far' against her with regard to her evidence of pagan survivals.[54] Those who have followed in Merrifield's wake have, by and large, repeated the received interpretations on concealed animal remains, shoes, and clothes as survivals or 'folk memories' of sacrificial practices, or at least they have not questioned the basis for this interpretation.

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[51] Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, pp. 185, 186, 117.

[52] June Swann, 'Shoes concealed in buildings', *Northampton Museums and Art Gallery Journal* 6 (1969) 8–21; June Swann, 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', in Hutton (ed.) *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts,* 118–130, p. 128.

[53] Margaret Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford, 1921).

[54] Thomas, *Sacrifice in Cornwall*, p. 48; Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, p. 160.

The concept of foundation sacrifice is a hindrance to the better understanding of post-medieval, ritual domestic deposits. Indeed, in her recent thesis on building concealment traditions in Finland from the thirteenth to the twentieth century, Sonja Hukantaival rightly decides not to discuss foundation rituals if 'additional sources are lacking'.[55] The concealment of shoes has also been subject to more subtle reassessment recently from an archaeological perspective.[56] Much greater attention needs to be paid to inferences and hints from the archives, even when no explicit references to the practices represented by the material finds appear in the literary record. And, if the search for origins or continuities is to have any validity, scholars of post-medieval domestic magic need to pay much closer attention to developments in archaeological interpretation and less to old anthropological theories of survivals. That said, with a few exceptions, medieval archaeology is something of a missing link with regard to domestic concealments.[57] But understanding developments in this period will be essential to interpreting at least some, though not all, of the practices materially manifest in the post-medieval period.

[55] Sonja Hukantaival, *"For a Witch Cannot Cross Such a Threshold!" Building Concealment Traditions in Finland c. 1200–1950* (Turku, 2016), p. 9.

[56] Ceri Houlbrook, 'The Other Shoe: Fragmentation in the Post-Medieval Home', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 27(2) (2017) 261–274.

[57] Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course* (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 227–36; Stephen Gordon, 'Domestic Magic and the Walking Dead in Medieval England', in Ceri Houlbrook and Natalie Armitage (eds) *The Materiality of Magic* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 78–80.

CHAPTER 3

Bodies: Mummified But Not Ancient

In 2007, a house in Toronto became the scene of an unusual media story. An old two-storey house was being renovated when a building contractor found a mummified baby wrapped in a newspaper dated 15 September 1925, hidden between the second-floor ceiling and the attic. As he told the press, 'I've found coins, and I've found bottles and antiques and various things, but I've never found anything like this. And I was not hoping for this.' When he went home, his wife noticed his pale face, and 'told him he looked as if he'd seen a ghost'.[1] We mostly associate mummification with ancient Egypt or perhaps the even older Chinchorro bodies preserved in the dry heat of the Atacama Desert of northern Chile. But the process of mummification does not take centuries or millennia, and in certain circumstances, as in Toronto, the modern buildings we live in can conceal desiccated bodies that tell of recent tragedies that have little to do with ritual and magic, but much to do with everyday life and domestic misfortune. The concealments discussed here are technically not mummies in the ancient Egyptian sense, in that they have not been deliberately prepared for preservation by embalming or other techniques. But the term mummification has broadened to include the natural and unintentional process of preservation by desiccation, or, in the case of bog bodies, preservation

[1] https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/the-mystery-of-the-mummified-baby/article690120/.

O. Davies, C. Houlbrook, *Building Magic*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76765-5_3

by the anaerobic, acidic properties of peaty soils. In a post-medieval British and Irish context we are basically talking about desiccated babies and cats, and what the different responses to them reveal about our emotional interpretation of the past in relation to ritual.

Desiccated Babies

Human bodies and body parts have occasionally been found concealed in post-medieval homes and buildings. Some are evidence of murders and subsequent dismemberment. This is the most likely explanation for the desiccated arm of a young woman found in 1931 embedded in the wall of a small room at Westhoughton Railway Station, near Bolton. More typical was the skeleton of an adult found buried under the hearthstone of Berkeswell Rectory, Coventry, in 1866, and another similarly discovered under the hearthstone of a cellar at the corner of London Street and James Morrison Street, Glasgow, during the construction of the underground in 1892.[2] Other murderous concealments have been found under floorboards over the last two centuries. Skulls have been found in church and chapel walls, presumably as reinternments from old sanctified burials, but they also occasionally crop up in domestic buildings as well. In 1935 builders found an old human skull embedded in a wall of a property in Oxford Street, London, and the following year a human skull was found bricked up in the wall of an old house in Coventry during demolition.[3] These were perhaps mementos of an ancient burial found on the construction site, or, maybe, the macabre remains of murders. The Crediton petty sessions heard a case in 1885 where the skull of an infant wrapped in a bag was found concealed in the ceiling of a garret of a farmhouse. It was the gruesome remains of an illicit child that a domestic servant had given birth to the previous year. Rats had eaten the rest of the concealed body.[4]

When a slater was doing repairs to a roof in Newport in 1921 he came across what he thought was the skeleton of a cat. After all, the owner, George Durston, had been told eight years before that his roof contained such feline remains. On closer inspection, however, it turned out to be a

[2] *Irish Independent*, 16 October 1931; *Penrith Observer*, 20 February 1866; *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 July 1892.

[3] *Gloucester Citizen*, 26 February 1935; *Gloucestershire Echo*, 5 March 1936.

[4] *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 24 July 1885.

mummified baby no more than seven days old.[5] Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries numerous such mummified babies were found concealed in different parts of houses in Britain. A still-born child was found in a coal cupboard in Pimlico in 1901, for instance, and a desiccated baby was found up a chimney in Ashton-on-Mersey in 1905.[6] The same year, in Holbeach, Lincolnshire, a chimney sweep entered the false roof of a house and found an accumulation of rubbish. On clearing it out he found 'a small wooden box contained the mummified remains of a baby'. The coroner decided that no good could come from holding an inquest on the remains.[7] Three years later, a chimney sweep engaged in cleaning an unoccupied house in Garnier Street, Portsmouth, found behind the iron plate of the kitchen range a charred and desiccated child wrapped in brown paper.[8] When, in 1945, a bomb-damaged house in Brixton was being repaired a mummified baby wrapped in a shawl was found squeezed into the space between the ceiling of a semi-basement and the floorboards of the room above.[9]

Miscarriages and still births were common during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and some of the desiccated babies may have been concealments following the natural, late demise of foetuses rather than the result of abortions. Abortion was illegal but despite the severe penalties it had long been a means of popular birth control, and with the anonymity that came with life in large industrial-urban towns and cities it was easier to get away with it without detection. Reports from the turn of the nineteenth century confirm that in urban working-class culture some women did not consider abortion before three months as sinful. Any desiccated remains reported as 'babies' in the records, however, would have to have been late abortions. There were numerous quack doctors and backstreet abortionists offering their illicit services, but many working-class women self-medicated at home. Herbal remedies consisting of savin, rue, ergot, hellebore, and penny-royal had long been used to induce abortions, compounds of aloes and iron were also employed to irritate the lower bowel and induce expulsion. From the 1890s knowledge of the abortifacient properties of a lead compound known as diachylon, found in

[5] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 3 November 1921.
[6] *Evening Express*, 22 November 1901; *Lancashire Evening Post*, 20 December 1905.
[7] *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 4 November 1905.
[8] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 18 July 1908.
[9] *Evening Despatch*, 4 October 1945.

many working-class homes for treating cuts and sores, spread quickly in northern and midland towns and cities.[10]

Infanticide, which is the killing of a new or recently born child as distinct from an aborted foetus, explains a mummified baby found in 1934 in a box amongst the straw in the underdrawing of a roof in Horseforth, Leeds. A piece of tape had been tightly wound around the baby's neck. A doctor reckoned that it had been concealed there at least thirty years before.[11] There had been a major infanticide debate in the press during the 1860s when the well-known surgeon and coroner Dr Edwin Lankester made dubious calculations as to an epidemic of infanticide in London. He responded to the scepticism by stating in *The Times* in 1866: 'when it was remembered that the cases that came before the Coroner's Court were only those that had been clumsily put away—thrown into some neighbouring street or pond—it had always appeared to him that a very large number of infants were successfully put away and concealed. It was not improbable that for every body discovered another was successfully concealed.'[12] Many were no doubt successfully buried in the ground or thrown into rivers and ponds at night, while numerous others were incinerated in bonfires. In areas of dense urban housing, with people living in close intimacy in lodgings and slums, it was less easy to dispose of baby corpses outdoors and the home became a more important repository for above-ground disposal.

The preservation of bodies by natural desiccation requires a warm, dry, ventilated environment. Experiments have shown that in optimum conditions a human body can be mummified in a closed structure within as little as four months.[13] Those babies placed up or near fires and chimneys were likely to have had the best chance of preservation. Wall cavities and roof spaces provide other conducive environments. Several infants were found wrapped tightly in paper. In 1936, an inquest on a mummified baby found under the floorboards of a house in Kensington heard how it was wrapped

[10] Anne-Marie Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain, c. 1600 to the Present* (Basingstoke, 2013); Angus McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1978), pp. 231–54; Angus McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals* (London, 1984), pp. 89–145.

[11] *Shields Daily News*, 9 June 1934.

[12] *The Times*, 6 October 1866. See Nicola Goc, *Women, Infanticide and the Press, 1822–1922: News Narratives in England and Australia* (London, 2013), pp. 85–90.

[13] Christine Quigley, *Modern Mummies: The Preservation of the Human Body in the Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, 1998), pp. 16–19.

in a newspaper dated 1870.[14] The newspaper would have absorbed the humidity arising from the decaying corpse and prevented the entry of external bacteria and insects thereby enabling the desiccation process—as well as inadvertently providing a date for the concealment. A mummified baby found in the attic of the White Horse pub in Woolwich Road, Charlton, in 1919, was reported at the inquest to have had a smell of pepper from it. The coroner remarked, rightly, that it was probably to mask the smell, but black pepper was also used in antiquity in the mummification process, so it may have inadvertently helped in this instance.[15]

The frequency with which dried babies were being revealed during the early twentieth century led, not surprisingly, to associations with haunted houses. At the inquest on the mummified baby found in Newport, mentioned earlier, the coroner joked when asking George Durston: 'You have heard no mysterious rappings, and have seen no spirits except in bottles?' 'No', replied Durston.[16] In at least one case the revealing of a mummified baby was sought as an explanation for a house having had a prior haunted reputation. By 1921, number 578 Rotherhithe Street, Rotherhithe, had stood empty for some twelve years, and like many long-empty houses, it had accrued the reputation as a ghostly place. Then, the house was renovated and a new tenant moved in. When he tried to light a fire he had great difficulty pushing the regulator back. On investigation he found it was blocked by a little package containing a mummified infant wrapped in an old stained cloth.[17]

Feline Remains

Apart from human babies, the most common mummified objects found in buildings were domestic and wild animals. In 1890, it was reported that when the chimney of the now Grade 1 listed Old Porch House, Potterne, Wiltshire, was pulled down 'many years ago' the desiccated remains of a chicken that was trussed and ready for cooking were found up it. Subsequent reports on this find omit the status of the chicken as prepared cuisine.[18] In the early 1930s a mummified ferret was found at the back of

[14] *The Scotsman*, 23 July 1936.
[15] *Daily Herald*, 8 September 1919.
[16] *Nottingham Evening Post*, 3 November 1921.
[17] *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 12 November 1921.
[18] *Warminster & Westbury journal, and Wilts County Advertiser*, 9 August 1890.

a beam at the base of a chimney at the Dun Cow pub in Dunchurch. The publican remembered how, forty years before, the ferret had been put into a hole in the wall to deal with a pesky rat—and never returned.[19]Across the Atlantic, in 1916, the *Boston Sunday Post*, and other newspapers, reported that workmen renovating the Chapel of St Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, found a perfectly mummified raccoon in the rafters. In 1954, papers reported a mummified possum having been found in an old house on Monterey Circle, Maryland.[20] More recently a correspondent with building experience in the southern states of America observed that, 'In the South it is not too unusual to find a dead mummified possum when tearing out a wall. They seem to like crawling in there from the attic or crawlspace but they get stuck and die.'[21]

Cats were by far the most ubiquitous of mummified animals in Britain, and in the age of survivals their discovery has generated theories regarding their ritual concealment, sacrificial origins, and apotropaic purpose. We have already noted in the previous chapter the influential article by Margaret Howard that was readily embraced by Ralph Merrifield. But search through the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century newspapers and one finds numerous matter-of-fact references to the finding of cat skeletons and dried cats in buildings with no hint that they had anything to do with 'superstition' or ritual deposition. Indeed, in 1874, the *Illustrated London News* characterised 'skeleton of a cat discovered in a gas pipe' as a typical 'silly season' story, along with 'enormous gooseberry' and 'shower of frogs'.[22] The discovery of dead cats in pursuit of dead rats was deemed particularly newsworthy. *Bell's Weekly Messenger* reported in July 1823, for instance:

> On removing, last week, an old partition in the house of Mr. Charles Reesby, miller and baker, of Stamford, the skeleton of a cat was discovered, wedged between the partition and the wall; and what constitutes the singularity of the discovery is, that between the extended fore legs of the cat, the skeleton of a rat was also found.[23]

[19] *Midland Daily Telegraph*, 17 February 1937.
[20] *Boston Sunday Post*, 24 September 1916; *Hagerstown Daily Mail*, 2 June 1964.
[21] Pers. comm. Dennis, South Carolina, 06/07/2017.
[22] *Illustrated London News*, 9 September 1876.
[23] *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 7 July 1823.

Up until the late nineteenth century such concealed cats were generally described as skeletons, though reference was sometimes made to their unusual preservation and the parchment like quality of their skin. The use of 'mummified' to describe their condition grew out of the public fascination with ancient Egypt from the mid-nineteenth century. 'Egyptomania' manifested itself in numerous cultural ways from garden design to the antiquarian fad for growing 'mummy wheat' from ancient sites. Museums up and down the country purchased human and animal specimens as public curios. Some also ended up in private homes as fashionable talking points. During the 1830s and 1840s, the public unwrapping of ancient human mummies as scientific entertainment boomed, and by the latter part of the century the mummy as monster had become established as the familiar fantasy character we know today.[24] More to the point, in the 1830s it was widely reported that several tombs full of mummified cats had been discovered by the Italian Egyptologist and explorer Giovanni Battista Belzoni and others. He had found one necropolis full of cats wrapped in red and white linen. Others were found in packets or wrapped in mats.[25] One of the earliest analogies made between Egyptian mummified cats and those found in British homes was in a news item in the *Perthshire Advertiser* in 1857. Headed 'A Mummy Cat', the piece reported the finding of a desiccated cat when demolishing an old tenement in George Street, Perth, 'as thoroughly preserved in flesh and bone as the famed personations of nobler animals found in the tombs of Memphis'. 'It was strange to see how perfect he was in all his lineaments', it continued, 'though neither asphaltum from the Dead Sea, nor spices from Araby the Blest, had contributed to the result'.[26] A few years later, the debate about whether the recent find of the desiccated body of an Australian Aboriginal was a petrified 'fossil' or not led to comparisons with an ancient 'mummy' recently found in Peru and a cat and a rat on display in Colchester Museum of

[24] Tessa T. Baber, 'Ancient Corpses as Curiosities: Mummymania in the Age of Early Travel', *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 8 (2016) 60–93; Beverley Rogers, 'Unwrapping the Past: Egyptian Mummies on Show,' in Joe Kember, John Plunkett and Jill A Sullivan (eds), *Popular Exhibitions, Science and Showmanship, 1840–1910* (Abingdon, 2012), pp. 199–217.

[25] Thomas Joseph Pettigrew, *A History of Egyptian Mummies: And an Account of the Worship and Embalming of the Sacred Animals* (London, 1834), p. 189.

[26] *Perthshire Advertiser*; reprinted in the *Bradford Observer*, 6 August 1857.

Antiquities. The latter had been uncovered in a wall cavity during the demolition of a local building.[27]

Press and public interest in mummified cats was spurred further in 1890 when some 180,000 Egyptian mummified cats were imported to Britain from Beni Hassan, an ancient Egyptian cemetery site some hundred miles from Cairo. There were an extraordinary eight and half tons in all and they were transported in a hundred sacks by steamship to Liverpool where they were auctioned. Shockingly most of the shipment was destined for British mills to be ground up for agricultural fertiliser. Quite a few mummified cats' heads in the shipment were, nevertheless, auctioned singly to curio hunters, with most selling for between two and four shillings a piece. Many were bought by a Mr Gorat, who, the auctioneer observed, intended to sell them on to museums for four or five pounds each.[28] In June 1890, someone also placed the following advertisement in *The Era*: 'To Showmen. A Mummified Cat. For Sale. A Perfect Specimen. The only one to be found. Cross, Liverpool.'[29] The language of 'mummies' and mummification spread further into public discourse. In 1896, for instance, the makers of Rodentium Biscuit Poison jumped on the bandwagon and advertised, 'Rats and Mice Mummified!'[30]

Despite the huge numbers of ancient Egyptian mummified cats potentially available for purchase, a trade in the home-grown variety as curios actually predated Mummymania and continued into the twentieth century. The earliest reference we have found for such a trade dates to 1790. When a roof was removed from an old house in Steyning, Sussex, a dried cat with a rat in its mouth was found in a position where it was stuck in a hole in the building. The object was apparently purchased by a Mr Reader as a curiosity for his private museum in Brighton. When another such cat and rat were found in 1836 during the demolition of two old houses next to the White Hart stables, Westgate Street, Bath, they were quickly purchased and put on public display as an attraction.[31] The 1890 Egyptian shipment no doubt gave a further fillip to the public display of the domestic variety. In 1894 an exhibition for the Fulham Society of Literature, Science and Art included a dried cat with a rat in its mouth, found behind

[27] *Field*, 24 March 1866.
[28] *Lancashire Evening Post*, 11 February 1890.
[29] *The Era*, 14 June 1890.
[30] *Swindon Advertiser and North Wilts Chronicle*, 26 December 1896.
[31] *Northampton Mercury*, 4 September 1790; *The Standard*, 18 October 1836.

a chimney on pulling down a house in Gray's Inn Road.[32] When a desiccated cat was found between the lining and the outside planking during the breaking up of HMS Menelaus in 1903 it was put on display at the Customs Watch House on Ryde Pier.[33]

By this time, people knew the value of a home-grown desiccated cat. When one was discovered while taking down a partition wall in Elgin in 1896, the building's owner, a plumber, placed it as an attraction in his shop window in front of some bicycles.[34] The issue had become a matter of legal debate in the Aberdeen sheriff's court in July 1880. The case concerned one of the oldest houses in town, located in Castle Street. According to local legend it had been occupied at one time by Mary Queen of Scots. It was owned by a local printer named Joseph Cornwell who had made it well known that he was having the structure demolished and had been asked to preserve any curious finds by the Perth Antiquarian Society. During the demolition one of the workmen found an old desiccated cat in a wooden partition. The man who had been contracted to purchase the first hundred cart loads of demolition stone, Mr James Wallace Thom, a temperance hotel keeper and local politician, recognising the potential monetary value of the dried cat and demanded it was handed over to him. Being on site at the time looking for any relics that might have been associated with the Queen, he made away with it. Shortly after, he advertised it as being on display as the 'fossilised cat' of Queen Mary, and on the first day of its display at his hotel he took in a very healthy £1 3s. 6d. Cornwell then tried to reclaim the cat claiming he had lost its worth of £200. The sheriff found in favour of Cornwell stating that Thom had purchased the masonry debris fair and square but not the cat. A local newspaper, reporting on the case, observed: 'Mr Thom's action has added a distinct value to the cat as an antiquarian curiosity, and it may be a question whether, owing to the thousands of spectators who will now flock to see it, the management of such museum as it may be consigned to should not extend a little of the compensation which the Sheriff has refused to Mr Thom'.[35] This was not the end of this bizarre feline affair. Six months later, Thom brought a suit against Cornwell for the return of the cat within six days, and if he did not he would be liable for £100. He now stated it was worth £1000. The case of 'Queen Mary's Cat' rumbled on for several months.

[32] *West London Observer*, 19 May 1894.
[33] *Graphic*, 19 September 1903.
[34] *The Dundee Courier*, 6 July 1896.
[35] *The Northern Warder*, 6 July 1880; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 30 July 1880.

Thom had long argued that the dried cat was a fossil and therefore a stone to which he was entitled, but in late March a fatigued sheriff's court determined that it was not a stone and Thom had no rights to it. He then vowed to take the case to the Court of Session. Thom's death ten years later in Glasgow was still considered newsworthy because of this episode—'he first came into public notice in connection with an action anent the supposed remains of a cat'.[36]

As cat owners know today, our feline friends have a habit of getting into tricky situations. So, as well as reporting on their mummified remains, newspapers have long found newsworthiness in cats rescued from possible death and desiccation. The *Mid Sussex Times* reported in 1896 that a cat had been found alive but emaciated after being stuck in a wall cavity after the hole created for a sink pipe had been bricked up. In 1908, newspapers described how the Persian cat of John Stephenson, Chatsworth Street, Sunderland, had been entombed in a wall for a month having climbed into a ventilation chamber in the wall during renovations. The cat was eventually rescued after its mewing was detected. A similar incident of entombment was related from Park Road, Newcastle, after recent bricklayer's repairs in 1931.[37] There were also numerous reports in the local press of the rescue of cats stuck up in chimneys, such as that found in the store room chimney of Plymouth and Oreston Timber Company, Sutton Road, Plymouth.[38] In Belle Vue, Carlisle, a cat had to be rescued in 1930 after raising three kittens in an old bird's nest up a chimney. In 1905, a fortunate moggy was spared the fate of the well-known mummified cat found in the organ of Christ Church cathedral, Dublin, when it was rescued after being stuck in the organ of Bridport Wesleyan Chapel.[39] It was also unwise for cats to have a nap during roofing works. While thatching a house near Buckingham in 1892 workers heard strange noises emanating from the newly covered roof and found a cat barely alive that had been buried for a week in a new section of thatch.[40] In the following instance we have the

[36] *Dundee Courier*, 8 January 1881; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 2 April 1881; *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 4 July 1891.

[37] *Mid Sussex Times*, 14 April 1896; *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 11 March 1908; *Portsmouth Evening News*, 12 February 1931.

[38] See, for example, *Daily Herald*, 21 March 1921; *Dundee Courier*, 20 October 1932; *Western Morning News*, 2 April 1938; *Gloucester Citizen*, 11 January 1949; *Western Morning News*, 6 September 1939.

[39] *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 19 May 1930; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 24 October 1905.

[40] *Buckingham Advertiser and Free Press*, 6 February 1892.

complete story of a missing cat that did not make it out alive. Around 1913 a tortoiseshell cat belonging to George Wentworth of the Coach and Horse Inn, Poole Road, Wimborne, went missing. Ten years later, a local newspaper reported that one of his family was cleaning out the hay loft of the stables when he 'found beneath a wall underneath the thatched roof a skeleton of a cat which it is believed was the missing animal, with the remains of a rat—simply the bone and cartilage—in its mouth in a position that suggests poor pussy was choked in its endeavour to get the better of the rodent'. The cat was described as perfectly preserved with a painful expression.[41]

As noted in Chap. 1, the finding of dried cats in several Dublin houses led, in 1911, to the suggestion that they were a survival of human sacrificial practices. This idea was given further credence in 1937 with a posthumous entry on 'Foundation Rites' in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* written by the folklorist Edwin Sydney Hartland. It contained the usual jumble of global anthropological and historical comparisons used by the survivalists, and he observed at one point that:

> The dried bodies of cats found so frequently walled up in old houses both in this country and on the Continent point to their having been immured alive. The hypothesis derives probability from the belief that every new building must have a victim, in order that human life may be preserved.[42]

As hardly any dried cat finds can be dated to the origins of the buildings in which they are discovered, the sacrifice hypothesis has no evidential foundations. It was Margaret Maitland Howard, though, in her 1951 article in the anthropological journal *Man*, who firmly established the topic as a matter of serious study. While she was open to multiple interpretations, including that they were the result of accidental entombments, her primary focus was the proof for residual sacrifice. One of the arguments for this was several cases where the cat seemed to be deliberately posed along with a mummified rat or mouse. It was deemed unlikely that both rat and cat expired at the same moment—they had to have been placed there for a function it seemed. The most likely explanations appeared, therefore, to be that they were concealed to ward off vermin, either as a display of sympathetic magic or merely as a physical vermin scarer—rather like the fluttering plastic hawks

[41] *Western Gazette*, 22 June 1923.

[42] Edwin S. Hartland, 'Foundation Rites', in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh, 1937), vol. 6, p. 113.

employed to keep pigeons away from buildings today. The latter idea seems to have been proposed by Noel Teulon Porter in correspondence with Margaret Howard. Teulon Porter was a maverick intellectual based in Cambridge (though not a member of the university), with interests in archaeology, anthropology, rural traditions, and eugenics. He also had a stint as a BBC broadcaster in the late 1920s.[43] Unbeknownst to Howard, Teulon Porter had been compiling information about dried cats while in his role as a founding member of the Shaftesbury & District Historical Society. The two got in contact and Teulon Porter handed over his material with the request that she publish it as part of the article that she subsequently published in *Man*.[44] His interest in the topic certainly continued, for he was consulted in 1954 on the find of a dried cat during renovations of Wynters Armourie, a moated country house in Magdalen Laver, Essex.[45]

But these are all twentieth-century explanations. As we have already seen, cat and rat finds had been reported periodically by newspapers from the late eighteenth century onward, but although considered curiosities they were never interpreted as mysterious, magical, or inexplicable. All the early reports proposed natural reasons for the positioning. In 1822, for instance, when the house of a Mr Budd, Shepton Mallet, was undergoing repair workman found between the ceiling and the thatched roof, which had not been re-laid for forty years, the skeleton of a rat and five inches behind that the remains of a cat, and behind that the skeleton of a second cat. The finders concluded that, 'the cats followed the rat till they could get no further nor return'.[46] This was a familiar scenario. A decade later another example found in the thatch of an old cottage in Mansfield was widely reported in the press and described as having 'the head of the rat so far in the mouth of the rat, that the latter appears to have been suffocated'.[47] Veterinarians today deal periodically with cats with such oesophagus obstructions that can cause death.

One of Howard's key pieces of evidence for the deliberate positioning of cat and rat as a ritual act concerns the cat and two rats found beneath sixteenth-century woodwork in a house in Borough High Street, Southwark. 'No imaginable accident could have preserved them in such

[43] Lois W. Banner, *Intertwined Lives: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Their Circle* (New York, 2003), p. 321.

[44] Howard, 'Dried Cats', p. 149.

[45] Essex Record Office, T/P 541/1.

[46] *Bristol Mercury*, 1 June 1822.

[47] See, for example, *Leamington Spa Courier*, 7 September 1833.

lifelike attitudes', she said. 'It is quite obvious that the group has been very ingeniously set up.' The only evidence presented for this is a display of the cat and rats photographed in the *London Illustrated News* in 1948. This was actually one of numerous items displayed for a three-day exhibition celebrating the history of Southwark in December that year. The caption was as follows: 'perpetuating some mysterious sudden death: A cat and two rats, mummified in the moment of conflict'.[48] The photograph clearly shows the framed display is much older. This was not a recent find, but a tableau probably displayed in a museum or public house for decades. We have no evidence for the exact positioning of the finds on their discovery, and can draw no conclusions about whether it was accidental or not.

If we look carefully at all the finds reported and found of dried cats, the vast majority can be credibly explained in mundane terms of cats hunting in narrow voids and being unable to turn around or cats being sealed into voids while asleep. There are only a very few examples where the context of the concealment suggests deliberate human concealment. A couple of cat remains have been found, for instance, buried under hearthstones in this country.[49] When, in 1869, Moorhouse Farm, Soyland, West Yorkshire, was being repaired the skeleton of a cat was found which had been placed at the end of an old beam and then covered with the stones forming the wall. It was suggested that it had been placed there around 1605 at the time the house was built. In 1893, the restoration of the church at Ennis Friary, County Clare, uncovered a dried cat that had been sealed in a deep recess in the wall, most likely in the seventeenth century. It has more recently been interpreted as 'a seventeenth century reduced form of foundation sacrifice'.[50] Workmen were demolishing an old clay building at Longhead, near Wigton, Cumbria, in 1911, when they found a very well-preserved cat in the daub wall.[51] Then, in 1925, when Pill Farm, Barnstaple, was being rebuilt after a fire, workmen found the remains of a mummified cat with two owl's eggs embedded with it, completely enclosed in a thick

[48] *Illustrated London News*, 18 December 1948.

[49] M. Chris Manning, 'Homemade Magic: Concealed Deposits in Architectural Contexts in the Eastern United States', PhD thesis, Ball State University 2012, p. 226.

[50] *Brecon County Times*, 17 July 1869; John Sheehan, 'A Seventeenth Century Dried Cat from Ennis Friary, Co. Clare', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 32 (1990) 64–68.

[51] *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Friday 12 May 1911. See also finds from: Reindeer Inn, Banbury—*Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 20 May 1903; Peterborough, *Cambridge Independent Press*, 2 August 1907; Paris Street, Exeter—*Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 20 September 1929; under the floor of St John's Hall, Spittal—*Berwickshire News and General Advertiser*, 10 September 1935.

wall. The reporter mooted the fanciful explanation that an owl had killed the cat and took it to its nest in the wall, laid its eggs on the warm body, and the nest was subsequently walled up.[52] Does this handful of examples add up to evidence for a ritual tradition, though? There is certainly no clear uniformity in how they were placed, and no evidence for the pre-concealment treatment of the corpses. Are they, instead, the result of builders having a bit of fun with dead cats? There were certainly plenty of dead cats lying around in towns and villages, as old health and safety reports confirm. Likewise, consider the two mummified rats found in 1909 by workmen renovating Crisp's premises, Cumbergate, Peterborough. They were also found 'embedded in the masonry', and 'from the position in which they were found the architect was of opinion that they had been there for at least three hundred years'.[53]

Magical and ritual explanations have stuck tenaciously to concealed cats since Margaret Howard's 1951 article. Considering 'the remarkable place which the cat has held in superstition', she wrote, 'it is not surprising that the remains of cats should be found in positions suggesting that they were deposited as foundation or rooftree sacrifices'. She went on to suggest the following scenario:

> During the superstitious, witch-hunting times of the Middle Ages, the cat acquired a reputation as a magical animal, the familiar of witches and the associate of the Devil. Cats had probably become very plentiful and were therefore easily available for use as sacrifices and offerings to their supposed master, the Devil, as the old gods had come to be called.[54]

This statement is riddled with problems and hardly helps the case she puts for ritual concealments. First, the 'witch hunts' were not conducted in the Middle Ages but in the early modern period from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century. Secondly, there is no evidence for some Europe-wide, pervasive increase in the cat population that made them cheap sacrificial offerings at the time, and there is no evidence of cats being sacrificed to the Devil—and it is not even a dominant motif in the lurid literature on the sabbats. The reference to the Devil being one of the old gods confirms the influence of Margaret Murray's theories of pagan survivals on Howard's conception of the witch trials. Others have tried to

[52] *Western Times*, 2 October 1925.
[53] *Stamford Mercury*, 28 May 1909.
[54] Howard, 'Dried Cats', p. 150.

situate the supposed ritual concealment of cats within the broader set of popular beliefs around cats as witches' familiars, witches and devils shape-shifting into cats, black cats as a cause of bad and good luck, and cats as denizens of an underworld of dark spiritual forces.[55] It has even been stated that because of their association with evil, dried cats 'were thought to decoy witches away from the house's occupants'.[56]

The folklore regarding cats is, indeed, rich—more so than for any other domestic animal.[57] There are also numerous accounts from the witch-trial records of cats as familiars. But in all the archives there is no connection between the concealment of *dead* cats in buildings and beliefs regarding *living* cats and supernatural beings in the guise of cats. There is no body of lore about *dead* cats being lucky or unlucky, or concerned with witches. To conflate the two states of existence and associated beliefs is a category error. There is, then, no concrete basis for a ritual explanation for desiccated cats in buildings. Even if ritual was involved in a very small number of cat concealments we cannot assume they all had the same purpose. Some might have been vermin scarers—whether through the agency of sympathetic magic or otherwise. The Ennis Priory cat could have been a builder's prank or a reverential internment of a beloved cat associated with the church. A few concealments might have been the result of idiosyncratic rituals invented by cunning folk. This is as far as we can take any interpretations of individual dried cat finds.

* * *

So, two main categories of desiccated bodies were found in buildings, but while one has been enchanted by theories of ritual and protection the other has not been considered at all by scholars. Dried babies have not attracted survivalist theories, even though it is clear that they were deliberately

[55] Petra Schad, 'Tiermumien aus Depotfunden im Landkries Ludwigsburg – Relikte frühneuzeitlicher Magievorstellung?', in Ingolf Ericsson and Rainer Atzbach (eds), *Depotfunde aus Gebäuden in Zentraleuropa* (Berlin, 2005), p. 155; Freya R. Massey, 'Ritualisation and Reappropriation: Special Deposits and Ritual Activity in Domestic Structures in Early Modern England', PhD thesis, University of Sheffield 2014, pp. 30–31; Ian Evans, 'Touching Magic: Deliberately Concealed Objects in Old Australian Houses and Buildings', PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, NSW 2010, pp. 171–2; Manning, 'Homemade Magic', pp. 236–43.

[56] Monica-Maria Stapelberg, *Strange but True: A Historical Background to Popular Beliefs and Traditions* (London, 2014).

[57] See, for example, Steve Roud, *The Penguin Guide to the Superstitions of Britain and Ireland* (London, 2003), pp. 63–71.

concealed, unlike most of the cat finds. It could be argued that it is patently obvious that dried babies were the result of tragic personal circumstances and therefore there is no need to consider ritual activity. Yet infants, some still born and some several weeks old, have been found buried in mediaeval domestic contexts, leading to the suggestion that they might have been part of a fertility ritual for ensuring that similar premature deaths did not befall future children born in the home.[58] If this is the case, then it shows how similar concealments had different purposes in different periods. But maybe the medieval examples, like the modern ones, were not ritual at all. If dead cats were placed in buildings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an unwitting, residual, building sacrificial practice then why not human babies? There is no evidence for either practice. Yet, it has seemed reasonable that cats could fit the survivalist theories but not dead babies because they illicit a different set of emotional responses that locate them in a very different affinity with the past.

[58] Roberta Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the life course*, pp. 219–23, 284–5; Gilchrist, 'Magic and Archaeology: Ritual Residues and "Odd" Deposits', in Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (eds), *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic* (Abingdon, 2019), pp. 383–401.

CHAPTER 4

Folk Science Meets Folk Memory: Acoustics and Illumination

Talk of pagan foundation sacrifice has long pervaded discussion about the horse skulls found in the voids of churches and dwellings, even though, as we shall see, the overwhelming evidence is that they had an acoustic function. In his book, *Byways in British Archaeology* (1912), which explored the archaeology of churches and churchyards, Walter Johnson was supremely confident that 'the modern theory of the acoustic purpose of the skulls fades as we trace the custom to more remote times', and further that, 'it is sufficiently obvious that the sacrificial idea preceded the economic'. Johnson, a Fellow of the Geological Society and a school master in Battersea, had previously espoused his theories in *Folk-Memory, or the Continuity of British Archaeology* (1908). He defined 'folk-memory' as the 'conscious or unconscious remembrance, by a people collectively, of ideas connected with the retention of rites and superstitions, habits and occupations'. It was in essence, as he was willing to admit, analogous to the theory of survivals.[1] It was a seductive idea that modern 'rational' explanations for beliefs and practices were merely an enlightenment veneer, that folk-memory held truths that were lost to contemporary intellectual minds.

[1] Walter Johnson, *Byways in British Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1912), p. 445; Walter Johnson, *Folk-Memory, or the Continuity of British Archaeology* (Oxford, 1908), p. 11. On Johnson see, *The Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London* 106 (1951) lxvi; *London Daily News*, 8 September 1910.

O. Davies, C. Houlbrook, *Building Magic*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76765-5_4

But as the story of so-called witch balls demonstrates, folk-memories can very quickly be invented and spread. As they and concealed horse skulls show, survivalist theories were actually often a false memory of modern developments in folk science and not folk magic.

Skulduggery

The interest in buried horse skulls was particularly lively in Ireland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There was an early flurry of interest in the pages of *Notes and Queries* in 1869. One correspondent recalled that during his childhood in County Clare, there was a field where he stayed that was reputed to have a very fine echo due to the burial there of the skull of a horse that had lived on the estate till the grand old age of thirty. He also 'frequently heard the peasants and farmers gravely say, in accounting for such and such a public building being good or bad for hearing, that a horse's skull had or had not been buried in it when in process of erection'.[2] Following a recent find of horse skulls under some flooring in 1893, a correspondence in the *Weekly Irish Times* also considered the acoustic value of horse skulls in churches. One old woman told a correspondent about two skulls placed under the flagging of her church, which caused unwelcome reverberations as carts and horse-drawn cars passed by on the road outside.[3] By the time the matter was discussed again in the *Irish Examiner* in 1938 the theory of survivals had become established in public discourse, while the popular memory of the original acoustic practice was fading. The report, which arose from the discovery of a collection of horse skulls in an old house, noted that it had 'aroused the usual conflicting conjectures', including that they were buried to keep the fairies away.[4]

That same year, perhaps spurred by this correspondence, the Irish Folklore Commission issued the following query to correspondents across the country: 'Do any traditions exist locally (or are tales told in which the idea occurs) about the burying of the heads of animals or other objects in certain places (castles, houses, bridges, etc.)? If so, please state what these

[2] *Notes & Queries*, 4th S. Vol. 3 (12 June, 1869) 564.
[3] *The Weekly Irish Times*, 15 July 1893.
[4] *Irish Examiner*, 13 June 1938.

traditions are, even if the information available is scanty or incomplete.'[5] The results were published in 1945 by Seán Ó Súilleabháin, who concluded that the acoustic purpose was secondary, and that the burial of horse skulls was 'another link in the chain of evidence regarding foundation sacrifices'.[6] He would change his mind a few years later though, under the weight of evidence produced by the Swedish folklorist Albert Sandklef that horse skulls had a secular origin and function in enhancing the acoustics of rooms and threshing floors.[7] Over the subsequent decades a series of finds and references were recorded in the journal *Ulster Folklife*. By 2004, thirty-three instances of horse skulls concealed in or under buildings, including threshing barns, had been recorded from across Ireland, with most found in dwellings having a clear acoustic purpose.[8] Similarly, across the Irish Sea, some fifty or so examples of concealed horse skulls had been recorded from England, and around twenty-seven instances collated regarding Wales.[9]

The much-read author of old farming life in East Anglia, George Ewart Evans helped spread notions of the magical interpretation of buried horse skulls. In his *Pattern under the Plough* (1966), Evans noted examples of the mundane use of animal bones to firm up mud floors, but, like Walter Johnson, also sought evidence for survivals of an ancient horse cult in contemporary rural lore and practice. That said, Evans considered the concealment of horse bones and skulls around the home as an apotropaic ritual rather than a foundation sacrifice.[10] Then Merrifield picked up the trail. He accepted that rows of skulls under floorboards probably had an acoustic function, and noted the use of acoustic pots in antiquity and in churches in medieval times. Indeed, the subject of acoustic pots or jugs had been researched and published back in the late nineteenth century,

[5] Seán Ó Súilleabháin, 'Foundation Sacrifices', *Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 75(1) (1945) 45–52, p. 45.

[6] Ó Súilleabháin, 'Foundation Sacrifices', p. 50.

[7] See Owen Davies, 'The Material Culture of Post-Medieval Domestic Magic in Europe: Evidence, Comparisons and Interpretations', in Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (eds), *The Materiality of Magic* (Paderborn, 2015), p. 393.

[8] Alan Gailey, 'Horse Skulls, Acoustics, Threshing and Preaching', *Ulster Folklife* 50 (2004) 110–14.

[9] Brian Hoggard, 'Concealed Animals', in Hutton (ed.) *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, 106–117, pp. 110–14; Eurwyn Wiliam, 'Concealed Horse Skulls: Testimony and Message', in Trefor M. Owens (ed.), *From Corrib to Cultra: Folklife Essays in Honour of Alan Gailey* (Belfast, 2000), pp. 137–40.

[10] George Ewart Evans, *The Pattern under the Plough* (London, 1966).

spurred on by a series of finds of such pots during renovations and repairs at the likes of St Peter Mancroft Church in Norwich in 1850 and Leeds Church, Maidstone, Kent in 1878.[11] Unaware of Ó Súilleabháin's capitulation to Sandklef decades earlier, Merrifield pursued a similar folk-memory line of argument that the acoustic explanation was a veneer. He described the relationship between acoustic skulls and acoustic pots as 'obscure'. The 'whole question of acoustic devices, both pots and skulls, is in fact closely entangled with that of ritual practices', he believed. To muddy the waters further, he went on to throw in the concept of the horse's head as an ancient symbol of power and the idea that the earliest food production had a strong religious element.[12] Although Merrifield did not cite Johnson's work in his bibliography, his conclusions on horse skulls and acoustic pots were very similar in their attempt to open enough worm holes to enable survivals to survive. Johnson posited that the burial of horse skulls as foundation sacrifices in temples came first, then 'secular architects' 'not versed in the mystic lore of their heathen fathers, become prone to substitute an urn or a jar for a skull'. So the acoustic horse skulls in domestic and ecclesiastical contexts developed 'side by side' with the acoustic pots, but ultimately had the same ritual origin. Johnson concluded in equivocal fashion that 'the mingling of the symbolic and the utilitarian idea is difficult to unravel, hence there is room for much speculation, and need for some suspension of final judgement'.[13]

When builders took down the spire above the belfry of Elsdon Church, Northumberland, in 1877 they found three carefully arranged horse skulls in a tripod form with the upper jaws upward in a specially prepared cavity.[14] This unusual find was picked up enthusiastically by the survivalists. The folklorist George Laurence Gomme noted it in his book *Ethnology in Folklore* (1892) as an archaeological example of global sacrificial practice parallel to living practices in India and folkloric survivals amongst the European peasantry. Johnson waxed lyrical on the same theme: 'the masons of old times doubtless imagined that the skulls would make the tones of the bells more resonant, but, "lulled in the countless chambers of

[11] George C. Yates, 'Acoustic Jars' in William Andrews (ed.) *Antiquities and Curiosities of the Church* (London, 1897), pp. 34–44.

[12] Ralph Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (London, 1987), pp. 125–6.

[13] Johnson, *Byways*, pp. 450–1.

[14] 'Horse Skulls at Elsdon Church', *Notes and Queries* 6th S. (22 May 1880) 424; *The Berwick Advertiser*, 3 May 1878; Edward C. Robertson, 'On a Discovery of Horse-heads in the Belfry of Elsden Church', *History of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club* 9 (1882) 510–12.

the brain" there must have been almost-forgotten memories of the traditional talismans'.[15] But until the Elsdon skulls are radio-carbon dated there is no evidence that they are medieval or early modern in date. Indeed, most of the evidence we have for skull acoustics dates from the eighteenth century onward, and concerns the building and design of chapels and not churches.

The Toleration Act of 1689 granted freedom of worship to Nonconformists. The earliest places of Dissenting worship were in homes and barns, but from the early eighteenth century new, dedicated chapels began to proliferate. There was a strong emphasis on acoustic properties and sightlines within, the better to heighten the drama and quality of the preaching. Pulpits were frequently built in the centre with pews on three sides.[16] Use was increasingly made in both churches and chapels of concave sounding boards and brass pans above the pulpit to prevent echoes and direct the sound more fully. There was some published debate about the design of soundboards, but then many were removed from churches during the major period of church renovation in the mid-nineteenth century.[17]

A series of finds from eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian chapels, urban and rural, confirm that the acoustic use of horse skulls was a well-known and quite widely used technique for chapel builders during the early phase of Nonconformist building expansion in the eighteenth century. When the old United Presbyterian church, founded in 1744, at Ceres, Fife, was demolished in 1870, several horse skulls were found under the pulpit. The local joiner reported knowing several other such cases. In the 1940s, an old barn-like former United Presbyterian church on Fala and Soutra was repurposed as a business premises. When builders took up the double-decker pulpit and floorboards they found a stone foundation beneath it with a hollow containing three horse skulls, which were almost certainly placed there during the founding of the original place of worship

[15] George Laurence Gomme, *Ethnology in Folklore* (London, 1892), p. 36; Johnson, *Byways*, p. 445.

[16] In Edward Royle, 'From Philistines to Goths: Nonconformist Chapel Styles in Victorian England', in Christopher Dyer, Andrew James Hopper, Evelyn Lord, and Nigel J. Tringham (eds), *New Directions in Local History Since Hoskins* (Hatfield, 2011), p. 208.

[17] Thomas Roger Smith, *A Rudimentary Treatise on the acoustics of public buildings* (London, 1861); 'The Acoustics of Buildings', *The Church Builder* (1870) 43–5; 'Acoustics of Churches', *The Church Builder* (1870) 102–5.

in 1788.[18] In 1872, at the centenary services of the United Presbyterian Church at Dysart, it was noted by one of the lecturers that horse skulls had been found built in under the pulpit floor of the old church, and that twenty-four horse skulls had also recently been found under the pulpit of the Rev. Peddie' Secession church in Edinburgh. Some of Peddie's flock explained to him that they were placed there to improve the sound with two of them placed behind the sounding board.[19] From another reference, it appears that when the meeting house in Bristo Street that preceded Peddie's church was taken down around 1805 the sounding board above the pulpit was found filled with horses' skulls. The correspondent who reported this in 1869 remembered seeing them revealed as a child, 'and for long after the heads presented themselves to my dreams'.[20] Chapel builders in Wales also used horse skulls for the same reasons. Twenty horse skulls were found in the ceiling of the Bethesda Nonconformist Chapel in Brechfa, which was built in 1803. When the Calvinistic Methodist Church at Caerfarchell, Pembrokeshire, was being built in 1827, a member of the congregation was apparently told to find two skulls 'to kill the echo'.[21]

From the material finds of horse skulls in seventeenth-century English and Welsh domestic contexts, it is clear that the eighteenth-century chapel builders were drawing upon a continuing practice. Most of the early finds are from manor houses, halls, and substantial farmhouses—in other words the homes of well-to-do families. Around 1934 workmen repairing two English houses dating to the mid-seventeenth century found in one some forty skulls laid out in rows between the floorboard joists, and in the other nineteen oxen and horse skulls. Organs had apparently been installed in both houses at some point, and the skulls had been used to improve the tone.[22] The front parlour seems to have been a key location. When, around 1860, the curate of Thrimby, the Rev. Whiteside, visited Thrimby Hall, Cumbria, he saw a mouldering heap of horse skulls in the garden. Inquiring as to their purpose, he was told they had been found under the parlour floor, and that 'they had been placed for purposes of sound by the tenants who were a musical family'. The skulls had been chipped to make them fit

[18] T. Ratcliffe Barnett, 'Church Acoustics: Primitive Sound-Amplifiers', *The Scotsman*, 27 June 1942.

[19] *Fife Free Press, & Kirkcaldy Guardian*, 21 December 1872.

[20] *Notes and Queries*, 4th S. Vol. 4 (1869) 66.

[21] Wiliam, 'Concealed Horse Skulls', pp. 138–40; Kevin J. Gardner, *Building Jerusalem: Elegies on Parish Churches* (London, 2016), p. 175.

[22] *The Times*, 15 January 1935.

snug against the boards.[23] In 1861 three horse skulls were found under a portion of the front parlour floorboards of Musgrave Hall, Penrith.[24] In the case of a house in North Devon reported in 1895, eight horses' skulls and ten bullocks' skulls were found in order under the floorboards of the ground floor drawing room.[25]

In the late seventeenth century, a few wealthy country homes had ground floor 'music rooms' where visiting troupes performed, or where a family harpsichord or organ was installed. The concept of the 'music parlour' developed and came into wider vogue in the following century, and the piano became an increasingly frequent sight in the homes of the burgeoning middle classes.[26] Two instances have been reported from Northern Ireland of horse skulls having been placed between floorboard joists in parlours or drawing rooms where a piano was kept.[27] Such private spaces might be used for evangelical preaching purposes as well, at a time when chapel building was expanding but informal rooms were still used for worship. The evangelical Anglican clergyman, John Newton, incumbent of Olney, Northamptonshire, wrote to a friend in 1769, 'We are going to remove our prayer-meeting to the great room in the Great House. It is a noble place with a parlour behind.'[28]

In Ireland there was a strong eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tradition of communal and family dancing in the homes of the modest and poor. Due to size and cost we would not expect rows of horse skulls, but in homes where clay or mud floors were common there was clearly a strong tradition of placing one skull under the hearthstone by the fire. This may have been given impetus by the tradition of solo 'step dancing',

[23] T. McKenny Hughes, 'Acoustic Vases in Churches, traced back to Theatres and Oracles of Greece', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 28 (1915) 70. Merrifield mistakenly places Thrimby Hall in Bedfordshire.

[24] *Cumberland Pacquet, and Ware's Whitehaven Advertiser*, 2 April 1861.

[25] *Notes and Queries*, 8th S, Vol. 8 (14 December 1895) 475.

[26] John Trevor Cliffe, *The World of the Country House in Seventeenth-century England* (New Haven, 1999), p. 161; Regula Hohl Trillini, *The Gaze of the Listener: English Representations of Domestic Music-making* (Amsterdam, 2008), pp. 42, 46; Karen Lipsedge, *Domestic Space in Eighteenth-Century British Novels* (New York, 2012), pp. 23, 187 n26.

[27] Alan Gailey, 'Horse Skulls under a County Down Farmhouse Floor', *Ulster Folk Museum Year Book* (169–1970) 13–14; Alan Gailey, *Rural Houses of the North of Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 28–9.

[28] Donald E. Demaray, *The Innovation of John Newton (1725–1807): Synergism of Word and Music in Eighteenth Century Evangelism* (New York, 1988), p. 225.

which developed among the poor.[29] One of the respondents to the Irish Folklore Commission survey reported how 'it was customary in olden times when step-dancing was very common in every home to have at least one large level flagstone in front of the fire on which the dancing was done. … Under this flag it was usual to place the skull of a horse to make the dancing sound better.'[30] The fiddler might also sit or stand on the flagstone the better to project his playing. As an old Irish woman explained in 1893, 'it would give back the sounds of a flute or fiddle "as if it was risin'"'.[31] As in churches, pots were also placed under the hearthstone for the same purpose. One was found in County Limerick in 1955 under the eight foot by four foot flagstone in front of a farmhouse kitchen hearth dating to the early nineteenth century.[32]

There is little evidence of the same, humble, domestic use of skulls under hearthstones in England, Wales, and Scotland. Nonconformist communities in Britain certainly discouraged such 'frivolous' domestic pleasures as folk dance and music. In Ireland there was also the factor that colonial repression restricted popular gatherings in public spaces, thereby fostering folk dancing and fiddling in homes and public houses. Solo dancing, such as clog dancing, was far less prevalent in Britain than in Ireland by the nineteenth century, and few homes of the poor had the space for reels and jigs, which were more likely performed in inns and pubs. There is one very clear example in England of a substantial coaching inn that used skull acoustics to enhance such public entertainments. Around 1850, the architect Thomas Blashill attended a meeting in a large room at the Portway Inn, Staunton on Wye, near Hereford. The landlord told them that there were two cartloads of horses' skulls under the floor where they were being entertained, placed there, he said, 'to make the fiddle go better'. Blashill returned there thirty years later to find an extraordinary spectacle: 'the place was surrounded by scaffolding, and on the top of every scaffold pole was a horse's skull. It was a nine-days' wonder, and the workmen decorated the building with these strange objects.' They had

[29] See, Catherine E. Foley, *Step Dancing in Ireland: Culture and History* (London, 2016); Helen Phelan, *Singing the Rite to Belong: Ritual, Music, and the New Irish* (Oxford, 2017).

[30] O' Súilleabháin, 'Foundation Sacrifices', p. 45.

[31] *The Weekly Irish Times*, 15 July 1893.

[32] Caoimhín Ó Danachair, 'Notes: A pot under a kitchen floor', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 60 (1955) 128.

found some twenty-four skulls under the floor screwed through the eye holes to the underside of the boards in three rows.[33]

Pretty much every reference to buried horse skulls in religious and domestic contexts prior to the late nineteenth century refers to acoustics as their purpose. Explanations in terms of ritual appear several generations on from the end of the building practice, and in the wake of the survivalists promoting folkloric evidence for sacrifice and horse cults. Lack of precision in language over the last century has also confused the purpose of concealments. The distinction has sometimes been lost in the archaeological and ethnographic literature between the concealment of a horse's *head*, which would certainly imply ritual, and a horse's *skull*. A head implies that it is complete and not de-fleshed—and, most important of all, would include the lower jaw bone. Excavation of an early modern Danish farmhouse, for instance, uncovered a deep pit in the stable in which a horse's *head* had been deposited as it contained the teeth of both the upper and lower jaw. This would, indeed, suggest some magical purpose.[34]

While professional excavation and analysis of post-medieval British and Irish finds are few, the historic and contemporary reports suggest the lower jaw bone is nearly always missing. The below ground excavation of an early modern house at Portmarnock revealed a horse skull now embedded in the old floor level. There was no evidence for an attached jaw bone, which confirmed, as the archaeologists stated, 'that the head was in a defleshed state at the time of interment and had probably come from an animal that had died some time before'.[35] A recent Irish find at Carnlough, County Antrim, was only analysed after workmen had already removed the skulls from the floor of the house. But there were no lower jaws accompanying the skulls and the clear absence of nasal bones on eight of the ten skulls confirmed deposition took place long after death. As the archaeologist reported, 'all evidence points to the conclusion that the burial involved that of horse skulls and not horse heads'.[36] It is also important to note the careful and skilful treatment of the horse skulls to ensure

[33] *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 32 (1882) 83; *The Architect*, 26 November (1881) 349–50.

[34] Morten Søvsø, 'Votive offerings in buildings from rural settlements', p. 343.

[35] Colm Moriarty, 'Buried Horse Skulls: Folklore and Superstition in Early Modern Ireland', *Irish Archaeology* http://irisharchaeology.ie/2015/02/buried-horse-skulls-folklore-and-superstition-in-early-modern-ireland/.

[36] 'Horse Skulls at Bay Farm Cottage, Carnlough', Glens of Antrim Historical Society http://antrimhistory.net/horse-skulls-at-bay-farm-cottage-carnlough/.

their correct placement. This was a matter of craftsmanship. In 1866, newspapers reported that workmen removing the ground floor boards of a house in Bonsall, Derbyshire, discovered that the centre beam was resting on twenty-nine horse skulls. The papers noted that the lower jaws were all missing the better to rest more solidly on the ground.[37] When, in 1933, rows of horse skulls were found under the floorboards between the joists of a seventeenth-century house in Bungay, Suffolk, it was observed how the heads rested on the earth with the incisor teeth supported on a small piece of wood or stone.[38]

Why were the skulls of horses used?[39] A few oxen skulls have been found with clear acoustic purposes, but the vast majority are, indeed, horse skulls. Size is clearly important, but it is difficult to see why the shape of a horse head would be acoustically better than oxen or cattle. Is this crucial evidence for the survival of horse cult and pagan sacrifice in building concealments? In his survey of Welsh examples, Eurwyn Wiliam noted the problem of the theory of survivals and 'frequent subliminal wish for a deeper meaning' regarding horse skulls, and suggested instead that the tradition was both a consequence of the expansion of chapel building and the increased significance of the horse in industrial and urbanising Wales.[40] British and Irish eating habits present a more likely secular reason, though. The main method for killing cattle was poleaxing to the head, which punctured the skull, and sometimes required several blows. As part of the butchery process the head was subsequently split and its fleshy constituents, including the brain, were used as a food source, such as in meat jellies.[41] The bones were then used to make gelatine, and from the early nineteenth century, the bone waste was increasingly ground industrially and used as fertiliser. Horses, by contrast, were not eaten as part of British or Irish diets. Horses were worked to death, and the meat perhaps sent to kennels and the skins kept for horsehair. The skulls did not have the commercial value of livestock and therefore were much more likely to be used for acoustic purposes.

[37] *Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald*, 8 September 1866.

[38] *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 13 May 1933.

[39] Sonja Hukantaival, 'Horse Skulls and "Alder Horse": The Horse as a Depositional Sacrifice in Buildings', *Archaeologia Baltica* 11 (2009) 350–356, p. 355.

[40] Wiliam, 'Concealed Horse Skulls', pp. 146–7.

[41] Ian MacLachlan, 'Humanitarian Reform, Slaughter Technology, and Butcher Resistance', in Paula Young Lee (ed.) *Meat, Modernity, and the Rise of the Slaughterhouse* (Durham, New Hampshire, 2008), pp. 112–15.

It has been repeatedly observed, particularly by those who seek a ritual interpretation, that horse skulls would, in practice, provide little acoustic value, and that the location of some skulls in buildings do not make sense acoustically. But we need to be careful about applying our contemporary scientific understanding of sound enhancement. Master medieval cathedral builders and early modern theatre designers certainly knew a thing or two about shaping the acoustics of large buildings, but the local builders of rural homes, inns, and chapels conducted their own experiments on how to enhance and amplify sound to best suit hymn singing, preaching, dancing, and music in small spaces that were not necessarily designed with acoustics in mind. Horse skulls and sounding boards were part of this period of applied folk science before the pervasive influence of the professional architect. In Britain the chapel builders were the last to use horse skulls. From the mid-nineteenth century, with Nonconformist chapels becoming bigger, more cavernous, and more church-like in their design and interior, and with Anglican churches going through a Gothic refurbishment, there was a return to the 'acoustics of the cave'.[42]

Witch Balls

The hollow, coloured glass balls known as 'witch balls' have become part of the contemporary popular culture of magic. It is stated in numerous books on witchcraft, particularly in neo-Pagan literature, as well as all over the internet, that from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries English people hung glass balls in their homes to keep witches away. This understanding has been reinforced by museums that have 'witch balls' in their collections that are labelled as having apotropaic purposes.[43] There is even a Wikipedia page for 'Witch balls', which explains how they were hung up in cottage windows in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to ward off witches, spirits, and spells, explaining that, 'Just as hanging a witch was believed to remove evil influences from a village, hanging a tried and tested witch's ball that had been floating in water, around a home, was believed to protect the home from similar ills'. It also adds that 'according

[42] William Whyte and William Hadden Whyte, *Unlocking the Church: The Lost Secrets of Victorian Sacred Space* (Oxford, 2017), p. 85.

[43] https://www.museum.ie/The-Collections/Documentation-Discoveries/November-2013/Witch-Ball; https://www.horniman.ac.uk/collections/stories/witches-and-cunning-folk; https://www.cmog.org/glass-dictionary/witch-ball.

to folk tales', witch balls enticed evil spirits 'with their bright colours; the strands inside the ball would then capture the spirit and prevent it from escaping'. Then there is the notion that witches could not bear seeing their own reflection in any such surface. Yet another explanation of their potency circulating today is that they averted the evil eye by attracting the gaze of the witch. But there is not one bit of evidence that these blown glass balls were considered apotropaic or associated with witches prior to the early twentieth century. Do a search on Google Books and the digitised newspaper and periodicals archives, for example, and the term 'witch ball' is only used in an American context and refers to the hair bezoars that were believed to have been shot by witches into the bodies of humans and livestock.[44]

Manufacture

Hand-blown, hollow glass balls, usually around the size of a cricket ball, were being produced in significant quantities for several purposes from the late eighteenth century onward. In 1819, for example, a notice was placed in the press requesting a quantity of glass 'watch balls' from which to cut convex glass lenses to protect watch dials. The technique was still being used at the end of the century. In 1827 a Dublin supplier advertised a large quantity of such glass 'watch balls' for sale.[45] Placed close to candles, such balls also improved luminosity in rooms, rather like an incandescent light bulb. They were also used in larger public buildings, such as churches, to reflect candle or gas light into hidden recesses. Indeed, in 1837 the evangelical Anglican journal, *The Christian Observer*, included an article 'On the lighting of Churches' that considered the use of different forms of glass globe and shades for illumination. The author contrasted the lack of attention to the principles of church lighting with the sophistication in theatres, noting that as a devout man he knew of the latter not from personal experience of such frivolous places but from reading about it.[46] Glass balls were also filled with water and placed near candles to provide a more intense and diffuse illumination for sewing and lace-making at night.[47]

[44] Owen Davies, *American Bewitched: The story of witchcraft after Salem* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 32–7.

[45] *Morning Advertiser*, 22 January 1819; 'The Watch-Glass Trust', *Daily News*, 7 August 1907; *Dublin Evening Post*, 20 January 1827.

[46] 'On the Lighting of Churches', *The Christian Observer* (London, 1837), pp. 26–31.

[47] J.H. Yoxall, *Collecting Old Glass: English and Irish* (London, 1916), pp. 8, 38–9.

When, in 1931, the ghost hunter and author of 'ye olde' histories, Robert Thurston Hopkins, cast a critical eye on the notion of 'witch balls', he made inquiries about them at a London glass factory. He was surprised to find they were still being produced specifically for Fleet Street engravers who filled them with water and placed them before an electric light bulb to diffuse the light for their fine work.[48]

Coloured glass balls, along with other such glass ornaments like rolling pins, began to be affordable in more modest English homes from the early nineteenth century. Bristol, Nailsea in Somerset, and Wrockwardine were the main nineteenth-century production centres of such objects. The Nailsea Glass Works, founded in 1788, developed a particular reputation for its ornamental glass-blown balls, and hired French and Venetian workmen to introduce new decorative styles.[49] These new products were sold as home decorations, particularly for Christmas, and they were also used as decorative jug and bowl covers preventing dust and insects getting inside. They were also dangled to occupy infants. During the mid-nineteenth century hollow blown glass balls were also manufactured in Norway as buoyant floats for fishing nets. The practice spread over the next few decades, with numerous colours and designs, until metal and then plastic floats superseded the glass versions from the early twentieth century.[50] During the First World War British anti-submarine nets were still buoyed by hollow glass floats. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century druggists and chemists shops also displayed some of their liquids and powdered wares in blue, green, and red glass 'show globes', as well as in storage bottles known as carboys. These became an international symbol for the high-street pharmacy trade, the forerunners of the globally adopted green cross in the later twentieth century.[51]

New production techniques introduced during the mid-nineteenth century perfected the coating of hollow glass balls on the inside with silver, thereby creating a range of new shiny metallic, mirror versions in different colours. It was a subject enthusiastically described in popular science

[48] *Worthing Herald*, 26 December 1931.

[49] See Andrew Smith, *The Nailsea Glassworks, North Somerset: A Study of the History, Archaeology, Technology and the Human Story – 2004* (No place of publication, 2012).

[50] Tom Rizzo, 'Glass Fishing Floats', http://www.theglassmuseum.com/fishingfloats.htm.

[51] 'Drug Store Lighting', *American Druggist and Pharmaceutical Record* 61 (1913) 47–50; George Griffenhagen, 'The Show Globe – A Symbol of Pharmacy', *Journal of American Pharmaceutical Association* 19 (1958) 233–5. Thanks to Ciara Meehan for suggesting the analogy with the green cross.

books and journals at the time.[52] This development led to a new definition of 'watch ball' as a gazing mirror—not to look at oneself but to observe the environment around. As one description of the silvering process put it in 1850, 'so great is their power of reflection that the entire details of a large apartment are caught upon them with surprising minuteness and clearness of definition and in that amusing perspective, which is peculiar to spherical substances'. It went on to remark that they also contribute 'beyond any other known material to the effect of artificial illumination'.[53] A new growth area for the manufacturers came with the rise of the decorated Christmas tree in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1855, the *Illustrated Queen Almanac and Lady's Calendar* recommended that 'tin reflectors behind each candle are great improvements, and it is well to hang as many coloured glass balls about as you can'.[54] Another household magazine advised, 'long strings of coloured glass balls should be bought and suspended in loops in and out of the branches; these will reflect the wax lights'.[55] Large versions of these mirrored watch balls were also used by shopkeepers as an early form of security monitor. In 1926, one London journalist described stopping at an antique shop near the British Museum. In the window were two glass balls, which he described as 'those glittering things of silver, blue, and pink that enable people sitting inside a room to see people approaching on the pavement outside'.[56]

Enter the Witches

The earliest reference to English 'witch balls' is in a letter sent to *Country Life* magazine in February 1913, in which one E. Keates stated he or she possessed a dark green glass globe seven and a half inches in circumference with a small metal ring attached for suspension. 'This is said to be a genuine old witch-ball, and I shall be much interested if any of your readers can give me information about such balls and the superstitions connected with

[52] See, for example, John M. Moffatt, *The Book of Science* (London, 1835), p. 211.

[53] 'The History and Mystery of the Glass-House', *Bentley's Miscellany* 28 (1850) 674; L.G.G. Ramsey (ed.), *Antique English Pottery, Porcelain and Glass* (New York, 1961), p. 116.

[54] *Illustrated Queen Almanac and Lady's Calendar* (London, 1855) 54.

[55] *Bazaar Exchange and Mart, and Journal of the Household* 8 (1875) 420.

[56] G.H.F. Nichols, *London Town* (London, 1926), p. 10; Luke Honey, 'The mysterious history of witch balls', *Homes & Antiques*, 2 December 2016, http://www.homesandantiques.com/feature/antiques/decorative/mysterious-history-witch-balls. See also, Alan Major, 'Lustered Glass Spheres: Watch Balls or Witch Balls?', *Collectors News* 28, 6 (1987) 6.

them.'[57] No responses were apparently forthcoming from *Country Life* readers, but, within the year, talk of 'witch balls' would become widespread thanks to the pioneering urban folklorist, Edward Lovett (1852–1933).

In January 1914, the press widely reported a talk Lovett gave at the Horniman Museum in south London. The topic was 'superstitions' and included a slideshow of some of the many charms he had collected in London and elsewhere. A journalist present remarked on the 'very remarkable' 'glass witch-balls that were so commonly found hanging in sweet-stuff shops'. Lovett explained that he had tried to purchase them but the shopkeepers refused saying they were lucky 'and not to be disposed of'. Lovett went on to tell his audience that on a trip to Venice he had come across a shop selling nothing but these glass balls. He was told that the peasants bought them to hang up in their gardens to ward off witches from spoiling their crops. 'The two ideas were no doubt connected', thought Lovett.[58] But there is no evidence they were. Over the next year or two, Lovett clearly managed to purchase some, as they were on display at the 'Folklore of London' exhibition he curated at the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in Wigmore Street in the autumn of 1916.[59] The national and regional press reported Lovett as saying in the 'old days' they were hung up in homes to drive away evil spirits but that now 'many are unaware of their old meaning'. He added that the tradition was known in France and Italy, and that in Constantinople many druggist shops had large glass balls suspended in their shops.[60] Three witch balls were also on display at an exhibition accompanying the Folklore Society's jubilee congress at Burlington House, Yorkshire, in 1928. They contained bits and pieces of coloured thread, and were described as a 'relic of the times' when people feared witches.[61] Curiously, when Lovett published *Magic in London* in 1925 he did not include witch balls amongst the numerous

[57] *Country Life* 33 (15 February 1913) 252. Our thanks to Lucie Whitmore for providing us with a copy of this reference.

[58] *Evening Despatch*, 26 January 1914.

[59] See Jude Hill, 'The Story of the Amulet: Locating the Enchantment of Collections', *Journal of Material Culture* 12 (2007) 65–87.

[60] *Falkirk Herald*, 4 October 1916.

[61] *Yorkshire Post*, 22 September 1928.

examples he provided in the book. But he returned to the subject in a piece for the *Daily Mail* in 1926.[62]

In 1921 the press reported that 'decorative witch balls' were now much in vogue amongst women—no longer for keeping evil spirits away, but for their decorative value when hung from electric lamps and gas brackets, or placed in the window, to catch the light. 'They have a charming effect, as they reflect the room in miniature', explained one commentator. In 1924 artist Isaac Cohen painted 'The Blue Witch Ball' for *Tatler* magazine that depicted a stylish woman sitting at a table in distracted mood with a blue glass ball.[63] Over in America, in 1930, it was reported that 'witch balls' filled with water and a sprig of ivy were given out as prizes in Bridge competitions.[64] The following year the women's page of the *Leeds Mercury* noted that witch balls were so popular that the chances of purchasing old ones from cottage homes were slim, but that fortunately a supply was available from the more exclusive high-end art shops, beginning in price from 2s 6d.[65] A few years later, it was reported that The King and Queen had joined the fad, and several were hanging in their private quarters in Buckingham Palace.[66] By now, early nineteenth-century examples were becoming collectors' items along with the established trade in Victorian glass paperweights and tear glasses.[67] Within a decade of Lovett's much-publicised talks, the term 'witch ball' had become the standard term for blown glass balls whatever their actual and assumed purpose was.[68]

The Story Spreads

The notion of a venerable tradition of West Country witch balls was further cemented in 1934 by a highly colourful account by a London journalist of his journey to the provinces to see a middle-aged man in Dorset who complained of being bewitched. The 'overlooked' man had apparently explained, 'I don't know why I was chosen, for I have kept my witch's ball in my window all these years'. The city-slicker journalist went

[62] Edward Lovett, 'Old Fashioned Witchballs in Modern House Decoration', *Daily Mail* 29 December 1926.
[63] *The Tatler*, 2 April 1924.
[64] *The Register* (Sandusky) 5 January 1930.
[65] *Leeds Mercury*, 18 April 1931.
[66] *Dundee Courier*, 4 January 1934.
[67] *Aberdeen Press*, 24 December 1925.
[68] *The Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 1 August 1921.

on to state: 'as I passed through the villages I noticed each house with its (golden) witch ball in the window or a lucky stone pierced through and hung by a string over the door'.[69] The piece caused some annoyance and puzzlement amongst readers of the local press. One wrote to the *Taunton Courier* suggesting the journalist was telling tall tales, 'drawing the long bow for the entertainment of City readers', and queried the supposed prevalence of witch balls in the windows of Dorset cottages. The Somerset folklorist W.G. Willis Watson did not mince his words. He described the report as 'undiluted piffle'. '"Witch balls?" Pshaw! Some people may call these toys "witch balls" but I doubt if a real "witch ball" could be found in Dorset or the West of England', he thundered. 'Coloured balls have been used for decorative purposes in houses and gardens in England and on the continent for years.' He went on to conclude, 'the coloured balls sold for a few pence each today may be called "witch balls", but it may also be recorded they have no association with the witchcraft of folk lore'.[70] He was absolutely right.

But the inventions kept on multiplying. In 1928, the American *House & Garden* interior design magazine's Q&A section presented the question, 'What is a witch ball?' The answer was, 'a small glass ball, open at the top, which was hung in the rafters in the olden days, supposed to avert lightening'.[71] During the 1930s a theory circulated that they were brought to England by the Crusaders, mostly on the basis of the presence of hollow glass globes in eastern European churches and in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. As one sceptical journalist pondered, the theory posed the practical problem of the difficulty of carrying fragile medieval glass all the way back in one piece.[72] They were no doubt being used for nothing more than to reflect the rich use of candle light in Orthodox and Catholic churches. In 1935, the *Gloucester Journal* included a brief item, 'Have you noticed the return of glass "witch balls" for ornaments in the home?' It went on to explain that 'according to ancient ideas' 'they were made in vari-coloured strips and there was a theory that as long as one had a ball suspended before the threshold one was "witch proof", as no witch, it was believed, could enter before she had counted the

[69] Reprinted in the *Taunton Courier*, 7 February 1934.

[70] *Taunton Courier*, 31 January 1934; *Taunton Courier*, 7 February 1934.

[71] *House & Garden*, 53 (1928) cxxviii.

[72] *Uxbridge & W. Drayton Gazette*, 4 December 1914; *The Courier and Advertiser*, 15 April 1939.

various colours'.[73] Well, as we have seen, the vari-coloured nature of glass balls was only developed not much more than a century before this report. In 1937 the *Framlingham Weekly News* included an item titled 'Witchballs' in which it was even conjectured that they were 'descended from crystal gazing' traditions, and hence dated back to Roman Orphic divination cults.[74]

Due, in part, to the experience of the First World War, there developed a thriving and diverse trade in protective charms and amulets during the 1920s, and witch balls became part of this vogue for talismanic merchandise. The globes began to be marketed and sold as 'witch balls'.[75] In August 1924, writer Petronella O'Donnell, sister of popular ghost hunter Elliott O'Donnell, noted in her newspaper column that she had been told by a London grocer that witch balls could be purchased not far away in a shop run by a spiritualist. Small adverts appeared in the provincial press in 1929 offering 'witch balls for luck' as wedding presents.[76] A journalist visiting the 'Olde Shoppe' at the entrance to Wookey Hole Caves in 1932 noticed they sold glass globes with a mirrored surface. Inquiring as to what they were, she was told they were witch balls and that 'tradition' said that witches would not enter a room containing one as they could not abide seeing their own reflection. The same year, a newspaper reported that there was a shop in the heart of London that sold 'witches' balls' and was driving good trade because of their efficacy in warding off evil.[77]

Darkness and Light

The power of the re-enchanted witch ball even cropped up in a remarkable Cornish church dispute. The substance of the case concerned 'certain articles and ornaments' from St Hilary Church, Truro, deemed by a small number of parishioners to be inappropriate for the conduct of Anglican services. The ornaments concerned included several stone altars, a granite shrine, a doll's house, several paintings, and six silvered glass globes described as 'witch-watching balls' that hung between the arches in the chancel. The presence of the witch balls was noted in a letter to a local

[73] *Gloucester Journal*, 4 May 1935.
[74] *Framlingham Weekly News*, 5 June 1937.
[75] Owen Davies, *A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination, and Faith during the First World War* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 135–77.
[76] *Western Daily Press*, 16 August 1924; *Yorkshire Post*, 12 October 1929.
[77] *Somerset Advertiser*, 5 February 1932; *Western Morning News*, 19 January 1932.

newspaper in 1932 by one Walter Poynter-Adams, an electrical engineer and Fellow of King's College, London, who had moved to Cornwall around 1922. He stated that a parishioner had called them 'witch watchers', and his own conclusion was that 'they are obviously intended to ward off witches from the Reserved Sacrament'.[78] This was a reference to an idea put about by demonologists in the early modern period that witches stole the holy Host for their nefarious purposes in order to pervert and invert Christian ritual. But there was more behind this brief letter to the press than meets the eye. The reference to the 'Reserved Sacrament' was significant—it was a hot topic at the time. The practice of keeping part of the sacrament after Mass, either for the sick or for further worship, had been largely forbidden by Protestant churches during the Reformation. It made a comeback in the mid-nineteenth century due to a resurgence of Anglo-Catholicism and it spread further during the First World War due to popular demand for spiritual succour for the sick and dying beyond the ritual confines of Communion. The Bishop of Truro at the time, Walter Howard Frere, was a High Church proponent of instituting the practice beyond the needs of the sick, stating that it should be (within strict boundaries about the authority to do so) available to those whose social positions and working patterns precluded traditional attendance, such as 'farm hands, milk boys, market porters and the like, to say nothing of some classes of women'.[79]

Poynter-Adams delivered a provocative public talk at Penzance in 1929 about the troubling Anglo-Catholicism on display at St Hilary. He repeated it at another meeting three years later when he decried the 'Romanizing priests' who were a grave challenge to all Protestant people in Cornwall.[80] So his view on the witch balls was clearly coloured by the notion that their presence in St Hilary Church was an expression of old Catholic 'superstition'. In the summer of 1932, members of the Protestant Truth Society raided the church and removed the balls along with other

[78] *Western Morning News*, 29 June 1929; *Western Morning News*, 5 March 1932. See also, Peter Hewitt, 'Watch-bottles, Witch-balls, Witch-watchers, Wizard-balls and "bounched glasses": A History of the Witch Ball', Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, http://museumofwitchcraftandmagic.co.uk/news/watch-bottles-witch-balls-witch-watchers-wizard-balls-and-bounched-glasses-a-history-of-the-witch-ball/.

[79] Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain, 1830–1910* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 344–5.

[80] *Cornishman*, 31 January 1929; *Cornishman*, 9 June 1932.

offending items.[81] The vicar who had furnished St Hilary, Bernard Walke, retired in 1936, but the legal consequences of this religious dispute rumbled on, coming to a head at a Church consistory court in 1938. During the hearing, one of the petitioners, Miss Anne Maria King, an ally of Poynter-Adams, was asked about the witch balls:

> 'What is wrong with them?'
> 'That is what most people ask. They were regarded as spheres that drove away evil spirits in olden days.'
> 'They are really looking glasses, are they not?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'They are very valuable for increasing light?'
> 'Not at all.'[82]

The incumbent vicar did not object to their removal, unlike some of the other items, but observed facetiously that, 'it would make the church darker and that would justify an application for more candles'.[83]

* * *

In 1932, the American antique dealer and expert on early glassware, Rhea Mansfield Knittle, wrote in the magazine *Antiques* that the term 'witch balls' had been incorrectly applied to blown glass balls that only had decorative or practical domestic functions. In the early 1940s one expert on the antiques of rural Pennsylvania noted the 'blown balls, incorrectly termed witch balls', were generally still being used by householders to cover bowls and jars to keep flies out.[84] But by this time such sceptical voices were being drowned out. Glassware collectors and antiques experts on both sides of the Atlantic had largely accepted the apotropaic witch ball as historic fact. One noted that the Nailsea workers were reputed to be most uncouth and superstitious, and so it was no surprise that 'they originated the so-called "witch balls" … hung in windows or from rafters as charms

[81] *Western Morning News*, 11 August 1932.
[82] *The All England Law Reports* 4 (1938) p. 149; *The Cornishman*, 31 March 1938.
[83] *Western Morning News*, 11 October 1938.
[84] Cited in Frank H. Swan, *Portland Glass Company* (Providence, 1939), p. 111; Earl F. Robacker, *Pennsylvania Dutch Stuff: A Guide to Country Antiques* (Philadelphia, 1944), p. 92.

to ward off the evil eye'.[85] The catalogue for an exhibition of early glassware at the Carnegie Museum in 1949 noted the decorative and practical uses of 'witch balls' as jug covers, but introduced the notion that Irish emigrants stuffed them with pieces of coloured yarn tied together with one piece dangling out of the hole to attract any witch that might try and disturb the household but who would be fascinated with the task of pulling out the yarn.[86] The magazine *Country Life* had a significant influence in spreading several other 'origin' stories in Britain. In 1948, in answer to a reader's query, the editor stated that the origin of witch balls were vessels to keep precious household salt in the eighteenth century, and were hung up near the fire to keep the salt dry. Because of the connection with the protective power of consecrated salt, the witch balls quickly gained a reputation for being lucky and having 'the power to hold any of the elements of ill health which might gain access to the house. Each morning the salt bottle would be wiped to remove these harmful elements.'[87] Three years later *Country Life* gave further credence and publicity to two further twists to the story of their purpose and origin. One was the idea that from the late seventeenth century round bottles filled with holy water were hung in homes to protect against evil spirits. The other, which gained quite a lot of traction from the 1940s onward, was that 'witch ball' was a corruption not of 'watch ball' but of 'wish ball'. The article stated that from the 1780s the marbled and coloured balls made in Nailsea and elsewhere 'were given as presents with a wish for prosperity and long life'.[88] We can find no reference, however, to any of these notions prior to the mid-twentieth century.

Doreen Valiente, one of the influential early founders of the neo-pagan Wiccan movement during the 1950s, was much taken with witch balls and used them in a limited way in her practice. In her guide, *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present* (1973), she demonstrated some historical knowledge about the Nailsea glassmakers and production developments, including their use as fishermen's floats, but concluded that, 'in the early nineteenth century the witch ball began to be more of a decoration, and

[85] Evangeline H Bergstrom, *Old Glass Paperweights* (Chicago, 1940), p. 66.

[86] Lowell Innes, *Early glass of the Pittsburgh district, 1797–1890: exhibited at Carnegie Museum, April 21 to Sept. 6, 1949* (Pittsburgh, 1949), p. 29.

[87] 'The Purpose of Witch Balls', *Country Life* (27 August 1948) 434. Thanks to Lucie Whitmore for providing copies of this and the following reference.

[88] G. Bernard Hughes, 'Reflecting Globes and Witch Balls', *Country Life* (6 July 1951) 43.

its old magical significance faded into the background'.[89] This fitted with the general Wiccan narrative at the time that venerable witchcraft practices of the pre-modern world had been largely suppressed or lost, but that the 'old' knowledge had just about survived into the twentieth century and was liberated by the post-war Wiccan movement. For Valiente and others the interpretation of blown glass balls as a decoration or illumination device *was* the modern reinvention.

[89] Doreen Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present* (New York, 1973), pp. 387–90. See also Doreen Valiente, *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* (London, 1978), pp. 91–2.

CHAPTER 5

Sealing Memories

Some objects deliberately placed under buildings and in their fabric were physical expressions of their concealers' sentiments and messages for posterity—in other words, they acted as personal time capsules. The term 'time capsule' was actually coined as a marketing phrase in 1938 by the Westinghouse Electric Company for its New York World Fair publicity campaign, which included the public burial of an eight-hundred-pound cylinder. The burial of such large capsules, sometimes in the form of metal safes, had become a popular event in early twentieth-century America. They contained artefacts of modern technology that captured the progress of the present, such as telephones, photographs, and phonographic records. The Westinghouse capsule contained fifteen minutes of newsreel and thousands of pages of microfilm. But they also included items representing the everyday, including shoes, stockings, and even toothpaste.[1] As we shall see, though, the modern conception of the time capsule has a much older history rooted in civic foundation rituals dating back centuries, and also more enigmatic personal deposits in the home.

[1] Nick Yablon, *Remembrance of Things Present: The Invention of the Time Capsule* (Chicago, 2019). See also Brian Durrans, 'Time Capsules as Extreme Collecting', in Graeme Were and J.C.H. King (eds), *Extreme Collecting: Challenging Practices for 21st Century Museums* (New York, 2012), pp. 181–202; Brian Durrans, 'Posterity and paradox: Some uses of time capsules', in Sandra Wallman (ed.), *Contemporary Futures: Perspectives from Social Anthropology* (London, 1992), pp. 51–67.

O. Davies, C. Houlbrook, *Building Magic*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76765-5_5

One of the very few studies of the broad concept of time capsules identified three main categories: those deliberately deposited for an indefinite span; those deposited with a specified date to be reopened—an idea that largely dates to the twentieth century; and archaeological material accidently deposited, such as a ship and its cargo, which evokes 'the immediacy of a past period'.[2] The building concealments considered in this book represent all three, and the emergent scholarly interest in memory and material culture in modern life has also opened up new ways of thinking about how such objects represent emotional domestic topographies that continue to be expressed in what people hide away in the backs of wardrobes and in boxes in the attic or garage.[3]

Foundation Rituals, Public Ceremony, and Civic Pride

The official consecration of new churches and other public or prestigious buildings was a well-engrained service provided by the medieval Church, and continued in Catholic countries in the centuries after the Reformation. The laying of the stone, often a corner stone, was usually celebrated with both secular and religious ceremonies, including banqueting and feasting, Masses, circumambulation of the site, and the sprinkling of salt and holy water. Blessings were given that God was the builder of all things. Specially commissioned portrait medals of worthies, coins, precious objects, and victuals were sometimes deposited under or on top of the stone. When, for instance, a new almonry was to be built at St Albans in 1326, the date and the abbot's name were written on the foundation stone. Underneath it were sprinkled fragments of saints' relics, along with earth from where the bodies of the martyred followers of St Amphibalus were said to have been disinterred in the late twelfth century.[4]

The practice of placing medals and coins seems to have flourished during the Renaissance period, inspired by the Humanist interest in the ancient Greek and Roman practice of building deposits, as found in the archaeological remains, but also as described in the writings of Tacitus and

[2] William E. Jarvis, *Time Capsules: A Cultural History* (Jefferson, 2003), pp. 21–2.

[3] See, for example, Daniel Miller, *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (London, 2001).

[4] Louis F. Salzman, *Building in England Down to 1540: A Documentary History* (Oxford, 1952), p. 391.

others. In renaissance Italy, the practice spread from churches to the foundations and fabric of private residences. Then, from the late fifteenth century, medals and coins were increasingly placed in containers to better ensure their survival and preserve the identity of their patrons for posterity. By the seventeenth century the practice of depositing foundation medals had become a widespread practice for any prestigious building project in Italy and Bohemia, for example.[5]

The Florentine architect Filarete (d. 1469) wrote about the importance and significance of foundation ceremonies, and explained to his patrons why objects such as medals should be placed with the foundation stone:

> The reason I put these things in this foundation is because, as every man knows, things that have a beginning must have an end. When the time comes, they will find these things, and know our names, and remember us because of them, just as we remember when we find something noble in a ruin or in an excavation. We are happy and pleased to find a thing that represents antiquity and gives the name of him, who had done it.[6]

He also believed, though, that the foundation stone and its ceremonial laying sealed the fate of the building, hence astrological calculations were employed to identify the most propitious moment.[7] For late nineteenth-century survivalists, such as the Freemason George William Speth, the use of coins and portrait medals at this period was inevitably interpreted as the continuation of ancient foundation sacrifice, the depictions of monarchs and patrons being replacement effigies:

> Our forefathers, ages ago, buried a living human sacrifice in the same place to ensure the stability of the structure: their sons substituted an animal: their sons again a mere effigy or other symbol: and we, their children, still immure a substitute, coins bearing the effigy, impressed upon the noblest of

[5] Nick Holder, 'Medieval foundation stones and foundation ceremonies', in Caroline M. Barron (ed.), *Memory and Communication in Medieval England* (Donington, 2010), pp. 6–23; Berthold Hub, 'Founding an Ideal City in Filarete's *Libro Architettonico*', in Maarten Delbeke and Minou Schraven (eds), *Foundation, Dedication and Consecration in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 17–59; Minou Schraven, 'Out of sight, yet still in place: On the use of Italian Renaissance portrait medals as building deposits', *Res* 55/56 (2009) 183–93; Tomáš Kleisner, 'An Unknown Medal for the Foundation of Sušice Monastery, 1651', *Acta Musei Nationalis Pragae* 61 (2007) 87–93.

[6] Hub, 'Founding an Ideal City in Filarete's Libro Architettonico', p. 32.

[7] Hub, 'Founding an Ideal City in Filarete's Libro Architettonico', pp. 23–4.

> metals. … I do not assert that one in a hundred is conscious of what he is doing; if you ask him he will give some different reason: but the fact remains that unconsciously, we are following the customs of our fathers, and symbolically providing a soul for the structure.[8]

Speth was not wrong in suggesting that the well-established foundation ceremonies of the late nineteenth century drew upon venerable practices intended to bring security to buildings and bridges. But, as we shall see, the modern practice was largely a knowing reinvention that was inspired by the past but which came to reflect recent developments in society, culture, and industry.

Following the Reformation, some Protestant theologians decried such foundation rituals and the like as idolatrous Catholic 'superstition'. But it depended on what sort of Protestantism was adhered to by each state. The German Lutheran Church resumed the blessing of church foundation stones within decades of the Reformation. It was recorded in 1615, for instance, that when the German Lutheran community in Prague began the construction of the Trinity Church, and laid the first stone, 'the lords, gentry and foremost citizens threw down many gold and silver coins for good fortune'.[9] In England and Wales, consecration services took place in the seventeenth century, but it was only in the early eighteenth century that religious services were adopted with renewed vigour for the sanctification of new churches and the laying of foundation stones for civic buildings.[10] The usual practice in the early eighteenth century was for the foundation stone of the theatre, bridge, chapel, charitable hospital, or other public building, to be laid in the presence of the 'great and the good', such as clergymen, MPs, aldermen, and charity committee members. Collections were sometimes made for the workmen as part of the event. When, in 1730, Sir Richard Grosvenor decided to build a chapel in

[8] George W. Speth, *Builders' Rites and Ceremonies* (Margate, 1894), p. 22. See also, Lewis Dayton Burdick, *Foundation Rites with some Kindred Ceremonies* (New York, 1901), pp. 10, 101.

[9] Quoted in Kleisner, 'An Unknown Medal for the Foundation of Sušice Monastery, 1651', *Acta Musei Nationalis Pragae* 61 (2007) 92. See also Vera Isaiasz, 'Early Modern Lutheran Churches: Redefining the Boundaries of the Holy and the Profane', in Andrew Spicer (ed.), *Lutheran Churches in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon, 2012), pp. 17–37.

[10] Anne-Françoise Morel, 'Church Consecration in England 1549–1715: An Unestablished Ceremony', in Delbeke and Schraven (eds), *Foundation, Dedication and Consecration*, pp. 297–315.

Grosvenor Square for the benefit of locals he personally laid the foundation stone and then threw down a purse of guineas to 'entertain' the builders and workmen.[11] Inscriptions were sometimes carved on the stone. For the rebuilding of St Olave's Church, Southwark, a foundation stone was laid that bore the simple inscription: 'This Church was rebuilt in the Year of our Lord 1738, at the Expense of the Parishioners'.[12] When a new charitable hospital was built in Lamb's Conduit Field, London, a copper plate, placed between two protective plates of lead, was laid on the foundation stone with the inscription: 'The Foundation of this Hospital, for the Relief of expos'd and deserted young Children, was laid 16 Sept. 16 George II. 1742'.[13]

From around the mid-eighteenth century we start to find more and more reports that such foundation ceremonies included the deposition of coins and medals—a practice that seems to have gone into abeyance in England after the Reformation. The laying of the foundation stone of what would later be called Blackfriars Bridge was witnessed by numerous gentlemen and ladies. Tin plates bearing lengthy inscriptions were ceremonially buried, along with several coins of gold, silver, and copper, and a silver medal given to the architect. They were revealed again in 1870 when the bridge was demolished. They were donated to the Guildhall Museum and consisted of a guinea, half-guinea, crown, half-crown, shilling, and two six pences.[14] When the foundation stone of St Paul Church, Bristol, was placed in 1789 it was ceremonially buried with a brass inscription and several medals and coins minted that year were placed in a cavity underneath.[15] The Enlightenment interest in antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, and the experience of the Grand Tour amongst the eighteenth-century English elite, may have inspired this vogue for placing coins and medals with foundation stones at this time, just as it led to the adoption of classical, Italian architectural styles.

The rise of Freemasonry was also a major influence on the spread and reinvention of foundation ceremonies throughout Britain. The movement really took off from the 1720s onward, masonic lodges proliferated, and their members soon began to have an influence within civic organisations.

[11] *Fog's Weekly Journal*, 11 April 1730.

[12] *London Evening Post*, 1 April 1738.

[13] *Universal Spectator and Weekly Journal*, 18 September 1742.

[14] *London Evening Post*, 1 November 1760; *Catalogue of the collection of London antiquities in the Guildhall Museum* (London, 1908), pp. 257–8.

[15] *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 25 April 1789.

Freemasonry was inspired by the symbolism of the construction of the biblical Temple of Solomon and the moral and social value of brotherhood, but it also developed a mystical wing that sought to unlock the ancient wisdom contained in the arcane alphabet of the Kabbalah, mason's marks, and alchemical symbols. Ritual was central to their collective activities in private and public. With regard to their influence on civic building in late eighteenth-century America, they have been described rather neatly as the 'ritual mercenaries of the new republic'. The same could be said in relation to Britain and its growing empire.[16]

The first Masonic officiation of a public building ceremony occurred in Edinburgh in 1738, when the city's Board of Works invited the Grand Lodge to join the foundation event for the commencement of the building of the Royal Infirmary. They processed in full masonic regalia.[17] Another such ceremony occurred again in Edinburgh in 1753, when, at the laying of the foundation stone of the New Exchange, the Grand Master addressed the Lord Provost and gathered dignitaries, before distributing medals struck for the occasion.[18] In 1764, the foundation stone of a bridge over the River Tees, Stockton, was assisted by the Master and Brethren of the Lodge of Freemasons, No. 23.[19] The Grand Lodge walked in procession to lay the foundation stone of a new theatre in Durham, in 1791, and two years later, two hundred brethren of the Lodge attended divine service and then processed to attend the laying of the foundation stone of a new bridge commissioned by Freemason and local MP Rowland Burdon.[20] The involvement of the Freemasons generated a new ritual complexity to proceedings over the decades as they developed their formal ceremonial procedures. By the time of the foundation ceremony for the New Bridewell in Edinburgh in 1791, a plumb, level, and mallet, the symbolic tools of freemasonry, were ceremonially passed to the Grand Master. He then applied them to the foundation stone, giving three knocks with the mallet and declaring: 'May the Grand Architect of the Universe grant a blessing on this foundation stone which we have now laid, and by his Providence enable us to finish this and every other work which may be undertaken for the advantage of this city and country'. He then proceeded

[16] Neil Harris, *Building Lives: Constructing Rites and Passages* (New Haven, 1999), p. 18.
[17] Joseph G. Findel, *History of Freemasonry from Its Origin Down to the Present Day*, 2nd edition (London, 1869), p. 195.
[18] *Public Advertiser*, 26 September 1753.
[19] *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 4 September 1764.
[20] *The Freemasons' Magazine*, April 1794, p. 247.

to pour corn, wine, and oil on the stone, saying, 'May the All-bounteous Author of Nature bless this city and county with abundancies of corn, wine, and oil, and with all the necessaries, conveniences, and comforts of life; and may the same Almighty Power preserve this city and county from ruin and decay to the latest posterity'.[21] Such masonic foundation ceremonies became a staple of colonial spectacle and public ritual across the British Empire. Indeed, in 1760, the Freemasons rather than the Church took charge of the dedication ceremony for a newly built chapel in the ruined British fort in Calcutta after its recapture.[22]

Freemasonry was also instrumental in cementing the use of a ceremonial silver trowel as an integral component of foundation ceremonies—whether they involved the Freemasons or not. The practice may have been inspired by the foundation ceremony for the building of the Louvre in the 1660s (though silver trowels had been used before then in France). On that occasion Louis XIV wielded a silver trowel for the token application of mortar to the cornerstone before coins were thrown into the foundation pit for the workmen.[23] At the much-reported foundation ceremony for the Regent's Bridge, Vauxhall, London, in 1811, Lord Dundas also used a silver trowel. In the presence of the Prince Regent, he mortared a glass case, containing coins of the realm and an inscribed commemorative plate, into a cavity in the foundation stone.[24] By the second half of the nineteenth century the silver trowel usually bore an engraved inscription that described the nature of the occasion, the date, and the names of those responsible for the edifice.

The use of glass containers for sealing the coins and medals began in the late eighteenth century. The earliest references date to the 1780s. For the foundation ceremony at the White Linen Hall, Belfast, in 1783, a large glass tube was made containing several papers, including a panegyric to the Freemasons, which began 'At this Epocha too, Freemasonry is at the very zenith of its glory, spreading from pole to pole and zone to zone'.

[21] *Public Advertiser*, 8 December 1791. See also, Martin Joseph Naylor, *Sermons Preached on Various Masonic Occasions* (London, 1842), pp. 261–2.

[22] See Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1717–1927* (Chapel Hill, 2007), pp. 14, 253; Daniel O'Connor, *Chaplains of the East India Company, 1601–1858* (London, 2012), p. 77.

[23] Indra Kagis McEwen, 'Midsummer Moderns: The Foundation of the Paris Observatory, 21 June 1667', in Delbeke and Schraven (eds), *Foundation, Dedication, and Consecration*, p. 343.

[24] *The Tradesman* 6 (1811) 498.

Prior to the event the vessel was hermetically sealed. Four years later, at the laying of the foundation stone of Pentonville Chapel, Islington, 'there was placed thereon a glass vessel, containing some coins of the present year', along with an engraved stone.[25] Other delicate receptacles were also employed. The coins deposited under the foundation stone of the Manchester Exchange, which was completed in 1809, were placed in a porcelain white biscuit vase. *The Builder* magazine reported in 1847 that when the stone and vase were recently uncovered all the coins were missing. Someone had stolen them either just before they were covered or shortly after they were revealed again.[26] While copper and brass boxes continued to be used, the mass-manufactured glass bottle became a common receptacle for modest ceremonies over the next century. By this time British glass factories were producing cylindrical bottles with a significantly taller body and with more capacious volume for contents.[27] They were relatively cheap, and they also enabled any future finders to see within that it had significant contents before being destroyed or disregarded as mere demolition rubbish.

The next development of the modern tradition was the addition to the capsule of a newspaper to provide a precise date point for the ceremony and to act as an emblem of the times. By the end of the eighteenth century, newspapers had become a well-established literary medium and a significant expression of national and regional culture. They were seen as progressive vehicles of education and enlightenment. There were more than seventy provincial newspapers in Britain by 1800 and over two hundred some forty years later.[28] The earliest references to the inclusion of a newspaper in a time capsule are from the 1790s. At the foundation ceremony for the new Rutherglen Church, in July 1794, for instance, the glass bottle contained seventy British coins and medals, a copy of the *Glasgow Courier* and an edition of the *London General Evening Post* that contained a report of Lord Howe's naval victory against the French fleet on 1 June.[29]

[25] Philip Robinson, 'A Message for the Future: Note on a Building Custom', *Ulster Folklife* 32 (1986) 48–9 (our thanks to Leanne Calvert for obtaining a copy of this article); *Whitehall Evening Post*, 21 June 1787.

[26] *The Builder* 5 (1847) 403.

[27] David Dungworth, 'Three and a half centuries of bottle manufacture', *Industrial Archaeology Review* 34 (2012) 37–50.

[28] See, for example, Hannah Barker, *Newspapers and English Society 1695–1855* (London, 2000).

[29] *The Sun*, 30 July 1794.

In America, the following year, on 4 July, Paul Revere and Samuel Adams laid a time capsule in the Massachusetts State House in Boston with much pomp and ceremony. When it was once again found and opened in December 2014 (it had been dug up and reinterred previously in 1855) it was found to contain two newspapers as well as coins.[30] The practice of including newspapers would go on to be ubiquitous.

The massive expansion of urban Britain during the nineteenth century generated a major boom in the building of municipal institutions, such as public libraries, town halls, gaols, prisons, council offices, theatres, schools, and educational institutes. Foundation stone ceremonies became a standard means of marking such expressions of communal and societal 'progress' while also promoting public consciousness of the social contribution of the professionals, honorifics, and politicians who were involved in the creation of the civic environment.[31] As well as the growth of civic buildings, the nineteenth century also saw a major rebuilding and renovation of Anglican churches, and a boom in Nonconformist chapel building. With regard to the Church of England, this provided opportunities for High Anglican ritualists, such as those inspired by the Oxford Movement, to inject a more Catholic sense of ritual and display into the fabric of the churches, including founding and opening ceremonies.[32] The Exeter clergyman, Edward Charles Harington, for instance, endorsed the practice of church foundation rites and cornerstone consecrations. In his *The Object, Importance, and Antiquity of the Rite of Consecration of Churches* (1844), he considered the pre-Reformation use of fumigations, blessings, and hymns to the saints. They may have been condemned as 'superstitious' by early Anglican theologians, but Harington was circumspect and suggested 'possibly there was no ill intent in any'. Harington liked a good opening ceremony and was known for having attended the turning of the first sod of every new railway in England during his lifetime.[33]

[30] https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/what-was-found-inside-oldest-american-time-capsule-180953820/.

[31] 'Foundation Stone Ceremonies', *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 44 (1936) 82; Neil Harris, *Building Lives: Constructing Rites and Passages* (New Haven, 1999).

[32] See for example, Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain, 1830–1910* (Oxford, 1999).

[33] Edward Charles Harington, *The Object, Importance, and Antiquity of the Rite of Consecration of Churches* (London, 1844), pp. 69, viii; Richard Hooper, 'Edward Charles Harington', *DNB*.

Nonconformists clearly saw foundation ceremonies as an important public expression of the permanence of their faith and their deepening roots in society's mainstream. The involvement of the Freemasons as a nondenominational, civic organisation helped in this respect. In 1818, for instance:

> A grand masonic procession took place from Mr. Smith's, the Anchor inn, at Wooler, which was met by a deputation of the trustees, elders, and others of the congregation of protestant dissenters of the West Chapel, the Rev. Mr. Mitchell, minister, and proceeded to the site fixed for a new meeting house, where the foundation stone was laid by Mr. Richard Jobson. Under the stone were deposited in a sealed bottle various coins of his late majesty, and a roll of parchment containing a list of the presiding officers of the society and the lodges attending, after which, an appropriate oration was delivered by brother Joseph Armstrong.[34]

Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists embraced such rituals as they moved status from radical evangelisers to sober, established denominations; the foundation ceremony was clearly framed as a secular confirmation of respectability rather than a venerable religious ceremony. At the foundation stone ceremony at the building of a new Wesleyan Sunday School at Crewe, in 1861, copies of a couple of local newspapers, as well as the *Methodist Watchman* and *Methodist Recorder*, were sealed and buried in a large bottle along with several bronze and silver coins and a document stating particulars of the new building and the healthy state of Methodism in the area. A similar ritual was performed at the foundation ceremony of a new Wesleyan chapel in Hull in 1860.[35] The ceremony at the founding of the Wesleyan Reform Chapel, Shipley, in 1863, was attended by some 2000 people, and included the deposition of a bottle with the usual newspapers, coins, a list of Methodist worthies, but also the name of the builders. Likewise, that buried under the foundation stone of the Primitive Methodist Chapel at New Wortley, also included the name of the architect and contractors.[36]

[34] John Sykes, *Local records; or historical register of remarkable events which have occurred exclusively in the counties of Durham and Northumberland* (Newcastle 1824), p. 292.

[35] *Cheshire Observer*, 12 October 1861; *Hull Packet*, 24 August 1860.

[36] *The Wesleyan Reform Union Magazine* 3 (1863) 104; *The Primitive Methodist Magazine* 41 (1860) 362.

From the mid-nineteenth century, the Irish Catholic Church also brought into the strategic value of the re-invented but now well-established public foundation ritual, with its mix of venerable ecclesiastical heritage and more recent masonic and civic influences. Holy water was sprinkled and blessings were performed, and Catholic priests wielded silver trowels making crosses three times. The ceremony at the laying of the first stone of the new cathedral in Limerick, in 1856, also included a sealed bottle containing coins of the realm and a parchment bearing the date of the commencement of the building.[37] As Niamh NicGhabhann observes, 'The adaptation of the silver trowel into a specifically Roman Catholic object, through the alteration of its shape and the inclusion of iconography and materials that explicitly referenced the early Christian Irish past, reflect the incorporation of these secular ritual aspects into a more explicitly Catholic ceremonial culture'.[38]

Sealing Sentiments and Memories

From the sixteenth century onward it became fashionable in Britain for the wealthy to include a visible date stone marking the creation, purchase, or extension of their manor houses and town properties. By the mid-seventeenth century the yeoman and tradesman strata of society had adopted the practice as well. Date stones, often accompanied by initials, were public statements of pride and prosperity. They were also manifestations of a broader cultural impetus in the period to record moments in time materially, with dates increasingly appearing on church bells, church memorials, furniture, and ceramics.[39] But there is a less documented tradition in the post-medieval period of builders and householders leaving concealed records that recorded time, and which also sometimes marked their emotional relationship with the buildings they built, renovated, and repaired.[40]

[37] Niamh NicGhabhann, '"A development of practical Catholic Emancipation": laying the foundations for the Roman Catholic urban landscape, 1850–1900', *Urban History* 46 (2019) 44–61.

[38] NicGhabhann, 'A development of practical Catholic Emancipation' 13.

[39] Harold Mytum, 'Materiality and memory: an archaeological perspective on the popular adoption of linear time in Britain', *Antiquity* 81 (2007) 381–396.

[40] See, for example, Kate Giles and Mel Giles, 'Signs of the Times: Nineteenth-Twentieth Century Graffiti in the Farms of the Yorkshire Wolds', in Jeff Oliver and Tim Neal (eds) *Wild*

Builders recorded their sentiments through their work. This was often expressed through simply inscribing or writing dates, initials, names, or brief messages on timber frames or plasterwork hidden from view. Repair work on the leaky roof of Wentworth Woodhouse, near Rotherham, South Yorkshire, revealed, for instance, more than twenty such builders' messages carved on roof timbers and lead work, some dating back to 1806.[41] It is a practice or ritual that continues into the present. A reader of *Current Archaeology*, having read a review of the *Spellbound* exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum in 2018, recalled how in the 1970s a builder working on her parents' house scored 'bugger' into the plaster on one wall after dropping a hammer on his toe. He also pencilled the name of the correspondent's infant son with the date on the plaster of his new bedroom.[42] The widespread adoption of wallpaper provided many more opportunities for concealing such messages in domestic buildings.

Builders had long used newspapers, other publications, and objects with fabrication dates as a datable record of their labours. In 1969 renovations of an old cottage in Harvington, Worcestershire, revealed behind some plaster a handbill dated 1796 relating the wilful and cruel murder of Joseph Pinfield.[43] The clay pipe bearing the date 1837 found embedded in the thatch of a house in Altaglushan, County Tyrone, in 1936, was presumably placed there as a record of the laying of the roof. More unusual is the Irish National Land League enrolment card issued on 10 December 1880 that was found in the wall of a dwelling in Altataskin during renovations in 1969.[44] When builders were pulling down a cob wall of a thatched cottage at Lyng, Somerset, in 1938, they discovered a copy of *Moore's Almanack* and a George III halfpenny dated 1786 together in a small cavity at the top of the wall.[45] Small denomination coins such as this were probably the most ubiquitous dating memento in domestic dwellings. Builders taking down No. 5 Alfred Place, Aberystwyth, in 1905, for instance, found three halfpennies of George III in the wall. When renovations were carried out at Hegarty's Hotel, Letterkenny, in 1937, an Irish

Signs: Graffiti in Archaeology and History. Studies in Contemporary and Historical Archaeology (Oxford, 2010), pp. 47–59.

[41] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-43668977.

[42] *Current Archaeology* 345 (2018) 7.

[43] *Birmingham Daily Post*, 23 June 1969. The murder was also recorded in the *Gentleman's Magazine* 65 (1795) 1110.

[44] *Ulster Herald*, 26 December 1936; *Anglo-Celt*, 12 September 1969.

[45] *Taunton Courier, and Western Advertiser*, 22 January 1938.

halfpenny dated 1744 was found in a wall, and a few years later re-plastering of a house in Macknagh, County Fermanagh, revealed a copper coin dated 1805 in the wall.[46]

How to determine whether coins were buried as dating objects as distinct from having a lucky or protective purpose? Coins had long been placed for good fortune under masts during boat and ship construction, for example. When Seán Ó Súilleabháin conducted his 1938 Irish folk tradition survey he received a few references to the placement of coins in buildings, but the purpose, or at least the interpretation of purpose, was not clear. Silver coins were apparently buried under house foundations in County Kerry. In County Leitrim it was reported that it was customary to secrete coins in the walls of houses when they were being built, usually ones bearing the same date as the new house.[47] What can be said with some certainty is that low denomination copper and bronze coins, like halfpennies, were deposited merely as a builders' dating memento. From the nineteenth century onward, at least, coins placed or carried for luck and protection were nearly always silver. The popularity of charms and talismans during the First World War, with many soldiers carrying lucky silver coins, gave the tradition a further boost.[48] In the general election of 1922, for instance, election officials emptying the ballot boxes on Anglesey found several silver threepenny bits that had clearly been wrapped in ballot papers to give good luck to the desired candidates.[49] The silver coin luck tradition, as distinct from a dating tradition, possibly became more widespread in the building trade in the first half of the twentieth century. A Lincolnshire builder Tommy Tomlinson, head of the building firm H.R. Tomlinson Ltd, espoused the custom of placing a silver coin underneath the first brick of new houses for good luck. 'The old country is built on tradition', said Tommy in a press interview in 1949.[50] But some such coin deposits remain difficult to decipher. Consider farmer T.G. Jones of Caersws, Montgomeryshire, who, in 1955, found a silver shilling with the head of Charles I when pulling down part of his farmhouse. It was secreted

[46] *Aberystwyth Observer*, 25 May 1905; *Strabane Chronicle*, 31 July 1937; *Fermanagh Herald*, 14 July 1951.

[47] Seán Ó Súilleabháin, 'Foundation Sacrifices', *Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 75(1) (1945) 45–52, pp. 46, 48.

[48] Owen Davies, *A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination, and Faith during the First World War* (Oxford, 2018), p. 143.

[49] *Tamworth Herald*, 2 December 1922.

[50] *Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian*, 28 May 1949.

behind a beam. The coin bore no date, so was it a venerable lucky concealment or a stolen coin hidden and never recovered?[51]

Builders also left their mark by concealing modest time capsules that were inspired by the civic ceremonies discussed earlier. During repair work to a house in North Street, Greyabbey, County Down, a blocked-up wall was taken down and a bottle was found containing a tightly rolled piece of paper on which was written, 'These premises were repaired and an addition built thereto by Hugh Taylor'. There then followed a list of the builders engaged on the job.[52] In another example from County Down the builder George McMaster drew upon his Freemasonry membership and knowledge in devising his message to the future. A piece of paper was folded inside a newspaper and contained a brief note signed by him stating that the wall was built in the Diamond Jubilee year, 4 August 1897. On the other side, however, he drew a series of Masonic symbols in ink, including a sun, moon, and seven stars, a five-pointed star, a hammer, mallet and chisel, a ladder, and crossed swords under a heart.[53] When Beke Place, Billingshurst, West Sussex, underwent renovations in 1954 builders found a bottle bricked up in a wall that was part time capsule, part builder's prank. Inside was a note on ragged paper. On one side was written: 'William Todman, drunken carpenter, Tisman's Common, Rudgwick. Drunk when this bottle was sealed.' On the other side:

> June 27, 1894. This is to certify that we, the undersigned, were workmen to Messrs. J. Wadey and Sons, Builders, Five Oaks, Billingshurst. Edwin Dewey, Bricklayer, Slinfold. Edwin Tullett, Bricklayer, Slinfold. James Redman, Bricklayer, Billingshurst, Jesse Gratwicks, Labourer, Billingshurst, George Palmer, Labourer, North Heath. Maurice Ireland, Propsitor [?], Broomfields, Billingshurst.[54]

A more sober and chatty note to the future was found in a bottle built into the wall of an old barn belonging to the Cock Inn, Stanton, Bury St Edmunds.

> Stanton, March 25th, 1887. This barn was repaired by Sturgeon Brothers but 65 years from this date it was used as a Weslen Chapel; the ware the

[51] *Western Mail*, 23 November 1955.
[52] Robinson, 'A Message for the Future', p. 50.
[53] Robinson, 'A Message for the Future', p. 50.
[54] *West Sussex County Times*, 10 December 1954.

> bottle will be found was the door ware they went in. Theair will be grate rejoicing in England this year as it is the Jubilee year of Hear Majesty reign Queen Victoria. H.S. Dudding is the rector of the parish but the parish is to poor to do enney thing for the Jubilee but they are trying to get an organ for the church which will cost 120£.

The note concluded with the names of the Sturgeon family and others, and 'God save the Queen'.[55] During the conversion of the Union Bank in Parliament Square, Edinburgh, into government offices in 1884 workmen came across a bottle concealed behind some plaster work. Inside was the following poignant message in which the builders addressed the future directly with their reflections on mortality:

> December 1829.—Men of other years, this will inform you that the plaister work of this Bank was executed by the undersigned individuals in the employ of Mr James Anderson, wages at the present time being 13s per week, and the trade in a very bad state, consequently a great number of the profession are feeling the most serious privations. Reader, when this comes to your eye the winds of (perhaps) a hundred winters will have blown over our graves. May it have a salutary impression on your mind, when it informs you of the dissolution of all human affairs.—JOHN CAMPBELL, foreman; ARCHIBALD DONALDSON, RODERICK INNES, THOMAS KIRKWOOD, ROBERT ALLAN, JAMES ROUGH, ALEXANDER MILNE, JOHN INNES.[56]

In some cases, it is impossible to determine whether domestic concealments were made by builders or the inhabitants. For example, a crumbled, illegible letter—which could have been written by either—was found pasted to the wall where an eighteenth-century child's shoe was found in a cottage in Huntingdonshire. While another illegible handwritten scrap of paper was found with a woman's ankle boot, a desiccated rat, and a nineteenth-century newspaper in the ceiling of Abingdon Park Museum, Northamptonshire. We suspect most such concealments were by builders, but in some instances it is clearly the owners who were responsible or instructed the builders to act on their behalf. When several old houses in

[55] *Bury Free Press*, 10 December 1948.

[56] *Evening Telegraph*, 29 February 1884. We look forward to a forthcoming book that also considers builders' graffiti: Nick Mansfield and Martin Wright, *Emissaries of the Past: The Visual and Material Culture of British Labour in the Long Nineteenth Century*.

Bocking, Essex, were demolished in the early twentieth century, a bottle was found bricked into one of the chimneys. Inside was a copy of the lease of the building dated 1795. A similar concealed bottle was found in the adjoining house.[57] Other concealed documents also appear to have been written by the occupants. Renovations of a cottage at the rear of Burlington Hotel, Eastbourne, in 1953, revealed a bottle buried in a wall with a note that read, 'I, Freda Morley, put this here, 1882, April 20th'.[58]

Some buildings have also yielded overt messages from occupants to future dwellers. In 2018, a story was widely reported in the news of a couple living in San Jose, California, who found a message from past occupants beneath the plasterboard of their bathroom. Written across the wall in marker were the words, 'Hi! We're the Shinseki's [sic]! We remodelled this bathroom summer 1995 If you're reading this, that means you're remodelling the bathroom again. What's wrong with the way we did it?' Alongside this was a photograph of a smiling couple, presumably the Shinsekis. A more personal and touching example comes from the authors' colleague, whose family found a message written by her late grandfather beneath the wallpaper of a bedroom: 'NORM DONE ALL THIS FOR SALLY COS HE LOVES HER NO PAYMENT REQUIRED'. This message was clearly intended to be found and read in the future by our colleague's grandmother, Sally.[59]

Perhaps similar sentiments also motivated the concealment of objects such as shoes. There are numerous examples of datable literature being concealed along with other items. Forty-two concealed shoe caches recorded in the Northampton Concealed Shoe Index were hidden alongside some form of written document, much of it literature bearing dates. A paper inscribed with 'Mary Nichols 1819' was found up the chimney of a house in Norfolk, alongside a man's ankle boot, corset stays, and a pouch. A pair of men's elastic-sided hobnailed boots in poor condition, found in the roof of the vestry of the Savoy Chapel, contained a scrap of wallpaper bearing the pencilled message 'William Chapman/B 3d July 1828/this was don in 1876'. There is also the 1798 revolutionary list found with a cache of shoes and garments under a floor in Spitalfields, and the tax assessment from 1812 found in a large cache of shoes, horseshoes,

[57] *Leominster News and North West Herefordshire & Radnorshire Advertiser*, 5 October 1906.

[58] *Eastbourne Gazette*, 29 April 1953.

[59] Pers. comm. Leanne Calvert, July 2018.

and coins between two inglenook fireplaces in a farmhouse in Leicestershire. A coal receipt was found with a clog overshoe under the staircase of a farmhouse in Kent, and a playbill for a production of *Romeo and Juliet* dated 1899 was hidden alongside a nineteenth-century leather boot, an alarm clock, a teacup, and myriad other objects in a house in Illinois, USA. Other examples include ballad sheets, receipts, tickets, pages torn from calendars, letter fragments, almanacs, account books, fashion magazines, and a gardening pamphlet. Newspapers have also been found wrapped around shoes, such as in the case of the nineteenth-century child's shoe found under the floorboards of a house in Folkestone, Kent. Other cases have the newspaper pages stuffed inside the shoe, such as the man's nineteenth-century button boot in Colchester, Essex. The presence of datable literature in such caches strongly indicates that the concealment was more about posterity than protection. We must remember, furthermore, that not all concealers would have been literate and may have resorted to personal objects to represent a similar snapshot of their lives and times. Personal items could serve the same purpose as a time capsule, a mute message about the present for the future.

'An old shoe placed in the chimney with the hope of finding in it, not a toy, but a memory of days gone by.' This observation was made in 1885 in an article by a British correspondent of the *Globe* reporting on Christmas in Paris. It was used as an analogy for the sceptical Parisian's emotional memory unlocked by attending midnight Mass. The old shoe in the chimney, like Proust's madeleine, was an ostensibly worthless item of the everyday that provoked the most profound of emotions about the intimate past.[60] In 2009, a group of researchers, exploring the processes of capturing future memories, asked ten families to create their own personal time capsules. Once made, they had expected these time capsules to include overtly emotionally significant objects, but instead found that they often contained, in their words, 'mundane elements of everyday life'. Various pieces of footwear were amongst these mundane elements, from a child's first shoe to an odd pair of ballet socks. The family who included the latter are quoted as saying, 'Ballet socks, actually not a pair nor pristine. They tell a lot about how we are: we do things but we are not hugely organized and we do not mind too much about certain things.' The

[60] *Globe*, 28 December 1885.

researchers observed that 'a pair of ballet socks represents the philosophy of the family'.[61] Are concealed shoes evidence of a similar mentality?

'Why the shoe?' June Swann asked. Because it is 'the only garment we wear which retains the shape, the personality, the essence of the wearer'.[62] By retaining the foot's shape, the shoe becomes a metaphorical symbol of the wearer. Van Driel-Murray writes that, 'As bearer of the individual's imprint, the shoe functions as a signature—a spiritual graffito'.[63] This makes it the ideal ritual deposit. Since antiquity, votives and other offerings have been associated with their depositor's identity, from model limbs to locks of hair. These objects are not designed to simply represent the depositor, but to *be* the depositor. As archaeologist Chris Tilley writes, the 'thing is the person and the person is the thing', a notion that anthropologist Alfred Gell has termed the 'objectification of personhood'. This can lead to 'distributed personhood', whereby the deposited object—in this case, a shoe—becomes a detached part of the depositor.[64] The theory has been put forward that such notions 'allow' the shoe to be used for protection. Dinah Eastop has described this idea as 'metonymical analysis'; powered by a metonymical link with their wearer, the concealed shoe can act as a diversion or a lure, capturing any malevolent forces that invade the household.[65] Ralph Merrifield suggested that such a belief could stem from the tale of John Schorn, a parish priest from Buckinghamshire believed to have conjured a devil into a boot. The shoe has thus been described as a 'spirit trap' and a 'lightning conductor', diverting the malevolent force from entering the house.[66] Fooled by Gell's 'distributed

[61] Daniela Petrelli, Elise van den Hoven, and Steve Whittaker, 'Making History: Intentional capture of future memories', in *Proceedings of the 27th international ACM conference on human factors in computing systems* (Boston, 2009), 1723–1732.

[62] June Swann, 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', *Costume* 30 (1996) 56–69, p. 56.

[63] Carol van Driel-Murray, 'And did those feet in ancient time … feet and shoes as a material projection of the self', in P. Baker, C. Forcey, S. Jundi and R. Witcher (eds) *TRAC 98: Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference Leicester 1998* (Oxford, 1999), 131–140, p. 136.

[64] Christopher Tilley, 'Objectification', in C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands, and P. Spyer (eds) *Handbook of Material Culture* (London, 2006), 60–73, p. 63; Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency* (Oxford, 1998), p. 104.

[65] Dinah Eastop, 'Outside In: Making sense of the deliberate concealment of garments within buildings', *Textile* 4(3) (2006), 238–255, p. 247.

[66] Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, p. 135; Hoggard, 'The archaeology of counter-witchcraft and popular magic', p. 179; Timothy Easton, 'Ritual Marks on Historic Buildings', *Weald and Downland Open Air Museum Magazine* (Spring 1999) 23. On the

personhood', the evil force supposedly believes the concealed shoe to be a member of the household, attacks the shoe instead, and becomes trapped inside. This, so the argument goes, explains why so many concealed shoes (94% of those recorded in the Northampton Index) are old, well-worn, or damaged. To have the power to lure and trap, the shoe must be unambiguously linked with its wearer, physically testifying to the miles they have walked together.

Adhering to the metonymical analysis does not necessarily make the concealed shoe—and indeed garment—an apotropaic device. Instead, perhaps the concealers were motivated by the same sentiments as those families in 2009 who placed shoes and ballet socks, amongst other 'mundane elements', into their time capsules. Perhaps concealment of such objects was—like the written document—less about protection or power and more about posterity. They were a way of capturing memories, for themselves, for their children grown, for distant descendants, or for any unrelated future inhabitants of their home. Like the modern time capsule, the concealed object may too anticipate its future retrieval.[67]

* * *

The sentiments behind the creation of personal time capsules have affinities with the psychology of graffiti. As Beaton and Todd have commented, walls of graffiti can 'act as a time capsule or snapshot'.[68] Not only do they both act as momentary records of human experience, they also function as forms of time-lapsed communication. They attest to a desire to proclaim 'I was here' by altering the physical environment.[69] There are examples of this from across the world and throughout history.

legend of John Schorn see Katherine Barker, 'The Devil in a Boot: Katherine Barker throws new light on an intriguing medieval wall painting in Sherborne', *Dorset County Magazine* 151 (1991) 11–14.

[67] Durrans, 'Time Capsules as Extreme Collecting', p. 182.

[68] Bruce Beaton and Shannon Todd, 'Reclaiming the Ruins: A Case Study of Graffiti Heritage Interpretation at the Evergreen Brick Works in Toronto', in Troy Lovata and Elizabeth Olton (eds) *Understanding Graffiti: Multidisciplinary studies from prehistory to the present* (Walnut Creek, CA, 2015), 105–116, p. 111.

[69] Shirley Campbell, 'The Captivating Agency of Art: Many Ways of Seeing', in Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas (eds) *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment* (Oxford and New York, 2001), 117–135, p. 117.

Graffiti provides what Susan Stewart has termed 'a matter of individuation'.[70] Spray-painted tags, initials scratched into a library desk, messages left on the walls of public toilets are manifestations of people's desire to leave their individual mark—and so, perhaps, are objects concealed for future finders.[71] In such a way material things can act as constructions of 'the self' for people in the future to witness.[72]

Despite—or perhaps because of—this focus on 'the self', both graffiti and time capsules tend to be communal creations. 'Folk assemblages' are a case in point, to employ Jack Santino's term for spontaneous accumulations that invite participation from other members of a community, from wishing-wells to shoe trees.[73] Folklorist Lynne McNeill coined the term 'serial collaborative creations' to describe such assemblages, wherein both individual and communal identities are constructed.[74] Groups, families, and communities can likewise be represented by concealed objects. Sometimes this can be quite explicit. Eastop, for instance, reports a concealed cache from Virginia, USA, made up of dolls, which appeared to represent a family (a man, woman, children, and a baby), alongside shoes.[75] More commonly, these 'families'—to use Swann's expression[76]—are made up of just shoes. The Northampton Index reveals that marginally more shoes are found in unmatched groups (42%) than alone (41%), ranging in

[70] Cf. Robert Reisner, *Graffiti: Two Thousand Years of Wall Writing* (New York, 1971); Lovata and Olton (eds) *Understanding Graffiti*; Susan Stewart, 'Ceci Tuera Cela: Graffiti as Crime and Art', in John Fekete (ed.) *Life after Postmodernism: Essays on Value and Culture* (London, 1988), p. 165. See also Abel and Buckley, who describe graffiti as 'announcements of one's identity, a kind of testimonial to one's existence in a world of anonymity': *Handwriting on the Wall: Toward a Sociology and Psychology of Graffiti* (Westport and London, 1977), p. 16.

[71] Waldenburg dubs this a 'form of basic self-expression': *The Berlin Wall Book* (London, 1990), p. 12. Reisner calls it the '"I was here" syndrome': *Graffiti*, p. 70.

[72] Joanna Brück, 'Material Metaphors: The relational construction of identity in Early Bronze Age burials in Ireland and Britain', *Journal of Social Archaeology* 4(3) (2004) 307–333; Joanna Brück, 'Fragmentation, Personhood and the Social Construction of Technology in Middle and Late Bronze Age Britain', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 16(3) (2006) 297–315.

[73] Jack Santino, 'Performative Commemoratives, the Personal, and the Public: Spontaneous Shrines, Emergent Ritual, and the Field of Folklore', *Journal of American Folklore* 117 (2004) 363–372.

[74] Lynne McNeill, 'Portable Places: Serial Collaboration and the Creation of a New Sense of Place', *Western Folklore* 66(3/4) (2007) 281–299.

[75] Eastop, 'Outside In', p. 247.

[76] Swann, 'Shoes concealed in buildings', p. 64.

number from two singles to more than 20. Many caches contain just children's shoes, but many more contain shoes from different age groups and sexes. At least eighty nine caches have been recorded containing adults and children's shoes, and thirty five containing men and women's. Are such concealed caches evidence of serial collaborative creations intended to declare, 'we were here'?

As is evident throughout this book, of course, shoes and garments constitute only two categories of concealed objects. There is vast variety in the types of things people chose to hide within the fabric of their homes, and miscellany abounds. This is consistent with the types of objects people today choose to store in private boxes deep in wardrobes, under stairs, and up in attics, rather than have them on display. Twenty-first-century surveys have found that people conceal a wide range of objects that have deep sentimental value: objects that rarely have any material worth or association with luck, and are functionally useless, ranging from shells picked up on beaches to diaries, coffee-shop receipts to carvings and art made by family members, baby's socks to dog collars, T-shirts to teddy bears, even a motorcycle cog and a pregnancy cast. Every item held an important nostalgic significance which would be lessened by having them on habitual display.[77] Is the same sentiment behind some of the historic concealed caches we are discovering? Are we perplexed by the choice of objects because they are personal, sentimental, and contain associations specific to the individuals, families, or communities whose thought processes are inaccessible to us? Might an enigmatic bit of detritus in a midden hold a power that we know nothing of, not about ritual but about emotion and memory?

[77] See Daniela Petrelli and Steve Whittaker, 'Family Memories in the Home: Contrasting Physical and Digital Memories', *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing* 14 (2010) 153–69; David S. Kirk and Abigail Sellen, 'On Human Remains: Values and Practice in the Home Archiving of Cherished Objects', *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction* 17 (2010) 1–43.

CHAPTER 6

Seeking Protection: Objects of Power

While the apotropaic purpose of horse skulls, mummified cats, concealed shoes, and witch balls is doubtful historically, there were other objects that had a pervasive and well-documented history of apotropaic usage in early modern and modern buildings, placed in and around the windows, doors, chimneys, and roofs to protect against fire, witches, fairies, spirits, and nightmares. In his *Select Cases of Conscience* (1646), the puritan chaplain John Gaule listed some of the 'ignorant' methods people employed against suspected witches. It included, 'The putting of such and such things under the Threshold, and in the Bedstraw, &C'. What were the such and such? Gaule was reluctant to say: 'I am loath to speak out, lest I might teach these in reproving them'.[1] We get some clues from other sources at the time. The Scottish cunning woman Issobell Bennet, prosecuted in 1659, apparently recommended burying a live mole in a box under the outside of the threshold to keep all harm away.[2] The mid-seventeenth-century astrologer-physician Nicolas Culpeper published a cure for the bewitched that involved putting quicksilver in a quill, sealing it, and laying it under

[1] John Gaule, *Select cases of conscience touching witches and witchcrafts* (London, 1646), p. 76.

[2] http://witches.shca.ed.ac.uk/.

O. Davies, C. Houlbrook, *Building Magic*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76765-5_6

the threshold of the door.[3] Later in the century the burial of 'witch bottles', using imported Bellarmine or Bartmann jugs, became a new addition to the arsenal, with over one hundred examples revealed through excavation and building renovation work in the twentieth century.[4] From the sixteenth century there is also good evidence for the concealment of written charms produced by cunning folk in and around the home and farmstead. Some were put in containers before being placed above or near entrances while others were folded and squeezed into cracks. In Germany there was a distinct tradition of plugging whereby a hole was drilled into a beam, the rolled up charm placed within, and then sealed.[5] Their contents were not to be read by their owners, but most of them were a mix of religious passages mingled with symbols and names of magical power. As we shall see, some apotropaics, such as horseshoes and hag stones, have, through their physical durability, remained material proof of past beliefs, but others were more ephemeral and intangible, their traces only recoverable from the literary archive.

Potent Plants

Several plants had a reputation for warding off witchcraft in the post-medieval period.[6] In Michael Drayton's fairy poem *Nymphidia* (1627) we find the much quoted—though often not properly attributed line: 'Therewith her vervain and her dill, That hind'reth witches of their will'.

[3] Nicolas Culpeper, *Culpeper's School of Physick* (London, 1659), p. L4r. The use of quicksilver in this way is a very strong element in Finnish folklore; see Hukantaival, *For a Witch Cannot Cross such a Threshold!*, pp. 75–6.

[4] Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, pp. 163–75; Charles Orser, 'Rethinking 'Bellarmine' Contexts in 17th-Century England', *Journal of Material Culture* 53(1) (2019) 88–101; Brian Hoggard, 'Witch Bottles: Their Contents, Contexts and Uses', in Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, pp. 91–106; Owen Davies and Timothy Easton, 'Cunning-Folk and the Production of Magical Artefacts', in Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, pp. 210–13.

[5] See Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular magic in English History* (London, 2003), pp. 147–63; Heinrich Stiewe, 'Zauberbohrungen, magische Zeichen und "Hexenbriefe" – Spuren von Alltagsmagia in Bauerhäusen aus Nordwestdeutchschland', in Bis-Worch and Theune (eds), *Religion, cults & rituals*, pp. 363–70; Owen Davies, *America Bewitched: The Story of Witchcraft after Salem* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 110–111.

[6] See, C. Riley Auge, 'Silent Sentinels: Archaeology, magic, and the gendered control of domestic boundaries in New England, 1620–1725', PhD thesis, The University of Montana 2013, pp. 222–27.

The antiquarian John Aubrey repeated a slight variant of this in his *Miscellanies* (1696), 'Vervain and Dill, Hinders witches from their will', and also related a story of a gentleman's house plagued by a noisy spirit that was restored to calm by placing hypericum (St John's Wort) under his pillow.[7] These references to vervain and dill were probably inspired by classical sources rather than reflecting English popular tradition. Both were considered highly potent herbs in Roman and Greek magic, religion, and medicine. St John's Wort was certainly a well-used, native folk apotropaic. When William Bingley took his tour around North Wales in 1798, he commented on how the locals on St John's Eve put sprigs of St John's Wort 'over their doors, and sometimes over their windows' to drive away evil spirits.[8]

The most widespread and enduring plant for domestic protection was rowan or mountain ash. There are references to the power of rowan against witches and evil spirits in the witch-trial records and literature of the early modern period. At the trial of the accused witch and cunning woman Margaret Stothard, Edlingham, Northumberland, it was heard how the servant Isabel Main, of Shawdon, consulted Margaret about her difficulties with cheese making. Margaret said the milk was 'forespoken' and advised the sprinkling of salt and gave her a piece of rowan wood to take with her to the cows.[9] It was kept in pockets and attached to churns and yokes, and goads and whip stocks were made from it to keep herds and flocks protected.[10] Rowan can be found growing wild across Britain, but is most abundant in Wales, Scotland, and northern and western parts of England, and not surprisingly its apotropaic use was most prevalent in these areas.

In Thomas Pennant's account of his tours of Scotland in 1769/1772, he noted that, 'the farmers carefully preserve their cattle against witchcraft by placing boughs of the mountain ash and honeysuckle in the cow houses on the 2 May'.[11] Most historic references, like this, concerned the placing of rowan in the buildings that housed animals rather than human dwellings, but pieces were brought into the home, though they are unlikely to have survived long as a material record of the practice. In Herefordshire,

[7] John Aubrey, *Miscellanies upon the following subjects* (London, 1696), p. 111.

[8] William Bingley, *A tour round North Wales, performed during the summer of 1798* (London, 1800), p. 237.

[9] C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism* (London, 1933), p. 324.

[10] See Roud, *Superstitions*, pp. 383–4.

[11] Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland* (Warrington, 1774), p. 141.

during the mid-nineteenth century, people placed pieces of 'witty', as rowan was known in the local dialect, above cottage doors on May Day morning. Some placed it in the form of a cross. One such example was seen in a house near Michaelchurch in the early twentieth century, and was placed there to counteract the influence of a malicious neighbour.[12] Around 1893, similar rowan crosses were still being made by an old man in Corgarff, Aberdeen, for locals to place in every opening of the house. In parts of Wales there was a tradition of placing rings made of rowan under doorposts to frustrate witches.[13] Sometime in the late nineteenth century an acquaintance of the Yorkshire clergyman J.C. Atkinson recounted an interview with an elderly woman who he saw wandering in a curious fashion in the countryside. It transpired she was looking for a rowan tree from which to cut some branches to protect her home from witchcraft. One piece was to be left on the upper sill of the front door, one for the head of her bed, and further pieces were to be fixed above the doors of the stable, cow-byre, and other outhouses. The wood had to be cut on St Helen's day (18 August) and from a rowan tree that the cutter had never seen before.[14]

A range of trees and plants have also accrued the reputation for averting lightning strikes. In his *Natural History*, the Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder noted the bay tree as never being struck, and according to the English clergyman Robert Dingley, writing in 1658, 'Our Country people do generally plant the Bay-tree in their Gardens, as thinking it may preserve their Houses, Fruit, and Flowers, from being injured by *Lightning*'.[15] By the nineteenth century it had largely lost this reputation in British custom, with the houseleek, or *Donner blatt* (thunder leaf) as it is known in German, becoming the plant most widely associated with protection from lightning. The notion that it also kept witches away only appears in Britain in twentieth-century sources.[16] The earliest reference to the planting of houseleek (*Sempervivum tectorum*) for protection in English printed

[12] Ella Mary Leather, *The Folk-Lore of Herefordshire* (Hereford, 1912), p. 18; Mrs Murray-Aynsley, 'Scraps of English Folklore, XVI. Herefordshire', *Folklore* 39 (1928) 383.

[13] Ellen Ettlinger, 'Documents of British Superstition in Oxford', *Folklore* 54(1) (1943) 227–249, p. 238; Elias Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore* (Oswestry, 1896), p. 246.

[14] John C. Atkinson, *Forty years in a moorland parish; reminiscences and researches in Danby in Cleveland* (London, 1891), pp. 98–9. Also, John C. Atkinson, *Glossary of the Cleveland Dialect* (London, 1868), p. 417.

[15] Robert Dingley, *Vox cæli; or, philosophical, historicall, and theological brace observations, of thunder* (London, 1658), p. 134.

[16] Camille Flammarion, *Thunder and Lightning*, trans. Walter Mostyn (London, 1905), pp. 155–6; Roy Vickery, *Garlands, Conkers and Mother-Die: British and Irish Plant-lore*

literature dates to the mid-sixteenth century. The Elizabethan physician and clergyman William Bullein included the 'houselyke' in his 'Booke of Simples', observing that 'the old wryters', that is the physicians of the ancient world, 'holde an Opynion superstitiously that in what house so ever it growth, no Lyghtning or Tempest can take place to doe any harme there'.[17] The polymath Thomas Browne (1605–1682), writing a century later, also made note of houseleeks, 'which old superstition set on the tops of houses, as a defensive against lightening, and thunder'.[18] Both Bullein and Browne refer to ancient texts for the practice rather than personal observation. In other words, it is difficult to assess whether house leek was widely planted against lightning in England at the time. Indeed, other seventeenth-century texts nearly all focussed on the plant's widespread uses in herbal medicine rather than house protection.

Moving on to the late eighteenth century, the Antiquarian John Brand noted in his 1777 *Observations on Popular Antiquities* that they were widely planted on roofs in northern England, though his only source on their protective function was still Thomas Browne.[19] Popular knowledge of the lightning apotropaic tradition may have spread from the following decade onward, though, due to the numerous editions of a revised and expanded edition of Nicolas Culpeper's *The English physician enlarged*. Although it referenced the lightning protection attributed to fig and bay trees, Culpeper's original seventeenth-century works did not mention the houseleek's protective qualities, but in the late eighteenth century an expanded edition with new additions stated that houseleek or syngreen 'groweth commonly on walls and house-sides' noting that it was reported by an earlier authority 'to preserve what it grows upon from fire and lightning'.[20] Still, come the nineteenth century and the evidence for people deliberately planting houseleek for protection, as distinct from referring to well-established houseleek colonies, is less than forthcoming. In *The Flowering Plants of Great Britain*, published in 1861, the botanist Anne Pratt concluded, 'this superstition seems banished from our

(London, 2010), p. 59. The earliest reference to keeping witches away we have seen is in the *Bradford Scientific Journal* 3, 1 (1910) 29.

[17] William Bullein, *Bulwarke of Defence against all Sicknesse* (London, 1579), Fol. 35.

[18] Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia, urne-buriall, or, a discourse of the sepulchrall urnes lately found in Norfolk* (London, 1658), pp. 125–6.

[19] *Observations on popular antiquities: including the whole of Mr. Bourne's Antiquitates vulgares* (London, 1777), p. 218.

[20] *Culpeper's The English physician enlarged* (London, 1784), p. 159.

country'.[21] In 1872 a correspondent to the *Derbyshire Times* also queried the supposed popularity of planting houseleeks on cottage roofs for protection, after it had been mentioned as a common belief in a previous edition of the newspaper. He had never heard of the notion, and noted, 'inquiries I have made have elicited nothing further'. He did, however, find out a lot about the continued medicinal use of houseleek, such as for assuaging scalds, burns, and inflammation. The crushed leaves were also applied to the sunburn suffered by harvesters.[22]

In 1899 a columnist in the *Cumberland Times* related how, on seeing a clump of houseleek growing against the chimney of an old cottage, he ventured to ask its aged owner why she let it grow there. It was worth its weight in gold she said, 'because it saved the house from being struck by lightning'. She knew of an instance from when she was in her teens where a local house that grew the plant on its roof was untouched during a thunderstorm but the houses either side were badly damaged.[23] Around the same time, the Somerset folklorist Walter Raymond expressed his admiration for the houseleek on a miller's roof, and was told by the miller's daughter that, 'Twas a-planted there a-purpose, or zo they do zay, time out o' mind. The house where 'tis can't never be struck by lightin' ne'et can't catch vire. An' 'tis a wonderful cure vor all complaints'.[24] There is no evidence to back up the statement in *The Garden* magazine for 1920, though, that, 'We are perfectly satisfied that this superstition exists, and that the Houseleek is often planted on roofs for this reason'.[25] All the instances above concern long-established colonies of houseleek, and no references have been found confirming the act of actually planting houseleek for protection in the nineteenth century.

Thunderbolts

Thunderbolts are prehistoric tools or fossils that were considered in the past to be the physical residues of lightning strikes hitting the ground. They were thought to have the power of averting lightning wherever they were placed, and they also accrued healing and other magical properties.

[21] Anne Pratt, *The Flowering Plants of Great Britain* (London, 1861), Vol. 2, p. 2.
[22] *Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald*, 26 October 1872.
[23] *Cumberland Times*, 22 July 1899.
[24] Walter Raymond, *Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree* (London, 1928), p. 106.
[25] H.C., 'The Houseleek and Ancient Superstition', *The Garden* 11 September (1920) 458.

These notions have been recorded across the globe and in many cultures past and present. It is no wonder, then, that they attracted considerable interest from the survivalists.[26] The notion of thunderbolts was noted by Roman authors, and there is some archaeological evidence that the Romano-British used them for protection against fire and lightning.[27] There was certainly a trade in thunderstones in Europe during the medieval and early modern periods.[28]

In Britain, Neolithic and Bronze Age stone tools, mostly axes and arrowheads which could be found scattered across the countryside, attracted the thunderbolt interpretation, but the range of beliefs recorded in the early modern and modern eras about what constituted a thunderbolt or thunderstone also depended on regional geology. In some chalk areas lumps of iron pyrites or iron accretions were apparently considered to be thunderbolts. Sources from the late seventeenth century onward observe how fossils, principally belemnites, also known as 'Devil's fingers', were called thunderbolts by the 'vulgar'. Belemnites, which were akin to cuttlefish, are mostly found in Jurassic and Cretaceous areas in the southern and eastern half of England. The early twentieth-century folklorist and amulet collector Edward Lovett observed that belemnites were considered as 'nothing' in areas beyond their geological distribution. When he showed one to various Cornish people it held no meaning to them whatsoever.[29]

[26] See, for example, Christian Blinkenberg, *The Thunderweapon in Religion and Folklore: A Study in Comparative Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1911). For more recent global perspectives see, Adam Brumm, 'Lightning teeth and Ponari sweat: Folk theories and magical uses of prehistoric stone axes (and adzes) in Island Southeast Asia and the origin of thunderstone beliefs', *Australian Archaeology* 84(1) (2018) 37–55; Jane T. Sibley, *The Divine Thunderbolt: Missile of the Gods* (Philadelphia, 2009).

[27] Stephen A. Castle, 'Excavations at Brockley Hill, Middlesex, March-May, 1972', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeology Society* 25 (1974) 251–263, p. 263; Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, pp. 10–16.

[28] Kristiina Johanson, 'The Changing Meaning of "Thunderbolts"', *Folklore: EJF* 42 (2009) 129–174; Peter Carelli, 'Thunder and Lightning, Magical Miracles: On the popular myth of thunderbolts and the presence of Stone-Age artefacts in medieval deposits', in Hans Anderson, Peter Carelli, and Lars Ersgård (eds) *Visions of the Past: Trends and traditions in Swedish medieval archaeology* (Stockholm, 1997) pp. 393–417; Matthew R. Goodrum, 'The Meaning of Ceraunia: Archaeology, natural history and the interpretation of prehistoric stone artefacts in the eighteenth century', *British Journal for the History of Science* 35 (2002) 255–69; Alexandru Ofrim, 'Attitudes towards Prehistoric Objects in Romanian Folk Culture (19th–20th Century)', *Swedish Journal of Romanian Studies* 2 (2019) 91–108.

[29] Walter W. Skeat, '"Snakestones" and Stone Thunderbolts as Subjects for Systematic Investigation', *Folk-Lore* 23(1) (1912), 45–80, pp. 62–3; 'Belemnites', British Geological

In some chalk and limestone areas fossilised sea urchins or echinoids, which were known variously as shepherds' crowns (Sussex), fairy or pharisees loaves (East Anglia), and bishops' mitres (Devon), were considered thunderstones by some. When, in 1938, local amateur archaeologist John Henry Pull conducted a survey of their presence on window sills in the villages of Patching and Clapham, Sussex, he found that in fourteen out of sixteen homes the inhabitants said they were kept there for luck and two said they prevented the home from being struck by lightning.[30]

There is a lot of nineteenth-century evidence in Scandinavia for the placement of thunderbolts under floors, in the rafters and walls, and also under the bed.[31] In 1911, the Danish archaeologist Christian Blinkenberg collated several pages of references to and reports on the practice in Denmark, noting that they were most frequently placed near the chimney, presumably as a more general protection from fire as well as lightning.[32] The literary and material evidence for the practice in the same period is less rich for Britain and Ireland but confirms that it was, nevertheless, geographically pervasive. When, in 1932, some old brick cottages were pulled down at Newbury, in the chalk downs of Berkshire, four heavy balls of iron pyrites were found in the plaster, and were interpreted as deliberate depositions for lightning protection.[33] There is an example of a late Neolithic/early Bronze Age mace-head found beneath a layer of burnt clay under a hearth in an Elizabethan fireplace in Langham, Essex, and two other instances of Stone Age tools found under cottage hearths in the same county. Their function here was perhaps to prevent fire from spreading from the fireplace rather than to protect from lightning strikes causing fires. During excavations of a timber-framed cruck cottage, at Rainsough Brow, Prestwich, in the 1980s a polished stone axe was found in a room where the hearth would have been. A stone implement was found in 1897 built into the wall of a house in La Moye, Jersey, apparently for protection

Survey: http://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/time/Fossilfocus/belemnite.html.

[30] John Henry Pull, 'Shepherds' Crowns: The Survival of Belief in their Magical Virtues in Sussex', published posthumously in Anthony Brook (ed.), *John Henry Pull and Shepherds' Crowns* (West Sussex Geological Society Occasional Publication 3, 2003), p. 33; Kenneth J. McNamara, *The Secret Life, Myths, and History of a Fascinating Fossil* (Chicago, 2011), pp. 121–45.

[31] Carelli, 'Thunder and Lightning'; Hukantaival, *"For a Witch Cannot Cross Such a Threshold!"*, pp. 181–5.

[32] Blinkenberg, *The Thunderweapon*, pp. 68–83.

[33] Skeat, '"Snakestones", p. 63; 'The Newbury Thunderbolt', *Folklore* 49 (1938) 49.

against lightning.[34] Lovett recalled travelling around the north of Ireland in the 1890s and seeing prehistoric stone axes placed on the rafters of cottages as a safeguard against lightning. This is confirmed by another account of a small celt (axe-like stone tool) kept on the rafters of a cottage in Antrim in 1887, and another seen similarly placed in a house in Portrush, County Antrim, in 1912.[35] More recent research has revealed further examples of such axes concealed under floors and in walls in Ireland, likely for the same purpose. It has been suggested that the concealments of prehistoric bronze axes and spears in Irish buildings may have been done for the same purpose, in which case form, shape, and otherworldliness were the key qualities for such attribution rather than the material substance.[36]

Any Old Iron?

There are numerous references in folklore and the archives that iron was considered anathema to fairies, witches, and evil spirits. One of the most frequent notions was that milk and beer could be protected from the souring effect of witchcraft by plunging hot iron into the liquid. Depositions taken against the suspected witch Agnes Heard of Little Oakley, Essex, in 1581/1582, record how Edmond Osborne and his wife testified that, believing Heard had bewitched their beer making, they put a red-hot iron into their malt vat, and thereafter they were successful in making a brew. The same trial heard how the wife of William Lane similarly put a red-hot horseshoe into her milk to rid the spell that was preventing her butter from coming.[37] Iron also had a more general reputation as a bringer of good fortune. In James Mason's attack on charmers and cunning folk

[34] E.J. Rudsdale, 'Thunderbolts', *Folklore* 49 (1938), 48–9; 'Thunderstones are go!', https://ancientworldsmanchester.wordpress.com/tag/thunderstones/ (accessed 27 October 2018); Ettlinger, 'Documents of British Superstition in Oxford', p. 235.

[35] Edward Lovett, *Magic in Modern London* (Croydon, 1925), p. 50; W.J. Clarke, 'Stone Axes an Arrow Heads in Folklore', *The Naturalist*, cited in 'Stone Axes and Arrow Heads: Their Place in Ulster Folklore', *Northern Whig*, 2 December 1938.

[36] Stephen H. Penney, 'Axes, Arrowheads and other Antiquities in Irish Folklore', *Ulster Folklife* 22 (1976) 70–75; Marion Dowd, 'Bewitched by an Elf Dart: Fairy Archaeology, Folk Magic and Traditional Medicine in Ireland', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 28(3) (2018) 451–473; Donna Gilligan, 'Enchantment in the Walls: The use of a concealed bronze spearhead as a protective charm at a house in Corglass, Co. Leitrim', *Journal of Cumann Seanchais Breifne* (Breifne Historical Society) 52 (2017) 201–210. Thanks to Donna and Marion for providing copies of their articles.

[37] Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, p. 161.

published in 1612, he condemned a range of 'vaine and frivolous' beliefs including that luck would accrue to the person 'if he finde olde iron'. Nathanael Homes, writing in 1650, repeated the same, namely that if the common people 'finde some pieces of Iron it is a prediction of good luck to the finders'.[38] Finding old pieces of iron was still considered lucky in late nineteenth-century Shropshire and elsewhere.[39] It is not surprising, then, that iron objects were placed around the home and farm buildings. In his *Farriery improv'd: or, a compleat treatise upon the arts of farriery* (1743), Henry Bracken decried the popular belief that witches or the 'Bitch-Daughter', a Yorkshire term for a female supernatural entity (originally the *mara*) that caused nightmares, rode horses to a sweat at night, and noted that the country folk resorted to putting a 'Piece of Iron over the Horse's Back'.[40] Nearly a century and a half later, it was observed that in the area of Pendle, Lancashire, sickle blades and pieces of iron 'may still be found on the beams and behind the doors of stables and shippons' for such protection. In 1867, a Lancashire folklorist noted that even an old rusty nail found in the field was 'carefully conveyed home and hoarded up'.[41]An old iron grisset pan used for melting tallow for rush lights, which workmen found in the wall of a building in Altataskin in 1960, may have been placed there for the same purpose.[42]

The reason why iron was considered lucky and protective is difficult to pinpoint. Silver also accrued similar properties from the eighteenth century onward.[43] There is no foundation to the explanation mooted in the late nineteenth century that it was a survival of its sacred nature in prehistory. Edward Tylor posited, for instance, that because fairies were considered creatures of the Stone Age in the past, the advent of iron was considered 'hateful and hurtful to them'. This conveniently ignores the fact that copper and bronze were the first metals used by humans of course,

[38] James Mason, *The Anatomie of Sorcerie* (London, 1612), p. 90; Nathanael Homes, *Dæmonologie and Theologie* (London, 1650), p. 60.

[39] Georgina F. Jackson and Charlotte S. Burne, *Shropshire Folk-lore: A sheaf of gleanings* (London, 1883), p. 165; Roud, *Superstitions*, p. 264.

[40] Henry Bracken, *Farriery improv'd: or, a compleat treatise upon the arts of farriery* (London, 1743), p. 95; William Holloway, *A general dictionary of provincialisms* (Lewes, 1839), p. 12.

[41] James Mackay, *Pendle Hill in History and Literature* (London, 1888), p. 352; John Harland, *Lancashire Folk-lore* (London, 1867), p. 139.

[42] *Anglo-Celt*, 3 December 1960.

[43] Davies, *America Bewitched*, pp. 43–4, 112–3.

and iron implements came much later.[44] In Ireland, at least, there was a tradition that St Patrick had blessed the metal and hence given it efficacy, as noted in the *History of Ireland in Verse* (1750):

> On threshold that the house might be,
> From Witches, thieves, and divels free,
> For Patrick o'er the iron did pray,
> And made it holy, as they say.[45]

The quality of iron was not the only reason, though, why some implements were considered potent against supernatural intruders. Sharpness also had an important apotropaic function, providing both a spiritual and physical defence: physical in that the act of drawing blood from the body of a witch was a powerful counter spell that was performed many times in the early modern and modern periods; spiritual in that a sharp blade could also repel the metaphysical presence of a witch or other supernatural beings sent by witches. The seventeenth-century poet, Robert Herrick, alluded to the placement of sharp farm implements in buildings in his 1648 poem, 'Another Charme for Stables':

> Hang up Hooks, and Sheers to scare
> Hence the Hag, that rides the Mare

He also mentioned that the 'superstitious wife' could keep harm from her child by placing a knife near the child's heart.[46] Sometime in the second half of the nineteenth century a Leeds cunning man similarly advised a client, who was diagnosed suffering from witch-induced nightmares, 'what you must do is to go home, take a scythe, lay it down by the bed, and when you hear the nightmare coming near to the bed you must slash at it three or four times'.[47] The placement of sharp tools at vulnerable points in the home continued into the nineteenth century. In Merionethshire scythes were placed up chimneys to prevent both physical and spiritual intruders, while the Somerset cunning man James Stacey advised a farmer near Crewkerne to place two reaphooks under the roof of

[44] Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2nd ed. (London, 1873), vol. 1, p. 140.
[45] *History of Ireland in Verse* (Dublin, 1750), p. 9.
[46] Robert Herrick, *Hesperides* (London, 1648), p. 56.
[47] *Burnley News*, 20 January 1923.

his pigsty to counter the spell he said was upon his pigs.[48] Renovations at a late medieval timber-frame farmhouse in Swaffham Prior revealed a sickle embedded in the wall of a first-floor room and a horseshoe in another wall, both concealed during historic additions or changes to the original house.[49] The Irish concealments of Bronze Age bronze axes and spears may also have been for the same purpose.[50]

Old weapons have also been found, though reading ritual into their placement is problematic. In 1903, Hull Museum was donated a rapier found in an old chimney in a house in Shipton, Market Weighton.[51] Two seventeenth-century rapiers were found in a wall cavity in the Star and Garter Inn, Windsor, in 1939, and two basket-hilted broad swords were found concealed in the roof of an old thatched cottage at Cathcart near Glasgow in 1893. In the latter case it was suggested they may have been hidden after the battle of Langside (1568), but they could also be apotropaic placements. The iron and brass pike head found in the thatched roof of a house in Shankhill in 1958 was similarly explained as a military concealment during the Irish Rebellion of 1798. The sword found in the thatch of an old house in Bruff, County Limerick, in 1956, was certainly not ritual. It was the one-time home of the IRA Officer Commanding, Sean Wall. A bundle of despatches was also found along with it. Wall was killed in action in 1921.[52]

Several references have already been made to horseshoes. The horseshoe was the most widespread and enduring iron apotropaic, usually hung in public view above or beside the door of the house, stable, or byre. Fanciful arguments were put forward by the survivalists about the horseshoe being a symbol of an ancient mother goddess or a horn-like propitiation to the Devil and his pagan antecedents. There is no evidence for such theories at all, and a look at the folklore evidence shows that they were

[48] E.A Kilner, *Four Welsh Counties. Brecknock, Caernarvon, Merioneth and Pembroke. A holiday book* (London, 1891), p. 196; *Taunton Courier*, 9 October 1901.

[49] Jonathan Duck, 'The Profane and the Sacred: Expressions of Belief in the Domestic Buildings of Southern Fenland, circa 1500 to 1700 AD', PhD thesis, University of Leicester 2015, pp. 196–7.

[50] Gilligan, 'Enchantment in the Walls'.

[51] *Hull Daily Mail*, 19 May 1903.

[52] *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 6 May 1939; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 3 August 1893; *Connacht Tribune*, 20 September 1958; *Irish Examiner*, 26 July 1956.

hung either way up.[53] The horseshoe was a ubiquitous everyday iron object with ready-made nail holes making it easy to nail on doors and walls or to hang from a string. Reginal Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) included numerous charms against witches, some referenced from continental demonologies like the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Among them he observed in reference to England, 'the principall waie is to naile a horse shw at the inside of the outmost threshold of your house, and so you shall be sure no witch shall have power to enter thereinto'. 'And if you marke it', he continued, 'you shall find that rule observed in manie countrie houses'. One example comes from a trial in Essex in 1593 where it was recorded that a suspected witch named Widow Rand was pushed over a threshold on which a horseshoe had been nailed to break her spell.[54] When Frenchman François Maximilien Misson travelled through England in the 1690s he 'often observ'd a Horseshoe nail'd to the Threshold of a Door, (among the meaner Sort of People)'. He asked several householders as to its purpose. 'They gave me several different Answers', he said, 'but the most general was, That they were put there to keep out Witches'.[55] The continued ubiquity was confirmed in the 1720s by Daniel Defoe, who noted that a horseshoe nailed on the sill of the door was one of many charms against witches, observing that they were 'too simple to be believ'd, are yet so vouch'd, so taken for granted, and so universally receiv'd for truth, that there is no resitting them without being thought atheistical'.[56]

As, throughout this book, we need to consider the intangible actions that are not evident from the material remains, and this applies as much to horseshoes as any concealed deposit. The horseshoe found above a door may have been the subject of ritual, magical treatments before being nailed up as an apotropaic. Consider, for instance, this recipe against witchcraft published by the astrologer-physician Joseph Blagrave: 'Another way is to get two new horseshooes, heat one of them red hot, and quench him in the patients urine, then immediately nail him on the inside of the threshold of the door with three nailes, the heel being upwards'.[57] How many

[53] See, for example, Elias Owen, *Welsh Folk-Lore: A Collection of the Folk-Tales and Legends of North Wales* (Oswestry, 1896), p. 246.

[54] Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), p. 266; Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970), p. 300.

[55] *M. Misson's Memoirs and Observations in his Travels over England*, trans. Mr Ozell (London, 1719), pp. 129–30.

[56] Daniel Defoe, *The history of the Devil, as well ancient as modern* (London, 1728), p. 312.

[57] Joseph Blagrave, *Blagraves astrological practice of physic* (London, 1671), p. 154.

horseshoes in the period and in subsequent decades were similarly dipped in urine? Another ritual set down in an Irish medical manuscript from 1794 includes the instruction: 'Take four shoes of an entire ass, and make two halves of each shoe. Put a half-shoe on the threshold and a half-shoe on the window, and thus a half-shoe on each door and window that is in the house, and there shall come no fairy or demon of the air in across them.'[58] Certain individuals may have also been responsible for the placement of the horseshoes. In a case of witchcraft accusation in Cambridge in 1846, the local blacksmith was tasked with nailing three horseshoes to the door of the bewitched.[59] These examples also raise the issue of how many ritually used horseshoes were worn-out discards from horses and mules, and how many were new or made specifically for ritual purposes. As we have seen, there is a long folk tradition of using found iron objects. John Aubrey, for instance, noted in the late seventeenth century that it should be a horseshoe that one has found. In nineteenth-century Dorset it was recommended that the horseshoe pinned on the door had to have fallen off itself from the left hind foot of a horse.[60]

Hag Stones

In Samuel Butler's mock epic poem, *Hudibras*, written between 1660 and 1680, there is a passage satirising popular folk beliefs that includes the lines:

> Chase evil sp'rits away by dint,
> Of sickle, horse-shoe, hollow flint.[61]

In the early modern and modern eras, holed stones were hung to ward off the attack of witches and fairies, and also sometimes employed as a cure for the ague and rheumatism. They were known as 'mare stones' (as in nightmare) in parts of Scotland. In southern, eastern, and midland England they were referred to as 'witch stones'. One example was put on display in 1852 at the recently opened public museum in Leicester. It bore

[58] An Seabhac, 'Sean-Oideasaí Leighis', *Bealoideas* 9 (1939) 168; Caoimhin Ô Danachair, 'The Luck of the House', *Ulster Folklife* 16 (1970) 20–27, p. 26.

[59] *Hereford Times*, 28 March 1846.

[60] Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, p. 112; Hermann Lea, 'Some Dorset Superstitions', in Thomas Perkins and Herbert Pentin (eds), *Memorials of Old Dorset* (London, 1907), p. 298.

[61] Samuel Butler, *Hudibras: A Poem*, with notes by Zachary Grey (London, 1822), Vol. 2, p. 15.

the following label, 'Witch-Stone from Wymeswold', and had been donated by one T.R. Potter Esq. who said it had been preserved for many generations in the family dairy.[62] In North East England they were known as 'holy stones' (as in a hole rather than in a sacred sense), and in Yorkshire they were also referred to as 'bitch daughter stones'.[63] The term 'hag stone' was also widely used.

They were most commonly hung, like iron, to ward off nightmares. John Aubrey noted that to prevent the nightmare in horses, people hung a flint with a hole in it by the manger or around animals' necks.[64] One of the earliest references to this practice was recorded in the mid-sixteenth century by the Norfolk gentleman and Humanist, Thomas Blundeville. In his *The Order of Curing Horses Diseases* (1566), he printed this 'folishe charme' that was to be written down as well as hanging 'a flynte stone that hath a hole of his owne':

> In nomine patris, &c.
> Saint George our Ladyes knight,
> He walked day so did he night,
> Until he her founde,
> He her beate and he her bounde,
> Till truly her trouth she hym plight,
> That she woulde not come within the night,
> There as Saynt George our Ladyes knight
> Named was three tymes, Saint George.

As a good Protestant, Blundeville noted that 'fryers in tymes paste were wonte to charme the money out of playne folks purses' by providing such charms.[65]

While rare Neolithic stone maces (which have an artificially ground hole) might serve as such protection from witches and nightmares the vast majority were stones, mostly flint, with a naturally occurring hole that were found on beaches or ploughed up in the fields. One peculiar example that was kept in a house in Marykirk, Scotland, through much of the

[62] Charles James Billson (ed.), *County Folklore: Leicestershire and Rutland* (London, 1895), p. 16.

[63] Bailey John Harker, *"The Buxton of Yorkshire." Being a complete guide for tourists to Grassington, in Upper Wharfedale, etc.* (Manchester, 1890), p. 56.

[64] Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, pp. 111–12.

[65] Thomas Blundeville, *The Order of Curing Horses Diseases* (London, 1566), p. 17.

nineteenth century had two human teeth inserted into the holes of the stone.[66] Like horseshoes, they were generally hung in open view outside or inside buildings, or above beds or on the bed frame when employed against the nightmare or rheumatism. Again, like horseshoes, they were very occasionally concealed in walls. One holed flint was found attached to a peg inside a brick wall of the workhouse at Thame in 1836.[67]

In the 1830s, Edward Moor, who researched the words and dialect of Suffolk, noted a recent conversation between a farmer and a master butcher in the neighbourhood of Woodbridge, which shows the precision with which hag stones were sometimes suspended. The two men were concerned about an unusually 'hot' calf. The butcher explained, 'the Pharisees [fairies] have been here; and … have been riding that there poor calf all night'. He went on to advise getting a stone with a hole in it and hanging it up the calves' crib, 'just high enough not to touch the calves' backs when standing up'. This would 'brush the Pharisees off the poor beasts when they attempted to gollop 'em round'. This made sense to Moor who had long seen a similar suspended holed stone just above the horses' backs in his own stables.[68] A visitor to a cottage in Lincolnshire recalled in the 1890s seeing a three-cornered, holed flint covered in cobwebs hanging from a nail by a loop made of tape at the side of the front door (inside). The woman of the cottage explained that it was to keep witches from the house, and when the visitor remarked he had not heard of such a thing before, she said, 'We never tell gentlefolks about such things, for fear they should laugh at us; but we all keep witch-stones, and that I have given you was my grandmother's, and we have had it more than one hundred years'.[69]

A survey of such holy stones in North East England conducted in 1873–1874 revealed that although their presence had diminished over the previous twenty years, cherished examples were still to be found in farms and homes. In Weardale, County Durham, for instance, it was noticed that two or three examples 'yet hang by their rotten strings where they have

[66] Earl of Ducie, 'Exhibition of three "Mare Stanes," or "Hag Stones"', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 17 (1888) 134–137, p. 135.

[67] *Notes & Queries*, 5th S., 6, 21 July, 1894, 56; Ettlinger, 'Documents of British Superstition in Oxford', p. 235. For more references see Roud, *Superstitions*, pp. 437–8.

[68] Edward Moor, *Oriental Fragments* (London, 1834), p. 456.

[69] *Spectator*, reprinted in the *West Somerset Free Press*, 21 April 1894.

hung for a hundred years or more'. Although prevalent in cattle byres to stop nightmares and witch riding, they could also be found in rural homes in the northeast. One example was seen in 1864 suspended from a string behind the door of a house in Brotherlee, Weardale, together with a two-inch piece of rowan wood. Another pair was seen in 1874 by the author of the survey hanging by a string from a joist. The 77-year-old widow who owned the house said she had known them hanging there most of her life and that her husband was very particular about them being put back carefully whenever the room received a thorough clean.[70]

During the early twentieth century the antiquarian William Self Weeks was still finding a few holed stones on the other side of the Pennines on the farms of the Ribble Valley, Lancashire. When Weeks saw a stone hanging in a shippon or cattle shed at Great Mitton, and asked the farmer about it, he was told that it was there when he took the farm and that the previous tenants had told him that as long as it hung there the cows would not cast a calf. 'If that's the only protection I have', grumbled the new farmer, who clearly rejected the old ways, 'it is a very poor do, and you can have it'. Another yeoman farmer known to Weeks told him how, one time, birds kept tapping at his windows. He took this for a bad omen, and so hung several holed stones around the place. The ominous unpleasantness eventually manifested itself in a disagreement with a servant. The farmer feared it would end in a legal dispute, but fortunately nothing developed thanks to the stones. Weeks also reported that the Reverend Doxey, formally curate of Whalley, obtained a stone that hung over the bed of a parishioner to prevent nightmares.[71] By the time Herbert Toms was busy collecting hag stones in southern England in the 1920s and 1930s, there was little reference to their old apotropaic function among the locals he interviewed, and most were hung in the home or outside by the front door for luck, sometimes in conjunction with a horseshoe.[72]

[70] 'The Holy or Lucky Stone', *Egglestone's Weardale; Or the Weardale Nick-Stick* 4 (1874) 107–111.

[71] W. Self Weeks, 'Witch Stones and Charms in Clitheroe and District', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 27 (1909), 108–110; 'Witches' Night Ride. Why Holed Stones Were Hung up in the Stables', *Burnley News*, 20 January 1923.

[72] Christopher J. Duffin, 'Herbert Toms (1874–1940), Witch Stones, and *Porosphaera* Beads', *Folklore* 122 (2011) 84–101.

Heart and Hearth

The sticking of pins into images to cause harm had long been practised in popular magic dating back to antiquity, and usually involved an image or doll that represented the person or body part that the pricker desired to afflict. It was an act of sympathetic magic. It is not surprising, then, that the heart was one target for such counter magic. In 1584, Reginald Scot related the case of a Kent cunning woman named Mother Baker who told a client that a local witch had wrought witchcraft on a young woman by 'making a hart of wax, and pricking the same with pins and needels' and concealing it 'in some secret corner of the house'.[73] This was an act of witchcraft, but there is little evidence in the early modern British records for the *counter*-witchcraft ritual of piercing animal hearts that was a widespread domestic practice in some parts of the country from the eighteenth century. A correspondent to the *Taunton Courier* recalled in 1921, for instance, that his mother had told him she had witnessed the creation and suspension of a pierced heart on many occasions.[74] There were three main purposes for the practice: counter attack, detection, and deterrent, each of which is evident both from the literary record and from the location of the material remains—or the lack of them. The purpose dictated, by and large, the survival of the heart as an above-ground archaeological artefact.

The use of pierced hearts to cause immediate agony to suspected witches usually involved putting the heart directly into a fire or just above it. When pigs in the village of Worle, near Weston-Super-Mare, kept dying mysteriously a cunning man in Taunton was hired. He performed a ritual that he said would draw the witch to the house to beg for mercy. To this end he pierced the heart of one of the deceased pigs with pins and threw it directly in the fire to burn.[75] In the 1880s, a Devon farmer suffering from the loss of several bullocks was similarly instructed by a cunning man to take out one of the hearts, stick it full of pins, and hang it up to 'frizzle'. In and around Melcombe Bingham, Dorset, the ritual concerned the usual sticking with pins, but the heart was placed in the fire and when the heart burst with the heat the spell was broken.[76] The bursting of the heart could be dramatic. When, in the Devon case noted above, the farmer's daughter

[73] Scot, *Discoverie*, p. 258.

[74] *Taunton Courier*, 20 July 1921.

[75] Frederick T. Elworthy, *The Evil Eye: An account of the ancient and widespread superstition* (London, 1895), p. 56.

[76] R. Bosworth Smith, *Bird Life and Bird Lore* (London, 1905), p. 366.

came down and lit the fire next morning and the flames reached the heart, there were 'the most horrible and indescribable noises', presumably as the gases escaped from the chambers of the heart. She fled in terror and it was feared she would have a permanent shock to the nervous system.[77] A similar experience was recorded in the 1890s regarding the Blacksmith of Piddlehinton, Dorset. The story was told to the local folklorist H. Colley March, whose attempt to write the account in dialect was aided by the novelist Thomas Hardy. The blacksmith had pierced a cow's heart with eleven nails and bound the heart with wire before hanging it above the fire. He put sack cloth on the windows to keep prying eyes away, and got the fire going. He went to bed for a couple of hours and came down to see how things were progressing: 'I sot down again in front o' the fire, when all of a suddent like, there busted a spout o' blood out 'o the heart sort o'sideways, right out on the kitchen floor, and 'fore we had time to spake a word the awfullest screeches and noises that ever anybody did hear, just outside our front door'.[78]

Heart roasting and boiling was also widely practised in northern England during the nineteenth century. In his *History of Skipton* (1882), William Dawson noted that a century earlier it was not unusual that farmers of bewitched cattle would take out the heart and boil it in water—'every one present was to put pins into it'. In the mid-nineteenth century a Westmorland farmer was advised by a village elder to take the heart of a cow that had died that morning, stick it full of pins and plunge it into a roaring fire at midnight to punish the witch.[79] A rare reference to the practice in Scotland comes from a letter James Bowd wrote to the celebrated novelist Sir Walter Scott, who had a lively interest in the history of witchcraft and popular magic. The letter explained how, in 1812, a friend of Bowd's had been making alterations to his house in Dalkeith, Fife, and on taking up some flagstones the workers found a roasted calf's heart studded with pins. It was subsequently donated to the Scottish National Museum. Through conversations with elderly people in the area it was surmised that a few decades earlier the house had been owned by people who had kept cattle, and the concealment of the heart probably dated to that time. A

[77] *North Devon Journal*, 14 January 1886.

[78] H. Colley March, 'Dorset Folklore Collected in 1897', *Folklore* 10(4) (1899) 478–489, pp. 484–5; Jacqueline Dillion, *Thomas Hardy: Folklore and Resistance* (London, 2016), p. 50.

[79] William H. Dawson, *History of Skipton* (London, 1882), p. 389; James Hardy (ed.), *The Denham Tracts* (London, 1895), Vol. 2, p. 68. The practice was also recorded in Wales: Jonathan C. Davies, *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales* (Aberystwyth, 1911), p. 239.

woman in her eighties said that when illness befell the cattle the country people took 'the heart of a calf, as a representative for the heart of the witch by whose malice their cattle were visited, and to place it on a spit before the fire, sticking in a pin at every turn, until it was completely roasted, by which the witch was subjected to a simultaneous operation of proportional severity in her own bosom'. The heart was then buried secretly where the cattle were kept. When, in the early 1890s, George Black, Assistant Keeper at the Museum of Scotland, investigated the case he was unable to find any other record of such a ritual having been practised in Scotland.[80] Perhaps it had died out or perhaps it was highly localised in the first place and may have been influenced by incomers from northern England where heart roasting was more widely practised throughout the nineteenth century. The burial of the studded heart in the home would appear to be highly unusual, though an animal heart studded with nails, now in Cliffe Castle Museum collection, was found under the floorboards of a house in Keighley, Yorkshire. In the early twentieth century a Yorkshire Antiquary named J.P. Gatesby was in the possession of a calf's heart stuck full of pins that had been found in an unspecified location in a cattle shed in Pendle Forest.[81]

These counter-witchcraft rituals sometimes served the purpose of detecting the identity of the witch deemed responsible. The excruciating pain would draw the witch to the house where the pricking, burning, or boiling of the heart was taking place and he or she would beg for the spell to stop. It could also be similarly employed to identify thieves. When, around the mid-nineteenth century, a tenant farmer from Richmond Hill went to the Newcastle cunning man Black Jock about the loss of a horse, the latter divined that someone had put poison in the animal feed. To identify the culprit he was instructed to cut up the horse, take out the heart and stick it full of pins and roast it between eleven and twelve o'clock at night. At midnight they were to open the door and look outside and they would see the poisoner pass by. The farmer and his farm servant duly

[80] 'Letter addressed to Sir Walter Scott, Baronet, by Mr James Bowd, on a Popular Superstition used to prevent Cattle from Witchcraft', *Archaelogia Scotica* 3 (1831) 300–301; George Black, 'Scottish Charms and Amulets', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 27 (1892) 498.

[81] *Burnley Express*, 27 September 1930.

carried out these instructions, and on looking outside the first person who came along was a highly respected neighbour on his way home.[82]

The practice of burning hearts in a fire usually left no material remains to be discovered decades later. But in the West Country there developed, sometime around the mid-nineteenth century it would seem, a popular variant on the ritual whereby the pierced heart was placed up the chimney to be smoked and dried but not consumed by the flames. It is mostly these that people have rediscovered in their homes and a few survive today in museum collections. It is possible it developed from the following practice noted in Dorset in 1834: 'in some chimneys a piece of bacon stuck with pins used to be suspended, to interrupt witches in their descent, and so prevent their visit'.[83] The earliest reports of the use of animal hearts date to the 1860s and 1870s. When one of the cottages owned by the cooper of Honiton Clyst, Mr Chown, required repairs to the chimney in 1877 a pig's heart was found stuck all over with thorns. It was the third such find in the village, suggesting one individual, a cunning person, was responsible for the practice.[84] A pig's heart found in the recess of a cottage in Ashbrittle, Somerset, in 1882, was studded with pins and white thorns, and from its location it was clearly not intended to burn and burst but to shrivel slowly.[85] A description of the practice from Dorset in 1884 notes that the heart was placed 'sufficiently high to escape the chance of being consumed summarily by the flames, and to be gradually dried up; when the last pin has dropped out, the witch is supposed to have no further hold on her victim'.[86] In 1901, a chimney sweep cleaning a cottage chimney at Shipton Gorge, Dorset, found an old canvas bag fixed to a cranny in the chimney wall about eight to ten feet above the ground. Inside was an old dried bullock's heart wrapped in paper and studded with thorns and pins. It was one of several found recently in the village.[87] The long-term apotropaic purpose seems clear from another Devon case that did not involve

[82] William Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders* (London, 1879), p. 221.

[83] George Roberts, *The History and Antiquities of the Borough of Lyme Regis and Charmouth* (London, 1834), p. 262.

[84] *Western Times*, 1 May 1877.

[85] Elworthy, *Evil Eye*, p. 53.

[86] John C. Mansel-Pleydell, 'On Sorcery and Witchcraft, with an account of the Examination of Witnesses and the committal of a woman for Witchcraft at Wareham, 1638', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 5 (1884) 1–15, p. 4.

[87] John S. Udal, *Dorsetshire Folk-Lore* (Hertford, 1922), p. 214.

fires or chimneys, but natural decay. In 1902, three men working on a farm near Hatherleigh were drawn to a foul smell emanating from an outhouse. They found a bag tied under the roof around twelve feet from the ground. When they took it down they found inside a bullock's heart wrapped in brown paper stuck over with pins and black thorns.[88]

The hearts were usually taken from dead livestock, and we know of a couple of instances in late nineteenth-century Dorset, where they were removed after the animals had been skinned as part of the butchering process.[89] In a case from Alnwick, though, a cow considered to be bewitched was slaughtered in order to obtain the heart and perform the burning ritual.[90]

As with horseshoes, the pierced hearts that survive tell us little about the range of rituals that were performed as part of the process that led to their suspension. There were some common themes. The placement of the heart in the fire was usually done at midnight, and often required the sealing of all gaps around doors and the covering of windows to ensure that the suspected witch could not look in or enter. In several instances the hearts were to be roasted over ash or rowan wood.[91] It was sometimes specified that new pins had to be used.[92] We know from an interview with a Dorset blacksmith in the 1890s that he made special 'three headed nails' specifically for the heart ritual. The head was created with three blows. 'Many a time I've got up, middle o'night, to make un', he said. In another Dorset example, the pierced heart ritual was most efficacious if the thorns used were 'maiden thorns', that is thorns that had grown the year in which they were picked. In another Dorset case the horse's heart had to be boiled in water containing sage, peppermint, and an onion. Once cold, one half was stuck with new pins and the other with maiden thorns.[93]

[88] *Western Times*, 27 August 1902.

[89] Colley March, 'Dorset Folklore', p. 483.

[90] William Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders* (London, 1879), p. 222.

[91] Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-lore of the Northern Counties*, p. 224; Owen Davies and Timothy Easton, 'Cunning-folk and the Production of Magical Artefacts' , in Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, pp. 214–5.

[92] Owen Davies, *A People Bewitched: Witchcraft and magic in nineteenth-century Somerset* (Bruton, 1999), p. 64.

[93] Colley March, 'Dorset Folklore', p. 487; Udal, *Dorsetshire Folk-Lore*, p. 213; Thomas Perkins and Herbert Pentin (ed.), *Memorials of Old Dorset* (London, 1907), p. 298.

Words and verses were sometimes spoken, as in the following written instructions, most likely from the hand of the renowned, nineteenth-century Yorkshire cunning man John Wrightson, also known as the 'Wise Man of Stokesley':

> Bleed the Sick animall and Clip in amongst The Blood som hair Cut of the animals mane Tail and 4 Quarters Then put in 3 spoonfuls of Salt Then have a Sheeps heart stuck with 9 new pins 9 new needles 9 small nails Then rool The heart well in rhw blood and at 12 at night put The heart on a Good fire of Coals and ash Sticks and as it Burns Read Those Psalms 35-104. 109-56-77 Read Them 3 times over and let all be done by one Oclock make doors and windows fast keep all very Secret and have a Strong faith if this do not answer you must do it twice more at the full and Change of the moon Just as you did the first time with fresh Things should This fail you need go to no one else as Thay will nor Can not Cure your Beast.[94]

In the West Country an adaptation of a common cursing rhyme used in love magic and harmful magic was also uttered in some cases:

> It is not this heart I mean to burn,
> But the person's heart I wish to turn,
> Wishing them neither rest nor peace
> Till they are dead and gone.[95]

Nearly all the cases mentioned so far concerned bewitched livestock, but what about people bewitched? It was obviously not possible to take out the hearts of dead people and perform the ritual. Substitutes were required, which meant that the usual intimate sympathy between witch and victim could not operate as an aspect of the magic. Instead, animal hearts were used as a proxy for a human heart. So, during the trial of the Yorkshire cunning man Isaac Rushworth in 1857, the court heard that Rushworth came to the lodgings of a client, Ritty Littlewood, with a bullock's heart and some shoemaker's awls. He burned the heart in the fire and told Ritty to put the awls under her pillow, in her pocket, and around the house.[96] The Reverend

[94] Atkinson, *Forty years in a moorland parish*, p. 124. On Wrightson see Owen Davies, 'Cunning-Folk in England and Wales during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Rural History* 8 (1997) 91–107.

[95] Davies, *A People Bewitched*, p. 63.

[96] Owen Davies, *Murder, Magic, Madness: The Victorian trial of Dove and the Wizard* (London, 2005), p. 191.

Thomas Jackson recalled how during his childhood in Sancton, East Riding of Yorkshire, during the early nineteenth century, a labourer's wife he knew well fell ill and was thought to be bewitched. They were instructed, no doubt by a wise man, that to detect and punish the witch they should purchase an ox heart from a butcher, stick it with as many pins as possible, and roast it in a fire one evening until midnight. The witch, it was assured, would come begging for mercy.[97]

This use of animal hearts as a human substitute was also known in parts of France. In late 1826, a farmer near Dunkirk fell ill with a rheumatic illness that was attributed to witchery. A cunning man was called in, who as part of his ritual requested the wife to purchase the liver of an ox. This was then pierced with several hundred pins and roasted in the fire. Around the same time another magician in the region, near Troyes, did likewise with a liver and some sheep's hearts, needles and pins to draw out the wicked spirit held responsible for his client's illness. In the 1840s the tribunal at Valences, at the other end of the country, heard how a cunning woman attempted to cure a man of witchcraft. She took out of her pocket a fresh calf's heart and some tacks and told the sick man to take one tack and stick it into the heart. Each of those present did likewise, and she then pushed in the last tack. The heart was then put in an iron vessel of holy water and oil and placed on a fire while she muttered some incantations. As the mixture boiled three loud bangs emanated from the vessel, each of which, she said, was a wicked spirit departing.[98]

Back in England, the use of an onion as a substitute for a human heart was recorded in 1872, when, one stormy night, several fell from the chimney of the Barley Mow ale house in Rockwell Green, western Somerset. They were studded with pins and each had a label with the name of a local person on it. The anthropologist Edward Tylor, who was a local magistrate, acquired two of them to display at a public talk he gave in London later that year. For him, they were important material examples of his theory of survivals. One of them is still on display at the Pitt Rivers Museum today.[99] Another instance of onions stuck with pins and placed up the chimney in the neighbouring county of Devon suggests that the practice was the inspiration of one local cunning person. There is no

[97] Thomas Jackson, *Recollections of My Own Life and Times* (London, 1874), pp. 13–14.

[98] *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, 11 January 1826; *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 8 May 1844.

[99] Chris Wingfield, 'Is the Heart at Home? E.B. Tylor's Collections from Somerset', *Journal of Museum Ethnology* 22 (2009) 29–31.

evidence onions were a widely used substitute. In both these instances, furthermore, it appears that the intended victims were not suspected witches but enemies to be punished by sympathetic magic.[100]

As the onion examples suggest, we should be wary of assuming all pierced hearts preserved up chimneys were the result of counter-witchcraft rituals. The same practice could be appropriated for other purposes. In December 1882 a farmer's wife who lived near Bridport was the victim of a classic gypsy fraud known as the *hokkano baro* or great trick, which involved a simple money switch. A couple of female gypsies knocked at the farmer's door and told his wife that for a few shillings they could treble the amount of any gold she possessed by Easter Sunday. Duly inveigled by such a promise, she handed over some gold coins. The gypsies then concealed the coins in a pig or sheep heart tightly encased in scarlet and black material. Several crosses and other symbols were made by sticking pins into it. It was then hung up the chimney with the instruction that if the heart was touched before Easter Sunday the magic would be broken and ill luck would plague the farmhouse. When the farmer found out about the whole matter he opened the heart to find the gold sovereigns had been replaced with several farthings, brightened to look more valuable.[101] If found today smoked and shrivelled, the assumption and interpretation would understandably be that it was a counter-witchcraft spell.

[100] Elworthy, *The Evil Eye*, p. 55.

[101] *Western Gazette*, 5 January 1883. On the *hokkano baro*, see: George Henry Borrow, *The Zincali, Or An Account of the Gipsies of Spain* (New York, 1843), p. 37; Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Culture, 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 260–1.

CHAPTER 7

Luck and Wellbeing in the Home

Writing in the early 1950s John Henry Pull looked back at his early investigations into shepherds' crowns as protective charms in rural Sussex and noted that such lore and practice were rapidly in decline. Each year through the 1920s and 1930s there were fewer shepherds' crowns to be seen on windowsills, fewer horseshoes on doors, and fewer hag stones hung up around the farms. But then something changed during the 1940s and early 1950s:

> "Crowns" which had been removed from certain cottage windowsills made their re-appearance and more were added to swell their numbers. Other cottages exhibited them, where they had never been before. Moreover, they began to make their appearances in the outskirts of certain nearby towns, on windowsills of new property. … Likewise horseshoes became a veritable craze, but, strangely enough, holed lucky stones, suspended by a thong or cord, have not shared in this revival of interest.[1]

Pull's observation hints at two intertwined themes. One is the declining display of a narrow range of venerable building apotropaics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the fear of witches and magical remedies for misfortune receded. The second is the concomitant

[1] John H. Pull, '"Shepherds" Crowns: The Survival of Belief in their Magical Virtues in Sussex', *West Sussex Geological Society Occasional Publication* 3 (2003) 33–35, p. 33.

O. Davies, C. Houlbrook, *Building Magic*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76765-5_7

vogue during the mid-twentieth century for ascribing domestic luck and wellbeing to a wide range of objects in the home, and the processes by which, as Jane Parish puts it, 'an ordinary collection of household ornaments [was] made extraordinary'.[2] Both themes reflect broad shifts in society, culture, and belief over the period, and both are tied to the ways in which people thought about their houses or apartments as homes in the twentieth century. To understand these developments we need to be clear about the distinction between apotropaic *protection* and promoting *luck*. The two functions are often conflated. They may both be employed to ensure the wellbeing of the home, but in a literal sense they *do* very different things: one prevents or repels the bad while the other ensures or attracts the good, and one is concerned with external threats while the other is often located within the realm of inner lives. Granted, *protection* can be an aim or the result of good luck, but it is a specific subcategory within the far broader and vaguer umbrella notion of luck. They are not the same, and therefore should not be treated as such. This is not just a problem with semantics; it can lead to the misrepresentation of people's emotions and actions.

Of Shoes and Horseshoes

In 1970, Irish folklorist Caoimhín Ó Danachair reported that, 'Even yet there is scarcely a parish or town in Ireland in which horseshoes may not be seen fastened on or above the doors of some dwellings or outbuildings. … Nowadays most people have only a vague, often jocular, notion of the meaning of the lucky horseshoe.'[3] In the past, however, he goes on to say, 'the belief was more serious and more specific'. At the start of the nineteenth century, there were still numerous references to horseshoes being hung as apotropaic devices, specifically to repel witches.[4] For example, Dora Harcourt, a Londoner visiting Cumbrian relatives in 1820, wrote in a letter to her father:

> This afternoon I went into the kitchen to inquire about the time the post went out, and hit my head a sharp rap against an old iron horse-shoe that

[2] Jane Parish, 'Locality, Luck and Family Ornaments', *Museum and Society* 5 (2007) 168–178, p. 173.

[3] Caoimhín Ó Danachair, 'The Luck of the House', *Ulster Folklife* 16 (1970) 20–27, p. 26.

[4] Cf. M. Oldfield Howey, *The Horse in Magic and Myth* (Mineola, NY, 2002), pp. 102–107.

> was nailed on the door, which led to Sally's informing me, with many apologies, that it was placed there to prevent witches entering the house; for, as Sally sagely remarked, "No one knew where they might come from, and it was best to be prepared." I shall grow superstitious myself if I remain here much longer.[5]

But over the course of the nineteenth century the horseshoe gradually shed its predominant apotropaic function and became a talisman for luck. The waning of its importance has been charted, for instance, in its declining presence on the doors of London houses during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[6] During the latter half of the century references to the custom become more akin to Ó Danachair's description of the 'vague, often jocular, notion of the meaning of the lucky horseshoe'. In 1880, for instance, James Fields published a poem entitled *The Lucky Horseshoe*, in which.

> A farmer travelling with his load.
> Picked up a horseshoe in the road,
> And nailed it fast to his barn door,
> That Luck might down upon him pour.

What follows is a wave of bad luck until the farmer is informed that he had 'nailed the horseshoe upside down!/Just turn it round, and soon you'll see/How you and Fortune will agree'.[7] The debate concerning the correct direction of a hung horseshoe is detailed in Lawrence's 1899 *The Magic of the Horse-Shoe*, in which both customs—the prongs facing up and down—are explicitly linked to luck.[8]

The declining fear of witches was obviously one reason for the attenuation of the horseshoe's apotropaic function, but its growing association with luck was not necessarily a direct consequence. The late Victorian vogue for charm jewellery promoted lucky horseshoe designs in silver, and the First World War further cemented its revised role as a luck bringer in

[5] Dora Harcourt, *The Letters of Dora Harcourt: Concerning the customs and traditions of Whitehaven in 1820* edited by Alan Cleaver (Whitehaven, 2007), p. 10.

[6] Owen Davies, 'Urbanisation and the Decline of Witchcraft: An Examination of London', *Journal of Social History* 30(3) (1997) 597–617, p. 611.

[7] James T. Fields, 'The Lucky Horseshoe', *Harper's New Monthly* 62(367) (December 1880) 127.

[8] Robert M. Lawrence, *The Magic of the Horse-Shoe* (Houghton, 1898), pp. 104–7.

the popular consciousness.[9] As local newspapers attest, the presentation of lucky horseshoes became a popular part of wedding ceremonies from the 1930s to the 1960s, for instance, with numerous adverts promoting 'Lucky Horseshoe for Bride'. A similar but much less widespread pattern of shifting purpose is also observed with hag stones and sea urchins.

Another form of shoe tells a more enigmatic story of domestic luck. In 1937, E. J. Rudsdale, Assistant Curator of Colchester and Essex Museum, wrote a letter to the Folklore Society, which was subsequently published in the Collectanea of the *Folklore* journal in March 1938. Rudsdale was responding to a reference in an earlier volume to a 'thunderstone' held by the museum, and having described a number of prehistoric implements concealed or hung up 'for luck', he turned to a different form of object:

> While on the subject of talismans, you may be interested to know that we have three examples of shoes of sixteenth century date being found up or behind Elizabethan fireplaces in the district. One is from Colchester, one from Stoke-by-Nayland, and one from Easthorpe. I have always understood that this was intended to bring good luck to the house.[10]

This is, as far as the authors are aware, the earliest known literary explanation of the custom of concealed shoes as a ritual act. Granted, Rudsdale, who was born in 1910, was only twenty-seven years old when he claimed to have 'always understood' it this way. Any personal experience he had of the custom was in the twentieth century, but his impression likely stemmed from oral tradition. His sources are beyond our knowledge, but what his statement clearly demonstrates is that by the early twentieth century shoes were believed to have been concealed in fireplaces to ensure the luck of the house. There is no mention of protection. The shoe is not identified here as a 'spirit trap' or an apotropaic device for repelling malevolent supernatural forces. Rudsdale's explanation is supported by a comment in a brief article published in 1906 on 'Old Shoes for Good luck', in which it was observed that 'to keep old shoes that are past wearing about the place will surely bring good luck'.[11]

While it is true that there is little archival evidence for the concealment of shoes in buildings, there is a well-documented history of shoes in

[9] Owen Davies, *A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination, and Faith during the First World War* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 144–5.

[10] E.J. Rudsdale, 'Thunderbolts', *Folklore* 49(1) (1938), 48–50, p. 49.

[11] *Pearson's Weekly*, 4 October 1906.

popular beliefs and ritual practices. Such records again generally associate the shoe with notions of luck rather than protection. Some beliefs involve bad luck: it is considered unlucky to place a new shoe on a table, to put your left shoe on first, and to find a knot in your shoe lace.[12] However, the shoe frequently also ensures good luck: to dream of shoes was considered lucky at the start of the twentieth century, as was finding a shoe dropped by a baby, and burning a shoe in certain parts of England.[13] Most well-known was the custom of throwing a shoe after somebody for luck. The sixteenth-century English poet and playwright, John Heywood, penned the words: 'And home agayne hytherward quicke as a bee, Now for good lucke caste an olde shoe after mee'. In *Canidia, or, the Witches* (1683), Robert Dixon made several references to the same belief, including the line, 'For good luck, throw after me an Old Shoe', while a decade later *A New Dictionary of the Canting Crew*, which purported to list the sayings and slang of gypsies, beggars and cheats, included '*To throw an old shoe after one*, or wish them good Luck in their Business'.[14]

During the first half of the nineteenth century, folklorist Michael Aislabie Denham recorded the custom in northern England. 'When a young person is leaving his family and friends or going to be married', she wrote, 'it is still usual to throw an old shoe after him for luck. Many try to hit the party on the back.'[15] In 1853, *Notes and Queries* related a story of a Norfolk cattle dealer who asked his wife to 'trull her left shoe after him' as he set off to Norwich to buy a lottery ticket. Turning around to see if she had done as he demanded, he was smacked in the face by the shoe, gifting him two black eyes. He persevered with his mission, though, and gained a winning ticket. The cattle dealer's son told the correspondent that his father was convinced the shoe had brought him the luck he hoped.[16] Queen Victoria is depicted in a *Punch* cartoon 'Throwing the Old Shoe' after her soldiers as they depart for the Crimean War, but by the

[12] Edwin Radford and Mona A. Radford, *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions* (London, 1949), pp. 158, 305–306; Roud, *Superstitions*, pp. 404–6.

[13] H.J. Rose, 'Folklore Scraps', *Folklore* 34(2) (1923), 154–158, pp. 156–7; Roud, *Superstitions*, p. 403.

[14] John Heywood, *Iohn Heywoodes woorkes* (London, 1562), p. C^{v}; Robert Dixon, *Canidia, or, the Witches* (London, 1683), p. 121; B.E., *A new dictionary of the canting crew* (London, 1699), p. L2^{v}.

[15] James Hardy, *The Denham Tracts. A collection of folklore by Michael Aislabie Denham* (London, 1895), vol. 2, p. 33.

[16] *Worcester Journal*, 14 April 1853.

late nineteenth century, the custom was most popularly associated with weddings, with shoes thrown after the bride and groom as they left for their honeymoon, marriage being one of the most significant journeys in life for most people at the time.[17]

In 1895, folklorist James Crombie explained, 'the throwing is done by them [the wedding guests] with a view to bring luck to the persons assaulted. Now', he asked, 'where does this luck come from?'[18] Crombie drew upon on anthropological notions of sympathetic magic to argue that the shoe was believed to contain the wearer's soul or life-essence, which through the act of throwing 'can be transferred to others and absorbed by them to the great advantage of the absorber'.[19] Lovett, writing in the 1920s, followed in the same vein by claiming that the shoes 'must have been worn by old people who had led good and useful lives. The wish at the throwing of these shoes was this: "May your path through life be as good and as happy and as long as that of the owner of this shoe"'.[20] Another specification for the custom, as evident from the examples above, was that the shoes had to be old. Crombie observed that 'the shoes thrown are invariably old and worn, and unfit for further wear'.[21] One theory suggests economy as the original motivation behind this. Shoes were expensive items and would not have been discarded lightly. If the efficacy of the shoe lay in its sympathetic association with its wearer, however, then its age and condition could certainly have been integral to the custom, and this would explain why so many of the historical sources, as early as the sixteenth century, explicitly specify an 'old' shoe. Still, an old shoe was probably just an old shoe in most cases.

Perhaps shoes were not only thrown for luck, but also hidden for it. Just as the thrown shoe transferred its wearer's life-essence to the person being aimed at, so too could the concealed shoe, secreted within the fabric of a building, endow the household with life and luck. This would certainly fit with the condition of the concealed shoes, 94% of which (where condition was recorded) were old and damaged through wear and tear. Like the thrown shoe these concealed objects also required age for their efficacy. The symbolism of the shoe in this case is obvious. The shoe's

[17] From *Punch, or The London Charivari*, March 11 1854, vol. 26, p. 100.
[18] James E. Crombie, 'Shoe-Throwing at Weddings', *Folklore* 6(3) (1895) 258–281, p. 259.
[19] Crombie, 'Shoe-Throwing', pp. 276–77.
[20] Edward Lovett, *Magic in Modern London* (Croydon, 1925), p. 59.
[21] Crombie, 'Shoe-Throwing', p. 259.

primary function is, after all, to aid walking and hence enable journeys. Some cultures extend this function to include travel into the afterlife, with many funerary practices incorporating footwear, from Korean to Greek and Roman to African-American.[22] There is evidence of shoes having been burned in cremations, and myriad instances of tombs containing shoes, often worn on the feet of the dead but sometimes set out in readiness, placed on either side of the body, or deposited on the coffin. Writing of Nordic customs, Guerber described how 'the Northern races were very careful to bind upon the feet of the departed a specially strong pair of shoes, called Hel shoes, that they might not suffer during the long journey', whilst Sanderson, conducting ethnographic research amongst Romani travellers in the British Isles, noted the custom of burying the deceased 'with stout shoes for the journey'.[23] This cross-cultural association of the shoe with journeys (literal, metaphorical, and spiritual) explains some examples of concealment. This would especially be the case if the shoes were not hidden by members of the household, but by builders who had their distinct set of professional beliefs about avoiding bad luck and promoting good luck. In the late nineteenth century, it was reported that bricklayers refused to start building on sites that looked over cemeteries and that the breaking of their tools was an omen that they would lose their jobs. Builders were known to stop work if a 'cripple' was seen walking past an unfinished house as it heralded that one of them would break a leg or an arm.[24]

In more recent cases where ethnographic evidence is available, June Swann has identified examples of concealment by builders and workmen. In 1934–1935, a child in Norfolk witnessed his father and a workman

[22] Youngsook Pak, 'Safe Journey! A very short history of shoes from Korean Tombs', *The Silk Road* 13 (2015) 1–16; Carol van Driel-Murray, 'And did those feet in ancient time … feet and shoes as a material projection of the self', in P. Baker, C. Forcey, S. Jundi and R. Witcher (eds), *TRAC 98: Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference Leicester 1998* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 131–140; John P. McCarthy, "Magic' in the expression of identity in Antellebum Philadelphia: Non-Christian burial practices at the cemeteries of the First African Baptist Church', in Robert J. Wallis and Kennet Lymer (eds), *A Permeability of Boundaries: New Approaches to the Archaeology of Art, Religion and Folklore* (Oxford, 2001), 41–45; James M. Davidson, 'Keeping the Devil at Bay: The shoe on the coffin lid and other grave charms in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 14 (2010) 614–649.

[23] Hélène A. Guerber, *Myths of Northern Lands* (New York, 1895), p. 167; Stewart F. Sanderson, 'Gypsy Funeral Customs', *Folklore* 80 (1969) 181–187, p. 186.

[24] *The Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard*, 16 July 1897.

placing a boot beneath the kitchen floor when it was re-laid. In 1974, a woman in Lincoln was pestered for an old shoe by her builder, wanting to conceal it within her home when the building work was complete. A workman's wellington was buried in the foundations of a new development in York in 1983.[25] With these few examples in mind, it is likely that other shoes were also concealed by builders, with or without the home-owner's knowledge or approval. It is also plausible that this custom was followed by builders not to ensure the luck of the household, but, in keeping with the custom of 'throwing the old shoe' before a journey, to ensure their own luck as they embarked on their next job. This probably does not account for all concealed shoes, but as has already been argued, we cannot expect one theory to explain all concealments. So, while some shoes may have been hidden for luck and occupational success of an individual only fleetingly part of the household, others may still have been concealed to ensure the wellbeing of the home.

It is of course possible—indeed, likely—that concealed old shoes served different functions over the centuries. We have already considered how they could act as domestic time capsules. Another completely prosaic purpose was as a receptacle for hiding money and valuables. A report on penny banking for the poor in 1865 hoped that it would end old practices of keeping money in 'the stocking kept out of the house; the secret corner of the paillasse; the old shoe in the chimney, or the tin-box buried in the back garden'.[26] Only a few years before, a farmer named Jasper Dowsett, East Tilsbury, concealed the sum of £40 in gold in an old shoe and buried it under his barn floor. He later found that someone had been aware of his concealment, had dug it up, taken the gold, filled the shoe with corn, and reburied it in the same spot.[27] In 1896 a gold miner recently returned from California related how one day while prospecting he rested by some old tumbledown miners' cabins:

> I observed that part of the fireplace of a near cabin had tumbled down the bank toward the creek, and that the foot of an old gum boot was sticking out of the dirt. It seemed to project from beneath the stones forming the hearth of the old chimney. I thought it was strange that any man should have laid his hearth over an old gum boot. Then it occurred to me that some man might have been murdered and buried under the hearth. … I found

[25] June Swann, 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', *Costume* 30 (1996) 56–69, p. 58.
[26] *London Evening Standard*, 17 November 1865.
[27] *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 18 December 1857.

> that the foot of the old boot projected from under a large, flat stone that was still in place. I lifted the stone, and found that there was only one boot there, and no sign of a human skeleton nor bones of any kind. … As I was passing down the bank I came to the old boot, and, in passing, gave it another kick, sending it almost into the creek. It landed leg down hill, and from the end poured a golden shower of nuggets and dust.[28]

Although much less numerous, concealed garments match the characteristics of concealed shoes in that they are old, worn, and damaged. As the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project, led by Dinah Eastop, found, concealed garments, like concealed shoes, are often found with other items.[29] There had long been a lively trade in old clothes. In the days before wood pulp paper in the nineteenth century, linen rags were collected for paper production, and clobberers and revivers sold repaired and revived second-hand clothes for market. The concealed items clearly had no monetary value. Their worn-out quality makes it unlikely they were stashed stolen goods. Some were clearly part of builders' rubbish stuffed into cavities with other bric-a-brac, and some were used to plug holes and drafts. A postman's tunic discovered in the wall of a house in Mountmellick, Ireland, in 1930, was suspected to be that of a recently murdered postman whose body had not been recovered.[30] Not all finds can be explained away in such pragmatic terms.

In contrast with concealed shoes, there is no substantive, recorded tradition about worn clothes bringing luck or protection to people. Absence of evidence is not necessarily absence of tradition, but it is highly unlikely that concealing old garments represents some completely unrecorded apotropaic practice with no analogues. Eastop is right to suggest that there were probably different concurrent traditions—or at least practices—responsible for the concealments, but there is not a scrap of evidence that such clothing had a protective function or active magical properties. There is one tantalising piece of literary evidence for the ritual concealment of clothes in buildings, though, which has been missed by researchers. When, in the 1860s, James Howard the Liberal M.P. for

[28] *The Weekly Telegraph*, 28 March 1896.

[29] Dinah Eastop, 'Outside In: Making Sense of the Deliberate Concealment of Garments within Buildings', *Textile* 4(3) (2006) 238–55; Dinah Eastop, 'Garments Concealed within Buildings: Following the Evidence', in Hutton (ed.) *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts*, pp. 131–46.

[30] *The Scotsman*, 26 March 1930.

Bedford purchased a large part of the Clapham Estate and had it redesigned to incorporate a model scientific farm, an existing old farmhouse was pulled down. As they took it apart, workmen discovered a niche in the wall of the old kitchen that had been carefully bricked up. Within it they found a fine linen smock-frock, as worn by labourers and small farmers for their Sunday best, and a fine linen shirt. A friend of Howard's, the economic historian James E. Thorold Rogers, wrote about the curious find in *Notes & Queries* in 1890 and explained his investigation of the matter:

> One of the oldest labourers on the estate remembered that in his youth, early in the present century, the farmer who lived in the house died, and that the clothing was said at the time to have been put in the niche, and bricked up by the dying man's orders. … Of course the idea of the farmer was that the spirit of the clothes would accompany him after death. The clothes, Mr. Howard tells me, though to appearance sound, soon fell to pieces. The people, however, who were about, and knew the motive of their dedication, would not, he told me, have appropriated them.[31]

Despite the 'of course' in this account, the notion that clothes would accompany the dead in the afterlife in this way is not widely attested, although there was some debate on the matter of spirit clothing in the period.[32] By the early nineteenth century a farmer would most likely be buried in grave clothes rather than a winding sheet, but a smock-frock would not, perhaps, be deemed appropriate apparel. So, the explanation put forward by Thorold Rogers is reasonable as an example of a personal eschatological request. But this intriguing example does not solve the 'mystery' of those concealed garments that were old, worn, and torn rather than cherished and pristine linen.

With regard to worn clothes it is possible that some deposits were intimate acts cementing relations between individuals and their homes—in life and for posterity, to ensure a sense of wellbeing. It is quite likely the concealers were not the people who wore the items but they were nevertheless emotionally attached to their former wearers in some way. Something akin to these actions and emotions lay behind a modern concealment of old clothing. When the Victorian-era Ladysmith Barracks, Ashton-under-Lyne, were due for demolition in the 1980s, a man familiar

[31] James E. Thorold Rogers, 'A Bedfordshire Custom', *Notes and Queries* 7th S., Vol. 9 (June 1890) 505–06.

[32] Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A social history of ghosts* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 33–4.

with the place decided to make his own personal commemoration. He buried an old military hat band or *puggaree* from a pith helmet beneath a flagstone, and uttered a little personalised prayer to the soldier who must have worn it and who, he liked to think, had been stationed at the barracks. 'It had survived all this time', he said. 'Someone must have cared for it. I couldn't throw it out.'[33]

Hearth and Home

The *locations* of some concealed shoes certainly attest to the importance of notions of luck and wellbeing in the home. The most popular places for concealment were in hearths, fireplaces, and chimneys, with 34% of British finds being made in such places. Their presence there is usually explained as a form of protection from malevolent supernatural intrusions via the chimney. It is, however, more likely—considering Rudsdale's knowledge of the custom in the 1930s—that the hearth was a popular place in which to conceal objects not because it was an access point for negative forces, but because of its pivotal role within the home, in the time before central heating and television: not because of its liminality, but because of its centrality. This centrality was emphasised at the start of the twentieth century by German architect Hermann Muthesius in his *Das englische Haus*:

> To an Englishman the idea of a room without a fire-place is quite simply unthinkable. All ideas of domestic comfort, of family happiness, of inward-looking personal life, of spiritual wellbeing centre round the fire-place. The fire as the symbol of the home is to the Englishman the central idea both of the living-room and of the whole house; the fire-place is the domestic altar before which, daily and hourly, he sacrifices to the household gods. This is why the English have never thought, and will never think, of relinquishing the fire-place, however irrational it is, however much trouble it causes and however doubtful its practical value. To the English, to remove the fire-place from the home would be like removing the soul from the body.[34]

[33] Brian Durrans, 'Time Capsules as Extreme Collecting', in Graeme Were and J.C.H. King (eds), *Extreme Collecting: Challenging practices for twenty-first century museums* (New York, 2012) 181–202, pp. 191–2.

[34] Hermann Muthesius, *The English House*. Edited by Dennis Sharp, trans. by Janet Seligman (London, 1979), p. 181.

This centrality, in both the literal and figurative senses, which saw families congregating around the fire come nightfall, led to its symbolic significance. So when Robert St George described how the house represents the body in his *Conversing by Signs*, he portrayed the hearth as the heart.[35] With this powerful association, it is unsurprising that so many rituals and popular beliefs surround the domestic hearth.

In his article on 'Hearth and Home' in post-medieval Ireland, Barry O'Reilly describes myriad hearth-related beliefs and practices.[36] It was a note of pride, for example, as well as evidence of familial continuity, if a household could claim their hearth fire had been burning continuously for generations, covered in ashes every evening and rekindled the next morning. And when relocating, the hearth fire in the new house should be lit by coals taken from the old house. Similar practices can be found worldwide. The significance of placing the Yule log in the hearth is well documented across Europe: to keep it lit in the hearth over the Christmas period until it burnt away was considered good luck.[37] Charles Dickens' Christmas short story 'The Cricket on the Hearth' (1845) popularised a long-held belief that a cricket chirping near the fire brought good luck to a household. Maria Rundell noted in her *New Family Recipe Book* (1815) for instance that 'these troublesome insects, from a superstitious notion that they bring good luck, are frequently preserved', before going on to provide advice on how to destroy them.[38] The notion travelled with migrants to America and, indeed, in 1895 it was widely reported that a cricket farm had been set up in Rochester, New York State, to supply new households with lucky crickets.[39] Brass crickets were also sold as ornaments to be placed around the hearth. New traditions related to the hearth also emerged in industrial-urban Britain. By the late nineteenth century a lump of coal had become a lucky charm in working-class belief, for instance, carried by burglars, tramps, and by soldiers during the First

[35] Robert B. St George, *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

[36] Barry O'Reilly, 'Hearth and Home: The vernacular house in Ireland from c.1800', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature 111C.* Special Issue: Domestic Life in Ireland (2011) 193–215.

[37] Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 38–40.

[38] Frank Cowan, *Curious Facts in the History of Insects, Including Spiders and Scorpions* (Philadelphia, 1865), pp. 92–7; Maria Eliza Rundell, *The new family receipt book containing eight hundred truly valuable receipts* (London, 1815), p. 358.

[39] *Exmouth Journal*, 13 January 1894.

World War.[40] In 1893 it was observed that a piece found in the gutter was especially valued, and 'we have frequently seen people of both sexes carefully pick up and treasure these small articles'. An echo, perhaps, of the tradition of the found piece of old iron in rural culture. 'It is impossible to fathom the reason which has induced this idea', concluded the correspondent.[41] But it is surely the association with the warmth and comfort of the hearth and the sense of home that gave lumps of coal their potency.

In his 1925 *Magic in Modern London*, Edward Lovett observed that, 'the old belief as to the fireplace being the sacred place of the house is well known … in many cases, objects are hung over the mantelpiece'.[42] One example he gives is of pieces of flint bearing uncanny resemblances to people or animals displayed on the mantelpiece, which he described as '"for luck!" In short, a votive offering'.[43] Holed stones and sea urchins, once employed for specific apotropaic functions, were, by the 1920s and 1930s, also being displayed on the mantelpiece for luck. Herbert Toms, the early twentieth-century curator of Brighton Museum, reported seeing stringed fossil sea urchins hanging over the mantelpiece for luck at a farmhouse near Reading, while a letter to Toms in 1930 explained that keeping a particular holed stone on the mantelpiece ensured that 'while it remains there' the occupier 'would never be in want'.[44]

Although the hearth has been a feature of homes in Britain for almost as long there have been homes in Britain, the mantelshelf is a far younger component of domestic architecture. Fireplaces have long been embellished and decorated, since at least the twelfth century, but enclosed hearths and chimney stacks only started to become popular in the sixteenth century, with the fireplaces we are more familiar with today only entering the living room in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.[45] Some houses contained mantelshelves before this, but it was the

[40] *Burnley Express*, 24 February 1894; Davies, *Supernatural War*, p. 143.

[41] *Hampshire Telegraph*, 13 May 1893.

[42] Lovett, *Magic*, p. 28.

[43] Lovett, *Magic*, p. 27.

[44] Christopher J. Duffin, 'Herbert Toms (1874–1940), Witch Stones, and *Porosphaera* Beads', *Folklore* 122 (2011) 84–101, pp. 96, 91.

[45] Rachel Hurdley, *Home, Materiality, Memory and Belonging: Keeping Culture* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 42–6; Ronald W. Brunskill, *Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture* (London & Boston, [1971] 1987) p. 119; Nathaniel Lloyd, *A History of the English House: From primitive times to the Victorian period* (London, 1978), pp. 433–47; Anthony Quinney, *House and Home: A history of the small English house* (London, 1986), p. 40.

Victorian period when their popularity became widespread in the homes of the lower classes.[46] From this point on, the mantelshelf was a feature to be adorned. In the high Victorian period it was popular to have a mantel valance, embroidered or tasselled, and to top it with other objects for decoration. Architecture historians Barrett and Phillips describe how the mantelpiece 'would typically be arranged with a rigidly symmetrical array of ornaments which might include a clock in the centre flanked by candlesticks or dried flowers displayed under a glass dome'.[47] Overmantels became popular in the late nineteenth century with shelves and brackets for displaying ornaments—'every kind of combination', noted Muthesius, 'not all in the best of taste'.[48]

Working-class and lower middle-class homes kept the mantelshelf simpler, but still used it for the display of objects. Muthesius observed that 'even in the poorest house [the fireplace] is the part on which a little money is spent'.[49] Paintings provide useful evidence for this. John Lewis Krimmel's 1820 *Country Wedding* shows a modest country parlour with a mantelshelf symmetrically adorned with a vase of flowers, ornaments, and books, whilst the mantelshelf of the cottage in John Collinson's 1850 *Answering the Emigrant's Letter* bears figurines, a mirror, and framed pictures. The tellingly titled *The Mantelpiece*, a 1907 painting by Walter Richard Sickert, likewise depicts a mantelshelf heavily clustered with ornaments, as is the mantelshelf of the flat in Spencer Gore's 1913 painting *The Gas Cooker*. Ralph Mills argues that because the hearth was viewed as the heart of the home in nineteenth-century working-class abodes, the objects placed on the mantelshelf held particular significance.[50] This rise in the popularity of the ornamented mantelshelf thus allowed for the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century display of lucky objects. It also facilitated the transition of objects such as horseshoes, holed stones, and sea urchins from apotropaic devices to domestic mascots.

[46] M.W. Barley, *The House and Home* (London, 1963); Helena Barrett and John Phillips, *Suburban Style: The British Home, 1840–1960* (London and Sydney, 1987).

[47] Barrett and Phillips, *Suburban Style*, p. 73.

[48] Helen C. Long, *The Edwardian House: The middle-class home in Britain 1880–1914* (Manchester and New York, 1993), pp. 101–115; Muthesius, *The English House*, p. 185.

[49] Muthesius, *The English House*, p. 181.

[50] See Ralph Mills, '"A chimney-piece in Plumtree-court, Holborn": Plaster of Paris "images" and Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Material Culture', in Helen Kingstone and Kate Lister (eds), *Paraphernalia! Victorian Objects* (London, 2018), pp. 99–121.

The experience of the First World War and Second World War helped socialise the public display of lucky objects and talismans and inspired new genres of mass-manufactured mascots.[51] It also fostered the adoption of foreign motifs and traditions, such as the display of lucky white elephant ornaments. An article on 'Modern Idols' penned in 1931 describes how the average man 'may buy [idols] as ornaments for the mantelpiece when he visits distant countries', and a piece describing the décor of the home of a Conservative Member of Parliament noted that 'On one of the mantelpieces is … the family mascot in the form of an Egyptian god'.[52]

From the 1920s the press took an interest in the array of lucky objects that could now be found on mantelpieces. One newspaper reported, in 1923, for instance, that in the boardroom of Millwall Football Club, London, the team's brass lion mascot was in 'a position of honour on the mantelpiece'.[53] While in 1940s Essex, a couple were described as having a 'lucky box' they planned to display on their mantelpiece:

> A box—an ordinary tin box—is a treasured link between Mrs. Smith, of Grays (Essex), and her soldier husband, R.S.M. Herbert Smith, serving with the British Army in India. Every three or four months she receives from him a parcel of gifts in the box. She unpacks it, refills it with books and comforts, then posts it back to him. To reach him it journeys 12,000 miles … "We call it our lucky box," said R.S.M. Smith. "We would not part with it for worlds, and after the war it is going to have a place of honour on our mantelpiece."[54]

A piece reprinted from *The Lauriston Parish Magazine* in 1929 noted:

> Nearly every home in Scotland prides itself in the possession of a couple of china dogs, which faithfully keep their watch on mantelpiece or sideboard. … What is it makes the china dog such a necessity in every home? Is it the feeling of security inspired by the live dog and sub-consciously transferred to the china dog? Is it the feeling of peace and permanence that invariably shines from its vacant porcelain eyes? Is it a fetish, a talisman, a mascot?[55]

[51] Davies, *A Supernatural War*, pp. 227–8.

[52] S.M. Berry, 'Modern Idols', *The Nottingham Journal*, August 1931, p. 6; B. Wilson, 'Egyptian God Mascot of Devon M.P.' *Morning News and Daily Gazette*, Saturday March 6, 1937, p. 8.

[53] 'The Millwall Lion', *The Shields Daily News*, Thursday February 1, 1923, p. 4.

[54] 'Their Lucky Box', *The Yorkshire Evening Post*, Tuesday August 31, 1943, p. 4.

[55] 'From "The Lauriston Parish Magazine"', *The Sunderland Echo and Shipping Gazette*, Tuesday September 3, 1929, p. 5.

In 1937, the Mass Observation survey team recognised this vogue, and the emotional impulses behind it, and issued a directive to new researchers to record the objects on their mantelpieces 'in order from left to right', and to do likewise for the houses of neighbours and friends, noting the age and social class of the inhabitants. Some 158 reports were forthcoming.[56] Napkin rings were frequently noted, but also a diverse range of other objects including religious items, such as a fourteenth-century ivory Madonna and a wooden figure of St. Margaret. Foreignness was significant for some objects, but there were objects of everyday British folklore as well: 'A horse-shoe, picked up at least three years ago',[57] for instance, and 'a "Good Luck" mascot consisting of a black cat framed in a silvered (cardboard) horse-shoe. It is propped against the wall for support. It was a wedding gift.'[58] The horseshoe was certainly a popular feature of the fireplace, with a 1929 article on notions of luck opening with the image of the horseshoe nailed above the mantelpiece.[59]

With the spread of domestic gas heating and then electrical appliances from the 1930s, the introduction of the Clean Air Act in 1956, and the advent of high-rise flats, the presence of the open coal or log fire declined significantly in British homes by the 1970s. Its loss to domestic wellbeing for many was expressed by one angry man during an open meeting organised by the Institute of Fuel to debate the 1954 report that led to the Act. 'Everything that is nice and good is either illegal, immoral, or fattening, I refuse to be deprived of some of the things that are dear to my heart, and one of them is the open fire', he said. Watching the flickering flames was like 'watching the waves breaking on the sea shore—and who wanted to sit and look at the electric radiator or the gas fire?'[60] Not everyone was unhappy, though, including the housewives who had to do the cleaning. At the same meeting, the female mayor of Tottenham observed that while

[56] See Deborah Sugg Ryan, *Ideal homes, 1918–39: Domestic design and suburban modernism* (Manchester, 2018); Hurdley, *Home, Materiality, Memory and Belonging*.

[57] Day Survey Respondent 007, June 1937–August 1938, © Mass Observation Archive. University of Sussex Special Collections; Day Survey Respondent 195, June 1937–August 1938, © Mass Observation Archive. University of Sussex Special Collections.

[58] Day Survey Respondent 495, June 1937–November 1937, © Mass Observation Archive. University of Sussex Special Collections.

[59] 'How Best to Look on Luck', *The Courier and Advertiser*, Friday February 1, 1929, p. 6.

[60] Peter Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800* (Athens [Ohio], 2006).

'papa' enjoyed the comfort of the open fire on returning home from work, 'mamma' wished for electricity and gas to avoid the dirt from coal fires.

The move to gas and electric fires undoubtedly impacted on hearth customs. In many households, a Yule log, for example, could no longer be placed in the flames to burn over the Christmas period, and fewer families took pieces of coal from the fireplace when moving home to place it in the hearth of a new residence. But some families have found ways to adapt. Richard Bradley, growing up in Derbyshire in the 1980s and 1990s, detailed an interesting example of his family's persistent observance of First Footing, even when they had an electric and gas fire. This custom, practiced primarily in Scotland and North East England, involves a person—preferably tall and dark—coming to the house on New Year's Eve and bringing with them a gift of coal as a symbol of warmth, which would be placed in the hearth.[61] The lack of a coal fire did not stop Bradley's family from following the custom. In the 1980s when they had an electric fire, they would move the fire to one side and place a piece of coal in the original grate behind. And in the 1990s when they had a gas fire they would remove and then replace one of the flame-retardant simulated pieces of coal instead.[62] Although this custom is largely unobserved now, for some families it perseveres—and adapts to the more contemporary home.

* * *

Affection for the mantelpiece retains its hold on the domestic psyche whether it still frames a glowing fire or now sits below a wall-mounted, plasma television. Rachel Hurdley's exploration of its contemporary cultural meaning reveals how people look upon the mantelpiece as a domestic shrine defined not only by family nostalgia and personal emotions, but also by media representations of what constitutes a good home. While its role as a place for lucky ornaments seems to have attenuated since the 1950s, there

[61] Venetia J. Newall, 'Two English Fire Festivals in Relation to Their Contemporary Social Setting', *Western Folklore* 31(4) (1972) 244–274, pp. 253–254; M. E. Ringwood, 'New Year Customs in Co. Durham', *Folklore* 71(4) (1960) 252–255, pp. 254–255.

[62] Richard Bradley, 'Gas Fires, Plastic Dustbins and Robert Maxwell: Threats to UK calendar customs from the domestic and mundane world of everyday life'. Paper presented at Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Contemporary Legend inaugural symposium, 14 November 2018. With thanks to Richard for sharing his paper with us.

are other domestic spaces where the same items are displayed.[63] Between 2004 and 2005, Jane Parish interviewed twenty-five elderly women in the Potteries about the ornaments they considered lucky. The way they expressed the potency of the objects is telling. One woman said they kept 'bad luck outside' and another said they ensured 'feeling well in my home'. The ornaments, many of which were locally produced miniature ceramic animals and busts called 'Whimsies', were kept away from public display and were carefully placed upstairs in the privacy of bedrooms. Unlike contemporary domestic time capsules though, none of her interviewees would put their lucky ornaments in the loft as such a dismissive action would apparently tempt luck to desert the household.[64]

[63] Hurdley identifies a significant change in items on mantelpieces between the 1930s and the 1980s. See Hurdley, *Home, Materiality, Memory*, pp. 73–4.

[64] Parish, 'Locality, luck and family ornaments', pp. 175, 176.

CHAPTER 8

Curators and Custodians of the Revealed Concealed

Not all hidden objects stay hidden. That much has hopefully become clear through the preceding chapters. If they did all remain concealed, we would not know about them; we would not mull over them; and this book would not exist. Unlike many artefacts from the past, though, these concealed deposits are not unearthed through deliberate excavation. Most have been stumbled upon by chance by home-owners and builders during renovations, as they opened up old fireplaces, repaired roofs, re-laid hearthstones, knocked walls through, and lifted floorboards. Thousands of concealed deposits have been discovered this way and are currently recorded in the Concealed and Revealed Virtual Museum and elsewhere.[1] Sometimes these hidden objects are viewed as rubbish, disregarded and discarded. A cache of nineteenth-century shoes, for instance, found by builders when renovating the roof of a house in Otley, Yorkshire, originally contained six shoes, but when the first was found it was simply thrown away. This is unsurprising considering it was an old, dirty, and damaged shoe. When the remaining five were found, they were salvaged by Otley Museum, where they have been held ever since.[2] Many other

[1] Members of the public are encouraged to post any new findings to our virtual museum: https://www.historypin.org/en/person/66740.

[2] Ceri Houlbrook, 'Ritual, Recycling, and Recontextualisation: Putting the concealed shoe in context', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 23 (2013) 99–112.

O. Davies, C. Houlbrook, *Building Magic*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76765-5_8

anecdotes tell of people—and even museums—disposing of concealed objects only to discover their historical significance years too late.[3] Many of those that are found are kept, however, and this chapter considers what becomes of such objects. Houlbrook has previously extolled the importance of exploring the 'afterlives' of these finds, drawing on ethnographic and folkloristic approaches to demonstrate that they generate a range of emotions in the contemporary finder.[4] This chapter takes her research further by drawing together the diverse establishments and groups of people that find themselves the curators and custodians of these objects, once concealed and now revealed.

The Museum

The interest in unusual and strange objects led to the eighteenth-century vogue for cabinets of curiosities for private amusement and also public display for profit. They consisted of an eclectic mix of colonially appropriated items that were deemed 'exotic', archaeological finds, fossils, anatomical aberrations, macabre creations such as items made of human skin, and domestic oddities such as mummified cats. Antiquarianism and the founding of local Literary and Philosophical Societies then gave impetus to the founding of local and regional museums across the country during the nineteenth century, with civic museums paid for by public rates emerging in the second half of the century.[5] By the late nineteenth century the collecting impulse behind the rise of museums was being heavily influenced not only by the public interest in curiosities but by academic models of human development and the collection of objects from across the globe that confirmed comparative anthropological assumptions about cultural evolution. The rise of the British folklore movement at the same time led to increased interest in the material culture of domestic folk belief and survivals. As a consequence, as Oliver Douglas has observed, 'museum

[3] Owen Davies, 'The Material Culture of Post-Medieval Domestic Magic in Europe: Evidence, Comparisons and Interpretations', in Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (eds), *The Materiality of Magic* (Paderborn, 2015), p. 385.

[4] Ceri Houlbrook, 'The Concealed Revealed: the 'Afterlives' of Hidden Objects in the Home', *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018) 195–216.

[5] See, for example, Amiria Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange* (Cambridge, 2005); Kate Hill, *Culture and Class in English Public Museums, 1850–1914* (London, 2017); Barbara J. Black, *On Exhibit: Victorians and Their Museums* (Charlottesville, 2000); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London, 1995).

collections themselves came to justify survivalist doctrine'.[6] We can certainly see this shift from curiosity to survival object in the curation of mummified cats.

When, in 1849, a perfectly preserved 'petrified' cat and rat were found stuck in the aperture of a chimney stack of an old house in Coleraine, the local press described them as 'worthy of a place in the Belfast or British Museum'. They did, indeed, end up in Belfast Museum. The grandson of the woman who lived in the house wrote to the press in 1903 to say that he remembered seeing them there in a glass case, posed as they had been originally found, the rat three inches in front of the cat.[7] The view that these were curiosities that required curation was also expressed in the 1850s by the *Perthshire Advertiser*. In pulling down an old tenement in George Street, Perth, a mummified cat was found in a small recess in the foundation of the back wall. The newspaper observed of its status:

> As the apparently immortal remains of Tom are decidedly a novelty in their way, they have been dealt with as all real curiosities should be—not thrown into a corner and forgotten, after people have had their stare, but placed in the Museum, where they may be seen and commented on for generations to come.'[8]

In 1903, it was reported that among the curiosities of Northampton Museum, in Abington Park, 'there was none more interesting than the glass case containing the smoked cat'. This mummified cat with a mouse in its paws had been found in a chimney by builders doing repairs to the town's George Hotel.[9] Numerous domestic dried cats have been retired from displays over the course of the twentieth century as museums redefined themselves and moved away from the 'cabinet of curiosities' approach. But their allure remains, and their re-enchantment thanks to survivalist doctrine has given them a new lease of life, with examples currently on display including the dried cats at Ayscoughfee Hall Museum, Keswick Museum, and the Museum of London, to name a few.

Whether donated to a small, local museum or an internationally renowned institution, the concealed object undergoes similar processes of

[6] Oliver Douglas, 'Folklore, Survivals, and the Neo-Archaic', *Museum History Journal* 4 (2011) 223–244, p. 230.

[7] *The Belfast News-letter*, 17 April 1849; *The Coleraine Chronicle*, 22 August 1903.

[8] *Perthshire Advertiser*, reprinted in the *Bradford Observer*, 6 August 1857.

[9] *Beverley Recorder*, 29 August 1903.

accessioning, tagging, and cataloguing. Many are then wrapped in acid-free tissue paper and placed in storage, such as the five survivals of the Otley shoe cache, while others are displayed in glass cases for public consumption. Such processes of accession inevitably remove the objects from their environmental contexts, though.[10] Certain peculiar issues do beset the curator of the concealed object, however, due to its enigmatic nature and convoluted biography. Many of these objects were not originally crafted as concealed deposits; they are not inherently ritualistic. Most began their 'lives' as utilitarian objects: the shoes and garments were designed to be worn; the bottles designed to contain liquids; while the cats and horses were not designed at all, but were living creatures with their own agencies. This all leads the curator to question how such finds should be presented.[11] Should they be restored or left in their found states? Should they be categorised as the things they are—shoe, bottle, cat—or as the concealed deposits they became? Back in 1934, the *Scotsman* pondered on the issues with regard to a mummified cat found concealed during the demolition of a building in Edinburgh. It was taken to the Natural History Department of the Royal Scottish Museum, leading the newspaper to ponder: 'If there is any likelihood of its being housed within a museum—it is not old enough to be classed as a fossil, and on the other hand too old to be stripped of its mummified flesh and classed as a skeleton. Falling between the two, it remains as an interesting archaeological curiosity.'[12]

The placing of an object into a museum also necessitates some level of interpretation.

When presented with mysterious objects of unusual provenance, curators naturally seek answers. They want to explain the purpose of the item; identification and categorisation are, after all, two primary purposes of the

[10] See, for example, David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 286; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Objects of Ethnography', in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington D.C. and London, 1991), pp. 386–443.

[11] Dinah Eastop, 'Outside In: Making Sense of the Deliberate Concealment of Garments within Buildings', *Textile* 4 (2006) 238–55; Dinah Eastop, 'Material Culture in Action: Conserving Garments Deliberately Concealed Within Buildings', *Anais do Museu Paulista: História e Cultura Material* 15 (2007) 187–204; Eastop, 'Garments Concealed within Buildings: Following the Evidence'; Ceri Houlbrook and Rebecca Shawcross, 'Revealing the Ritually Concealed: Custodians, Conservators, and the Concealed Shoe', *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 14(2) (2018) 163–82.

[12] *The Scotsman*, 31 March 1934.

museum collection. But the curator must decide what information is stamped on a label, printed in the catalogue, and fed to the public. Should the most popular or sensationalist explanations be reproduced? Should more nuanced interpretations be offered? Or should the curator give only basic information and allow the public to form their own theories?[13] Chris Wingfield explores this quandary in his examination of the Pitt Rivers Museum 'Witch's Ladder': a stretch of rope tied with feathers, found in the roof of a house in Somerset. Since the nineteenth century this mysterious item has been interpreted as a tool of malevolent magic—to this day, the public museum label states, 'Said to have been used for getting away the milk from neighbour's cows and for causing people's deaths'—despite historians identifying it as a piece of deer hunting equipment.[14] Evidently the enigmatic nature of the concealed object allows, or even calls, for stories of magic and the supernatural.

These stories, however, are not confined to the objects' histories. Some can be dated much more recently, born from the experiences, beliefs, and actions of museum staff themselves. Museums are, after all, hotbeds of 'superstition'. Luckhurst writes of the prevalence for 'Magical thinking that objects might carry ill-luck or that museum rooms could be haunted at night', citing the 'cursed mummies' of the British Museum. Another example, specifically concerned with a concealed object, can be found at Manchester Museum, to which a figurine, known as 'Little Mannie', was sold in 1987. It had been found under the cellar floor of a building in Hollingworth, Greater Manchester, and John Prag, Professor Emeritus of Archaeological Studies at the Museum, reflects on the uncanny happenings that succeeded its acquisition. Prag's colleagues began experiencing various misfortunes, from injuries and illnesses to broken car windows and trouser zips, and because the incidents always seemed to occur after handling the figurine, 'Little Mannie' was blamed for this ill luck. Prag notes that even the most sceptical among the museum staff became 'wary of the little figure's influences'.[15]

[13] See Jeremy Harte, 'Send for the Lucky White Mole', *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 14(2) (2018) 260–261; Houlbrook and Shawcross, 'Revealing the Ritually Concealed'.

[14] Chris Wingfield, 'A case re-opened: the science and folklore of a 'Witch's Ladder'', *Journal of Material Culture* 15(3) (2010) 302–322.

[15] Roger Luckhurst, 'Science Versus Rumour: Artefaction and Counter-Narrative in the Egyptian Rooms of the British Museum', *History and Archaeology* 23(2) (2012) 257–269, p. 267; John A. Prag, 'The Little Mannie with his Daddy's Horns', in Ceri Houlbrook and

In other museums, actions can speak louder than words. When a child's right boot was found in an internal wall in what is now the Gardner Gallery, Sherborne Museum, during an extension in 1994, it was returned to its place of concealment accompanied by a contemporary shoe.[16] A small ceremony was conducted that involved a young local girl placing the right Start-rite shoe of a child's pair recently purchased from E&D Rogers in Yeovil alongside the original. The left was accessioned into the museum's collection, and a label placed on the wall marks the place of concealment—although interestingly does not mention the original shoe: 'FOR GOOD LUCK! In the wall behind this notice is a child's shoe, donated by Christabel Hollingsworth, placed in 1994 when the Museum expanded into this room'. A similarly new (and reportedly controversial) concealment was made in Northampton Museum during refurbishments in 2012, when a workman concealed one of his worn boots under the newly installed raised floor in Gallery 1. Its pair was also accessioned into the Museum's shoe collection.[17] This was taken one step further in the Museum of Kent Rural Life, where a historic concealment was re-made. In the bedroom of a nineteenth-century cottage, a feature of the Museum, there is a photograph of a child's leather boot that was found under the floorboards. A nearby panel considers various theories for why it was originally hidden, before explaining: 'We have replaced the shoe in its original hiding place to remind ourselves of the spirits of the people who hid the shoe there all those years ago'. Jeremy Harte, curator of Bourne Hall Museum, reflects on this treatment of the shoe, remarking that 'the natural professional desire to pull everything out and put it on a shelf is rejected in favour of a second concealment, this time not magical in the old sense, but still in its own way doing honour to "spirits"'.[18]

Similar decisions have been made at historic houses, which also act as museums. A concealed shoe dated to c.1720 was found in Knebworth House, a Grade II* listed building in Hertfordshire, during restoration work in the 1990s. Following identification and photography, the shoe was replaced, together with a time capsule of modern items, including another shoe, a book entitled *Board Meetings in the Bath* by Lady Cobbold

Natalie Armitage (eds), *The Materiality of Magic: An Artefactual Investigation into Ritual Practices and Popular Beliefs* (Oxford, 2015) 171–181, p. 180.

[16] Pers. comm. Elisabeth Bletsoe, Curator, Sherborne Museum, 14/05/2018.

[17] Pers. comm. Rebecca Shawcross, Senior Shoe Curator, 09/05/2018.

[18] Harte, 'Send for the Lucky White Mole'.

of Knebworth House, and a CD of one of the famous pop music festivals held on Knebworth House grounds. The decision to re-conceal it was made by Lady Cobbold herself, and the archivist of the House remarks, 'let's hope it continues the good luck it was presumably intended to bring!'[19] Likewise, the boot discovered in the roof of Woodchester Mansion, Gloucestershire, was returned to its original hiding place after repairs were completed in 2011. 'We were told at the time that boots are placed in a roof space like this for luck and to keep the devil from your roof', explained the estate manager. 'It would have been nice to keep the boot to show people but tradition won out and the boot was returned—probably not to be seen for another 150 years.'[20] As Hilary Davidson observes, to find a concealed object 'is to make a decision about whether to alter the end result of a historical gesture'.[21] In these cases, as in others detailed below, conscious decisions have been made to perpetuate the historical gesture of concealment.

The Pub

Museums are not the only public institution in which antiquities are displayed, ergo not all 'curators' of concealed objects are formally curators. The public house is one such environment in which many concealed objects find themselves on show. This is partly because some objects are discovered in public houses and are then put on display for patrons to view, often in quite museumised style. The vogue for 'public house museums' seems to have grown in the nineteenth century, and one of the most well-known was the Hole in the Wall pub, Borough High Street, Southwark. In the 1890s it was also sometimes referred to as the 'Cat Cemetery' as it displayed numerous cat skeletons, including a mummified cat with two mice in its jaws, most of them found in the recently demolished remains of the notorious squalid slums known as the Mint. The pub also displayed two human skulls, and various stuffed animals, including a double lamb.[22] In 1893 the *Chard and Ilminster News* provided a cameo

[19] Pers. comm. Clare Fleck, Archivist, Knebworth House, 08/05/2018.

[20] Pers. comm. Hannah McCanlis, Manager, 21/10/2014.

[21] Hilary Davidson, 'Holding the Sole: Shoes, Emotions and the Supernatural', in Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (eds), *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History* (Oxford 2018), p. 91.

[22] *South London Chronicle*, 3 December 1898; Charles E. Lawrence, 'Public House Museums', *The Ludgate*, cited in Richard Daniel Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge,

of the collection of objects on display at the Chard Road Hotel next to the remote and now defunct Somerset railway station known as Chard Junction. The journalist described it as an 'attractive little museum of ancient relics and other curiosities displayed around the walls of the refreshment buffet'. This included some old rapiers and muskets, musical instruments, vases, and cups. Among these was the suspended heart of a calf covered in pins and sloe thorns.[23]

Some pubs today continue the tradition in a more modest way. Over the fireplace of the Lamb, a nineteenth-century public house in Bury, Greater Manchester, sits a child's shoe and several clay-pipes in a glass-fronted wooden case. The shoe was discovered up the chimney during renovation work in the 1980s, along with some clay-pipes which are now lost. Replicas were purchased to display alongside the shoe for context—a notably museum-like strategy—and ghost stories are told by landlord and locals, harnessing the supernatural to communicate the importance of keeping the shoe close to where it was originally concealed.[24] A shoe is similarly displayed in the aptly named Golden Slipper, York, while in the Eight Bells, Hatfield, an eighteenth-century miniature almanac, found in a dowel hole in the pub in 1970, is framed behind glass and hung on the wall alongside a traditional museum-like label: 'This child's almanac dated 1734 was secreted in this dowel hole. It was discovered during the course of building alterations in 1970. It was given to Edward Hoy by his sister Mary Hoy.' In the Portway Inn, Staunton on Wye, it is a horse's skull that is displayed beneath a glass panel in the floor, with a plaque that states simply 'The Portway Inn's Horses Heads'. This is one of many horses' skulls found under the floor of the pub, as noted in a previous chapter.

Dried cats have long been popular features of public houses. Two felines are displayed in a glass case alongside a pair of rats in the Stag Inn, Hastings. In an interview with a local newspaper in 1951, a previous publican explained that the cats were there when he took over the running of the Stag. '"I do not know if the cats are included in the schedule", said Mr. Webster, "but no one wants to move them. They are very popular, and people come here specially to see them."'[25] This latter point is

Mass., 1978), p. 20.

[23] *Chard and Ilminster News*, 21 October 1893.

[24] Houlbrook, 'The Concealed Revealed: The "afterlives" of Hidden Objects in the Home', *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018) 195–216, pp. 203–204.

[25] *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 31 March 1951.

particularly interesting and is returned to below. In his study of London folklore, Anthony Clayton describes how in 2008 the label accompanying the display claimed 'that the cats once belonged to a local witch named Hannah. She fled the town when her broomstick was stolen and the cats were later walled into the fireplace on the ledge where she used to sleep.'[26]

Another dried cat is on display at the Mill Hotel, Sudbury, beneath a glass pane in the floor of reception, while a newspaper article from 1898 describes a similar display in The Bear, Beyton: 'During the course of the work of renovation a perfect skeleton of a cat was found in a space beneath the roof, and the interesting feline frame has been placed under a glass case, and forms one of the objects of ornamentation of the parlour'.[27] At the Dun Cow in Dunchurch, Warwickshire, it was a ferret that was displayed. A newspaper article from 1936 writes of an:

> exhibit that can be seen in that comfortable country hotel, the "Dun Cow" at Dunchurch. In a small glass-covered cabinet attached to an oak beam in the smoke-room is the mummified body—in this instance of a ferret—a wizened wisp of skin and bone. The proprietor told me that some 40 years ago he remembered this self-same ferret being put into a hole in the wall to deal with a rat, but, unfortunately, nothing more was heard of the ferret either, and he was given up for lost. But one day, a few years ago, while alterations were being made to the wall near the great fireplace, a workman chanced upon the little corpse at the back of a beam at the base of the chimney. He had fallen there from a flue, and it had been impossible for him to get back. And there he had laid himself down and died, in the simple execution of his duty.[28]

In Jorrocks, Derby, it is not animal remains that are on display, but a human skull. Previously known as The George and The Lafferty, this public house was built in the late seventeenth century, but the damaged female skull discovered in a pit below the cellar floor, together with animal bones and shoes, dates much earlier. On display behind the bar, it is known as the 'George Skull', but according to the publore it is the skull of a ghost named Martha who is eager for it to be reburied in the pit. This story featured in an episode of the popular television show *Most Haunted* in

[26] Anthony Clayton, *The Folklore of London: The legends, ceremonies and celebrations, past and present* (London, 2008), p. 160.
[27] *The Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Standard*, 13 December 1898.
[28] *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 17 February 1937.

2003, which explicitly links the discovery of the skull with 'violent poltergeist activity'.[29] The pub's website publicises this claim to fame: 'Come and join us. … Jorrocks have evening entertainment and display the skull as seen on "Most Haunted"!'

Public houses evidently—and unsurprisingly—draw on their concealed objects and the stories that grow around them for promotional purposes. Folklore has long been adopted and adapted for commercialism, a process that is prevalent enough to warrant its own nomenclature: folklorismus. Its simplest definition comes from Venetia Newall, who characterises folklorismus as 'something adopted or imposed for some understood or ulterior reason', and even more simply from Amy Gazin-Schwartz and Cornelius Holtorf: folklore that is 'adopted for a particular reason'.[30] This phenomenon—alternatively, and more negatively, referred to as 'fakelore' by Dorson[31]—is employed most often for commercial purposes, to attract tourists, customers, or consumers. And the concealed object clearly works. Returning to the cats on display at the Stag Inn: 'people come here specially to see them'.[32]

The concealed object is enigmatic enough to draw attention. This is evident in the patron reviews for these establishments on websites such as *Tripadvisor*. Reviews for the Portway Inn, for example, make frequent reference to the horse's skull on display, as a feature that gives 'the place character'; as a piece of 'interesting history' that 'raised many questions'; as a 'fascinating story … there's GOT to be a folk song in that somewhere [sic]'; and as something 'You'll have to go and see for yourself'.[33]

The cat on display in the Mill Hotel provokes more mixed reactions, with some *Tripadvisor* reviewers declaring it 'Fascinating' and recommending, 'Don't forget to check out the dead cat in reception', while

[29] Season 2 (23), 2003, 'Three Locations – The Heritage Centre, Lafferty's Pub, The Bell Inn'. For a consideration of the relationship between folklore and *Most Haunted*, and the ability of television shows to play the role of legend-teller, see Mikel J. Koven, 'Most Haunted and the Convergence of Traditional Belief and Popular Television', *Folklore* 188(2) (2007), 183–202.

[30] Venetia J. Newall, 'The Adaptation of Folklore and Tradition', *Folklore* 98(2) (1987) 131–151, p. 131; Amy Gazin-Schwartz and Cornelius Holtorf (eds), *Archaeology and Folklore* (Routledge, 1999), p. 12.

[31] Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore and Fakelore: Essays toward a discipline of folk studies* (Cambridge MA, 1976).

[32] *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 1951.

[33] https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g1837432-d1837435-Reviews-or5-The_Portway_Inn-Staunton_on_Wye_Herefordshire_England.html.

others appeared almost repulsed by it. One reviewer in October 2017 wrote, 'The big downer for us was the dead cat in the floor at reception. It seems totally ghoulish and not necessary. Surely it is interesting to say that the poor tortured animal is lying beneath, but why not have a plaque rather than glass allowing you to see its pathetic corpse?' Another reviewer, in March 2015, declared the cat a 'marmite' feature: 'now being cat lovers [we] didnt like it, and we thought the cat should be buried in a 20th centry [sic] way!'[34] Love them or hate them though, such displays are clearly features that capture the attention and provide a sense of history and curiosity.

As we saw earlier, their commercial value accounts for why many pubs display such objects even though they were not actually discovered there. In 1852, *The Morning Advertiser* reported the find of a cat and rat in Gerard's Hall Crypt, London, 'which are now in the possession of Mr. Kent, landlord of the Old Red Lion Tavern, Basing-lane, City. … They will be placed in a handsome case by the above-named gentleman, who obliges all applicants with an inspection.'[35] Similarly in Ipswich, Suffolk, the skeleton of a cat found in a sixteenth-century building was reported in 1867 as being 'in the possession of Mr. Walter Reid, of the Pilot Inn, on the adjoining premises'.[36] This is unsurprising, considering that public houses have a long history of decorating their public spaces with antiquities and curiosities.[37] The nineteenth-century public house The Nutshell in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, proudly bills itself as a 'Museum of Art and Curiosities'—as well as Britain's smallest pub. Their dried cat is just one of the many curios that fill their small space, their website stating:

> From a mummified cat and currency notes on the ceiling to historical photos, military items and an aeroplane propeller on the walls there is much to view and talk about while you enjoy a drink. Please browse the photos to find out more, or pop in for a drink and view it all for yourself.[38]

[34] https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g210101-d193862-Reviews-or5-The_Mill_Hotel-Sudbury_Babergh_District_Suffolk_East_Anglia_England.html.

[35] *The Morning Advertiser*, 21 September 1852.

[36] *The Ipswich Journal, and Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, and Cambridgeshire Advertiser*, 29 June 1867.

[37] Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A social history 1200–1830* (London and New York, 1983), p. 276.

[38] http://www.thenutshellpub.co.uk/inside-the-pub.html.

Similarly, Clayton describes how a publican in Bishopsgate acquired a collection of mummified cats and rats from the residence of merchant Nathaniel Bentley, commonly known as 'Dirty Dick', in the eighteenth century: 'perhaps to trade on the notoriety of "Dirty Dick", which later became the name of the establishment'. This publican purportedly arranged his acquisitions in macabre circus-show fashion: 'visitors were encouraged to stroke one of the mummified cats for luck—suddenly, the back legs of the apparently dead creature would kick, thanks to a hidden spring'.[39]

What would have happened to these finds if publicans had not been interested in acquiring them and incorporating them into their collections and décor? If not discarded, then probably deposited in museum storage or a private home (see below), seen by only a few. Display in a public house probably ensures that these finds, along with their various interpretations and folklore, are viewed by far more people. In this way, the publican really does act as curator, and the pub as museum in preserving and displaying these items for public consumption. However, the pub is not the only form of public establishment in which concealed objects are unofficially curated.

The Church

Church buildings are akin to museums in that they preserve antiquities and artworks for public display. They have also been described as repositories of curios, not all of which are ecclesiastical in nature, such as those documented by Henry Feasey in his 1899 contribution to *The Antiquary*.[40] ChurchCare, the supporting organisation for over 16,000 parish churches in Britain, remarks that, 'The size of collections in historic churches is vast, including monuments, wall paintings, stained glass, textiles, medieval timberwork, and many other types of objects'.[41] Though not stated, included in those 'many other types of objects' are the concealed animal remains also found in church collections.

[39] Anthony Clayton, *The Folklore of London: The legends, ceremonies and celebrations, past and present* (London, 2008), pp. 170–172.

[40] Henry Feasey, 'Curiosities of and in our Ancient Churches', *The Antiquary* 35 (1899), 176–182.

[41] ChurchCare, *100 Church Treasures* (2012–2017): http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/support-our-parish-churches.

In Stoke Gabriel, Devon, the fourteenth-century Church House Inn displays a cat, nicknamed Cleo, accompanied by a framed information panel relating that Cleo was found in the Verger's Cottage (three doors up the road), when renovations were taking place, in December 1987. The Church House Inn, being still Church property, it was decided Cleo should go on show here, as a part of the history of Stoke Gabriel. The pub is clearly characterising itself as a form of museum for the local area, but interestingly it is the establishment's association with the Church—as a former 'church house'—that justifies this role. The cat and rat of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, are probably the most famous. Discovered in the 1870s when the organ was moved during restoration, they have since been posed in a glass case for visitors to view. The official Cathedral website advertises them as one of their features to discover: 'A mummified cat & rat are the most unusual inhabitants of the crypt, but also the most popular … they are known locally as "Tom & Jerry"'.[42] While the printed sign beside the display—interestingly opting for the more mundane explanation for concealed animal remains—reads:

> These two are probably our most famous residents, our cat and rat were trapped in an organ pipe in the 1860s and became mummified. They were made famous by James Joyce, when he writes in *Finnegans Wake*:
>
> "… as stuck as the cat to that mouse in that tube of that Christ Church organ …".

The three horse skulls found in the Church of St Cuthbert, Elsdon, Northumberland, in 1877 are still preserved in a wooden cabinet within the church nave. In 2016, a council meeting considered an improved cabinet with display lighting, and a recent National Lottery Heritage Fund restoration project has created an exhibition space in the south transept, where the skulls will be displayed in the near future. As part of this funding, plans are also being made to carbon date the skulls, and so hopefully more anon.[43]

Another example is the original church of St Michael Paternoster Royal, London, which once displayed the body of a cat discovered in a sealed

[42] http://christchurchcathedral.ie/visit-us/.

[43] Peter F. Ryder, 'The Church of St Cuthbert, Elsdon, Northumberland: An Archaeological Assessment' (2010), p. 9; Minutes of the meeting of Elsdon Parish Council held in the Village Hall on Thursday 9 June 2016; Pers. comm. Keith Maddison, Church Warden, 09/05/2019.

passage beneath the roof.[44] Because Richard Whittington, of *Dick Whittington and his Cat* folklore fame, was buried within the church precinct, the cat was believed to have been his, although Margaret Howard doubted the connection, and Clayton supposes it could have been concealed 'mischievously by workmen' after the Great Fire. It was displayed in a glass case by the church door, strategically placed above a donations box—nothing entices quite like a macabre curiosity—but has since been stolen.[45]

The Home

Most concealed objects are found in private houses, and although some are disposed of or donated to museums, many are retained by their finder. The finder thus becomes the custodian and curator, and the home becomes the museum, with many objects proudly displayed alongside ornaments, souvenirs, and family photographs. One example is a child's shoe, Victorian in style, found up the chimneybreast of a seventeenth-century farmhouse in Ilkley, Yorkshire. The owner of the farmhouse—and by extension the shoe—has it on display on a purpose-made shelf above the fireplace, as close as possible to its original place of concealment whilst still on show. Likewise, the finder of another child's shoe up the chimneybreast of a house in the Waveney Valley, Norfolk, had a box-frame made to display the find, which hangs within the fireplace. Its custodian explains her decision:

> This is because we felt that this best indicated the context in which they had been found and was a reflection of the superstition which may have led to the placement of the shoe. We showed the shoe to a neighbour who was born in the village and he was quite upset that we had removed the shoe from the chimney ledge and suggested that it would be best to replace it. He was very concerned when I suggested that I might take it to Gressenhall Museum for them to see and told me that removing it from the house would be very bad luck. It is interesting that, although I don't regard myself as superstitious in any way, I have never got round to making an appointment at the museum! (pers. comm. Alison Norman, 30/03/2016)

[44] Margaret M. Howard, 'Dried Cats', *Man* 51 (1951) 149–151, p. 149.
[45] Clayton, *Folklore of London*, p. 169.

This same denial of 'superstition' was repeated by the finder of a mock or rudimentary mezuzah (a scroll containing Hebrew verses) found in an internal upstairs wall in the early 2000s, in a twentieth-century terraced house in Whitefield, Greater Manchester. She has it framed and on display in her porch so any visitors to her home see it immediately—'that's been a nice topic of conversation'—but was originally concerned that it was a form of curse. Had it been crafted and concealed for malevolent purposes, she admits that she probably would have replaced it in the wall.[46]

Re-concealment in the home is also popular, with many finders opting to return their finds to their original hiding spots. The concealed is revealed, and then re-concealed.[47] For example, the skeleton of a cat recovered from beneath the hearthstone of a cottage in Deanscales, Cumbria, was re-laid to rest once the hearthstone was set down again, 'Because it seemed to be the right thing to do', explained the finder. 'It had been there for 200 years plus maybe, I don't know, so it just seemed right to put this little skeleton back.'[48]

Another example of re-concealment involves a find at a sixteenth-century farmhouse in Asse-le-Boisne, Normandy, France. In 2010, when a builder raised a door lintel in a part of the house that had originally been a barn, he discovered a ball of hay wrapped around a child's leather glove and a corked glass bottle containing a feather, which had been sealed within the wall. The owners of the farmhouse—a family with young children—kept the finds out for three days as they pondered what to do with them. They briefly considered donating the finds to a local museum, but it was their 'gut' feeling that they should be re-concealed. They had heard that the objects' deposition was probably 'to do with a belief stopping evil spirits entering your house', so they 'felt very strongly very quickly that we wanted it to be back in the wall where it was uncovered, because it was there for a reason'. And so, the objects were re-concealed. The builder, equally 'keen to get it back' in the wall, placed it just behind the new keystone, while the family watched on with some ceremony.

These finders are not simply leaving the concealed objects in situ; they are actively re-concealing them. To go to the trouble of removing an object during building work and then returning it to its hiding place after the work is completed implies a level of emotional investment in that

[46] Pers. comm. Elaine Maher, 15/08/2016.
[47] Houlbrook, 'The Concealed Revealed'.
[48] Pers. comm. Phil Bradley, 05/02/2016.

object. Why would a finder choose to re-conceal such enigmatic, alienable, and to some people quite repulsive items within the fabric of their homes, rather than dispose of them or donate them to a museum? Often, these private custodians are eager for the object to continue playing a role in the narrative of their homes; they are valued as a tangible part of the history of the building.[49] Homes are, after all, dynamic spaces bound up with past uses and occupants,[50] with Siân Lincoln observing that homes 'can be understood as material spaces in which historical trails are left all over the places'.[51] The concealed object is one such historical trail.

There is, however, a sense that belief in the efficacy of these hidden objects also continues, even if only negligibly or subconsciously. Despite the many theories surrounding concealed objects, as outlined in the preceding chapters, the most popular explanation is that they were intended to protect a building and its occupants from malevolent forces. They were, in many people's opinions, originally hidden as a form of supernatural safeguard; a belief perpetuated by the many anecdotes circulating of people finding hidden objects, removing them, and then experiencing misfortune. Often this bad luck is identified as a direct result of the object's displacement, even by finders who state that they are not ordinarily 'superstitious'.[52]

June Swann recounts a letter from a finder of concealed shoes in Hampshire who 'had innocently sent her finds to London for identification. While they were away, the house which had hitherto seemed so benign, had strange noises from the attic room where they were found.'[53] As soon the shoes were returned to her, she replaced them in their original place of concealment. Swann recalls another finder who reported a similar experience: 'while the boots were out of the house for exhibition, they had

[49] Ceri Houlbrook, 'The Concealed Revealed'.

[50] Cf. Roderick J. Lawrence, 'A More Humane History of Homes', in Irwin Altman and Carol M. Werner (eds), *Home Environments* (New York, 1985), 113–132; Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Identity, Intimacy and Domicile – Notes on the Phenomenology of Home', in David Benjamin (ed.), *The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings, and Environments* (Aldershot, 1995) 131–47.

[51] Siân Lincoln, "'I've Stamped My Personality All Over It": The Meaning of Objects in Teenage Bedroom Space', *Space and Culture* 17 (2014) 266–279, p. 269.

[52] Swann, 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', p. 119; Eastop, 'Garments Concealed within Buildings: Following the Evidence', p. 143.

[53] Goldstein et al. note that the 'popular culture stereotype features ghostly sounds coming from the attic', (Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia A. Grider, and Jeannie B. Thomas, *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore* (Boulder, 2007), p. 155).

nothing but bad luck, the death of pets, flooding and the shed fell down. They now wished to leave the boots strictly alone, no publicity, no photography.'[54]

Evidently the private home is just as much a hotbed of 'superstition' as the public house. After all, the haunted house is an immensely popular motif, with the house being the primary domain of the ghost in folklore, literature, and film.[55] In fact, Goldstein et al. assert that, 'In many ghost stories, the haunted house functions as both setting and character, with the sentient and self-aware house taking precedence over the beings that haunt it'.[56] With popular culture endowing the house its own agency, it would not be a stretch to believe that the house would react negatively when something intrinsic to its cultural fabric (a concealed object, designed to protect) is removed. In this way, finders who re-conceal appear less concerned with ghosts, and more with maintaining what Davies has termed 'the spiritual or emotional balance that creates that vague, intangible sense of a happy home'.[57] In an email sent to Dinah Eastop, for example, prominent researcher in concealed garments, the finder (and re-concealer) of a shoe in Cookham, Berkshire, claimed, 'I don't think what I did [re-concealment] was a superstitious reaction. … Perhaps there was also some element of taking no risk of upsetting the existing equilibrium [the good atmosphere of the house].'[58] Many finders have expressed the opinion that their finds belong not only in the house, but *to* the house, and they are merely their caretakers. Curators and custodians, yes, but never their owners.

* * *

The bulk of this book has been concerned with decoding the meanings behind concealment, the purposes attributed to these objects by their concealers. As has also been demonstrated throughout the preceding

[54] Swann, 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', p. 65.

[55] Cf. Debbie Felton, *Haunted Greece and Rome: Ghost stories from classical antiquity* (Austin, 1999); Sylvia Grider, 'The Haunted House in Literature, Tradition, and Popular Culture: A consistent image', *Contemporary Legend* 2 (1999) 174–204; Dale Bailey, *American Nightmares: The haunted house formula in American popular fiction* (Bowling Green, OH, 1999); Goldstein et al. *Haunting Experiences*, pp. 143–170.

[56] Goldstein et al. *Haunting Experiences*, p. 144.

[57] Davies, 'The Material Culture of Post-Medieval Domestic Magic', p. 410.

[58] Eastop, 'Garments Concealed within Buildings: Following the Evidence', p. 142.

chapters, however, there is not one meaning but potentially many—and this can apply even to a single object. After all, as archaeologist Chris Fowler observes, 'Artefacts, like people, are multiply-authored'.[59] Take concealed shoes as one example. A shoe is authored by the person who designs and crafts it; the person who uses it as footwear; the person who conceals it, 'ritually recycling' the shoe as a concealed object. And then the person who engages with it once the concealed is discovered: the finder, the custodian, the curator. In each stage in the shoe's life, it bears a different meaning, its most recent being no less significant than the preceding ones, which is why exploring the 'afterlives' of these objects is so important to our understanding of them.

In this chapter we have explored the museumisation of concealed objects: placed on display on walls or in glass cases for public consumption. This is not just in museums but in pubs and churches, publicans and church wardens thus becoming curators themselves. In these cases, the concealed object has been re-crafted as a curiosity, an attraction, commercialised for promotional purposes. More than this though, through the processes of folklorismus, these objects are also becoming the cornerstones of local folktales: the cat once belonged to a witch, the skull belongs to a ghost who wants it reburied, the shoe being moved led to poltergeist activity. Traditions are being invented around these objects. This is also the case in private homes, where finders of these objects also become curators, eager for the objects to continue playing roles in the narratives of their homes. Many finders choose to display them—on purpose-built shelves above fireplaces or in specially commissioned box-frames—for their visitors to see, exhibiting them as tangible evidence of the history of their home.

Many other finders, however, also choose to re-conceal their finds, as have some museums and pubs. Such conscious decisions to perpetuate the historic gesture of concealment are often attributed to the most popular interpretation of these objects: as supernatural safeguards for the home. Whether or not there is actual belief in the efficacy of these objects—aside from being extremely difficult to determine—is almost beside the point here.[60] What is important to take from this is the fact that most people

[59] Chris Fowler, *The Archaeology of Personhood* (London and New York, 2004), p. 65.

[60] For explorations into the complexities of belief, see: Linda Dégh, 'What is a belief legend?' *Folklore* 107 (1996), 33–46; Sabina Magliocco, 'Beyond Belief: Context, Rationality and Participatory Consciousness', *Western Folklore* 71(1) (2012), 5–24.

interpret concealment as evidence of *past* beliefs in the efficacy of these objects. Finders, custodians, and curators today like the notions that cats were bricked up in walls, horse skulls were placed under floors, and shoes were stuffed up chimneys ritualistically, because their concealers believed that they would magically protect against malevolent forces. Why? No doubt because it is a more interesting, enticing, and thrilling theory than a cat got stuck in a tight space, skulls are good for acoustics, and shoes were handy containers, and the enigmatic nature of the concealed object allows for this flexible interpretation.

This magical or ritual interpretation of the objects, whether accurate or inaccurate, is highly significant when exploring their meanings. Today, they are being widely presented as historic apotropaic devices, and so that is what they have become in the popular imagination. To return to Wingfield's examination of the stretch of rope tied with feathers in the Pitt Rivers Museum, what was likely a piece of deer hunting equipment has become—via the fancy of its early survivalist curators—a 'witch's ladder', a tool of malevolent magic.[61] The concept of a 'witch's ladder' probably did not exist before—at least not in the terms it was framed by scholars, just as notions of the protective power of dead cats, horse skulls, and shoes may not have existed in the past. But they certainly do now. Through the curation of these concealed objects, therefore, tradition is being invented.

[61] Wingfield, 'A Case Re-opened'.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

People like a good story. We like the fantastical, the magical, the mysterious. This is attested to by the popularity of such franchises as *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones*; by the myriad of revived festivals and cultural events across Europe; by the recent swathe of successful museum exhibitions exploring the theme of magic: *A History of Magic* at the British Library, *Spellbound* at the Ashmolean, *Smoke and Mirrors* at the Wellcome. Contrary to early predictions of Western secularisation, we in the modern day have been re-enchanted by the world.[1]

This is why when we find an old shoe stuffed up a chimney, a cat bricked up in a wall, or a cache of miscellany behind the fireplace, we want them to represent a belief in magic. We are attracted to the idea that they were apotropaic devices, because the idea of a family protecting their home from witches and demons is exciting and sensational. We build narratives around these enigmatic objects, drawing on snippets of past beliefs to label something magic or ritual. This is why when the remains of a cat were discovered in the ruins of a seventeenth-century cottage in Pendle, Lancashire, in 2011, it was cited in the media as suggestive that the

[1] See, for example, Jeremy Boissevain (ed.), *Revitalizing European Rituals* (London and New York, 1992); Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, Volume 2 (London and New York, 2005); Alessandro Testa, '"Fertility" and the Carnival 1: Symbolic effectiveness, emic beliefs, and the re-enchantment of Europe', *Folklore* 128(1) (2017) 16–26.

O. Davies, C. Houlbrook, *Building Magic*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76765-5_9

cottage had once housed one of the Pendle witches. The cottage was referred to as 'the witch's cottage'; the cat as the 'witch's cat'.[2] Such finds clearly stir the imagination. And sell newspapers.

We, the authors, are as guilty of gravitating towards ritual interpretations as anyone. Both scholars of the supernatural, of course we would prefer to state unequivocally that concealed shoes repelled evil forces rather than they were hidden in jest by builders and that mummified cats were foundation sacrifices rather than evidence of a mouse chase in a tight space ending poorly for the feline. But we have to go where the evidence takes us. We have to accept that there is not always one right answer, and that while magical protection from malevolent preternatural forces may be the more interesting interpretation, it is not necessarily the right one.

Interpretations of curious building finds are not isolated from the broader debates around ritual. Most notably, the tendency to ascribe ritual to any activity that has no apparent practical role. As archaeologist Joanna Brück disapprovingly observed, 'ritual is identified by default: if sites or artefacts cannot be explained according to a contemporary functionalist rationale, then they become relegated to a residual ritual category'.[3] This has certainly been the case with the finds outlined in this book: finders of these enigmatic items cannot immediately conceive of a practical purpose for them, and so ritual is identified by default.

Archaeology in particular has been divided in debates on ritual interpretations. On the one side, there have been those drawn to the concept of ritual and who therefore perhaps tend to overinterpret the evidence. Archaeologist Amy Gazin-Schwartz has warned against this by way of a personal anecdote. In her doctoral thesis she recounted how, upon discovering a horseshoe inserted into the wall of a nineteenth-century croft house on Skye, she instantly assumed ritual motivations for its deposition, noting both its liminal location and the horseshoe's history as a protective amulet. However, it was later explained to her that horseshoes were commonly placed within the walls for structural support.[4] Even having read Gazin-Schwartz's warning, one of the authors (CH) fell into the same

[2] Anonymous, '"Witch's cottage" unearthed near Pendle Hill, Lancashire', *BBC News Lancashire* 8 December 2011: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-16066680 (Accessed 17/01/2013).

[3] Joanna Brück, 'Ritual and Rationality: Some problems of interpretation in European archaeology', *European Journal of Archaeology* 2(3) (1999) 313–344, p. 317.

[4] Amy Gazin-Schwartz, 'Constructing Ancestors: Archaeology and Folklore in Scotland', PhD thesis, University of Massachusetts 1999, p. 58.

over-interpretive trap when conducting fieldwork at a wishing-tree in Argyll. Noting two horseshoes embedded into the trunk of the coin-encrusted tree, her excitement over these clearly amuletic ritual deposits was checked months later when presenting her finds at a public lecture. 'But perhaps, as this was the only tree along the track', one man in the audience diplomatically ventured, 'the horseshoes were put there as tie-rings for a horse's reins'.

On the other side of the archaeological debate are the 'rationalists', who debunk theories they view as overreaching. As Evangelos Kyriakidis observes,

> The very appeal of ritual for both archaeologists and their audience can lead to a distorted picture of the archaeological record. … Such overreaching has, in turn, discouraged a great number of scholars who, by contrast, consistently avoid all reference to ritual. Thus, in archaeology, ritual activities tend to be either over-imaginatively reconstructed or avoided entirely.[5]

The aim of this book was to walk what Burke et al. identified as the 'murkier middle ground' between over-imaginative reconstruction and avoidance.[6] It was not intended to debunk the ritual theories in their entirety or to claim that all examples of concealment or 'building magic' can be mundanely explained. We recognise that 'ritual' and 'functional' are not two neat, exclusive categories, and certainly would not have been for the people behind these enigmatic building finds. Functionality is, after all, 'always culturally-defined', as Brück affirmed.[7] Instead, we advocate Gazin-Schwartz's continuum-based model, which allows us to view ritual as part of everyday life, and much of everyday life as ritualised.[8]

Neither was this book intended to criticise, censor, or correct nearly seventy years of scholarship on concealments and building magic. Instead, its objective was to explore the ways in which this material has been variously interpreted over the decades and how the democratisation of knowledge has generated new challenges to those researching in the

[5] Evangelos Kyriakidis (ed.), *The Archaeology of Ritual* (Los Angeles, 2007), p. 2.

[6] Heather Burke, Susan Arthure, and Cherrie de Leiuen, 'A Context for Concealment: The Historical Archaeology of Folk Ritual and Superstition in Australia', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 20 (2016) 45–72, p. 69.

[7] Brück, 'Ritual and Rationality', p. 334.

[8] Amy Gazin-Schwartz, 'Archaeology and Folklore of Material Culture, Ritual, and Everyday Life', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 5(4) (2001) 263–280, p. 278.

field, particularly in the cases of past informed suppositions and misleading terms being disseminated and accepted as undisputed fact. However, such issues are not viewed here as necessarily problematic. They are at the core of the invention and reinvention of traditions, to which we return below.

By drawing on historic literary sources, primarily from newspapers and magazines, this book has revealed that many enigmatic finds can be explained without reference to magical protection. Middens under floorboards and in attics could have been evidence of waste disposal or the desire to seal memories for posterity and future finders. Horse skulls were likely placed under floors to improve a room's acoustics. The desire to keep activities hidden from prying eyes or items from unwelcome hands could explain Ouija boards in walls, coins up chimneys, and the remains of a sheep in thatching—evidence of thievery rather than ritual sacrifice. Children's toys secreted within the fabric of a building could speak to game-playing or pathological hoarding. Shoes and horseshoes could have been kept within the home for vague, unarticulated notions of luck and wellbeing.

These interpretations may be less sensational than that of the apotropaic device, but they are no less interesting. Accidental loss, storage, builders' larks, opportunist waste disposal, hoarding, improved acoustics, and concealment from other members of the household all offer invaluable insights into how people negotiated domestic spaces. Hidden caches of personal items speak of sentiment and memory, of declaring 'we were here' to any who might come after. And objects kept for luck or wellbeing shed light on people's emotional engagements with the material world. They all tell us something about the intimacy of personal lives.

These interpretations also reveal the plurality of meaning. Considering the vast variety of objects, the length of time represented by these building finds, their geographic spread, and the variety of building types—and consequently occupants—not one single interpretation could fit. No umbrella term could possibly be large enough to cover all of the examples we have on record, and therefore any attempt to group them into one category is misguided. Even building finds of the same object type concealed in the same architectural space cannot represent only one meaning, intention, purpose, desire, or fear. Would the person who placed a pair of women's shoes in the thatching of a sixteenth-century cottage in Bedfordshire have

been motivated by the same need as the person who hid a boot in the roof of a nineteenth-century terrace in Dumfries and Galloway? Possible, but unlikely. People are emotionally heterogeneous, and any 'meanings' ascribed to a custom will be as diverse as the participants themselves.

Finally, through adopting an object biographical approach to some of these building finds, from their concealment to their revealing and curation, this book has explored the reinvention of tradition. Narratives have been—and continue to be—constructed around these objects, both individually and collectively. Today, they are viewed and presented as historic apotropaic devices, interred into the fabric of buildings because people in the past believed they could magically protect home and hearth from malevolent forces. Whether or not this interpretation is accurate, this is what the objects have become in the popular imagination. Therefore, in the manner of the object biography, this is what they are today.

This book is titled *Building Magic* partly because it is concerned with practices that tangibly alter the fabric of buildings, be they cottages, townhouses, mansions, farms, churches, and so on. But it also uses 'building' as a verb: it explores the processes of building magic into our interpretations of the enigmatic material evidence; of building magic into the belief systems of those who inhabited these spaces before us; and of building magic into our engagements with our homes and the other structures we frequent. Magic has been built around the markings on our walls, the shoes up our chimneybreasts, the horse skulls under our hearthstones. This is a magic that may not have existed in the past, but it does now. What this book has ultimately revealed, therefore, is an ongoing story of the reinvention and re-enchantment of the material past.

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