

# *TOUCHING MAGIC*

DELIBERATELY CONCEALED OBJECTS  
IN OLD AUSTRALIAN HOUSES  
AND BUILDINGS

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this Thesis is the result of original research, the greater part of which was completed subsequent to admission for the degree.

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*Date:* 2 December 2010

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**IMAGES**

Where archival and other images have been included these are identified in the captions by the name of the contributor or photographer or in the following manner: BM British Museum, London; BA British Archaeology magazine; CoSA City of Sydney Archives, Sydney; CM Cuming Museum, London; FLS Folklore Society, London; GWMM Goulburn War Memorial and Museum, Goulburn, NSW; GF Greenwich Foundation for the Old Royal Naval College, London; HCCMAS Hampshire County Council Museums & Archive Service, Winchester; HHT Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Sydney; HRP Historic Royal Palaces, London; ML Mitchell Library, Sydney; MV Museum Victoria, Melbourne; NL National Library of Australia, Canberra; NMG Northampton Museums and Gallery, Northampton; NMS National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh; NMW National Museum of Wales, Cardiff; NPG National Portrait Gallery, London; PRM Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; RCAHMS Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Edinburgh; SoA Society of Antiquaries, London; SLNSW State Library of NSW, Sydney; SLR State Library of Victoria, Melbourne; SR State Records, Kingswood, NSW; V & A Victoria and Albert Museum, London; WHM Wiltshire Heritage Museum, Devizes; WL Wellcome Library, London. Images supplied by private individuals or from regional collections are credited by name. Uncredited images are by Ian Evans.

## ABSTRACT

The objective of the research that resulted in this thesis was to establish whether the practice of concealing objects in sealed voids in old houses and other buildings, widely known in the United Kingdom for many centuries, also occurred in Australia. The supplementary tasks were to establish how widespread it was, the period in which it occurred, and whether the practice displayed the same characteristics as in the United Kingdom. These objectives necessitated the discovery, photography and recording of as many concealed objects as could be located. Distinguishing qualifying objects from random losses or strays was based upon personal experience in the field together with information derived from research in the UK and discussions with colleagues in this area of research in that country. Following on from that, my intention was to place this custom within the framework of folk magic rituals carried out in England until the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. By confirming that folk magic was intricately woven into the lives of the English people a high probability that such practices were brought to Australia by convicts and settlers became evident. This research required an unusual methodology in that the virtually complete absence of any contemporary documentation, an absence of record that is recognised by UK researchers, suggested that a similar void might exist in Australian archives and libraries. My own prior extensive research into Australian domestic architecture had already failed to identify any references to such practices in this country in the literature relating to architecture, social history or the building trades in both Australia and England.

The focus of the research project therefore was to find as many concealed objects in Australian structures as possible and to examine and record these finds in an effort to understand the practice from a scrutiny of the objects and the place and manner of their concealment. The discovery phase was implemented by means of media releases, radio and television interviews, published articles in mainstream and heritage media and by lectures to specialist groups, particularly archaeologists. The result of this work, extending over a period of more than six years and which included travel to Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and within New South Wales, resulted in the accumulation of a significant number of finds of deliberately concealed objects. These have been recorded in a National Catalogue of Finds on which this thesis is based.

It was confirmed that objects, which in the context of this research include

boots and shoes, garments, cats and a variety of domestic artifacts and children's toys, were concealed in Australian houses and buildings, that they were both numerous and extremely widely distributed, that the types of objects and their placements were the same as those found in the United Kingdom and elsewhere and in consequence that a folk magic custom long established in the United Kingdom was practiced in this country, raising the possibility of an ancient lineage for a practice that was previously unknown in Australia. Further research is recommended in an effort to extend the scope of this one-man study. It is considered that this research will produce new insights into the lives of Australians in the period 1788 – 1930s.

## INTRODUCTION

The text that follows describes research that set out to identify and attempt to understand finds of deliberately concealed objects within houses and other buildings throughout Australia. This research has entailed visits to as many of the sites where concealed objects were discovered as could reasonably be achieved. The purpose of these visits was to check the circumstances of the concealments and to record and photograph both buildings and objects. While documentation associated with concealments was absent in every case, the objects themselves, though mute and mundane, conveyed information from which patterns associated with this practice were eventually determined. After hearing about the practice during a visit to England in 2002 I determined to establish whether it had travelled to Australia. I knew from my previous work on Australian architectural history that this practice was not known here. But after discovering in England that concealments were being made in that country throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became apparent that there was good reason to look for the custom in Australia. No-one, it seemed, had undertaken any research into the matter here. I was eventually able to locate and record more than a hundred sites throughout Australia where shoes, garments, cats and other objects had been placed in inaccessible locations within a variety of buildings. Travel within New South Wales was, for a period of two years, financed by a grant from the NSW Heritage Office. Travel to Tasmania and Queensland was self-funded before I began this thesis. A trip to Adelaide to give a lecture on this work was funded by Flinders University and provided the opportunity to visit a number of sites in Adelaide and environs and to photograph the objects found.

After locating sufficient finds to confirm that the custom had been well established in Australia I looked for published accounts and descriptions of the practice. While there were numerous journal articles in the United Kingdom there were no academic dissertations to which I could refer. The major reference book was Ralph Merrifield's *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, published in London in 1987. Merrifield drew a connection between concealments and fear of evil spiritual forces from the world beyond our own physical environment. Concealed objects, he believed, were charms designed to protect buildings and their occupants. Merrifield, in using the word "charms," sets this practice firmly within the realm of magic. But if it was indeed magic, who practised it? Where and when did it originate? Who initiated the practice? Who or what were the evil forces that directed harmful influences against ordinary people? Any attempt to provide answers to these questions was clearly going to produce significant challenges and perhaps

to defy complete resolution. But glimpses of possible answers to at least some of these questions are now apparent. I believe that the text that follows and the Catalogue of Finds will provide answers as well as raise further questions.

Much of the body of the text deals with the cultural *milieu* from which the greater number of Australia's convicts and immigrants were derived. The intention is to demonstrate that folk magical practices were part of the web of life in their places of origin, creating a mindset that was tuned to magic and the underworld, and that some of these beliefs and practices were transferred to Australia as a result of the convict system and of emigration from Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I have focussed on England in this study because it was from there that the largest group of emigrants came to Australia. The 1891 census of the population of the colonies of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia shows that 49.36% of the overseas-born in those colonies came from England and Wales. Those of Irish origin totalled 21.2%, the Scots 11.9% with the remaining 17.56% from elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 RITUAL ARMOUR

Professor Owen Davies of the University of Hertfordshire recently compiled a list of some of the protective rituals and devices used in England and Wales in the post-mediaeval period:

- Certain marks scratched on stone, plaster and timber in old buildings, or images marked on plaster using candle smoke. These marks will be described or illustrated later in this text.
- Witch bottles containing urine and sharp objects, used to counteract bewitchment.
- Pierced and baked hearts to ward off witchcraft and evil.
- Celestial letters. They circulated in print and manuscript and were used to protect against witchcraft and misfortune during childbirth.
- Written charms. Produced and sold by village and urban folk magic practitioners known as cunning-folk, they are fascinating examples of the interaction of print, manuscript and oral cultures.
- Harmful image magic. Dolls and effigies carved in wood and wax, usually pierced with nails or pins.
- Curses written on paper, or on slates and deposited in wells - a tradition strong in Wales.
- Concealed shoes, garments, bones, hair, animals and personal objects. These were secreted in wall cavities, under hearths and in roof timbers to protect the home.
- Healing objects. These include a wide range of items. Prehistoric beads, axes and arrowheads were valued for their healing powers. Other items include holed stones and cauls.<sup>2</sup>

It would be unreasonable to believe that practices such as these, assuming for the moment that at least some of them survived into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would simply disappear once convicts or settlers had arrived in Australia. Researching the survival or disappearance in Australia of the entire body of such practices is beyond the scope of this thesis: I have set out here to demonstrate that magic was a vital part of life among many English people before they came to Australia and that at least one such magical practice survived in this country in secret until at least the mid-1930s.

The English language is littered with evidence that the belief in the power of evil spiritual forces exerted a powerful influence on the minds of people in the comparatively recent past. Still in everyday use in English are words such as “nightmare,” “charm,” “charming,” “spell” and “magic” itself. These words have been stripped of the fear and power that they once embodied and have become innocent terms whose original meaning is rarely considered by those who use them today. We use these words lightly, but do not experience the feelings of dread that they once imparted. While dictionaries are not usually cited for scholarly work they provide a useful source for interpreting and dating words that have now lost almost all of their original power. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* provides dates for the first published reference to a great many words relating to evil spiritual beings and their activities. By telling us when such words came into the language it provides a marker to those periods when fear of supernatural forces was part of everyday life. From the *Dictionary’s* third edition (1968) here are some of the more common words with their original meanings and the dates of their first published appearance in English:

Bewitched	A person or animal under the power or spell of a witch. 1526.
Charm	The chanting of a verse having magic power. An incantation, magic spell or a talisman or amulet. The origins are thought to be the Middle English <i>charme</i> , from Old French, and from the Latin <i>carmen</i> meaning a song or incantation. 1564.
Charmed	A person or animal under the spell of a witch or evil being.
Charmer	A person who uses magic powers; an enchanter or enchantress. 1676.
Charming	The act of creating or imposing a spell; exercising the power of magic. 1720.
Magic	The art of producing effects claimed to be beyond natural human power and arrived at by means of supernatural agencies or through command of occult forces in nature. 1697.

Magician	A person skilled in magic; a necromancer, wizard or conjuror. Date unknown.
Nightmare	A female incubus, spirit or goblin that settled upon a person during sleep and induced a feeling of suffocation. 1562.
Overlooked	A person, animal or foodstuff harmed by the malignant power of the evil eye. 1596.
Spell	A set of words, formula or verse, supposed to possess occult or magical powers; a charm or incantation; an occult or mysterious power or influence. 1592.
Spellbound	Enchanted, entranced or trapped by a spell. 1799.

The social climate in which words such as these were in common use was described by John Webster, “practitioner in physick,” in 1677. “The common people,” he wrote: “..... are all generally enchanted and bewitched with the strange things related of Devils, Apparitions, Fayries, Hobgoblins, Ghosts, Spirits and the like.”<sup>3</sup> With the passage of centuries and a loss of belief in the power of witchcraft and of evil emanating from the spiritual world these words have gradually undergone a transformation in meaning. While they are all still in use they have been almost entirely shorn of their original supernatural connotations. Rendered harmless, they serve new purposes in the third millennium.

This is not the place to delve deeply into the vast subject of witchcraft other than to mention that the fear of witches, witchcraft and malign spiritual beings retained some of its force in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain and that the influence of these beliefs continued to be felt throughout the British Isles into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Recycled accounts of ancient beliefs were promoted by authors of populist books and helped to fuel continuing fears and village antagonisms. Among these was a description of a witch, published in 1823 in W. Grant Stewart’s *Popular Superstitions &c. of the Highlanders of Scotland*:

The face is so wrinkled that it commonly resembles the channels of dried waters and the colours of it resembles nothing so much as a piece of leather  
The eyes are small and piercing, sunk into the forehead, like the expiring remains of a candle sunk into the socket.....<sup>5</sup>

Elderly widows lacking the protection of a husband and family were largely socially defenceless against accusations of witchcraft. Ill-health, painful joints, loneliness and depression were very likely to reinforce their alienation from the communities in which they lived. The unknown author of a pamphlet entitled *The Old Witches*, published in 1853, scoffed at beliefs that appeared to pose a continued threat to elderly women in English villages at the time:



*Anne Baker, Ione Willimot and Ellen Greene, the Leicestershire “witches” with their “familiar.” These women were executed at Lincoln in 1618 and 1619. From Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcraft of Margaret and Philip Flower.*

An old woman with a wrinkled face, a furred brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue, having a ragged coat on her back, a spindle in her hand, and a dog by her side – a wretched, infirm, and impotent creature, pelted and pursued by all the neighbourhood, because the farmer’s cart had struck the gateway, or some idle boy had pretended to spit pins for the sake of a holiday from school or work.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

In discussing the European experience in the Australian colonies we need to consider the emotional implications involved in the transition from a life in Britain with long-established family and societal networks to an alien and exotic world on the other side of the planet. By any standards, this must have been an unsettling, disturbing and depressing experience – even for those who had made the decision to emigrate rather than having it made for them. For the convicts in particular, transportation was a terrible experience. They were torn from their homes, families and familiar environment and sent to the far side of the earth. There was to be no return and little prospect of ever seeing either home or their loved ones again. Emigrants would have found the experience almost as traumatic. The deeply unfamiliar landscape, creatures and indigenous people had an impact upon these new Australians, as they experienced for the first time the unearthly sounds of the Australian bush, the grunting of koalas, the howling of dingoes and the shrieks of Antipodean bats. A world away from family, friends and familiar surroundings, emigrants and convicts alike experienced profoundly unsettling phenomena: the seasons turned around, the sun rising and setting in different places and unfamiliar stars in the night sky. In this alien, exotic and sometimes frightening place they may have sought comfort in familiar rituals from home.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century the fear of death was part of everyday life. This was a time when you could expect several of your numerous children to die before they reached puberty, and a time when appendicitis or a cut that became infected could result in death. By the 1890s and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century you could die of the plague in Sydney and in other port cities around Australia.<sup>7</sup> The uncertainties of life in Australia spilled over into fear for family members left behind in the old country. When written news from home was not available, the Irish emigrant Martin Normile, a settler at Lochinvar in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales, relied on his dreams and those of his wife to inform them of the health of family members back on “the old Shammerick Shore.” In February 1863 his dreams had acquired a dark edge and he wrote home to ask if all was well: “My wife has been dreaming of her people also so we were thinking there might be something wrong with ye.”<sup>8</sup> The vast and unbridgeable distances that separated emigrants from family members “at home” created a need that could not be assuaged by mere reason or the consolations of everyday life. In an age before the advancement of science and the discrediting of magic, powerless people turned to rituals to assuage their fears. In *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1991) Keith Thomas explained why magic helped people at the time Martin Normile was fretting about his family in Ireland:

It lessens anxiety, relieves pent-up frustration, and makes the practitioner feel that he is doing something positive towards the solution of his problem. By its agency he is transformed from a helpless bystander into an active agent.<sup>9</sup>

Hans Dieter Betz described magic as:

... the art that makes people who practice it feel better rather than worse, that provides the illusion of security to the insecure, the feeling of help to the helpless, and the comfort of hope to the hopeless.<sup>10</sup>

Richard Godbeer found that, having survived the journey across the Atlantic, magic served 17<sup>th</sup>-century settlers in colonial New England in many ways:

New Englanders used magic to surmount the barriers of time and space, to look into the future and across vast distances. Magic also enabled them to harness the world and adapt it to their own ends. Through magic, men and women overcame their natural limitations: it made the world a more immediate and accessible place, giving new powers of perception and action to those who mastered its possibilities.<sup>11</sup>

It is appropriate at this point to define some of the terms that will be used throughout this thesis. Magic and several other words associated with it have already been discussed but there are other terms that require explanation. These include ritual, spiritual midden

and apotropaic. Ritual is defined in the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, 1965, as pertaining to or connected with rites, these being formal procedures or acts in a religious or other solemn observance, or a custom or practice of a formal kind. The term spiritual midden has to be split into its component parts, spiritual and midden in order to arrive at a clear definition of its meaning. Spiritual has many meanings but in this context the one that is most pertinent is in relation to a connection with spirits or supernatural beings. A midden is a mound or deposit of domestic refuse, commonly dating from the past. Thus a spiritual midden can be seen as a cache of domestic artefacts from a previous era which have the power to influence beings from beyond the world inhabited by humans. Apotropaic comes from the Greek *apotropaios* which means to turn away. In its present useage it refers to the use of magic and amulets or symbols to ward off evil or ill fortune.

In considering why people would turn to folk magic it is useful to understand just how different everyday life was in the Australian colonies during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the first half of the century the street and the neighbourhood of the town or city in which people resided constituted the practical world of themselves and their family. Relatives in England faded from their lives as a result of the difficulty and delay in communicating. Those who could read and write could keep in touch with letters but the mail was very slow and often uncertain. The illiterate could pay a scrivener or prevail upon a friend to put their news on paper. For a great many people, however, the voyage to Australia terminated ready contact with parents, siblings, and in some cases, with wives and children. To those “at home” the emigrants had passed into a world beyond understanding and beyond reach. Folk magic gave emigrants and exiles a sense of control at a time when their grip on this world seemed fragile indeed. By attempting to reach into the other world they sought to influence, to regulate and to some degree to control the place in which they found themselves.

It is necessary to approach the issue of precisely how to identify the concealment of objects in buildings. “Ritual” is the term generally accepted and used by academic researchers in this field in the United Kingdom, even though there has not been an academic study of the practice there. Turning to the profession of archaeology for guidance on the use of this term in the context under study might be considered a logical step to take if it were not for the fact that some prominent members of this discipline are still rigidly adhering to formal definitions from previous eras. *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* by the eminent archaeologists Paul Bahn and Colin Renfrew, now in its fifth edition and widely used to train students in archaeology, defines ritual as something that meets the following criteria:

#### **Focusing of attention**

1. Ritual may take place in a spot with special, natural associations (cave, grove of trees, spring, mountaintop)

2. Alternatively, ritual may take place in a special building set apart for sacred functions
3. The structure and equipment used for the ritual may employ attention-focusing devices, reflected in the architecture, special fixtures.....and in the movable equipment ....
4. The sacred area is likely to be rich in repeated symbols .....

#### **Boundary zone between this world and the next**

5. Ritual may involve both conspicuous public display and expenditure, and hidden exclusive mysteries, whose practice will be reflected in the architecture
6. Concepts of cleanliness and pollution may be reflected in the facilities .... and maintenance of the sacred area

#### **Presence of the deity**

7. The association with a deity or deities may be reflected in the use of a cult image ...
8. The ritualistic symbols will often relate iconographically to the deities worshipped and to their associated myth. Animal symbolism ... may often be used ...
9. The ritualistic symbols may relate to those seen also in ... rites of passage

#### **Participation and offering**

10. Worship will involve prayer and special movements ... and these may be reflected in the .... iconography of decorations or images
11. The ritual may employ various devices for inducing religious experience (e.g., dance, music, drugs, the infliction of pain)
12. The sacrifice of animals or humans may be practiced
13. Food and drink may be brought and possibly consumed as offerings or burned/poured away
14. Other material objects may be brought and offered ...
15. Great investment of wealth may be reflected both in the equipment used and in the offerings made
16. Great investment of wealth and resources may be reflected in the structure itself and its facilities.<sup>12</sup>

These criteria make no concession whatever to the possibility of humble household rituals and appear to have been wholly framed within the context of classical archaeology. With a new generation of archaeologists being trained by *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* – a book that has become required reading at universities in a number of countries – it appears that it will be some time before the profession recognises the role that folk magic rituals played in the lives of people until the comparatively recent past.

An alternative view to that offered by Bahn and Renfrew is promulgated by Amy Gazin-Schwartz, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Assumption College, Massachusetts, who concludes that ritual was often part of everyday life. These polarised points of view on ritual summarise the dichotomy of approaches to finds made during archaeological investigation, whether on ancient sites or those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At one end of the scale are those who recognize the models posed by Renfrew and Bahn; the other is occupied by researchers who can see the potential for a duality of use in everyday objects. For the latter group, an understanding of folklore provides the cultural equipment to see meanings that would otherwise remain undiscovered. Integrating material culture with ritual, the practical and the spiritual, provides new ways to understand the past. Gazin-Schwartz suggests that everyday objects:

... can be included as ritual items, however, because their practical use required that they be used in a consistent, prescribed manner and that the practitioner call upon other nonphysical aspects of the item, or powers associated with it, to achieve the healing or protection. In the context of daily, household, and subsistence activities, everyday items were invested with meaning that was not simply utilitarian or functional, but that expanded into the spiritual world.<sup>13</sup>

The concealment of objects in sealed voids, a practice carried out in secrecy and with considerable care taken with respect to the placement of particular objects in particular places, was undertaken by a great many people in widely separated locations in the United Kingdom and throughout the Australian colonies. The careful observance of this customary practice over a very long period of time in the United Kingdom, and for a lesser but still lengthy period in Australia, suggests both enduring and powerful motivation. The term “ritual” is thus considered an appropriate appellation.

The subject of this thesis is a ritual practiced by convicts, settlers and immigrants of European origin. The emphasis is thus on Australian colonial history. While the Aboriginal people of Australia had a rich culture in which magic played an important role, this complex history has not been examined as part of this research.

### **1.3 HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Analyses of the measures taken to protect houses from spiritual attack have been limited in comparison with the research and writing that deals with building technology, technique, materials, finishes and history. A large body of works on the history of houses and other buildings and their architecture exists and the number increases every year.

Furniture, furnishings and the decorative arts have been described and illustrated at length. We also know a great deal about the manner in which people lived in and used their houses. But an apparent refusal to draw an association between the fear of evil spiritual forces and the effects that this fear might have had upon the occupants of houses, and on the buildings themselves, has been evident for some time. Recognition of the fact that objects with a perceived role in protecting houses and their occupants were being found in many old buildings dawned slowly in Britain where Ralph Merrifield first drew attention to this domestic ritual with *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (1987). Merrifield's work was essentially an interrogation of practices that left traces in the archaeological record. More recently, in *Conversing by Signs* (1998), the American folklorist Robert Blair St George promoted the theory of the embodied house in which buildings represented the bodies of their owners. Different parts of the structure were taken to stand in for the flesh and bones of the people who lived in them. Windows were eyes, structural timbers the ribs and the fireplace hearth represented the heart. The house, according to St George, thus required the same degree of protection as the bodies of its occupants. The basis of this theory appears to be Robert Underwood's *New Anatomie* (1605). Underwood's work, a versified allegory of human physiology, also compared "the Body of Man" to a city – a fact which is apparently irrelevant to St George's need to make a point about houses. Underwood's curious and less than influential text is a dubious foundation for a theory on reasons for protecting houses from spiritual attack. Whether or not the concept of the embodied house actually existed in the minds of those who concealed shoes, garments, cats and domestic artefacts within the structure of their houses remains uncertain but there is tangible evidence of the fear that unpleasant spiritual forces aroused. St George records that the Puritans of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century New England used objects hidden in cellars or chimneys while houses were being constructed: "Shoes were concealed behind walls, above windows, under floors, in roofs, and in chimney stacks."<sup>14</sup>

The question of the source of the fear, itself evident in the rich harvest of concealed objects retrieved from buildings in Australia, North America, the UK and Continental Europe, has not been confronted until comparatively recently. It was only when a small group of historians, most notably Owen Davies in the UK, re-examined the issue of the survival of witchcraft beliefs into the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, that some conclusions could be reached. Keith Thomas's monumental work *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1991) had seemed to be the last word on the subject, effectively deleting witchcraft from the discourse on modern history. But Davies, using newspaper accounts of provincial court cases in England, confirmed the survival into the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries of the belief in witches and witchcraft and of the network of cunning men and women, conjurers, wizards and astrologers, who had been part of British life for many centuries. Enlightenment and social progress, it appeared, was not quite as universal as many people had believed. It became clear that deep pockets of ancient belief had survived until at least the early 20<sup>th</sup>

century. A preliminary excursion into the field of the material culture of folk magic and witchcraft in Britain was made by the independent researcher Brian Hoggard who, from his base in Worcester, sent questionnaires to 661 museums throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England alone, 47% of the museums that responded reported objects of interest to the survey.<sup>15</sup>

As research intensified, some long-standing conclusions and assumptions came under question. Principal among these was the belief that the rich culture of folklore, folk magic and witchcraft of Britain had failed to make the journey to Australia with convicts and settlers who arrived here in the period 1788 - 1935. This assumption is now under serious challenge. As Davies has said:

It is hard to believe that witchcraft accusations did not occur in the new continent and that magical practices, which were widespread in early nineteenth century urban and rural Britain, suddenly became redundant.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, evidence of these beliefs and practices is hard to find in Australia. Maureen Perkins, in *Visions of the Future: Almanacs, Time and Cultural Change* (1996) and *The Reform of Time* (2001), used 19<sup>th</sup> century almanacs to obtain a glimpse of the culture in which folk magic survived after being transplanted to the Antipodes. By examining the content of almanacs she was able to call “into question the image of a society completely absorbed in material concerns.”<sup>17</sup> Perkins conducted a meticulous examination of the entire surviving body of Australian almanacs and in so doing established that these mirrored the content of English almanacs. Almanacs blended the factual and the pragmatic, including the day and date and agricultural and horticultural advice with folklore relating to the weather, planetary influences on human life and astrological predictions. The first Australian almanac was *The New South Wales Pocket Almanac and Colonial Remembrancer*, published in Sydney by George Howe in 1806. Many others followed and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century almanacs were published widely throughout Australia. Perkins concluded that: “they met a demand for the marvelous, the unusual and the supernatural.”<sup>18</sup> The widespread distribution of almanacs in Australia and their evident success testifies to the existence of a culture that subscribed to belief systems in which astrology, folklore and the supernatural played a significant part. Tangible evidence of the belief systems hinted at by the almanacs has now been revealed by the discovery of a large number of examples of the material culture of folk magic in caches throughout Australia (see the Catalogue of Finds: pages 224 – 414). The concealment of these objects in sealed voids in houses and other buildings tells part of the story of the transplantation into Australian society of ancient fears and the folk magic practices and beliefs that were used to counter evil spiritual forces. Other evidence is likely to be found if social and architectural historians and archaeologists are prepared to look for it. The Catalogue is thought to be the first in

the world to provide a comprehensive national inventory that combines the evidence of folk magic practices involving the concealment of shoes, garments, cats and domestic artefacts in buildings.

It might be thought that the practice of folk magic and the practice of religion would be mutually contradictory but the evidence is that practitioners of folk magic, and indeed much of the population, saw no conflict in this. James Obelkevich in *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825 – 1875* (1976) recorded that in this part of Lancashire:

Villagers might attend both church and chapel, but their religious realm extended beyond the churches, and indeed beyond Christianity, to encompass an abundance of pagan magic and superstition.<sup>19</sup>

Obelkevich argued that the distinction between magic and religion had been blurred so that a case existed for an inclusive rather than an exclusive definition of religion.<sup>20</sup> Concealments of a variety of objects in Australian churches and associated buildings (two Catholic Churches and a Cathedral, an Anglican rectory, and a Primitive Methodist Church), plus the home of an active member of Sydney's Roman Catholic laity, provide support for this argument. Details are in the Catalogue of Finds, pages 227, 243, 394, 286, 341 and 375.

Faced with an absence of documentary material to explain questions associated with concealments, researchers are forced to draw conclusions from the evidence that is available. Tentative at this stage, such conclusions may be tested and either confirmed or found lacking at a later date. In discussing the fading power of witchcraft in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Lancashire, Obelkevich provided us with a theory that may fit the latter stages of the concealment ritual in Australia. He observed that dairymaids who had once believed that the evil eye of a particular witch prevented the butter from forming, at a later time attributed this failure to the abstraction "witchcraft." Obelkevich observed that:

...this was witchcraft without witches. A further stage was reached when dairymaids, still placing their remedial sprigs of wicken over the churn, no longer knew why they did so; they no longer knew about witches or witchcraft. It was a ritual without a myth, degenerating into mere luck.<sup>21</sup>

David Vincent's *Literacy and Popular Culture* (1989) revealed some of the factors that contributed to the slow fading away of witchcraft beliefs during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among these were the growth of mass literacy in Britain, the steady dissemination of knowledge resulting from the greater availability of education and the rise of the postal system which made newspapers more widely available. Despite this trend, memories of ancient cus-

toms remained durable and were extensively documented in Bob Bush's *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700 – 1880* (1982). The rich pattern of traditional culture and belief was examined by Bush in a book which remains the definitive work on the subject. The background to life, work and cultural activity in England in much the same period is meticulously described in John Rule's *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England 1750 – 1850* (1986).

The role of folk magic appears to have continued until quite recently in communities that were outside of the mainstream of national life in Britain. David Clark's *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (1982) records a range of practices and events which elsewhere has faded into history. The village of Staithes, an isolated and insular community, was studied by Clark who lived there for a time in the mid-1970s. He recorded that the villagers made no distinction between practices which appeared to be of pagan origin and those that emanated from the religion of their church: "The individual is merely born into a social setting in which a rich variety of religious beliefs and practices are in existence, both inside and outside the church."<sup>22</sup>

To return to the matter of the Puritan settlers in New England, Richard Godbeer's *Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (1992) examines cultural systems and magical practices within a group of people whose beliefs and customs had accompanied them from Britain, seemingly without significant alteration. While these people had left Britain a century and more before Australia received its first European settlers, the successful transplantation of English and Scottish witchcraft and magic into America provides an indication of the likelihood of the replication of this process in the Australian colonies in the period from 1788 onwards.

## ONE: METHODOLOGY

### ABSTRACT

This research depended on the active assistance and cooperation of members of the public, including homeowners and builders, and professionals such as archaeologists and architects. I set out to contact these people by using mainstream media and periodicals targeted to the owners of old houses and other buildings. The intention was to locate and identify concealments if indeed these existed in Australia. Opportunities to give lectures to community groups and to archaeologists were also sought. I had first to understand the history of the practice of concealments in the UK which I visited on two occasions during the course of research.

### 1.1 PRELUDE

During a visit to England in August 2002 I met colleagues who aroused my interest in unusual finds in buildings of the United Kingdom. Before leaving Australia I had arranged to meet Richard Bond, an architectural illustrator with English Heritage, in London. I had made contact with him via the British Archaeology email mailing list (BritArch) and had discussed an idea for a book on UK house styles and periods. Richard took me to *Sutton House* at Hackney where I saw marks carved into the lintel of a fireplace. Later, Richard gave me a photocopy of an article by Timothy Easton – an independent architectural historian and artist who had first described and offered a theory on the reason for the marks found on so many English houses of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. I later contacted Easton and went to stay at his house, *Bedfield Hall*, in Suffolk. He showed me a number of old houses and buildings in Suffolk and I saw what he termed apotropaic marks on many buildings. The word is from the Greek *apotropaios*, a term applied to Apollo who was said to protect the young and avert evil. I also saw marks on the ceilings of a 17<sup>th</sup> century house that had been “written” with smoke from a candle. These appear to be alternative versions of the marks inscribed on fireplace lintels and window and door reveals. At Easton’s house I saw shoes that had been found in the voids



*Timothy Easton  
Bedfield Hall 2002*



*One of numerous  
apotropaic marks on  
the original kitchen  
ceiling, Bedfield Hall,  
Suffolk, 1620.*

adjacent to the flue of the chimney that served both the kitchen and breakfast room of the building. These he considered to have been deliberately placed to decoy evil spirits who might enter the house via the chimney. The painted plaster ceiling of the original kitchen (now the breakfast room) at *Bedfield Hall* had been inscribed with numerous identical marks which were distributed across the surface. These consisted of a circle containing patterns resembling the petals of a flower. Easton believed their purpose was to protect the food served to members of the family of Thomas Dunstan who lived there from 1620.

I arranged for Bond to meet Easton in London and we had lunch in a café near the English Heritage office in Savile Row on 4 September 2002. It was at this meeting that I learned that shoes were still being hidden in houses and other buildings in Britain throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I immediately began to suspect that the practice might have been carried to Australia with convicts and settlers during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. I had been aware of the many concealed shoes found in the UK before I arrived in England but had thought the practice had died out before European settlement began in Australia. During my 2002 visit to England and on later visits in 2004 and 2006 I met Brian Hoggard, the folk magic researcher, in Worcester, Dr. Owen Davies of the University of Hertfordshire who has written extensively on British witchcraft and magic, and June Swann, former curator of the boot and shoe collection at Northampton Museums and the person who first began to systematically compile an inventory of concealed shoes in buildings. In the year after my return home in late 2002 I remained intrigued and alert to the possibility of finding either apotropaic marks or concealed shoes in Australian buildings but it was not until early 2004 that I found the opportunity to begin serious research in Australia. On 24 February I posted a brief message on the NSW Heritage Office email network for heritage advisors, tentatively seeking information on unusual finds in buildings. I asked:

Have any of you found or heard of artifacts or animals such as cats built into the fabric of old houses or buildings? Artifacts might include old shoes or items of clothing, perhaps inserted into cavities in a chimney stack. Objects of this type are often found in old buildings in the UK and served to protect houses and other buildings from evil. I suspect that they were also used here but have a feeling that no-one has looked for them.

I received two good leads within a few days: Ray Stevens of Oikos Architects, Balmain, reported the discovery of a very old shoe and part of a lace collar in a circa 1830 house in Dawes Point, Sydney (page 243), and the architect Christo Aitken of Bathurst described a tradesman's boot found in the chimney breast of *Burrundulla*, a well-known 1860's house at Mudgee, NSW (page 271). Shortly afterwards, when my message had been circulated on the Victorian heritage office email network, Wendy Jacobs of Ballarat reported the find of a concealed cat, made some years before, by workmen renovating *Her Majesty's Theatre*, Ballarat (page 339). When, sometime in March, one of the organisers

of the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales's *Out of the Woodwork* Festival rang to ask if I could give a lecture at their 2004 event I had a subject that seemed perfectly suited for the occasion. My lecture, entitled *Bewitched: Ritual, Magic and Witchcraft in Old Australian Houses and Buildings*, was delivered twice: on Saturday 1 May and Sunday 2 May, 2004, at the visitor centre on the Trust's *Rouse Hill* Estate, Rouse Hill, on the western outskirts of Sydney. This was the first time the information I had so far gathered was made public. It was also the first of many lectures that I was to give in the following five years. The information available to me at that time was slight but I felt confident that there were many more concealed objects to be found. I also felt that obtaining publicity provided the only way forward with this research. The Rouse Hill lectures attracted a great deal of media interest and many radio interviews took place as a result. These often produced new finds. But the greatest response came with the telecast at 9.30 pm on 17 October 2004 of an episode of the ABC-TV history programme, *Rewind*, which told the story of my research into deliberately concealed objects. Numerous reports of finds came from widely dispersed areas of Australia. After that, there could no longer be any doubt that the custom had been widespread in the Australian colonies.

## 1.2 STEPS TOWARDS AWARENESS

In previous projects directed at gathering information for my books on building conservation and Australian architectural history much of the research work had been carried out in libraries and archives. Documentary evidence was readily obtainable there. Both primary and secondary sources were consulted. The books and other sources used by Australian and British architects and builders during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were of particular use. A full list of these, consisting of more than 250 books, manuscripts, catalogues and pamphlets, is contained in the bibliographies of my books: *Restoring Old Houses* (Macmillan 1979), *The Australian Home* (Flannel Flower Press 1981), *The Federation House – A Restoration Guide* (Flannel Flower Press 1986), *Caring for Old Houses* (Flannel Flower Press 1988) and *The Queensland House – History and Conservation* (Flannel Flower Press 2001). These works included guides and catalogues on every variety of building materials and fixtures as well as more recent books on the social and cultural interpretation of historic buildings. I studied brickmaking, bricklaying, stonemasonry, plastering, joinery, carpentry, roofing, ceramic tiles for floors, walls and hearths, terracotta tiles for roofing, cast iron for practical and decorative purposes, lights and lighting and a considerable variety of techniques related to their use. I endeavoured to know something about everything that was associated with the construction of houses, from the design of chimneys to the system of bells used to summon servants to the various rooms. To understand interiors I investigated painting and decorating, the design and manufacture of wallpaper, stencils and stencilling, staining and graining of timber, and

design and construction of imported and colonial furniture, the placement of furniture within the rooms, fabrics, curtains, utensils and ornaments. I made an autodidactic journey through an area of study that traversed the disciplines of history, architecture and the decorative and fine arts in Britain and Australia in the period from 1788 to the 1950s. Extensive bibliographies relating to this area of research, and which list several hundred books, periodicals and manuscript material, can be found in *Furnishing Old Houses* (Macmillan 1983), *Colour Schemes for Old Australian Houses* (Flannel Flower Press 1984) and *More Colour Schemes for Old Australian Houses* (Flannel Flower Press 1992). Both of the latter were written in collaboration with Clive Lucas and Ian Stapleton.

To better understand wallpaper of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries I read the published literature, examined the Margaret Monk collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century wallpaper sample books in Melbourne and inspected surviving original wallpapers *in situ* on the walls of old houses. Theory, while essential to understanding, was not enough. Writing about buildings required site visits and in the course of many such inspections in various areas of Australia I became aware that history is also written in stone, brick, timber, earth and a host of other materials: paper, paint, ceramics, metal and glass. These materials, transformed by industrial processes and by the hands of tradesmen and craft workers and put into position as a result of artistic and creative impulses, became shelters for generation after generation of Australians. I learned to look for the truth beyond the document. Carefully scraping away later accretions of paint and wallpaper from the walls of old houses, I travelled back through time to see original finishes and decorative effects. It could be said that all of this work was a preparation, in a process of which I was not then aware, for discovering a story hidden within the very fabric of the buildings that had such a fascination for me. At the right time, all of this preparation reached the point where the flash of understanding occurred. It happened at that café in Savile Row, London, on 4 September 2002.

### 1.3 DISCOVERY

I was to learn that finds of concealed objects had been made throughout Australia for many years. The earliest recorded find of which I am aware was made in Brisbane in 1913.<sup>1</sup> The cut-off date for this practice is difficult to establish, but the remnants of a young person's boot, found within the base of the south-east pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, suggest it continued until at least the 1920s (page 277).<sup>2</sup> A woman's shoe of the early-mid 1930s, concealed in a chimney in the Newcastle suburb of Stockton (page 275), takes the story a little further forward in time.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of any understanding of their purpose, it appears that the vast majority of such finds were rationalised, disregarded or discarded. If, for example, a tradesman involved in renovating a house found an old shoe while demolishing a chimney and had no knowledge of similar finds made by colleagues

elsewhere or the reason for its presence in the building there was a high probability of the shoe being tossed onto the site's rubbish pile. Finds of this type extending back over many years are now being described by men involved in several of the building trades. Damian McMahon, an electrician from Wentworth Falls, NSW, emailed me on 4 August 2009 to report his own experiences while working in Sydney: "Over the years I have found many old shoes in chimneys and under floors."

A number of the recent finds has been made by tradesmen as news of their significance spreads throughout the wider community. Arthur Rudman, a specialist painter and decorator, was involved in finds of concealed shoes at *St Augustine's Catholic Church* at Balmain and the *Church of the Sacred Heart*, Temora, NSW, both of which are recorded in the Catalogue of Finds (pages 227 and 286). Other finds by tradesmen are listed in the Catalogue, including those of the skulls of two cows and a child's shoe at Triangle Flat (page 289) and shoes at Bathurst (page 229), Camperdown (page 236) and Mudgee (page 279) in NSW, as well as at Beulah Park, South Australia (page 363), and Lindisfarne, Tasmania (page 325). The earliest recorded find by tradesmen of which I am aware occurred at the old *Commissariat* building, Brisbane, in 1913, as previously referred to and as recorded in the Catalogue (page 401). This discovery was made by Queensland Works Department employees and because the significance of the *Commissariat* as the State's oldest surviving building was well understood the work appears to have been carefully supervised. A photograph taken of Works Department staff standing on the old upper level of the *Commissariat* after the roof had been removed underlines the importance of the building. When what was believed by Works Department supervisors to be a remnant of the convict period was found during the work it was swiftly passed on to the Queensland Museum. (See the Catalogue for more information and photographs). But this was a unique set of circumstances and there can be little doubt that there were a great many other instances in which shoes, garments and cats found in unusual locations went unrecorded. Busy tradesmen, especially in pre-internet years, were in no position to link the occasional discovery of a battered old shoe or a very dead cat with a body of finds, either in Australia or elsewhere, or to make the leap of understanding necessary to connect such objects with ancient beliefs involving fear of the unknown or evil spirits.

Archaeologists have been involved in finds made at *Southampton Homestead*, Balingup (page 377), and *St. Mary's Cathedral*, Perth, Western Australia (page 394), the former police station at Mitcham, South Australia (page 365), and the *Hyde Park Barracks*, Sydney, a property in the care of the Historic Houses Trust of NSW (page 279). The *Barracks* finds, made during the 1970s, were recorded but not understood. A pair of shoes, found in the roof cavity at *Elizabeth Bay House*, Sydney (page 247), provides an example of a find in a building that was being restored for use as a house museum by the Historic Houses Trust. A number of finds has been made by home renovators who are not tradesmen. These include the pair of shoes found by the architect John Endersbee and

his father-in-law during renovations of John's cottage in the Adelaide suburb of Parkside (page 368), and by Norbert Gross at Semaphore, South Australia (page 369). Finds reported to me by architects involved in conservation work include the shoe and part lace collar from Dawes Point (page 243) and the tradesman's boot from *Burrundulla*, Mudgee (page 271).

Most finds in the past were discarded. The exceptions were those in reasonably good condition and that were regarded as curious or quaint. Some of these were kept by tradesmen or the owners of the buildings in which they were found. A few made their way into museums but their significance was not recognized until my research became known. These museum objects were mostly 19<sup>th</sup> century shoes that were kept as artifacts relating to fashion, taste and social status. Some were garments. Museums and public organizations holding objects found in building voids include the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, the Burnie Museum, Tasmania, the Migration Museum, Adelaide, the Unley Museum, Adelaide, the Mount Horrocks Historical Society, Watervale, South Australia, the Residency Museum, York, Western Australia, the office of the Australian Archives, Adelaide, the Western Australian Museum, Perth, Chiverton House Museum, Northampton, Western Australia, the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, the Newcastle Regional Museum, National Trust of Australia (NSW) at *Riversdale*, Goulburn, Goulburn War Memorial Museum, and the Historic Houses Trust, Sydney. A few of the more interesting, unusual or appealing finds are privately held, either by tradesmen or the owners of the houses. These are seen as curios, often with rather puzzling questions associated with their discovery in building voids. As a result, some highly inventive scenarios are created to explain their presence in unusual locations. A pair of expensive boots of the 1880s, suitable for a young woman, found beneath the floor of the National Trust property, *Riversdale* (page 253), was explained by a descendant of the family resident there at the time as having been hidden during a game of forfeits.<sup>4</sup> Not every owner wants to keep the objects found in their houses. Many of the shoes are in poor condition and are not seen as decorative or desirable. I have been given some of these, as well as a child's winter coat from Cessnock, NSW (page 239), and a very unlovely dead cat from a house in the Sydney suburb of Marrickville (page 265), and have accepted them in order to save them from probable abandonment. I hope suitable homes will be found for these objects at the conclusion of this research.

Some owners prefer to replace concealed objects just as they were found. Others keep them in an accessible place such as a cupboard or on a shelf in a back room. Most of the concealed objects of which I am aware remain in the houses where they were found. There is still some superstitious awe associated with these objects. I have been aware of reluctance to allow some objects to be taken from the house as well as an urge to put others back into their original position. Robert Millington, owner of the miner's cottage in Hartley Valley Road, Lithgow, where nine shoes were found in the roof cavity (page 263), was reluctant to bring them out for photography and hastened to put them back immediately the shoot was completed.

## 1.4 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Within a few months of commencing research, I began to suspect that concealments had been carried out, at least in part, by members of several building trades. Large boots splashed with lime mortar or plaster found in voids in a number of buildings pointed to the almost certain involvement of bricklayers, stonemasons and plasterers. A number of such finds can be seen in the Catalogue. But the literature used by all of these trade groups had nothing to say about concealed objects. As previously described, I had already read a very large number of books on the building trade of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, principally in the collections of the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, of which the majority had been written and published in Britain. The books that I consulted all had a strictly functional and technological basis. They contained not a word that so much as hinted at folk magic or anything remotely connected with it.

I also referred to numerous books and archival descriptions of life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century home. Typical of the books was *Cassell's Household Guide*, published in London in instalments between 1880 and 1890. A definitive work of its time, it contained a vast range of information on everything from cooking to the engagement and management of domestic servants, the keeping of poultry and the making of wills. There is nothing that refers in any way to practices that might have the slightest connection to folk magic. Site visits, while an essential part of the research process, left me with a yearning for some contemporary written description of the custom. Conversations with colleagues in the UK, both by email and during visits there, revealed that British researchers have found nothing in contemporary archival documents. My own investigations in contemporary documentation yielded very little that related to concealed objects – except in a somewhat peripheral and enigmatic way. The texts relating to this practice are scarce indeed. There is an intriguing if cryptic reference in the diary of Samuel Pepys, identified by this researcher,



*Samuel Pepys by J. Hayl, 1666.*  
(NPG)

in which he describes a visit to his parents' house in London on 5 December 1660 where his mother had just passed a kidney stone. Pepys recorded that she had dropped this object “into the chimney and could not find it to show it me.”<sup>5</sup>

Such an intensely personal item would have been considered a suitable decoy to lure evil spirits into a void and so lead them away from the occupants of the house. We cannot be sure that this was its purpose but the particular phrasing by Pepys, a writer of some precision, in which he reports that the stone had been “let drop into the chimney” suggests an apparent deliberate intent to place it in a cavity from which

it could not be retrieved. “Drop into the chimney” has other implications, suggesting that someone had ventured into an upper level of the house, perhaps the roof cavity, and found a point of access that provided a one-way path for the deposition of the stone. Pepys’s note also states that his mother was “still ill of the stone,” raising the possibility that she suspected evil causes for her illness and providing a theoretical motivation for her apparent urgency in placing the stone she had passed in a chimney where it might serve to protect her. Had she intended to dispose of the stone by throwing it into the fire on the hearth a quite different form of expression would have been employed. Pepys appears to have found nothing unusual or significant in this behaviour and by taking it for granted implies that he understood what was taking place and was aware of the purpose behind it. Pepys’s diary was in code and not available in published form until 1825. Its circulation would have been too limited and the description of the event too vague to have had any influence on public practice of this custom. In seeking to trace the origins of concealments I also looked for information within the contemporary witchcraft literature. The outbreak of the plague in England, beginning in the mid-14th century and continuing during a further three centuries, may have had a bearing on concealments. The custom may have been stimulated by the witchcraft scares of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as the English Civil War (1642 – 1651) which added to the fear factor in the lives of a great many people. Folk magic would have been considered a suitable counter to the threat posed by evil forces, whether that threat came from witches, plague or war: each presented the possibility of harm delivered to the very door of one’s house.

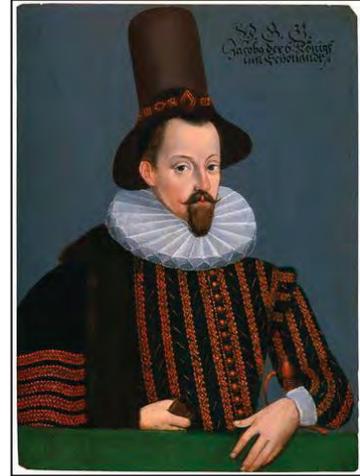
To give an example of a situation in which war affects the use of charms, the folk magic researcher Edward Lovett recorded a sharp increase in the price of cauls around the London docks after the first World War began. Cauls were prized by seamen as protection from the perils of the deep and with the advent of submarine warfare in the Great War their price at the London Docks rose from eighteen pence to £7.<sup>6</sup>

Extensive collections of books on witchcraft, from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, are held by the Museum of Witchcraft at Boscastle, Cornwall, and the Rare Books Library, Fisher Library, University of Sydney. While visiting Cornwall in 2006, I spent several days examining witchcraft books and artifacts at the Museum of Witchcraft and, back in Australia, a further period examining the Fisher Library collection. Key works consulted in both of these places are listed in



*The caul at top was placed on parchment paper, folded and carried in the small purse, above. Gladstone, Macleay River, NSW, late 19th century. (Ian Evans collection)*

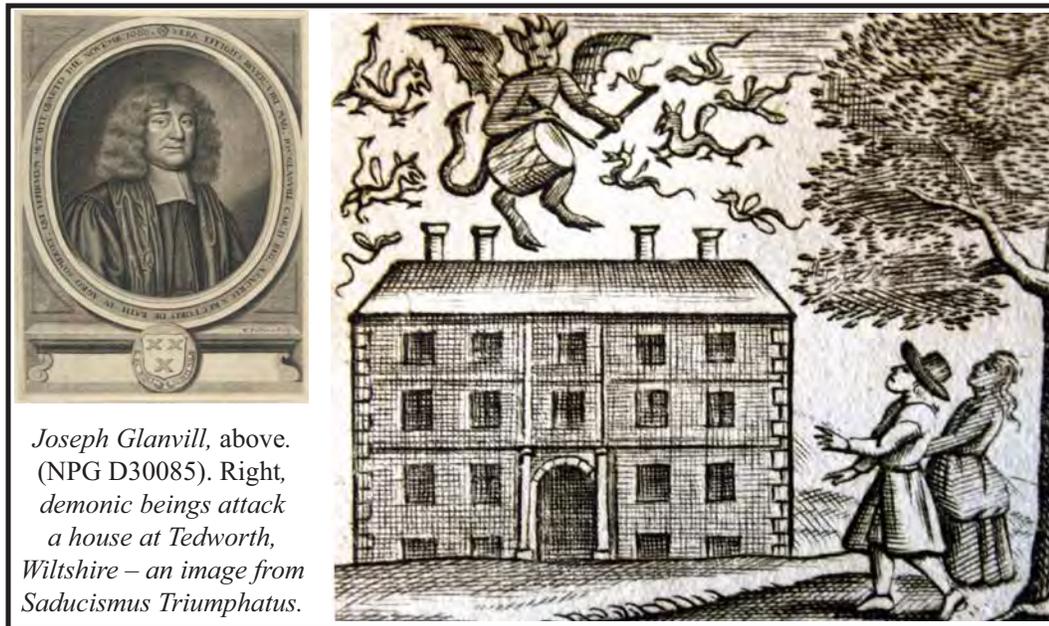
the Bibliography. The only relevant passages found in these books are discussed in the following text and in that part of the thesis that deals with the manufacture of what have come to be known as witch bottles. The witchcraft books consulted contained no overt reference to concealing objects in buildings as protective devices but allusions were found – one textural and one visual – that provide circumstantial evidence relating to this practice. The text is from *Daemonologie*, by James Charles Stuart (1566 – 1625), the king who united England and Scotland, patron of Shakespeare and instigator of the King James Bible. James was also a firm believer in witches and witchcraft and in *Daemonologie* expressed views that were generally accepted in his kingdom. First published in Scotland in 1597 it was reprinted in England in 1604 and widely distributed. In a discussion on witches’ “familiars,” the small evil beasts said to act as agents of the Devil, James wrote of the danger of these creatures entering houses to do harm to the people who resided in them:



*James VI, King of Scotland, painted circa 1590 before he gained the English throne. (NPG 1188)*

...being transformed in the likenesse of a little beast or foule, they will come and pearce through whatsoever house or Church, though all ordinarie passages be closed, by whatsoever open(ing), the aire may enter in at.<sup>7</sup>

The King’s remarks were not necessarily a statement of a startling concept at the time. In fact, he appears to have been expressing views that were already widely accepted and of ancient origin. But whatever the case may be, the King’s warning of dangerous spiritual forces that could enter buildings wherever the air itself passed through the structure appears to have had considerable force. Readers of this very influential work found their beliefs recorded and stamped with the seal of Royal endorsement. Apertures that could have been vulnerable to the sort of home intrusion described in the book included such liminal spaces as doors, windows, chimneys, and roof and subfloor cavities. Roof cavities were tightly sealed against the intrusion or rain, hail and snow but were often porous to airflow. The same applied to subfloor spaces where the passage of air was often necessary to carry away dampness from the earth. A further warning against intrusions by evil spirits came in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century in Richard Boulton’s *Complete History of Magick, Sorcery and Witchcraft*: “If they enter as a spirit only, any place where the air can pass thro’ is sufficient for their passage.”<sup>8</sup> This passage has a faint echo of the text in *Daemonologie* of the century before and suggests that memory of James’s warning had survived. Beings that could enter a house on a puff of air clearly required special precautionary measures.



Joseph Glanvill, above.  
(NPG D30085). Right,  
demonic beings attack  
a house at Tedworth,  
Wiltshire – an image from  
*Saducismus Triumphatus*.

Another significant find in the many volumes of witchcraft books consulted was a sketch and section of text in a work of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Nearly eighty years after James's warning, Joseph Glanvill (1636 – 1680) published *Saducismus Triumphatus* in 1681. It contained an illustration showing demonic beings hovering above a house in the village of Tedworth in Wiltshire. Perilously close to the chimneys, the creatures constituted a powerful visual image and served to reinforce the message of 1604. The text describes the sound of a demon singing as it came down the chimney to begin another night terrifying the occupants of the house of Edward Mompesson.<sup>9</sup> The chimney as a source of evil also featured in the case of John Davis of *Emms Court*, Sheep-street, Stratford-on-Avon, who in 1867 claimed that a widow named Jane Ward had bewitched his family. His daughter described events that had terrified the entire family: "... a man and woman came down the chimney a few days hence, both headless, and seized her by the body, cast her violently on the ground, and then tossed her in the air..."<sup>10</sup>

A resource that I examined in England was the folk magic collection of Edward Lovett, held at the Cuming Museum at 155-157 Walworth Road, London. Lovett (1852 – 1933) was the head cashier of a large City of London bank and an enthusiastic collector of items relating to folk magic. He was an active member of the Folklore Society, joining it in 1900, and an enthusiastic researcher and collector of information on rituals and of the objects associated with them. His collection of charms and objects was donated to the Cuming Museum, part of the Southwark Central Library, in 1916 and provides an insight into the folklore beliefs of Londoners during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Lovett's work produced evidence of the survival of ancient beliefs in an urban environment from which many of Australia's convicts and settlers originated.<sup>11</sup> The Cuming Museum collection is extensive and includes miniature shoes, a cow's heart pierced with nails, acorns said to

protect against lightning, a caul and a large number of other objects described by Lovett as charms. Among the more esoteric items are the skin of a black and white cat intended to be worn as a cure for rheumatism and chest complaints and a witch ball – an irregular glass sphere with a silvery surface patina, embossed metal top piece and a brown silk cord. This was said to have been used for crystal gazing. Edward Lovett and his folklore research are discussed in detail later in this thesis.

#### **1.4.1 RESEARCH TOOLS: THE MEDIA**

The support of the media, and in particular ABC National and Local radio, has been of enormous assistance in this research. Without media support it would have been impossible to locate the majority of the objects recorded in the Catalogue. Fortunately, I found no difficulty in interesting various forms of media in the project. My background in journalism and public relations has given me a lot of experience in preparing, issuing and placing news releases in the media. And the authority and credibility provided by my various books on Australian traditional architecture and building conservation ensured that what I had to say was heard. I was able to enlist media support by providing broadcasters and journalists with interesting news stories, using previous finds to encourage people to come forward and report fresh discoveries. Using the media in this way has been an essential element in this project. Travel to inspect sites and finds has been undertaken only after discussions by email or telephone with the person or persons who reported the find or finds from that area. There were no random pursuits of these objects. In the majority of cases the person who reported a find was the owner of the property. Research in a given area was thus initially targeted but also generalized in order to seek further concealments from that area. My usual practice when arranging to visit an area was to issue a media release in advance. These releases were always localized in order to make them more attractive to radio, local television or newspapers. When visiting the site of a confirmed find, perhaps in a regional town or city, the local newspapers were often invited to the scene after I had examined the find, assessed the site, discussed the circumstances with the owner or occupant of the building and confirmed the authenticity of the object. An interview and photograph of the find, with my request for information on any other objects found in the area, was often the result. However, timing the ensuing publicity was not in my hands and the result has sometimes been that I was no longer in that area when publicity eventuated. This most commonly occurred with local newspapers in cases where publication was weekly or bi-weekly. The effect of this was that a visit to a regional area, whether in New South Wales or another state, with all of the concomitant arrangements for travel and accommodation that this incurred, sometimes resulted in an article in the local newspaper after I had left the district and finds that were reported to me after I returned home. Return visits were not always feasible or economical and in such

cases I had to rely on owners to supply digital images or, in particularly interesting cases, arrange for a visit by a professional photographer.

As well as the major news media, other opportunities to publicise the project were provided by the websites of heritage organizations such as Heritage Victoria and Heritage South Australia. Brief messages, with images of typical finds, were posted with the cooperation of the relevant state heritage bodies. Email networks of heritage advisors, such as those run by the NSW Heritage Branch and Heritage Victoria, were used from time to time to keep the state-wide networks of heritage advisors and specialists in our two most populous states informed of progress in my research. Heritage advisors operate throughout regional areas of New South Wales and Victoria and are called in by homeowners to advise on restoration projects. Advisors visit houses and other buildings while work is in progress and, in discussions with tradesmen and homeowners, are in a good position to hear about finds of objects made during renovation work. Because they have now been briefed on this research heritage advisors are able to discuss any finds that are drawn to their attention and pass the information on to me. After some initial publicity in major metropolitan newspapers, coverage of this research in the printed news media has largely been restricted to the suburban and regional press and is usually linked to particular finds and a call for information from members of the public. Printed media associated with heritage organizations has provided useful support from time to time. These magazines included *Reflections* (magazine of the National Trust of Australia – NSW), *Heritage Matters* (newsletter of the WA Heritage Council) and *Trust News*, the national magazine of the Australian Council of National Trusts. Publications for the general public and also of particular special interest groups were employed to disseminate information on the project as widely as possible. Publications for which I provided articles ranged from *Reader's Digest Australia* (July 2006: 91–96) to the pagan community's *Spellcraft* magazine (Winter 2009: 4–6). I took part in numerous radio interviews, mostly with the ABC but also for a few commercial stations. I've spoken about this research on a number of ABC Radio National programmes and on ABC Local radio in every capital city and in regional areas throughout Australia. Among these stations perhaps the one that I least expected was a call for an interview on the ABC station in the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia. No record was kept of these interviews as I had no idea at the time that I would eventually begin work on a thesis and that this data might be usefully included in my methodology. The media has proved to be the most effective research tool in this project. This approach to the research has ensured that the number of finds of concealed objects in my Catalogue has steadily increased throughout the past five years. The gradual accumulation of finds has added to the weight of evidence that establishes deliberate concealments as a custom widely known to Australians throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Word-of-mouth has also carried the story of this research far and wide throughout Australia. People in whose houses shoes or other objects have been found

tend to tell their friends. And those who have heard radio interviews, or who saw me on *Rewind* on ABC-TV, are in a position to explain the significance of any discoveries that they may encounter to people who had previously been unaware of this research.

#### 1.4.2 RESEARCH TOOLS: LECTURING

Spreading the word via public lectures and presenting papers at academic conferences proved to be effective research tools. Academic conferences, especially those arranged by archaeological organizations and associations, provided a good opportunity for the targeted dissemination of information to people whose professional training and interests ensured an attentive audience. My first lectures at Rouse Hill in 2004 used old-fashioned 35mm slides but after discovering Powerpoint and its ability to use digital images to create pages that combined text and images I used it for all subsequent talks. The lectures that I gave changed as research progressed. Variations incorporated new information and new images so that more recent lectures are very different to those that preceded them. All lectures incorporate question and answer periods where members of the audience can seek further information and in fact often provide new information. It is during these segments of such events that new finds are often reported. Papers presented at archaeological conferences, while not always producing immediate results, may result in subsequent contact from some of those who attended to report finds that are the result of their professional investigations of old buildings. Two significant sites in Western Australia were the result of the lecture given at the Australasian Archaeological Association's *New Ground* conference at Sydney University in 2007. The finds, at *St Mary's Cathedral*, Perth (page 394), and at *Southampton Homestead*, Balingup (page 377), are described in the Catalogue of Finds.

#### LECTURES 2004 – 2010

- Historic Houses Trust of NSW, *Rouse Hill House*, Rouse Hill, NSW, 1 & 2 May 2004. Public lecture
- Central West Heritage Advisers' Network, Bathurst, NSW, 20 April 2005
- State Heritage Office of NSW, Parramatta, NSW, 26 May 2005. Talk to head office staff
- National Trust of Australia (NSW), National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill, Sydney, NSW, 4 October 2005. Public lecture
- Department of Archaeology, Flinders University, Institute Building, North Terrace, Adelaide, 19 October 2005. Public lecture
- Alstonville Plateau Historical Society, Alstonville, NSW, 17 September 2006
- Brisbane City Council Heritage Advisory Committee, Kindler Theatre, QUT

Gardens Point, Brisbane, Queensland, 11 November 2006

- University of the Third Age, Brunswick Heads, NSW, 14/11/06
- Australian Decorative and Fine Arts Society, Chauvel Cinema, Paddington, NSW, 21 June 2007, 12.00 noon and 6.00 pm
- Queensland Museum, South Bank, Brisbane, Queensland, 7 March 2007. Public lecture
- Australasian Archaeological Association *New Ground* conference, University of Sydney, NSW, 25 September 2007
- Australian Decorative and Fine Arts Society, Noosa Bicentennial Hall, Sunshine Beach, Queensland, 30 August 2008
- Australian Decorative and Fine Arts Society, St Mark's Anglican Church, Buderim, Queensland, 1 September 2008
- University of Newcastle, School of Humanities and Social Science, Tree House Function Room, Callaghan Campus, Newcastle, NSW, 3 November 2008. (Part of confirmation process)
- Australian Archaeological Association Conference, Australis Noosa Lakes Resort, Noosaville, Queensland, 4 December 2008
- City of Sydney Historical Association, Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney, NSW 14 March 2009.

#### 1.4.3 THE RECORDING PROCESS

Objects were identified, measured, photographed and examined for makers' marks, owners' tags or identification, sizes, damage (whether intentional or through wear), colour, style and/or design and any other characteristics that might serve to date the object and identify the original owner or the person or persons responsible for the concealment. Few of these processes applied to concealed cats. All that I could do with them was to verify that they had been found in a sealed void, photograph them and record details of the find. Not long after commencing active field research I realized that the shoes that were found were, within limits, dateable objects. I also understood that dating shoes was a highly specialized matter and that if this research was ever to be brought to a conclusion I could not find the time to undertake a study of shoes to a level of expertise that would enable me to accurately date those that were found. Timothy Easton, the independent architectural researcher of Suffolk, had found many caches of concealed objects and, in the context of dating shoes, mentioned June Swann of Northampton. Brian Hoggard's website ([www.apotropaios.co.uk](http://www.apotropaios.co.uk)) lists an article



*June Swann, MBE*

by Swann as recommended reading. She was for many years curator of the historic and famous boot and shoe collection at Northampton Museums and Art Gallery. Northampton was the centre of the British bootmaking industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I wrote to Swann and she agreed to date shoe finds for this project. I visited her at her home in Northampton in April 2006 and we have been in regular contact via email ever since. Her contribution enhances the Catalogue of Finds. The task of photographing the shoes and the buildings where they were found posed a challenge and I decided to convert from 35mm film, which I had used for many years, to digital.

## 1.5 INVESTIGATION

In order to provide laypersons and professionals such as archaeologists, historians and conservation architects with some means of identifying and distinguishing deliberate placements from accidental losses I set out to identify patterns associated with the concealment of shoes and other objects. This necessitated visiting the sites of as many finds as I could conveniently and economically manage. I inspected sites and the objects found and photographed them in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland. Within NSW I visited sites in the central west, Hunter Valley, south-western areas and Sydney and its environs. Many more sites, notably in rural Victoria and in Western Australia, have not been visited. To assist with this work within New South Wales, I was fortunate to receive a \$10,000.00 dollar-for-dollar grant for travel and research within the State from the NSW Heritage Office (now the NSW Heritage Branch) in 2007.

While there are no archival documents to tell us about this practice a great deal can be concluded from the evidence of the artifacts, mute though they are. As a result of numerous site visits in Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland I have gained a better insight into practices associated with the custom. Patterns of concealment have become clearer as the number of recorded finds has increased. The distribution of the practice throughout Australia is now apparent and the termination period is also reasonably firm – as can be seen in the Catalogue of Finds. A notable characteristic of all kinds of concealments is that they are placed (or dropped) beyond the reach of everyday life or use in the buildings in which they are found. It is also clear from the circumstances of a good many of these concealments that subsequent occupants had spent years living in houses without any knowledge of the objects secreted within their homes. In many cases partial demolition of some of the structure of a building, as in the case of renovations, may be the only way to find these objects. Floors may have to be taken up, chimneys demolished or walls opened up or taken down. In the rest, discovery may occur as a result of an awkward and unpleasant journey into dark, confined, dirty, spider-infested and unpleasant voids where people rarely venture. Finds are sometimes

made by tradesmen, pest exterminators, building valuers and others whose work requires venturing into spaces that are rarely visited. Others are found by homeowners who, for one reason or another, set out to explore the secret places of their old houses. Until I began to publicise this matter finds of concealed objects appear not to have been reported to heritage authorities. The objects in themselves are everyday artifacts, humdrum in their very ordinariness. Their position in buildings is what makes them extraordinary.

**TABLE 1.1**

<b>TOTAL CONCEALMENTS IDENTIFIED IN AUSTRALIA 2004 - 2010</b>	
Shoes	95
Cats	17
Garments	12
Religious objects	5
Animal bones	3
Toys	3
Miscellaneous*	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>147</b>
* Parasol, book covers, leather leggings, gloves, bottles, teaspoons, shoe last, cotton reels, gunpowder flask, coins, cutlery, baby powder tin, printed matter.	

Source: Catalogue of Finds. Note: a number of sites contain more than one type of object.

### 1.5.1 PATTERN AND VARIATION IN CONCEALMENTS

There are no significant variations in the pattern of concealments throughout the entire period of this custom from state to state in Australia (or colony to colony, as they were in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Additionally, no such variations have been found in 19<sup>th</sup> century concealment practices between the United Kingdom and Australia. This uniformity is a notable and in fact a remarkable aspect of a practice that occurred in Australia for more than a century, without benefit of any written instructions and in locations separated by great distances. In today's world the media and the internet would be essential tools in spreading information so widely and so effectively. The people who carried out concealments in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Australia had no such communication tools at their disposal. And with nothing in print, with the known exception being the cryptic reference in Samuel Pepys's diary and a folk magic researcher's note about concealed cats in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the only way in which this practice could have been disseminated is by word-of-mouth. The widespread dissemination of concealments throughout the Australian colonies speaks volumes for the depth and antiquity of this practice in the British homeland and its penetration among the convicts and settlers who brought it to the Antipodes. The locations of concealments within buildings reflect the cautionary words of King James in *Daemonologie*. In the case

of masonry houses walls are generally solid, providing less opportunities for impromptu concealments. The exception would be in those cases where objects are inserted in the wall during the course of construction or renovations. An example of this occurred at the former *Tasmanian Inn* at Epsom, Tasmania (page 307), where flat objects were selected for insertion in the interstices between sandstone blocks in an internal wall constructed in circa 1853. These can be seen in the Catalogue of Finds. A number of suitable cavities for concealments occur in those areas of buildings where structure takes precedence over purpose. These include chimney voids, beneath floors and within the roof cavity.

The single example of a purposely-created cavity so far found in the structure of a masonry building is at *Burrundulla*, Mudgee (page 271), in inland NSW, where the void was made by omitting a brick from the return wall of a chimney stack in the library. This associates the concealment with the bricklaying gang who constructed the house in 1865. The boot crammed into the resulting space is probably that of a bricklayer rather than a member of the family who owned the property. Plasterers who later covered the interior surfaces of *Burrundulla's* brick walls with two layers of plaster (the scratch coat and the finish coat) had to have been aware of the presence of this object. There is at least one other example of the probable involvement of plasterers in the concealment of objects. The child's boot and half a lace collar found beneath a lath and plaster wall of a house constructed in Lower Fort Street, Dawes Point, Sydney (page 243), in 1833 provides another link to the craft of plastering. Details of both of the finds described above are in the Catalogue and are more closely examined in the Analysis. There are numerous examples of finds of large boots splashed with lime mortar or plaster throughout the Catalogue. These finds suggest that the custom of concealing shoes in buildings has strong links to the building trades.

### 1.5.2 SHOES

Shoes are the objects most commonly found in concealment sites. It follows, therefore, that they were the preferred objects for concealment. For this custom to be so rigorously carried out, by so many people, over a very long period of time, at some personal trouble and inconvenience, tells us that it was thought to be important. In the UK, concealments of shoes, cats and domestic artifacts have been linked to belief in evil spirits, demons and witches. The English researcher Brian Hoggard has concluded that the objects selected for concealment were considered to be effective in protecting people in houses or other buildings from evil beings:

The location of these objects within houses, and primary literary sources relating to witch bottles in particular, indicate that at least some of these artifacts were concealed to ward off witches and other perceived evil influences

such as ghosts and demons. ... This evidence suggests that popular beliefs and practices concerning the fear of witchcraft and other malign forces changed little after the period of the witch trials, except in minor details, and continued through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and well into the 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>12</sup>

The large numbers of shoes found in concealments provide researchers with artifacts that are a useful research tool. Shoes can reveal a good deal of information, principally because they can be dated, sometimes to a fairly narrow period. Information derived from shoes can include not only the approximate age of the wearer, within very broad parameters, but also the sex and, to a degree, the social status of the wearer. The extent of wear, generally very high, speaks of a time when Australians were far less affluent than they are today.

The most common location for concealed shoes is in close proximity to an important fireplace or chimney. In cottages there may be a chimney “stack” that serves both the kitchen and parlour. In this arrangement the single brick or stone stack contains two flues, serving back-to-back fireplaces in the adjoining rooms. These chimneys are a prime location for concealments because of their role in serving two of the most important rooms in the house. The kitchen is where food was prepared and cooked on a cast-iron range usually set into the brickwork of the chimney, and the parlour was the place where families gathered at night to sit around the fire. Kitchens and parlours with their fireplaces were at the heart of every household but because chimneys were open to the sky they were seen as vulnerable – a point of easy entry for the forces of darkness. As C. Riley Auge has pointed out, the chimney was both a source of warmth and energy and a zone of great potential danger as it:

...conducted the ever present hearthfire smoke up and out of the home, but unlike windows and doors, it could never be closed and thus invited free commerce for any malicious traffic directly into the house through the hearth. Hence, the opening directly related to the hearth paradoxically left inhabitants feeling not only assured of warmth, sustenance and life but also vulnerable to and threatened by the possibility of misfortune, illness, and death.<sup>13</sup>

This is the very point made by King James in *Daemonologie*. The danger, he suggested, lay in such openings as doors, windows and chimneys. The perceived risk presented by chimneys and fireplaces may have posed an exquisite dilemma for the occupants of houses. Sitting close to the fire in the depths of winter could put them in peril of attack from evil beings who, in passing over the landscape at night, might have seen smoke rising from the chimney and decided to enter the house. The alternative scenario lay in the possibility of malign interference with the food on the kitchen stove. Attack in either case could have been catastrophic. The King’s warning appears to have been taken

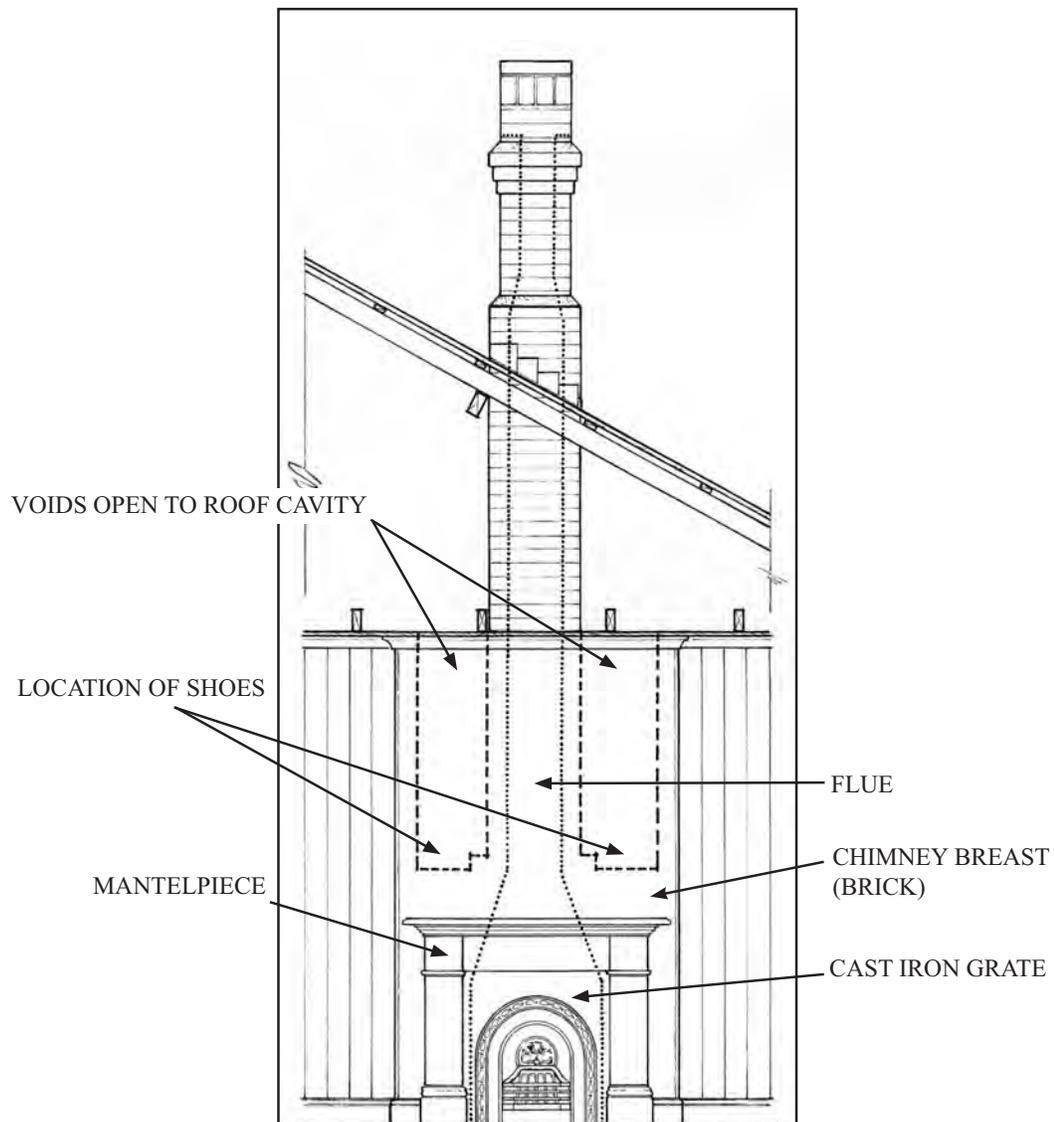
very much to heart in 17<sup>th</sup> century England and concealments in or close to chimneys were made there for the next three centuries. Shoes and the standard variety of concealment objects may be found under the floor near the hearth, in one or both of the voids on either side of the flue, or in the roof cavity. Smoke-shelf concealments, where hot gases passed by in close proximity, appear to have been reserved for shoes. Concealments in all of these locations occurred in Australia until the mid-1930s at least.

To understand where shoes may be concealed in a chimney it is necessary to know how chimneystacks were constructed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australian houses (see sketch on following page). Brickwork was built up in a broad structure from a concrete foundation set on solid ground after the removal of topsoil from the site. The base of a chimneystack was wide, often 1.8 metres or more. At floor level, there was a hearth on which fires or firegrates were set into an opening in the brickwork facing the room. Smoke rose from the hearth into a narrow flue that wound its way up through the roof structure and out to the sky. One chimneystack may contain one or more flues, serving two or more rooms. The brickwork of the stack necessarily contained voids, sometimes known among bricklayers as “pockets,” which made perfect receptacles for concealed objects. In some cases, these voids may be open at the top of the main structure in those examples where it terminated in the roof cavity. The flue or flues that carried on up through the roof were considerably smaller than the base of the stack. By entering the roof cavity through the trapdoor commonly found in a corridor or lesser room occupants of the house may have been able to drop objects into a void or voids in the chimney stack. In this way the structure made it possible to renew the power of the cache by the addition of further deposits from time to time. New objects may have been added by entering the roof cavity through the ceiling trapdoor and dropping the shoes or other items into the voids. The steady accumulation of shoes and perhaps garments and assorted household objects over the years created what in the UK has been called a “spiritual midden”<sup>14</sup> which is considered to have been employed to renew the effectiveness of the cache of concealments in a house. It was, in effect, a subset of a broader ritual practice. Refreshing the cache may have been carried out by new owners or occupants of a house to personalise the protection provided by concealments. The fact that new owners made fresh deposits in a midden suggests that the protection provided by concealed shoes was considered to be highly personal: it appears to have been thought that another person’s shoes or artifacts would not necessarily provide protection. This practice has been identified at *Valley Farm*, located near Ranelagh in the Huon Valley of Tasmania, and described in the *Catalogue of Finds* (page 326). The discovery of the practice of renewing the midden was made possible by fashionable changes to the style of footwear which make it feasible in many cases to narrow down the date of manufacture of individual shoes. This information can then be cross-referenced with property title records, thus opening the way to a tentative identification of the original ownership of the shoe, whether by a particular family or even an individual. The link to the possible

ownership of the shoe or shoes can be made by referring to land title records showing ownership, to directories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which record occupants of houses, and to family histories compiled by descendants of owners of houses. Dating a shoe thus opens the way to establishing a connection with the occupants of a house at a certain time in its history.

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**THE CHIMNEY AT *RHOS-Y-MEDRE*, TOOWONG, QUEENSLAND**



*Sketch by Michael McCowage*

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This cutaway view shows the fireplace in the dining room and the roof cavity above. The timber cornice and the room's wall and ceiling lining boards are also shown. Dotted lines indicate the flue through which smoke escaped from the building and the voids, accessible from the roof cavity, into which shoes were dropped. Voids which were open in this way enabled occupants of a house to periodically refresh the potency of concealments with additional shoes or other objects, thus creating what is now known as a spiritual midden.

### 1.5.3 WHY SHOES? WHY GARMENTS?

Shoes, unlike most other items worn by people, retain the shape of the body after we take them off. Some other items found in some Australian sites, including gloves and a straw hat, have similar characteristics but are less frequently used in concealments. Shoes are deeply personal, moulding themselves to the shape of the feet that wear them and thus retaining the “footprint” of the wearer. They were readily available and, once worn out, suitable only for use as decoys. The fact that it took so long to recognize their purpose when they were found in building voids is testimony to the fact that as charms shoes were subtly undetectable. The story of concealed garments is not as well documented as that of shoes, although they serve the same purpose. There is no record of the first recognition of this practice which may have begun at much the same time as the concealment of shoes. The circa 1350 mediaeval hat from Little Sampford Church, Essex, now in Saffron Walden Museum and documented by the Concealed Garments Project at <http://ehive.com/account/3580/object/28593/Hat>, was found during repairs to buttresses in 1908. Did concealed shoes, garments and other domestic artifacts have a propitiary function? The use of propitiary magic was common in British life and continued until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were charms to protect crops from thieves, amulets and talismans to protect men in war and the services of cunning men and women, the village or town practitioners of folk magic, when doctors failed to heal the sick.<sup>15</sup>

In the absence of any contemporary documentary explanation for the concealment of shoes, garments, cats, domestic artifacts and other items it is difficult to be dogmatic about the intent of this practice. The purpose no doubt existed in the mind of the practitioner: he or she alone knowing whether the objects were being concealed to propitiate evil forces or to lure them into a trap. In the latter case, the belief may have been that evil beings would be unable to escape from shoes or the voids in which they were placed, or decoyed away from their human prey by objects that had about them some of the essence of the occupants of the building. Shoes have a long history of association with rituals. In Roman Britain, shoes and other objects were deposited in wells and pits, for reasons thought to be linked to foundation offerings to the gods of the underworld. These were, in effect, gifts to placate the gods for the disturbance to the earth.<sup>16</sup> John Schorn, rector of North Marston in Buckinghamshire from 1290 to 1314, was said to have conjured the Devil into a boot. Painted screens depicting this feat have survived in churches in Suffolk, Norfolk and Devon<sup>17</sup> and a token illustrating this was recovered from the Thames at London and is now in the British Museum.<sup>18</sup> Rood screens may have served as inspiration for sermons in churches, thus disseminating the story of Schorn and setting the scene for a belief in the power of shoes in ritual protection against evil. The legend of John Schorn and his use of a boot as a trap for an evil spirit was widely known in England for perhaps two centuries and may have served to stimulate long-standing beliefs in the magical power of shoes.

There are obvious pitfalls in the process of attempting to read the past and writing what we believe to have been the purpose of artefacts, whether in groups or as solitary examples, which are unaccompanied by any contemporary explanatory text. Christopher Tilley explores some of these in “Interpreting Material Culture,” a chapter in Ian Hodder’s *The Meanings of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression* (1989). The primary problem, according to Tilley, is:

.....the precise assignation of meaning. The interpretation of the meaning and significance of material culture is a contemporary activity. The meaning of the past does not reside in the past but belongs in the present.<sup>19</sup>

The ambiguity of material objects from the past, discussed in Hodder’s chapter “Post-modernism, Post-structuralism and Post-processual Archaeology” adds to the difficulty of interpretation, resulting in what Tilley points out is a distinct reluctance by archaeologists to offer interpretations of the objects they find:

Archaeologists write, but many do not feel they should be writing! .....writing always transforms. The process of writing the past in the present needs to become part of that which is to be understood in archaeology. The ultimate aim of much archaeological discourse is to put an end to writing, to get the story right.<sup>20</sup>

Christopher C. Fennell in *Crossroads and Cosmologies: Diasporas and Ethnogenesis in the New World* (2010) describes practices adopted by members of incoming cultural groups in the United States as they attempted to maintain core cultural beliefs in an alien environment. They did so by focussing on individualised and private uses of core symbols to invoke spiritual powers for self-protection. Such rituals were carried out by widely differing ethnic groups, including members of the BaKonga and Yoruba people of Africa and German-speaking immigrants from Central Europe. African rituals involved the creation of caches of quartz crystals, polished stones, pieces of chalk, ash, iron nails and blade-like fragments, bird skulls, crab claws, coins and bone disks secreted under the floors of dwellings.<sup>21</sup> Interpretation of meaning is again a key element in understanding these practices. Hodder’s views on the possible interpretations of objects have a particular bearing on the objects found in Australian and other concealment locations:

.... The material object soon becomes divorced from its context of production and it can be taken into new concepts of use. The meanings of objects may change as they move into new contexts. The ambiguity has a greater potential for increase in regard to material culture, simply because the object is more durable....<sup>22</sup>

This ambiguity is clearly expressed in the objects that are the subject of this thesis. Shoes, garments, cats and domestic artefacts are considered, not in terms of their original purpose, but as objects with an altogether different and perhaps more sinister purpose. Meaning is thus distorted and we are, in effect, looking through a prism of time into a period when the world was viewed from a perspective which is not part of our life experience.

## 1.6 CONCLUSION

In 2002 there was no general awareness in Australia of the use in this country of a practice that had been carried out in England and elsewhere in the United Kingdom for many centuries. But, after discovering that the practice was still very much alive in the UK throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century I concluded that it must have been carried to Australia by British people who travelled here in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. From 2004 onward I conducted extensive on-site research in five states, which, combined with media publicity and telephone and email communication with Western Australia, resulted in the accumulation of records and images from more than 100 sites. Of these, some 60 sites were visited and carefully examined. All of the sites identified so far have been included in the Catalogue of Finds. The Catalogue is the first comprehensive record of a previously unknown, ancient and secret practice which survived in Australia until the mid-1930s. As such, I suggest it represents a breakthrough in the artifact-based study of Australian history and has repercussions for the field of social history and the study of folk magic in Australia and elsewhere.

While the objects found are not accompanied by any written explanation of their role or purpose, they have provided evidence that enables some of them to be dated and linked to particular occupants of the buildings where they were found. Examination of the circumstances of these placements and of the objects found has enabled tentative conclusions to be reached which will enable other researchers to identify the concealments which will inevitably be found in the future. The objects found to date are, I believe, the tip of an iceberg of concealments in the period up to circa 1935 and point to widespread use in cities, towns and rural areas of Australia of an age-old practice intended to protect households from evil originating in the spirit world. Site evidence indicates that this practice had links with the building trades, including bricklaying, stonemasonry, plastering and carpentry. Building tradesmen have always been charged with protecting the occupants of houses and other buildings from storm and tempest, rain, hail, wind, snow, extremes of temperature, rising or descending damp and the attacks of thieves, potential molesters and enemies of all kinds. This is part of the duty of care that is integral to the art and craft of the builder, and as such is intended at least as much for the protection of the tradesmen

concerned as the occupants of the buildings they constructed. Protection from other forces and influences, which were thought for many centuries to be inimical to human health, safety and security, and which were believed to direct attacks against the homes of people across the face of the earth, may have been seen as a logical extension of the duties of responsible building tradesmen.

There are indications that the participation of householders in this practice was important. The majority of concealed shoes bear no sign of wear by tradesmen, and the probability is that they were the shoes of the occupants of the houses in which they were found. This includes footwear of men and women and, in particular, the shoes of children and young people. But the possibility remains that these were, to a greater or lesser extent, trade concealments with the objects procured by the master builder from the current or incoming residents of a house. The exception to the general run of concealed shoes is what appear to be the boots of tradesmen. These are sturdy, well-worn and display on their surface the evidence of painting, plastering, bricklaying or stonemasonry in the form of splashes of materials commonly employed in these trades. Lime, paint, plaster and mortar usually mark these objects. It is not clear why some concealments are those of the householder and some the footwear of tradesmen. The possibilities are as follows: Some concealments may have been orchestrated by the master builder, as previously described. If a shoe or shoes relating to the occupants of the house were not available, he may have resorted to the use of his own worn-out boots or a boot or boots of a member of the building team. Without contemporary accounts of this practice it is not possible to make a firm statement of the circumstances that produced variations in the type of footwear used in particular concealments, although a theory on the use of children's shoes is considered later in this thesis. If shoes or boots – either from the owners of the house or a member of the building team – were not available another type of object, such as a cat, might have been chosen for the concealment. The issue of concealed cats will be discussed in greater detail but the history of other varieties of magical practice in Britain will be explored first of all in order to understand why folk magic came to the Australian colonies.

## TWO: CULTURAL CONTEXT

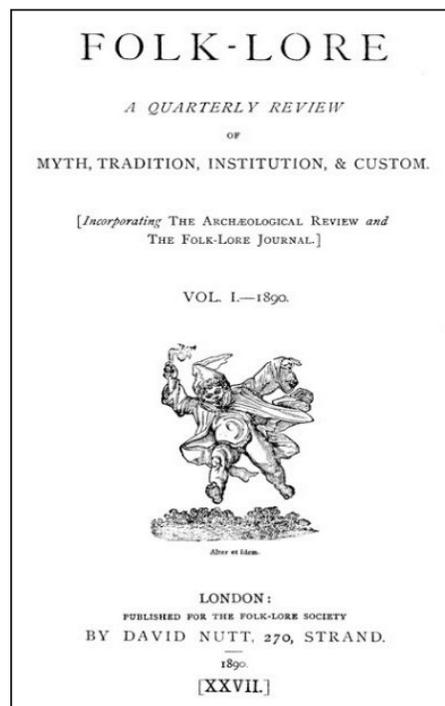
### ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the cultural context from which our British settlers came and scrutinises the ways in which folk magic was part of their lives. The intention is to examine one substantial and significant national group from which so many of our settlers and convicts originated and to demonstrate that these people came with personal histories in which magic and ritual were intertwined as part of the web of everyday life. It is suggested that some of these practices came to Australia and that they survived here, unnoticed, until at least the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the figures are described as “imprecise,” during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia received about 1,600,000 immigrants of whom approximately 50% came from England. Of these, approximately 80,000 were convicts, although this number is bolstered by the inclusion of family members transported with those sentenced to exile.<sup>1</sup> This chapter provides a glimpse of some of the belief systems by which these people lived before they arrived in Australia. While the ritual practices described may be widely known in England there is little awareness of them in present-day Australia. A further intention is to identify the people who first discovered the practice of concealing objects in buildings and to ascertain when and how their finds were made. Both documentary and oral history has been used to compile the history of a discovery that has not yet received full recognition by social historians and archaeologists.

### 2.1 BACKGROUND

Emigrants and convicts who came to Australia in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries brought with them a complex set of established values and beliefs. Cultural baggage from cities, towns and rural communities throughout the British Isles and elsewhere arrived with these people, although much of it failed to thrive in the new environment. Ronald Hutton’s *Stations of the Sun* provides an illuminating account of the range of seasonal ritual practices in Britain but it would be easy to conclude that the great majority of these practices were left behind on the docks from which the emigrant and convict ships sailed for the Antipodes. Morris dancers, hobbyhorse riders and a host of other traditions and rituals described by Hutton failed to survive in the Australian colonies, although Guy Fawkes bonfires burned throughout the country on 5 November until the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> It is easy to see how some practices that had been carefully observed in a British rural setting would disappear if, for example, people from such a context came to live in an Australian

city or town. The transition in such cases would have been too great and the context of the observance lost. There was also the dispersal effect in which members of previously homogenous social and ethnic communities were scattered throughout the population and so rendered unable to generate sufficient numbers to maintain the customs they had once practised. Where homogenous groups of immigrants existed, as at the Cornish mining village of Moonta in South Australia, some folk magic practices and beliefs survived for a time. The Cornish continued to celebrate Midsummer's Eve with bonfires and believed in the existence in the copper mines of dwarfs called knockers who used picks and hammers to find good ore.<sup>2</sup> But harvest rituals, an important seasonal marker in rural England, disappeared in colonial urban settings. The new environment and vastly different cultural context overwhelmed such rituals. While not all of the customs and rituals that were part of their lives "at home" were successfully planted in Antipodean soil, some of these survived the journey. Religious belief was a cultural given: attendance at Church and the rituals of joy or sorrow that surround marriage, birth and death were occasions and events that took place in the public domain. However, we are less well informed about rituals that may have been observed in secret. Edward Lovett, an English folklore collector in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, recorded in an article in the Folklore Society's journal in 1909 that these existed but were difficult to unearth: "The collector in search of folk-beliefs and articles connected with them meets with far more difficulties than the collector of old china or other merely material objects." He wrote of two opposing groups whom he had encountered in his extensive researches: the believers and the unbelievers. Both had their reasons for refusing to divulge information about the practice of magic: "... the ardent believer who will not expose sacred things to an outsider, and .... the unbeliever who refuses information about what he considers to be degrading superstitions or discreditable survivals."<sup>3</sup> By 1908, the reluctance to speak about old ideas and customs was becoming more evident. Lovett, an outsider from the city, found it difficult to gain the trust of the shepherds and country folk to whom he spoke: "The notes I gathered are undoubtedly very incomplete, partly by reason of the short time available for enquiries during my visit, but chiefly from the difficulty of getting those who still believe in charms and



*Folklore researchers were kept informed of work by other members of the Folklore Society through articles published in the Society's journal. Publication began in 1878 and continues to the present day. (FLS)*

magic to ‘own up,’ and to talk about the practices in which they still indulge.”<sup>4</sup>

The following text sets out to discuss some aspects of the cultural context from which many of the people who came to Australia before the 1930s originated. Examining their original culture provides us with important keys to understanding how these people lived and behaved in the Australian colonies. Taking England as an example, we can glimpse some of the beliefs and rituals that survived there until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of research by members of the Folklore Society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Established in London in 1878, the Society sought to discover and record beliefs and customs that were in danger of dying out at a time of rapid social change in England and elsewhere in the British Isles. Members fanned out across England to seek surviving examples or memories of rural customs and rituals that they believed were about to be lost. These were intelligent, sophisticated and well-travelled people, skilled at research and observation. They were seeking to define the essence of “Englishness” by understanding the belief systems of their people. If they could be said to have weaknesses, the principal failures would be in their readiness to see ritual where others might see tradition and to believe that rituals survived in the countryside rather than the city.

The material that follows analyses the backgrounds and possible belief structures of arrivals from England in Australia prior to circa 1930. The technique has been to cut a slice through cultural practices and beliefs by means of close examination of research conducted by members of the Folklore Society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, as reflected in the records and collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University. The Museum has a reputation for the quality of its record-keeping and documentation of the objects that have been gathered since its foundation in 1884. Many of its researchers and collectors were simultaneously members of the Folklore Society. Since the Society did not maintain collections of its own, folk magic objects acquired during the course of field research were often donated or sold to the Pitt Rivers or other museums. Links between the Folklore Society and Pitt Rivers Museum were strong. A number of Museum staff members was involved in the Folklore Society and Augustus Pitt Rivers, founder of the Museum, was a member of the Society from 1885 until his death in 1900.<sup>5</sup> The source of much of the information that follows is the excellent records and finds database maintained by the Pitt Rivers Museum and now available on the Internet at the website entitled *England: The Other Within*.<sup>6</sup> The site is the result of a three-year project, concluding in 2009, in which the 44,015 artefacts in the Museum’s English collections were subjected to intense study and research. Researchers involved in *England: The Other Within* gathered and analysed information scattered through catalogue records, examined objects in the collections of the Museum and assembled related background information from a variety of published and private sources.

This text focuses on the period before about 1950. It examines research conducted and collections gathered in the English countryside, a village in Somerset, and in London

in the period from 1870 to 1930. These views of country, village and city provide us with an overall picture of the place and the environment from which so many of our people came in the period before the 1930s. This sixty-year period marks the decline of many ancient rituals and beliefs and the beginning of the modern era when these practices faded away. It was therefore a crucial time for research into folklore practices. The stories of some of the people involved in this research are also part of this enquiry. The intention is to establish that Australia's settlers and convicts, especially those arriving in the period before the decline of magic-based rituals in their home areas, came from places that were richly endowed with cultural values in which folk magic, ritual and non-scientific belief systems were still important elements in the lives of the people. While the examination that follows is focussed on England, there is no reason to believe that the information it provides in terms of the generality of ritual practice and belief would differ from the situation existing at that time in Scotland, Wales or Ireland even though individual rituals and beliefs varied from place to place. As a result of emigration, the mindset and pattern of belief that existed in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries exerted a powerful effect on the situation in Australia in the same period. Folklore rituals that survived in the English countryside, village and city into the 20<sup>th</sup> century are examined here. The examples chosen include a custom that was widespread in rural areas in a number of counties, an occasion in a Somerset village when an eminent anthropologist was confronted with an example of an ancient practice that had survived into modern times, and the results of research and collecting by a folklore enthusiast in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century London.

### **2.1.1 THE COUNTRYSIDE: THE SPIRIT IN THE CORN**

Folklore Society members observed that numerous rituals thought to be of ancient origin had survived in rural communities in many of the counties of England. Some were fading towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century while others continued strongly into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, although subject to a lessening in intensity of belief and a distortion in practice. One of these rituals, that of the harvest trophy or favour, continued until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These were symbolic and decorative figures, made from the last sheaf harvested in summer. They were known by a variety of regional names including corn dollies, kern-babies, ivy girls, mell dolls, kim maidens and other names.<sup>7</sup> The practice of making these figures in the period before harvest mechanisation was thought to derive from a pagan belief that the spirit of the corn (or grain) lived amongst the crop and that the harvest made it effectively homeless. As a result of this belief a hollow shape made from the last sheaf left standing would be taken into the farmer's house to provide a home for the spirit during the winter. In Spring, the corn dolly would be taken into the field and ploughed into the first furrow of the new season to ensure the fertility of the next crop.<sup>8</sup>



*Corn dollies: ritual objects or craftwork? Left, a "harvest queen" made by Charlie Style of Harrietsham, Kent, 1949. Above, an elaborate corn-dolly made by L.G. Bishop of Conderton, near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, 1941. (PRM Nos. 1949.10.95 and 1941.9.3)*

Ellen Ettlinger, a Folklore Society member who was familiar with the Pitt Rivers Museum's collections of harvest trophies, in 1943 explained what she understood to be their purpose:

The protective influence ... is attributed to the fertilization spirit which they are believed to embody. This is most obvious in the harvest-amulets made from the last handful of corn left standing on the field, in which the fertilization spirit, here called the corn-spirit, was believed to be present. With the cutting of this last handful of corn the spirit is caught and carried joyfully home. The corn-stalks of the last sheaf are plaited into different ornaments or formed into puppets and kept in the farmhouse from harvest to harvest. The intention no doubt is, or rather originally was, by preserving the representative of the corn-spirit, to maintain the spirit itself in life and activity throughout the year in order that the corn may grow and the crops be good. Beyond it the corn-spirit is supposed to exert fertilizing influence over vegetation, cattle and even women.

Ettlinger suggested that the ritual of the corn dolly had lost at least some of its original purpose, surviving as a shell into an age that no longer fully believed in the existence of the corn spirit.<sup>9</sup> Allison Petch, one of the team of researchers involved in the *England: The Other Within* Project, found a number of descriptions of the harvest trophy ritual in the Museum's records and from other primary and secondary sources.<sup>10</sup> The records included descriptions of the ceremony at the end of the harvest and the making of dollies by people who participated in the festivities. The Pitt Rivers collection contains trophies from a number of English counties including Somerset, Kent, Cornwall, Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.<sup>11</sup> There is no information on the date of origin of this practice in England but pagan overtones suggest a pre-Christian period. The earliest English reference to these objects dates from circa 1598.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the ritual was widely known in Continental Europe, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and England, is suggestive of a long history in which there was ample time for numerous regional variations and patterns of associated belief to occur. Hutton, citing his own and European research by the Swede Carl von Sydow, is less convinced of the animist theory in which the spirit of the corn was said to be embodied in the harvest's last sheaf.<sup>13</sup>

A diligent search of pre-1850s newspapers in Hobart, Sydney and Maitland, using the Australian National University's on-line newspaper research site (<http://newspapers.nla.gov.au>) failed to produce any accounts of festival activities such as those that took place in England at that time. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century harvest festivals are reported as church news with the celebration firmly grasped in clerical hands. Typical of newspaper accounts of this period was that in the *Maitland Mercury* on 21/6/1892 in which it reported that St Paul's Anglican Church was decorated with produce and hymns such as "Come, ye Faithful People, come, Raise the Song of Harvest Home" were sung.

### 2.1.2 THE VILLAGE: THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE BEWITCHED ONIONS

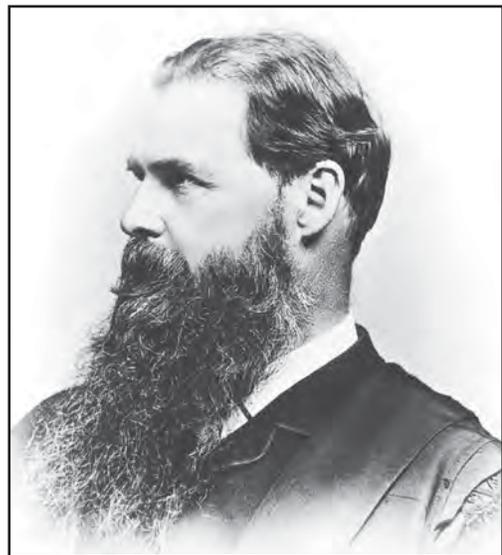
The collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum include objects relating to folk magic rituals conducted in various parts of England. One of the more unusual objects is an onion, one of four that fell from the chimney of an inn during a gust of wind. The incident was witnessed by Edward Burnett Tylor (1832 – 1917), a member of the Folklore Society, who was among a group of men gathered around the fire at the *Barley Mow Inn* in Rockwell Green, near Wellington, Somerset, on 14 April 1872. Sitting down for a companionable drink with some of his village neighbours, Tylor witnessed an event that revealed the survival in late-19<sup>th</sup> century England of ancient magic rituals:



*The Barley Mow.  
(Chris Wingfield)*

In a low cottage ale-house there, certain men were sitting round the fire of logs on the hearth, during the open hours of a Sunday afternoon, drinking, when there was a gust of wind; something rustled and rattled in the wide old chimney, and a number of objects rolled into the room. The men who were there knew perfectly what they were, caught them up, and carried them off.

Tylor was no village-level amateur but a magistrate and a man who in 1871 was already well embarked on a distinguished career as an anthropologist, academic, archaeologist and museum professional. As such, he was the perfect witness to an event with quite extraordinary resonances. In 1871 Tylor had been elected Fellow of the Royal Society, and in 1875 he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Laws from Oxford. He was appointed Keeper of the Oxford Museum of Natural History in 1883, and, as well as serving as a lecturer, held the title of the first Reader in Anthropology from 1884 to 1895. In 1895 he became the first Professor of Anthropology at Oxford and he was knighted in 1912.<sup>14</sup> Tylor's description of the event at the *Barley Mow Inn*, recorded in a letter to his uncle in 1872, also notes that the finds came as no surprise to others in the village:



*Edward Burnett Tylor, circa 1880.  
(PRM 1998.267.88.3)*

.... it being well known among the cottagers that to stick pins into objects identified with persons, and to hang them to dry up a chimney is a way of working harm by magical sympathy to the person who is thus pricked & dried up in effigy.



*One of the onions from the chimney at the Barley Mow Inn. (PRM 1917.53.776)*

The objects in question were onions, each bearing a paper label with the name of a resident of the village written upon it and each pierced with numerous metal pins. A length of wire had been passed through each onion and this had been turned into a hook at one end to enable it to be secured in the chimney. It was thought that the victims would be harmed by the act of stabbing the onions and then roasting them in the chimney. Tylor wrote that he “secured two of them, having to say something next week in a lecture in London about magic arts. I intend showing them there as proof how the old sorcery of the darkest ages still lingers in England.”

Both the magician and his victims have been identified as a result of recent research by Chris Wingfield for the Pitt Rivers Museum and which is set out in considerable detail in the *England: The Other Within* website. The innkeeper was Samuel Porter and the name on the sole surviving onion is that of John Milton, a shoemaker who circumstantial evidence suggests may have run up a bill at the *Barley Mow* before absconding, thus incurring the wrath of its publican. Another onion bore the name of Joseph Hoyland Fox, a magistrate and temperance campaigner who had been associated with the opening in 1869 of a Temperance Hall in Rockwell Green. The Hall featured a Coffee Room that was frequented by twenty to thirty people each evening and which was thus in direct competition with the *Barley Mow*. Tylor displayed his finds at the International Folklore Congress in London in 1891 and on his death in 1917 one of the onions was donated to

the Pitt Rivers Museum.<sup>15</sup> The Museum recorded the object as an example of sympathetic magic – a ritual in which the perpetrator uses the magical principle of “like affects like” to cause harm to an enemy.<sup>16</sup> Crucial for Tylor was the fact that the onions were discovered by accident. This, he suggested, proved the authenticity of the matter and also provided a clear case of bewitching with a belief in its effectiveness, rather than as a means of intimidation. A previous discovery of animal hearts stuck with pins had demonstrated that such practices had been practised until recently in the neighbourhood of Wellington, but Tylor wrote that “this was the first time of my having ocular proof of such things being still done in England.”<sup>17</sup>

The curious case of the bewitched onions fitted neatly into Tylor’s concept of “survivalism” in which he held that outmoded cultural practices lingered on into more modern phases of society. The concept, influenced by Darwin’s views on biological evolution, developed the theory of an evolutionary, progressive relationship from “primitive” to modern cultures. This theory was set out in Tylor’s most important book. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* was published in 1871 – the year in which the onions fell out of the chimney in the *Barley Mow*. In the book, Tylor asserted that when a society evolves, certain customs are retained long after they are no longer necessary. His definition of survivals was “processes, customs, and opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved.”<sup>18</sup>

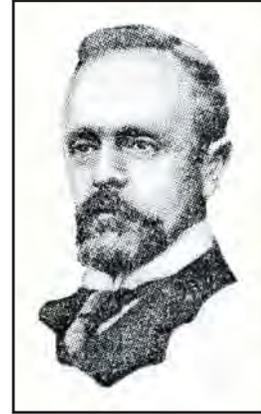
### 2.1.3 THE CITY: RITUALS OF LONDON

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Folklore Society’s most dedicated collector and researcher in London was Edward Lovett (1852 – 1933). Born in London, he joined the Folklore Society in 1900. A senior clerk in a City of London bank, Lovett seems an unlikely candidate for the role of field collector of amulets and folklore but his activities over many years indicate that his main interest in life was the collection of objects and descriptions of ritual practices associated with folk magic. By day he was the respectable banker but in the long summer evenings he sought out sailors, street hawkers and elderly residents of the city’s slums in search of talismans, amulets, charms and information.<sup>19</sup> In an article published in the Folklore Society’s journal in 1909 he wrote:

.... for the seeker after amulets, there is no better hunting ground than the hawker’s handbarrow in the poorest parts of slums of such dense aggregations of people as London, Rome, and Naples. ... For many years I have been in touch with some of the London street dealers in unconsidered trifles, and am

much surprised to find how much they know as to the reasons for carrying certain amulets.<sup>20</sup>

Lovett walked through the streets of Edwardian London, buying strange objects: amber charms and left-handed whelk shells from sailors and barrow men. In chemists' shops in the East End he found young girls buying powdered *Pterocarpus Draco* (Dragons' Blood) for love spells. Second-hand shops near the London docks offered caul used as protection from drowning. These were charms that were much prized by sailors. Lovett observed steep increases in the price of cauls with the commencement of submarine warfare during the First World War.<sup>21</sup> South Devon provided a rich harvest of objects, including a sheep's heart stuck with nails and pins for breaking evil spells, twigs of Ash tied together with red wool and carried in a mauve silk bag as a cure for fits and a dried frog in a small cotton bag, worn by children as a cure for fits. From the Suffolk coast came a piece of amber carried in a fisherman's pocket as a cure for rheumatism. Lancashire provided a hag stone – a naturally perforated flint that was tied to the stable door to protect the horses from being ridden at night by witches. In Sussex he found a fossil sea urchin or *echinus*, locally known as a shepherd's crown; placed on a windowsill outside the house it was said to keep the Devil away.<sup>22</sup> During his many years of folk magic research Lovett collected information and charms from throughout London and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. He was recognized as a national authority on folklore and superstition after a series of exhibitions of his findings in England and Wales. His first major exhibition was held in Cardiff in 1914, generating media interest in his work which spread as far afield as Adelaide where *The Advertiser* published a description of a visit to the researcher's London home:



*Edward Lovett  
(CM)*

In a ground-floor study in a London villa, Mr. Edward Lovett, a well-known member of the Folk Lore Society, has set out, so far as room permits, some of the fruits of thirty years' investigation into the popular beliefs and superstitions of many kinds. Mascots and amulets in a hundred different woods and metals crowd the walls. Cabinets are packed with specimens collected from every country in Europe. Shelves strain with volumes on folk-lore and anthropology; and rows of manuscript books record the result of their owner's research. Among them all Lovett moves quickly to and fro, laying now on this treasure, now on that, the unerring finger of the connoisseur. Here is a tray filled with charms bought solely from London hawkers' barrows; here a dried toad skin hung round the neck as a cure for fits; here, again, a set of mole's feet warrants

to protect the possessor from cramp and rheumatism. A drawer yields a bullock's heart stuck with scores of pins."<sup>23</sup>

The Cardiff exhibition was moved to Southwark Central Library and described by *The Times* in 1917. The exhibition, it said, included:

... details of folk rituals and superstitious charms, amulets, dolls, cures, and mascots carried for the purpose of averting misfortune, ensuring good luck, and curing specific diseases. Folk wisdom and medical lore also combined with more overt expressions of folk superstition....<sup>24</sup>

At least some of the objects displayed in the exhibition were donated to Southwark's Cuming Museum in 1916.<sup>25</sup> Some items with a medical or healing aspect went to the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in Cavendish Square.<sup>26</sup> Lovett also dealt with the Horniman Museum, Imperial War Museum, Pitt Rivers Museum and Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood.<sup>27</sup> Many of the objects acquired from Lovett by the Pitt Rivers Museum were donations. Lovett was a familiar figure at the Wellcome Museum and over a period of thirty years sold 400 objects to its curators. The Museum, then at 54a Wigmore Street, London, featured exhibits of charms, amulets, representations of witch doctors, displays of "fetish" figures and exhibits related to physical anthropology and pathology as well as archaeology in the Hall of Primitive Medicine, a space through which all visitors had to pass.



*The Wellcome Museum,  
54a Wigmore Street, London, circa 1919. (WL  
L0021132)*

After 1914 European folk material in the form of charms and talismans was included in a display which consisted of 37 cases of charms, talismans, amulets and so-called divining fetishes arranged into geographical or cultural groupings. Of these, one included amulets, charms and talismans from throughout Britain – excluding London. An additional four cases were required to display the collection of numerous specimens from London, most of which had been provided by Lovett.



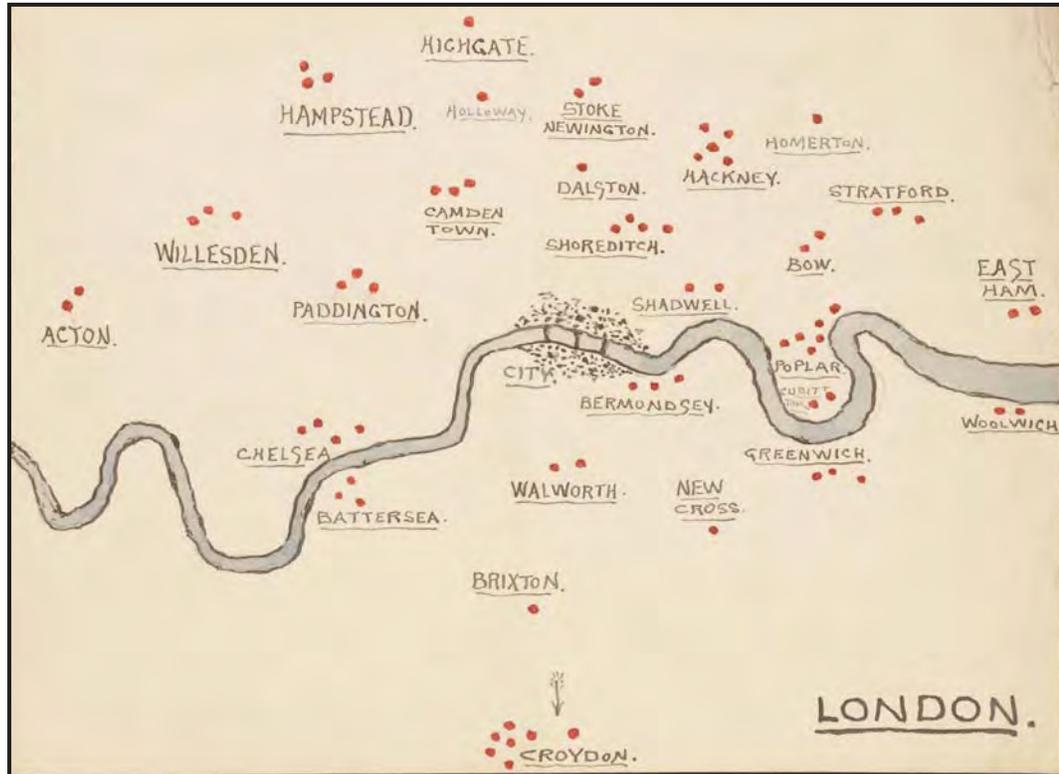
*The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum's Hall of Primitive Medicine, Wigmore Street, London, circa 1913-1932, where Lovett's collection of English charms and talismans was exhibited in five display cases. (WL L0029861)*

Lovett's role as an important contributor to the Wellcome Museum was confirmed when he provided 237 objects for an exhibition held in October 1916. Collected from throughout London, these provided the core of the exhibition which sought to reveal "the Folk-lore of London, consisting of medical charms, amulets and other objects used to avert disease, to ward-off evil, and to

**A SPECIAL exhibition, illustrating the folklore of London, will be opened at the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum (54A, Wigmore Street, Cavendish Square, W.) on Monday next. The collection has been formed by Mr. Edward Lovett of Croydon, and consists of medical charms, amulets, and other objects used to avert disease, to ward off evil and to bring good fortune. The exhibition will be open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., except on Saturdays, when it will close at 1 p.m.**

*The item above appeared in the British Medical Journal, 30/9/1916.*

bring good fortune."<sup>28</sup> Lovett hand-picked the objects, arranged the cases in the Museum and wrote most of the notes for the pamphlet accompanying the exhibits, recycling large sections of this material from his own publications. After the exhibition the Museum purchased most of the objects for retention in its own collections.<sup>29</sup> The Museum's Library retains a map drawn by Lovett in 1914 to illustrate locations within greater London where he had collected blue amuletic necklaces which were then thought to provide protection from bronchitis. This map, with its dots distributed across the landscape of the city, suggests that magical practices not only had survived but continued to thrive in 20<sup>th</sup> century London, co-existing in the same city as Wellcome's Museum where amulets, charms and mascots from other cultures were displayed in cabinets as scientific specimens.<sup>30</sup> The contrast was extreme and dramatic: in the terraces and tenement flats of London, amulets and charms were coveted and treasured.



*Lovett's map of 27/8/1914 shows areas where he had found blue amuletic necklaces in and around London. Dots indicate the number of necklaces collected from various locations. The cluster in the City of London suggests collecting activity close to his place of work.*  
(WL WA/HMM/CO/Ear/532)

Collected by Lovett, the very same objects went into museum cases for academic study and for public information and amusement. The Wellcome Museum guidebook of 1920 confirmed the impression conveyed by Lovett's research and the Museum's own displays of folk magic objects from throughout Britain:

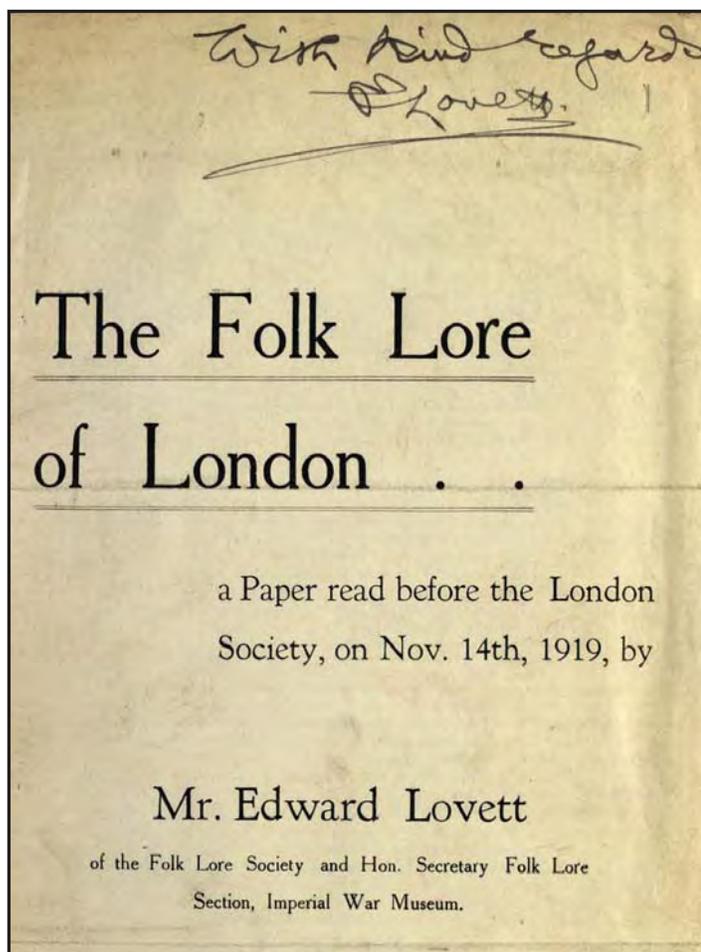
This belief in the occult effect of certain objects exhibits the lower stages of the human mind in seeking for the principles of natural action and is found not only in the most barbaric tribes, but also among the highest civilized peoples of to-day . . .<sup>31</sup>

Lovett published the results of his research in *Magic in Modern London* in 1925, a privately commissioned work that was printed by a local newspaper office at Croydon, where he lived. I have previously referred to the fact that Lovett was aware of the practice of concealing cats in cavities in buildings. His undated, but post 1918, leaflet to promote his lecture on "The Folklore of the Cat" announced that "cats built up alive in the walls of houses" would be discussed.<sup>32</sup> Although Lovett wrote nothing further about concealed cats and there are regrettably no transcriptions of his lecture the leaflet does place knowledge of

cat concealments on record as at circa 1920. Lovett's leaflet appears to be the first published account of this practice. Lovett's principal achievement was to demonstrate that folklore and magical ritual survived and continued to thrive in one of the world's great cities in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The objects that he found and collected, although ordinary in the extreme, provided tangible demonstration of the fears and beliefs of working class Londoners. His artifacts are not examples of the work of craftsmen, of goldsmiths or silversmiths, or of jewellers setting rare and precious stones in extraordinary talismans. Lovett found instead hand-made and

home-crafted objects fashioned from natural or commonplace materials. However meagre, crude or apparently unsophisticated, their power as magic, protective objects was intrinsically linked to their material construction, often in combination with their particular form or shape. The shape of a mole's foot, curved to form a scoop and armed with sharp claws, was thus deemed to be directly related to its power as an amulet. Lovett described this belief in *Folklore* in 1909:

There is a quaint form of superstition which has been described as sympathetic magic . . . It is the front feet, or digging feet as they are called, which are selected... Now this permanent curve is regarded by the folk as due to cramp and therefore as "like cures like" it must be a cure for cramp if carried in the pocket or in a bag around the neck.<sup>33</sup>



*A printed copy of the text of one of Lovett's many lectures on English folklore. (WL)*

Moles' feet were personal amulets, in the same category as the necklaces of blue beads that he found throughout London. Lovett scoured a large area of London in his efforts to determine the extent of the use of blue beads as charms. He travelled from Hackney in the north to his home suburb of Croydon in the south and from Barking in the east to Acton in the west. A printed copy of a lecture delivered by Lovett to a meeting of the London Society on 14 November 1919 and entitled *The Folk Lore of London* has survived in the Wellcome Library. In the following text copied from the script of the lecture, Lovett describes his research and explains the purpose of the beads:



*One of the necklaces collected in London by Edward Lovett in the second decade of the 20th century.  
(WL A630910)*

One of the first things that struck me, and I gathered the information from a lady doctor, was the wearing, chiefly by women and children, of blue glass beads round the neck as a preventive charm against bronchitis. I have found that such things—which, by the way, were made at Gablonz in Bohemia—were retailed in London at the extraordinary price of one half-penny per necklace. These beads are worn under the clothing so that they are not seen by the ordinary public. I set to work to investigate this subject, and, without going into unnecessary details, I may mention that in reference to the dividing up of London as given above, I visited, about one hundred and thirty different shops in these areas. One half of these were very small establishments, usually presided over by an aged woman; and in these shops were sold very poor, cheap toys, and sweets of a similar character, in farthings worths and upwards, all pre-war prices of course. In every one of these shops I found that the bead necklets were sold to be worn by children as a cure for bronchitis, and moreover that they were worn continuously until the child reached maturity, and then often for the rest of life; and that this practice was confined usually to females. It then occurred to me to ascertain what became of these beads at death, and I found, as I expected, that they were buried with the person who wore them.

The Wellcome Museum has many of these necklaces. Other personal talismans include examples of First World War soldiers' charms such as spent bullets and fragments of shrapnel or shell casing which have been provided with attachments or clips to enable them to be fastened to clothing, belt or braces for protection in battle.



*British and German military charms from World War One. Top, shell fragment charm, German (A79871); Far left, King Edward's hand amulet, worn by a member of a London regiment (A 79870); Left, amuletic brooch in the form of a black cat carrying a jewel, once worn by a member of the Royal West Surrey Regiment. (A79904) (WL)*

Other military charms included brooches formed in the shape of black cats and clovers. Sailors had their own charms, such as cauls and the heart-shaped pincushion carried as protection against drowning which Lovett bought at the London docks in 1917. The pincushion is included in another major collection of Lovett's dedicated fieldwork at the Cuming Museum which holds approximately 170 charms and objects of superstitious power. In an examination of the the Wellcome Museum's Lovett collection Jude Hill noted that:

The Lovett examples have a unique sort of beauty, fragility and symbolism; they generally appear fairly home-made or makeshift, and most had been fashioned out of natural, in some cases, fairly commonplace materials.<sup>34</sup>

Hill also pointed out that ritual objects were not inanimate: they had to be activated to release their power:

The connections between objects and everyday public and private rituals were crucial as a means to release their power. Certain objects were stroked against diseased parts of the body as a cure.<sup>35</sup>

Household charms collected by Lovett included horseshoes, the power of which was derived from their symbolic shape and the iron from which they were made. These were placed at strategic points, most typically the front door, to guard access to the house. Lovett also collected, as a label records, a "quantity of snail shells once strung up behind a door of a small house in east London to ward off evil."<sup>36</sup> Without the story of their purpose, objects such as these would have been meaningless. In collecting such artifacts and their legends at a time when folk magic was considered to be centred in the rural backwaters of the English countryside Edward Lovett demonstrated the continuing power of these beliefs in the city. Lovett was the pre-eminent researcher of folk magic rituals that not only survived but thrived in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century English metropolis.

## 2.1.4 DISCOVERING THE DISCOVERERS

Lovett was but one of the nineteen Folklore Society researchers actively and diligently looking for folklore rituals in the half century after the Society's foundation in 1878.<sup>37</sup> None of them appears to have



Above, *John Lea Nevinson. (SoA)*  
Below, *Nevinson's letter to The Times,*  
*23/1/1934. (News Ltd)*

considered building tradesmen as keepers and practitioners of secret rituals associated with shoes, garments or cats, or to have realised that houses and other buildings were repositories of the artefacts of a secret and ancient practice. Concealments were being found but no-one seems to have realised that there was something very odd about the finds and their locations in the buildings in particular. Allan Fea wrote in 1904 of an unusual find in Bromley Palace, Kent: "...in a small aperture below the floor, was found the leathern sole of a pointed shoe of the Middle Ages!"<sup>38</sup> Fea's report was in the context of curiosities found in secret chambers in old buildings and a shoe such as this barely raised an eyebrow.

But some people eventually began to suspect that there may have been more to this sort of find than was at first apparent. The first person to ask questions in print appears to have been John Lea Nevinson (1905 – 1985), a distinguished member of staff at the Victoria and Albert Museum. His obituary on the Museum's website describes him as an historian who made outstanding contributions in the field of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century dress and embroidery. During the 1930s, while a member of staff at the V & A, Nevinson compiled the *Catalogue of English Domestic Embroidery of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* which remains the standard work on that subject. He came from a talented family; his father

### A SUSSEX DISCOVERY

#### LADY'S SHOES OF THE TIME OF CHARLES II.

Under the stairs in an ancient Sussex house has been found in good preservation a pair of lady's shoes of the time of Charles II. They are brownish cow-hide (now rather grey with mildew), and the distinctive straight front of the toe is only 1½in. broad, coming back 2in. with nearly parallel sides to a width of 1½in. They were fastened with straps tied with laces of white linen tape, the tongue being ornamented with four pierced holes. The heel, leather over a wooden core, rises 1½in., and, as usual at that date, the sole is continued in one piece from the toe under the instep and under the heel. The length is 10in., a modern lady's size 4.

Similar shoes are in the Victoria and Albert, Guildhall, and London Museums, the toes of which just peeped out under the very full long skirt of a Barbara Palmer or Nell Gwynne. They were "straights," with no difference in make between right and left shoes, although wear has differentiated them. Though the shape has not been revived, modern practice has reverted to wood-covered heels and continuous soles.

was an architect, while other relatives included the war correspondent H. W. Nevinson and the cellist B. G. Nevinson who is commemorated in the “Enigma Variations.”<sup>39</sup> Nevinson’s work at the V & A took him to many old houses and exposed him to enquirers who brought objects into the Museum for identification and explanation. It was perhaps during the course of these enquiries and the site visits that he made that he became aware of finds of old shoes in odd places. Nevinson wrote to *The Times* as a result of a find at an unidentified house in Sussex where a pair of 17<sup>th</sup> century lady’s shoes had been discovered under a staircase. His letter, published in January, 1934,<sup>40</sup> recorded the find but made no comment on the position in which the shoes were found. In a second letter, published less than a fortnight later, he cautiously expressed suspicions of a

superstition associated with such finds and in doing so implied that he may have been aware of other such discoveries: “...is there any reason or superstition to account for the placing of old worn shoes (usually women’s) in walls or under floors?”<sup>41</sup> A perceptive and sophisticated researcher, Nevinson was clearly alert to the possibilities of what he seems to have suspected was an unknown and highly unusual practice. I attempted to trace the house that Nevinson visited but his diary for December 1933 – January 1934, held at the Society of Antiquaries in London, does not identify the building.<sup>42</sup> The shoes are not recorded on Northampton Museum’s Concealed Shoe Index or on the database of the Concealed Garments Project and they are not held by the Victoria and Albert Museum where Nevinson worked.<sup>43</sup> Nevinson does not appear to have pursued this matter and there do not seem to be any further references in print to it for the next twenty years. It was not until 1955 that a letter appeared in *Folklore*, drawing the attention of the Society to the discovery of shoes concealed in a house at Devizes, Wiltshire. The letter came from Mr. F. K. Annable, curator of the museum at Devizes which had recently acquired a collection of shoes and other objects from a 15<sup>th</sup>-century house, *Great Porch House*, at No. eight Monday Market Street, Devizes. The objects were discovered in the roof cavity during renovations and appeared to consist of a cache built up over three centuries:

## MEN’S STRAIGHTS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—The large collection of shoes in the Victoria and Albert Museum shows the change from the pointed and shaped shoes of the fifteenth century and earlier to the broad or square-toed “straights” of the early sixteenth century. Shakespeare’s own time is represented by a pair of slippers of about 1600 lent to this museum by Sir Harry Verney; these “will equally admit either foot,” and not betray haste.

In the seventeenth century men’s and women’s shoes and slippers seem without exception to be straights. Men’s shoes of the eighteenth century are rare, and though two late pairs in this museum are rights and lefts, straights were common, if not universal, in Dr. Johnson’s time. Evidence for this is supplied by the shoes of the effigy of Edmund Duke of Buckingham (d. 1735) in Westminster Abbey and the plate in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* (1762-72).

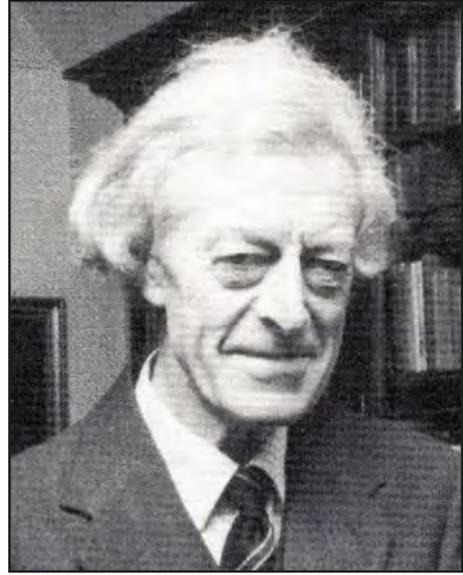
A surprising fact is that women’s shoes, which had pointed toes from at least as early as 1700, show no shaping at all before 1850. With reference to the discovery in Sussex, is there any reason or superstition to account for the placing of old worn shoes (usually women’s) in walls or under floors?

Yours faithfully,

J. L. NEVINSON.

Department of Textiles, Victoria and Albert Museum,  
South Kensington, S.W.7.

*Nevinson’s second letter to The Times, published on 5/2/1934, raised questions about concealed shoes in buildings and tentatively suggested a reason for the practice.*  
(News Ltd)



Above, *Frederick Kenneth Annable*  
(1922 – 2002).

Left, *Great Porch House, Monday*  
*Market Street, Devizes, Wiltshire.*

Bottom, *the shoes from*  
*Great Porch House.*  
(WHM)

Four shoes, one of late seveneenth-century date, the other three, of which one had belonged to a child in arms being early nineteenth century. There were also fragments of two pottery bowls, and a third, though also broken was complete, the three dating respectively to late seventeenth, late eighteenth, and mid-nineteenth centuries. Finally to complete the deposit were fragments of an eighteenth-century clay pipe, a wine glass stem, late eighteenth-century, a small iron file, broken at the tip, and the remains of what looks like a hat box along with a small length of corduroy cloth.

Annable also reported similar finds in Bedfordshire and elsewhere, citing examples of old shoes found in houses and placed in the Salisbury Museum. He appears to have been aware of garments discovered in similar circumstances. He suspected these to have been the clothing of deceased residents of the



buildings: “The discovery of old shoes, often bricked up into old houses seems also to be a common occurrence as instanced by examples in Salisbury Museum.” Annable concluded his report with an appeal for further information from anyone else who was aware of similar finds: “As a result of this discovery at No. 8 I have become interested in this question of ‘ritual deposits’ and am anxious to obtain further information.”<sup>44</sup>

This request contains the first known published reference to concealments being made for ritual purposes, although Nevinson had clearly suspected something of the sort. There were no responses to Annable’s request in *Folklore*. June Swann, who had started work as an assistant at Northampton Museums and Art Gallery in 1950, could have contributed to this discussion had she been aware of it.<sup>45</sup> In an article published in 1996, she described her growing awareness during the 1950s of odd finds of shoes:

...it was about 1957, in conversation with John Thornton, (then Head of the Boot & Shoe Department, Northampton College of Technology) that we realised simultaneously that the six or seven shoes we had each received for identification, could not be coincidence. They had come mostly from chimneys, and I recall being particularly puzzled by a small pair of child’s boots, found in the thatch of a cottage in Stanwick, Northamptonshire, and wondering what sort of people allowed a child so small to lose its boots on the roof.<sup>46</sup>

Swann says she was not aware of Thornton’s interest in shoes found in buildings until he visited her office at Northampton Museums and the conversation recorded above took place: “That’s when we realised simultaneously that with a dozen or more finds, there was more to it than shoes getting ‘lost’. So whatever the date was in the 1950s, that’s when we both registered ‘superstition.’” As with others who have visited houses where shoes have been found, Swann listened to a variety of often wildly improbable tales as householders struggled to make sense of the finds they had made: “You should read the range of ‘explanations’ I record, from large items that slipped through cracks between floorboards, boy chimney-sweeps losing their shoes, cats getting stuck, not to mention the multiple objects carried by mice and rats.”<sup>47</sup>

Some background about Swann’s colleague is relevant at this point. Thornton edited the *Textbook of Footwear Manufacture*, published by National Trade Press in 1953, and collaborated with June Swann to write *A Glossary of Shoe Terms* published by the Museum Assistants’ Group in 1973. I cannot establish when he became suspicious about shoes found in buildings as he does not appear to have published anything about this. June Swann said in her 1969 paper, “Shoes Concealed in Buildings,” that Thornton had been “listing these finds for many years.”<sup>48</sup> Thornton was a recognised expert on the history of footwear and in 1956, together with A. B. Goodfellow, was called in to examine and report on shoes found during the excavation of the South Corner Tower of the Roman

Stanwick		CS. 1993. 491 ✓
"Found when demolishing cottage".		
Date fnd./Mus.Ref.	Pre 1939 File D.11	In Northampton Museum
Desc. of shoes	Pair of child's boots	
Date of shoes	c.1860	
Condition		
Accession No.	D.15/1958-9 N.M. 9.6	

*One of the record cards from the Concealed Shoe Index at Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, Northampton. (NMG)*

Fortress, part of which survived at No. seventeen, Feasegate, York. Complete shoes, and fragments, for both adults and a child had been found in a post-Roman layer.<sup>49</sup> Swann began Northampton Museums and Art Gallery's card Index of Concealed Shoes some time in the period from circa 1957 to 1959 in order to organise the information she was getting. Cards were headed with the name of the town or village, the address where the shoe or shoes were found, dates the building was constructed and altered and the position of the object/s in the building. There were also fields for comments by finders and a record of any associated finds such as garments, artefacts, bones, chickens and cats.

Records included descriptions of the shoes and their date of manufacture, their condition and any references from literature or catalogues.<sup>50</sup> Swann thus became the first person to keep a comprehensive record of finds of concealed shoes. She had been named as Keeper of the Museum's boot and shoe collection in 1960 or 1961, a position she held until her retirement in 1988.<sup>51</sup> But the time available for trying to make sense of the steady stream of shoes that arrived at Northampton Museums was very limited. Up until 1961, when extra staff came on board, the organisation ran two museums and an art gallery with

Address	Whereabouts in house	Found with	Footwear found	Condition	Date of footwear	Present whereabouts
Tewkesbury Abbey, Wootton-under-Edge, High Street.	In roof. Under staircase.	Silver spoon, cannonball and bones.	2 men's shoes. Child's shoe.		Early 15th century. ? 18th century.	Tewkesbury Abbey, Wootton-u-Edge Museum.
<b>Hampshire</b> Beaulieu (house), Broughton, Charity Schoolhouse, Froyle (cottage).	In chimneypiece. Found during demolition. In chimney breast.		2 children's boots. Woman's shoe.		1860's—early 70's. 1677.	Salisbury Museum.
Odiham (cottage).	Under floorboards.		1 man's and 2 children's shoes. Woman's shoe and man's boot top.		1630-50. c. 1650.	
<b>Hertfordshire</b> Dagnell, Red Lion, Hemel Hempstead, Piccott's End (cottage).	Under floorboards. Under floorboards.		Child's shoe.	Latchet broken.	Late 1780's-1800.	
Hertford (house), Watford, High Street.	In walls. Found during demolition.		Shoe or half-boot. Pair of pattens. 3 shoes. Workman's shoe.	Sole worn.	? 17th or 18th century. c. 1750. Late 17th century. Late 16th century.	
Watford, Lower High Street.	Found during demolition.	Knife sheath.	Man's shoe, sole and quarters and shank from another.	Poor.	c. 1600-6.	Northampton Museum.
<b>Kent</b> "Bayleaf" (farm), Canterbury (farm).	Against chimney, 1st floor.	Glove and part of another.	Pair of men's shoes and 3 lasts—? men's woman's and child's. Woman's shoe.	Worn out, sole and heel missing.	c. 1600-25. c. 1700.	The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum.

*An extract from Swann's 1990 inventory of concealed shoes and other objects. (NMG)*

a professional staff of just three people. Swann described the situation: “I always said I did ten people’s work, but when I added up all the jobs some considerable time after leaving, it came to seventeen. I was not developing any theories on the shoe finds, just accumulating and very occasionally analysing evidence, usually only when I had to for some talk or paper.”<sup>52</sup>

Swann appears to cede the first understanding of the reason for the concealment of shoes in buildings to Annable, although it is possible that awareness was virtually simultaneous. She rightly points out that everyone who finds a shoe, in effect, “discovers” the practice. Understanding it is another matter altogether. She believes that there are many reasons for concealments and that each find should be assessed from the evidence it provides. While Annable was the first to apply and publish the term “ritual” in relation to concealed shoes it does not prove that he was the first person with full realisation of what had been discovered. Nevinson clearly had strong suspicions in this area. Annable made the announcement to *Folklore* before Swann began recording finds and before she went into print but not before she was aware of this custom. Swann is very cautious about expressing views on a field of research where facts are hard to come by. She wrote in 1969 that “... the pattern of concealment did not begin to emerge until after some years work and until the right questions were asked.”<sup>53</sup>

Differences in approach to the categorisation of concealed objects arose very swiftly after recognition of the practice. Researchers from the Folklore Society were quick to describe it as a ritual while archaeologists were very reluctant to use this term. Swann recalls being roundly criticised when she failed to use the prescribed term in a letter to the Folklore Society in about 1990. Archaeologists took the opposite view. She remembers that Ralph Merrifield was scoffed at by archaeologists when he suggested that shoes were concealed as part of ritual practice.<sup>54</sup> Swann says that she first became aware of the existence of concealed shoes in old houses in January 1950, shortly after she had started working at Northampton Museums. During the routine of checking display cases every morning, she noted a woman’s shoe of circa 1790 that had been found under the floor at



*June Swann, right, with the owner of The Old Malthouse, Earl Soham, Suffolk, inspecting the large mid-19<sup>th</sup> century hoard recovered from above a cupboard adjoining a fireplace. Objects were deposited by members of the Rice Family at various times in the 1850s, forming what is now known as a spiritual midden. (Timothy Easton, 1989)*

*Upton Hall*, Northamptonshire, which she thought was odd. When other such finds came to her notice she drew back from thinking about why they might have been placed in buildings because of her aversion to superstitious beliefs: “I, like so many others I was in contact with, tried not to think about the implications, myself for many years, and merely recorded what came my way (which was quite a lot), hoping that answers would thus emerge.” Swann kept her thoughts to herself for a considerable period of time before she felt able to express them in writing or conversation. Even now she is extremely cautious about conjectural expressions of points of view on concealments: “I have yet to cede any one reason for concealments, even if others want to term them ‘ritual deposits.’”<sup>55</sup>

Annable and Swann appear to have come to much the same conclusion about concealed shoes at much the same time. The number of finds brought to museums for identification was steadily increasing. Some of these were taken into collections such as those held by Salisbury Museum at the time. This meant that the circle of people who might begin to wonder about such finds was also increasing. John Nevinson’s suspicions about shoes in buildings do not appear to have been pursued. Shoes were at the periphery of his interests and he does not refer to concealments of them in print again. It appears that the discovery of the practice of concealing shoes in buildings was independently made by several people and in at least one case without awareness of the work of others in the field. Swann knew Nevinson as a result of referrals of Northamptonshire costume finds to the Victoria and Albert Museum and they were both foundation members of the Costume Society in 1965. She joined a trip to France in 1973 to see the Bayeux tapestry, an event that Nevinson organised. They became friends but she cannot remember when she became aware of his letters to *The Times*.<sup>56</sup> Swann also knew Annable, albeit not well, probably as a result of studies undertaken through the Museums Association for a museums diploma. The requisite course of study extended over three years from 1955, during which period she met people who, like Annable, worked in both archaeology and museums. She cannot now remember quite how she came to know of him.<sup>57</sup> Swann was not aware of Annable’s letter to *Folklore*, which she first saw when I sent her a PDF of it in September 2009. She described it to me as “a revelation.” Nor was she aware of Annable’s interest in shoes found in old buildings.<sup>58</sup> Her 1969 paper, “Shoes Concealed in Buildings,” does not have a record of the Devizes cache<sup>59</sup> but in 1990, two years after leaving Northampton Museums, Swann prepared a new summary of discoveries of concealed shoes which lists the Devizes find.<sup>60</sup> It thus appears that she became aware of the find Annable had made without knowing that he had grasped the concept behind the objects discovered in Monday Market Street, Devizes.

The deaths of Nevinson and Annable, two of the people involved in the discovery of the deliberate concealment of objects in old buildings, and the passage of time which has erased some memories on the part of another precludes a definitive analysis of the roles played by those involved in unearthing one of the most durable and secret practices

in the entire catalogue of folk magic practice and belief. Annable published nothing further about shoes in old buildings. To Swann, now an author of several standard works on shoes and shoemaking and an international consultant on the history of shoes and shoemaking, the concealment of shoes and other objects in buildings is a matter of ongoing curiosity and research. Swann continues to contribute to the Northampton Museums' Index of Concealed Shoes, dropping completed cards with details of her latest finds into the Museum letterbox during visits into the centre of the town where she still lives. She received the MBE in 1976 for her work as Keeper of the Boot and Shoe collection at Northampton Museums and Art Gallery.

The first book to describe shoe and other concealments in old buildings was Ralph Merrifield's *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, published in London in 1987 and in New York in 1988.<sup>61</sup> Born in Brighton in 1913, Merrifield gained a degree in Anthropology in 1935. His studies gave him a lasting academic interest in the archaeological evidence for past religions and witchcraft in England. After intelligence work during the Second World War, Merrifield worked in museums in Brighton and London and pursued his interest in Roman London, publishing *The Roman City of London* in 1965 and *London – City of The Romans* in 1983. When he retired in 1978 he was Deputy Director of the Museum of London. Merrifield was then able to pursue his interest in ritual and magic, concentrating for a time on witch bottles. In two articles in *The London Archaeologist* in the winter of 1969 Merrifield gave detailed descriptions of finds in Roman and post-Roman London of objects associated with ritual and magic. In the second article he referred to “numerous instances of the discovery of old shoes, usually odd ones, concealed in or immediately adjacent to chimney breasts.”<sup>62</sup> He died in 1995.<sup>63</sup>



*Dr. Ralph Merrifield (1913 – 1995) at Cutchey's Farmhouse, Long Thurlow, Suffolk, 1988. The chimney on the right had two spiritual middens on the first floor. These had begun in the later 17<sup>th</sup> century with materials being dropped into the void from the attic over the parlour chamber. Deposits continued into the 18<sup>th</sup> century.  
(Timothy Easton)*

*The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* was a seminal work, opening the way for discussion and further research on a field that had long been neglected. There is a suggestion in the book that Merrifield, who had an association with the Museum of Leathercraft, may have been put in touch with Swann. The Museum had been receiving enquiries from people who brought finds of shoes in to ascertain their age. Merrifield writes that he first became aware of the practice of concealing shoes “through an association with the Museum of Leathercraft.”<sup>64</sup> The Museum was established in 1948 by John Waterer, a leathersgoods designer, and Dr. Claude Spiers, a leather chemist. Its purpose was to collect examples of fine craftsmanship through the ages, and to preserve them for the benefit of the public and of young people entering the leather trades. For a number of years parts of the collection were housed at the Guildhall Museum and at Leathersellers’ Hall, both of which were in London. For some ten years from about 1970 the collection was housed at Walsall Borough Council’s museum. The collection moved to Northampton in 1978 under an arrangement with Northampton Borough Council. The Keeper of the collection until 1979 was Philip Green. He was followed by Victoria Gabbitas who remained until 1985 when Alison Hems took over. Hems was still at the Museum when Merrifield’s book was published. I located both Gabbitas and Hems, as well as another former Museum of Leathercraft employee, Simon Davies. None of them can recall any dealings with Merrifield but all were aware of Swann’s dossier on concealed shoes.<sup>65</sup>

It is likely that Annable’s letter to *Folklore* alerted a number of people to concealed shoes and that awareness of the practice was reasonably widespread among academics and folklore enthusiasts. Gabbitas believes that she first heard of it as a post-graduate student in the now-defunct department of Folk Life Studies at Leeds University. But Swann appears to have made her own separate discovery and understanding of this practice and was the first person to begin the systematic recording and analysing of finds. Merrifield relied largely on the work of Swann in describing the concealment of shoes in old buildings. He noted “there are few local museums in southern England that do not possess a few shoes, mostly dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that were found hidden in old houses, usually in a wall, roof or chimney breast, or under a floor.” Merrifield also discussed other objects found in building voids including the bodies of cats and chickens as well as garments and domestic artefacts. But he said that “by far the commonest charm to protect a building in post-mediaeval times, however, was an old shoe.”<sup>66</sup>

## 2.2 PRESENT AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There appears to be little doubt that many concealed objects remain to be discovered in old houses and other buildings in all of the countries where this practice has been recorded. No concerted, large-scale research has yet been undertaken in any of the countries where this practice is known to have occurred. Such research that does

exist is the result of personal interest and enthusiasm by a variety of individuals who may be employed by universities or museums or who fund their activities by employment in a variety of fields. In Continental Europe research appears to be largely focussed on the objects found as examples of craftwork, materials and manufacturing techniques of their period. The intent of those who made the concealments is rarely addressed and the historical context which produced concealments is seldom explored. Most of the European research into this phenomenon is taking place in England where a number of people and organizations is involved. Details are in Appendix Three (page 419).

### 2.3 CONCLUSION

The work of numerous researchers, many of them members of the Folklore Society, operating in rural, village and metropolitan areas of England during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries confirmed the survival of ancient customs and folk magic practices into the 1930s. Most surprising, perhaps, is the work of Lovett in establishing the role of folk magic in the lives of Londoners – then and now one of the world’s great cities and the ancestral home of many Australians. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a quarter of all emigrants departing from Britain originated in London.<sup>67</sup> Emigrants who left for Australia carried with them a rich and varied cultural pattern of thought and behaviour with which they established a new life far from “home.” But the survival of customs that they practiced in England varied greatly in Australia as a result of widely differing conditions and influences. Only those customs and rituals that were deeply embedded in the culture, whether as part of conventional religious practice or the result of a belief in folk magic, or which had been traditionally practiced for a very long time, appear to have survived the journey. Rituals that were not “place dependent,” as in the case of harvest ceremonies, or which relied on homogeneity of groups, had the best chance of survival – if not in their original form and nature. The majority of the public rituals and customs that had been practiced in the British Isles for centuries were lost, often quite quickly, but a practice that had been secretly and silently observed for a very long time, without notice by the collectors of folk magic practices, made the journey to Britain’s most remote colonial outpost and thrived in Australia until at least the mid-1930s. It remained unknown here until 2004 – long after its recognition in England.

The people principally involved in the discovery of the practice of concealing objects in buildings include John Lea Nevinson of the Victoria and Albert Museum, F.K. Annable, curator at Devizes Museum, Wiltshire, June Swann of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery and the archaeologist Ralph Merrifield. Merrifield was the first to describe the concealment of objects in buildings as part of a ritual practice intended to provide protection for the occupants. Of these people only Swann remains to tell the story of her role in the discovery of an ancient practice that survived into the modern era.

## THREE: TRACING THE PAST

### ABSTRACT

The intention in this chapter is to trace the history of the practice of deliberately concealing objects in old buildings before it arrived in Australia, to outline some of the people who may have been involved in either stimulating the practice or carrying out concealments and to describe other forms of magical practice used in Britain, and which raise the possibility of the transfer to Australia of rituals that are as yet not known here.

### 3.1 ANCIENT ROOTS

Without the benefit of a written record, tracing the history of practices that were always secret is difficult in the extreme. This story begins in Europe and it appears probable but so far unprovable that it came to Australia with the convicts and settlers who began to arrive here in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest shoes yet found in Australian concealments date from circa 1820 and we may find none from before that period: the slab-wall and bark-roofed buildings of the earlier years of settlement have almost all gone and there are no known records of concealments in them.

Secreting shoes in voids in buildings was not a practice unique to the British Isles. The evidence from concealments in Continental Europe indicates that it was widespread there, as related in the following text. And in both Britain and the Continent there is also evidence that this practice had ancient roots. The Concealed Shoe Index at Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, located in the heartland of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century British boot-making industry, traces the history of concealed shoes from the objects that have been discovered in both the UK and continental Europe. What is purported to be the earliest concealment yet found is the sole of a supposed Roman shoe, discovered within the wall of the east tower at *Lympne Castle*, near Folkestone in Kent. The find was made during restoration work in 1905.<sup>1</sup> Although commonly called a castle, *Lympne* is a fortified house and was formerly a residence of archdeacons of Canterbury. The building as it stands today was constructed in various stages in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with much earlier Roman and Saxon structures close by. The Roman attribution of the shoe sole found at *Lympne* is not substantiated and the date of the object is not known, but the find remains an interesting one although it has yet to be the subject of published research. According to English Heritage, the construction date of the east tower is now thought to be 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup> which, if correct, would bring the sole of the shoe found there close to the period of other early concealments. There is, however, the possibility that the tower wall was built on Roman foundations.

The Concealed Shoe Index also records the discovery of an early-14<sup>th</sup> century concealment at *Winchester Cathedral*, Hampshire, where portions of two shoes of about 1300 were found behind the choir stalls in a concealment that pre-dates building changes of 1308. Other mediaeval finds have come from Czechoslovakia, where shoes of the 1350s – 1360s were found at *Kloster Emmaus*, Prague<sup>3</sup> and from Germany where large deposits were discovered beneath the floors of three adjoining houses at Kempten in Allgäu. Known as the *Muhlberg Ensemble*, the houses are Nos. eight, ten, and twelve in the centre of the former Reichsstadt Kempten and were built between 1289 and 1354. The oldest cache was found within an upper-level floor at No. eight. Documents in the cache date this concealment to 1470 – 1530. It contained a large number of items, including writing exercises, a love letter, playing-cards, wooden waste from a turnery and also about 600 leather and skin objects that included a large number of shoes, many of which are the ankle boots of infants. Garments were of sheepskin and wool and included hoods, mittens, gloves and accessories such as bags. Whether this deposit is a ritual concealment or the used of trade and domestic waste to sound-proof and stabilise the floor is not clear. The finds in the *Muhlberg Ensemble* are among a large number of caches, including cats and other animals, that have been found throughout central Europe.<sup>4</sup> The English-language German newspaper *The Local*, published in Berlin but circulating throughout Germany, recently reported the find of caches of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century shoes within the walls of the *Liedberg Palace* in Korschenbroich in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. These were discovered during recent restoration work on the building.<sup>5</sup>



*Some of the objects from a cache at 12 Muhlberg, in Kempten, Allgäu, Germany. Trade waste or a ritual concealment? (Atzbach 2001).*

On the basis of records in the Concealed Shoe Index, June Swann wrote in 1995 that finds had been made in most of the counties of Britain and in Finland, Sweden, Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Czech Republic, Spain, Italy and Turkey; in North America, from the eastern states and provinces, through Indiana to California.<sup>5</sup> I receive occasional email messages from residents of North America, describing objects, including shoes, garments, cats and domestic artifacts, discovered in caches in old houses. The following email from Carol Smith, a Maryland resident, is typical of these accounts. In the email she describes how her brother, resident in their grandparents' house in Crisfield, Maryland, found a cache while repairing flood damage to internal walls: "Under the window, between the walls, he found an old sock that contained two horse shoes, a broken salt shaker, a large spent bullet and a large knife which has English insignia."<sup>6</sup>

Another Maryland cache consisting of two 1850s children's shoes found within a wall is now held by the Gatehouse Museum, Sykesville, not far from the find location at Flohrville.<sup>7</sup> The discovery of objects concealed within a chimney void was witnessed by the San Diego archaeologist Ronald May at Fort Rosecrans, California, in May 1998. The fort was established in 1872 to protect the entrance to San Diego harbour. May was present to record work on the site when one of the chimneys at an obsolete barracks dating from 1904 was demolished:

Amidst a billowing cloud of brick dust and flying debris, a cavity appeared concealed behind the finely mortared fire hearth. The construction team had just demolished 20-feet of chimney and began removing the yellow-tan firebricks, when the façade tumbled down. Vaguely familiar shapes slowly emerged as the dust settled. Pulling down the last of the façade, the workmen removed a scuffed old army boot and a Spanish-American War campaign hat.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.1.1 DATES OF SHOE CONCEALMENTS

Working from her own records in the Concealed Shoe Index at Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, June Swann published an article in *Costume*, the journal of the Costume Society, in 1996 in which she outlined the number of concealments found in a period that spanned eight centuries. The results are as follows:

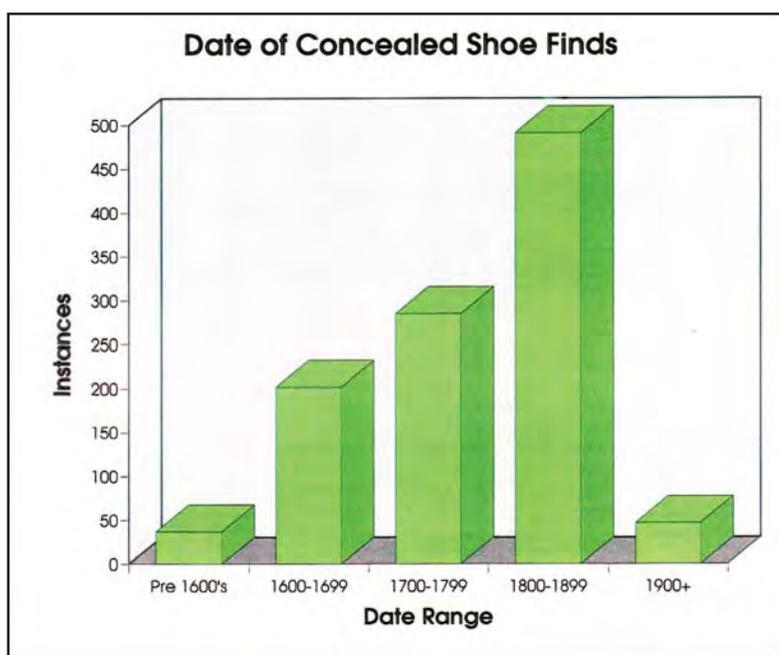
**TABLE 3.1**

<b>EIGHT CENTURIES OF SHOE CONCEALMENTS</b>	
13 <sup>th</sup> century	1
14 <sup>th</sup> century	4
15 <sup>th</sup> century	4
16 <sup>th</sup> century	20
17 <sup>th</sup> century	154
18 <sup>th</sup> century	270
19 <sup>th</sup> century	424
20 <sup>th</sup> century	44

Source: Swan, 1996

The table includes the Czech finds from the 14<sup>th</sup> century but does not include the Kempton Algäu finds from Germany which were not published until 2000 or reported finds from other countries which had not been verified to her satisfaction.<sup>9</sup> Further statistical assessment of finds was made in 1997 by Fiona Pitt, at that time Assistant Keeper at Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, who prepared the graph below for an article in the *Newsletter* of the Archaeological Leather Group, working from records largely compiled by June Swann.<sup>10</sup>

TABLE 3.2



Source: Pitt, 1997.

The same pattern of distribution over the centuries was noted by both Swann and Pitt: a steady, progressive increase from before the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, followed by a steep decline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While this type of analysis is not possible for Australian concealments (as European settlement here did not commence until 1788) we may be seeing the same profile, albeit in fragmentary form, as a result of the apparent transfer of the custom to the Australian colonies just before and during the most intensive period of its development. The practice thus came to the Australian colonies in the period in which it flourished in the United Kingdom. The pattern here follows the British prototype with the same extensive record of concealments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the same rapid decline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This appears to suggest that the forces that produced this phenomenon in the United Kingdom and in other parts of the world were also at work in Australia.

### 3.1.2 THE DEVIL IN THE BOOT

The name of John Schorn, pastor at St Mary's Church at North Marston, Buckinghamshire, from 1290 to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century has long been associated with a belief that shoes could serve as traps for evil spirits. The legend of Schorn's feat in "conjuring the Devil into a boot" spread throughout southern England in the centuries after his death in 1314.<sup>11</sup> The use of the word "conjuring" may be indicative of the reality of this supposed event at a time when the Church was known to be partial to deceptive practices to



*St Mary's Church, North Marston*

persuade the gullible that they had just witnessed a miracle. At St Mary's there is a small opening high on the north wall of the chancel that I saw when I visited the church in 2006. The hole in the wall opens onto a priest's room above the vestry and it is thought this may have been the place where a mechanical Devil, or Jack, popped out to terrify members of the congregation. The story of the Devil in the boot may be the origin of the child's toy in which Jack, a clown or jester, jumps out of a box.<sup>12</sup>

Schorn had gained a reputation as a healer of various ailments, including the ague (malaria), and rheumatic and eye afflictions. He was also believed to possess the power to revive dead cattle and resuscitate the drowned. The waters of the spring which he caused to rise from the ground near his church by tapping the earth with his staff were said to have healing properties. The water was chalybeate (containing salts of iron) and was reputedly a cure for gout which in itself may have been "the Devil in the boot." Scores of pilgrims visited Schorn's burial place at North Marston in order to display piety, perform penance, and in the hope of gaining a cure or witnessing a miracle. The continued success of the Schorn cult for a century and a half after his death attracted the attention of the Dean of Windsor, Richard Beauchamp, who was impressed by the fame and profitability of the Schorn pilgrimage centre at North Marston. King Edward IV made the official appeal to Pope Sixtus IV for a licence to move the bones to Windsor Castle and the transfer took place in



*Schorn's well today*

1478. Schorn's relics were housed in a specially constructed chantry chapel in the south-east corner of St George's Chapel with an iron money box, made circa 1480 for the purpose of collecting donations from pilgrims, conveniently standing by the shrine. St George's Chapel subsequently became one of the most important pilgrimage centres in southern England, although this is perhaps because Schorn shared the space with the bones of Henry VI. In addition to acquiring Schorn's bones Windsor appropriated his North Marston rectory (which probably refers to the benefice rather than a house), presumably to control the pilgrimage cult and maximise the profits. The Papal Bull authorising this takeover survives in the archives of St George's Chapel.<sup>13</sup>

In an age before mass media, communication with large numbers of people was achieved by sermons, religious tokens and by images on rood screens inside virtually every English church. Rood screens were the mediaeval equivalent of the very large flat screens which are used today to televise major events to mass audiences in city squares and outdoor spaces. Rood screens, with their depictions of saints, apostles, popes, biblical characters and angels, presented a powerful message to members of the congregation and were the focus of intense devotion. The purpose of the rood screen was to divide the chancel, with its altar, from the nave, which was often used for secular purposes. It was an invariable part of the furnishing of every church until the Reformation. The screen was generally surmounted by a loft, upon which stood the rood, a giant figure of Christ crucified. The East Anglian historian Tom Muckley records that the Reformation saw the destruction of roods and the majority of lofts, though the screens themselves were often spared as they were a useful feature in the ordering of the church. Most figure sculpture and painting depicted thereon, however, was generally defaced.<sup>14</sup> Roods consisted of three elements. The first was the screen which was set across the chancel arch, dividing nave from chancel, and standing at a height of say ten or twelve feet. Its lower section, or dado, stood about four feet high, was panelled and the panels usually decorated with painted images of the saints.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence of the destruction of screens in the Reformation



*Rood screen images of John Schorn with the Devil in the boot. Left, St. Gregory's, Sudbury. Right, St Helen, Gately. (Simon Knott, [norfolkchurches.co.uk](http://norfolkchurches.co.uk))*

we do not know how many depicted John Schorn's encounter with the Devil. His images survive today on 15<sup>th</sup> century screens at a small number of parish churches in England, among them *St Agnes*, Cawston, Norfolk, dated at circa 1450; *St Helen*, Gately, Norfolk, of 1480; *St Margaret*, Suffield, Norfolk, 1450; *St Gregory's*, Sudbury, Suffolk, circa 1500. Schorn's image has disappeared from a number of churches in which it once appeared, including *St Michael's*, Alphington, Devon, *St Onolaus*, Portlemouth, Devon, *St Paul's*, Wolborough, Devon, and

others, including *St Mary's*, North Marston.<sup>16</sup> The latter was destroyed in 1537 after John Stockesley, Bishop of London, a commissioner for pulling down superstitious pictures, reported to Thomas Cromwell, chief minister to Henry VIII, that he had found at North Marston “Mr. Johan Schorne blessing a boot, whereunto they do say he conveyed the Devil.”<sup>17</sup>

Schorn, the charismatic provincial pastor, celebrity doctor and one of England’s unofficial saints, became a star of the mass media of his time. In his appearances on rood screens he is dressed in the cap and gown of a Doctor of Divinity, gesturing at the Devil peeping from the tall boot held in his hand. It is difficult to tell from the images whether the Devil is entering the boot or popping out, like the jack-in-the-box that the Schorn legend is thought to have inspired.

The story of John Schorn, the boot and the Devil, was delivered to audiences across England for centuries. Images of Schorn also appeared on leadlight windows in churches. A painting survives



*John Schorn and the Devil in the boot. The painting, by Hamlet Watling, 1889, is a copy of a window from Bury St Edmonds Abbey, Suffolk. (V & A: D304.1889CG73)*



*The Schorn pilgrim badge from the Thames: plate 13 in Wright's The Romance of the Shoe.*

of the decorative window from Bury St Edmonds Abbey (now in ruins), on which the familiar tale was depicted. Pilgrim badges and devotional aids displayed the image of Schorn and his accompaniments. The Museum of London has a badge, recovered from the Thames in London in 1866, on which the priest, the boot and the Devil are portrayed. Several variations of this item, manufactured from lead and pewter, are known. The archives of Windsor Castle hold the gloriously-illustrated *Schorn Book of Hours*, used by a wealthy pilgrim on his journey to the shrine at North Marston, at some time in the period from 1430 – 1450. The flyleaf contains a hymn, sung at Mass at North Marston,

that appeals to Schorn to use his powers to heal a variety of ailments:

Hail, help of the sick / medicine of those harassed / by the pain of fevers  
 Hail, light of the eyes / liberator of the weak / from the toothache  
 Hail, since the ox / restored to life / gives witness of your miracles  
 Hail, thou who art the / rescuer of all the drowned / by thy prayers.<sup>18</sup>

On another level altogether are the numerous inns named “The Devil in the Boot,” at least six of which were dotted around the Buckinghamshire countryside until the 1970s.<sup>19</sup> The last of these, in Granborough Road in the village of Winslow, five kilometres from North Marston, has now either closed or succumbed to the fad for renaming pubs. If John Schorn was not in fact the inspiration for the use of shoes and boots as a kind of spirit trap in houses and other buildings throughout Britain he certainly did the movement no harm. It hardly seems likely that the connection between boots or shoes and the Devil would have passed without notice by the many people in late-mediaeval England who were made aware of the legend of John Schorn.



*The circa 1900 inn sign from Winslow, Buckinghamshire. (NMG)*

### 3.1.3 MASONRY AND FREEMASONRY

Masonry is the craft of working in brick or stone to construct buildings. Freemasonry is a fraternal organisation whose membership has shared moral and metaphysical ideals, and whose origins are sometimes erroneously claimed to have ancient roots in the craft of the mason. But those who sought ancient records of the craft found the documented history of the organisation sparse indeed. J.O. Halliwell-Phillips wrote in 1839 that:



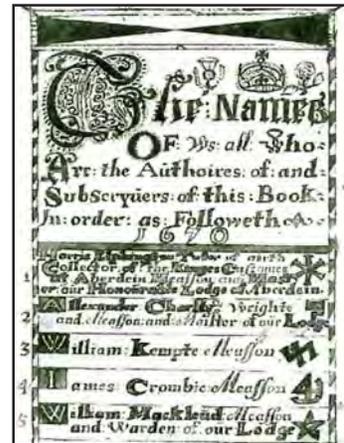
*A cathedral carving of a mason, reproduced in *The Builder*, January 1924.*

We possess no series of documents, nor even an approach to a series, sufficiently extensive to enable us to form any connected history of the ancient institutions of Masons and Freemasons.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, freemasonry originated in late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Scotland as a brotherhood of men bound together by initiation ceremonies, by rituals and forms of identification – all of which were secret – and organised into lodges. The lodges at Edinburgh and Aitchison’s

Haven have minutes of meetings surviving from 1599. New lodges appeared throughout Scotland in rapid succession throughout the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, including Kilwinning, Stirling, St Andrews and many others.<sup>21</sup> At first one of the principal purposes of the lodges was to regulate the working lives of stonemasons but social and ritual functions gradually subsumed the original purpose. In England, where freemasonry spread in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, members were largely drawn from the gentry and the army.<sup>22</sup> As a result of its various private rituals Freemasonry has long been regarded by outsiders as a highly secretive and rather controversial organization. A more welcoming and open attitude has been adopted by Masonic lodges throughout the world in recent times. The result is that some secrets of the past are no longer secret. A significant number of finds of concealed shoes in Australia appears to have been associated with members of the building trades and craftsmen in masonry (which includes bricklaying) in particular. These are apparent in the Catalogue of Finds elsewhere in this thesis. It was therefore considered appropriate to attempt to ascertain whether there is any link between concealed objects and Freemasonry.

Stonemasons have for many centuries chiselled symbols onto building stone for reasons that are locational, with marks that indicate where the block was to be placed in a building, and as signature marks that identify the work of a individual craftsmen. As Freemasonry gathered strength, lodges assumed the task of recording and registering the marks used by various stonemasons, thus ensuring that duplication did not occur.<sup>23</sup> The first lodges were often constructed adjacent to great cathedrals, churches, substantial houses or other buildings as a form of site office in which meals were taken and the work discussed. It was also common for masons to shape and carve the stone in the lodge, often a lean-to against the wall of the building in which they were working. The lodge protected them from heat, cold and rain. It also served as a tool store and as a place where men working away from home could sleep.<sup>24</sup> These lodges were eventually moved offsite and used to unite members to provide a regulatory framework for issues associated with the craft of masonry and moral and ethical questions. Restricting membership to working, or operative, masons was not possible at that time. The reasons for this dilution of the membership were described by H.L. Haywood, editor of *The Builder*, who offered an early 20<sup>th</sup> century view of traditional practices as he understood them at the time. Haywood noted that lodges were necessarily permeated by religious authorities and local corporations for whom cathedrals and churches were being built and by clerks employed to keep the account books and records of the work.<sup>25</sup> For these reasons, the membership of lodges was progressively diluted by



*Early masons' marks from the mark book of the Lodge of Aberdeen, 1670. (Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory)*

Early masons' marks from the mark book of the Lodge of Aberdeen, 1670. (Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons of South Australia and the Northern Territory)

non-operative, or so-called speculative members. As a result, steps were taken to restrict trade secrets to operative members of lodges. Haywood notes that lower expectations were applied to speculative members:

....such a brother could not take oath to keep the trade secrets about which he was to learn nothing; neither could he be required to produce a master's piece, as regular apprentices were, because he would not possess the skill.<sup>26</sup>

There is a clear inference in the above that not all of the secrets of the operative members of a lodge were freely shared within the lodge itself. Secrets of the trade and the lodge were also closely guarded from other tradesmen employed on a project:

At every fabric many workmen not members of the lodge were necessarily employed, of which we have abundant records; they were known as rough masons, cowans, rough setters, "masons without the word," wallers, plasterers, etc. It was strictly prohibited for any master mason to lay out plans or otherwise employ his trade secrets in the presence of these men, who were looked upon as "profane" or outsiders.<sup>27</sup>

The extent and nature of this culture of secrecy is very difficult to determine now. The question arises as to whether operative masons had a tradition of oral history in which secrets that were never recorded or revealed to outsiders were passed on through the generations of this trade. The control of lodges by operative masons began to wane in England after the Reformation as great churches and cathedrals were no longer built. The craft of masonry faded and Masonic lodges were controlled by speculative masons.<sup>28</sup> Individual stonemasons appear to have been left to fend for themselves for more than 150 years but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century guilds of Mark Master Masons began to be formed, the first being recorded in a set of minutes made up in Portsmouth in 1769.<sup>29</sup> A grand lodge of Mark Master Masons was formed in London in 1856. Mark Master Masons were active in Australia in the 1850s with the Adelaide lodge of Mark Master Masons being formed on 11 July 1854. Other lodges were formed in the various Australian colonies at different times during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A pre-requisite of membership of these lodges was that "A brother must be a Master Mason in Craft Masonry before he is eligible to become a Mark Master Mason."<sup>30</sup>

In the long period of time in which lodges were controlled by speculative masons craftsmen in stone continued to mark their work with the designs that identified individual members of the craft. Such marks are widely seen on 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century stonework in Australia, indicating the transmission of a practice that occurred in Britain and elsewhere in Europe for many centuries. Trade knowledge and secrets thus continued to be passed on,

as they had throughout history, from ageing masters to the younger men who had attained rank in their trade. One practical reason for the use of marks as personal identifiers is the very low level of literacy of tradesmen and other members of the community in the period before 1800 and even afterwards. For example, letters and requests, known at the time as memorials, from convicts to colonial officials in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century New South Wales were often prepared by scribes with the person who initiated the document signing with his or her mark. There are many examples of this in the records of the NSW Colonial Secretary, 1788 – 1825.<sup>31</sup>

Because the concealment of objects in buildings pre-dates by many centuries the establishment of Freemasonry there appears to be no reason to associate concealments with it. It is likely, however, that the construction of many Australian houses and buildings was supervised and managed by men who began their life in the building industry as stonemasons and who at some time became Freemasons. If, as I suspect, these men as part of their tradecraft became privy to the ancient custom of placing shoes and other objects in building voids they would have been the keepers of two different and distinct sets of secrets. The practice of concealing objects in buildings was not the exclusive rite of stonemasons but, as is evident from the Catalogue of Finds, was also observed by bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers and roof slaters. It appears to have been endemic among the building trades. Freemasonry and the concealment of objects within houses and other buildings are not, in my view, necessarily linked. It is, however, possible that the more ancient practice of concealing objects was adopted by some lodges and disseminated as part of their own individual secret traditions.

Between 2004 and 2009, my research into deliberately concealed objects in old buildings was the subject of considerable publicity throughout Australia in the electronic media (including one television programme that was screened nationally on two occasions and other local interviews and reports), as well as national, regional and local radio interviews and numerous articles in the printed media. Several tradesmen, including bricklayers, made contact as a result of this publicity and were aware of the practice of concealment solely because they had discovered objects in the course of their work. They had no knowledge of the history of this practice, and prior to my explanation of it, did not understand the significance of the objects they had found. There were no telephone calls or any other form of contact from stonemasons or Mark Master Masons in regard to this matter. Stonemasons were involved in the concealment of shoes and other objects in old Australian houses and buildings but while the association of individual tradesmen with Freemasonry is probable, and indeed highly likely, it cannot be said that the practice of concealment was part of any Masonic tradition.

### 3.1.4 WHO CONCEALED?

A particular group of folk magic practitioners first attracted my attention as possible suspects in the concealment of objects in Australian houses. In England, they were frequently known as cunning folk but the names were subject to regional variation. Conjurers, wizards, wise man or wise woman and white witch were some of the titles attached to them. The services offered by individual members of this craft varied as widely as their titles. They claimed to be able to locate stolen property, identify thieves and future husbands, procure love, heal the sick, provide protective charms, cast horoscopes and unbewitch the bewitched. Cunning men and women were folk magic's general practitioners, operating at a rural, village, town or suburban level for many centuries until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup>



*A 19th-century cunning woman, seen at work in this re-creation at the Museum of Witchcraft, Boscastle.*

Among the many tasks performed by them were the identification of witches and the preparation of witch bottles, the process of which is discussed later in this chapter. Writing of cunning folk in 2003, Owen Davies said: “a century ago everyone in rural society would have been familiar with the term and two hundred years ago the majority of the population, in both town and country, would have known of at least one cunning man or cunning woman.”<sup>33</sup>

Davies recounts the story of Ann Tomlinson of Oldham who, having asked Clayton Chaffer to tell her fortune, was informed that her husband had been having an affair for six years. A charm prepared by Chaffer would “make him one of the best of all husbands.” For seven shillings Chaffer gave her a written charm sealed with different coloured wafers which she had to place next to her heart under her stays. There were herbs to put in her husband’s tea and she was advised to burn his urine in the fire while saying the Lord’s prayer and reading certain parts of the Bible.<sup>34</sup> Cunning folk employed a variety of methods to impress the gullible, extraordinary and outlandish garb being but one such device. A Yorkshire cunning woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century used a stuffed lizard and papers and herbs strung from the ceiling. During consultations she wore a conical hat and a sheet scrawled with magical signs.<sup>35</sup>



Dr. John Harries (1828–1863) of the well-known family of Welsh cunning folk in a circa 1855 ambrotype. (NMW)

Other cunning folk, such as the several generations of the Harries family of Pantcoy, Wales, impressed and even terrified their clients with their extensive libraries of occult books. A book of spells, sealed with seven large padlocks, was said to give members of the family great power.<sup>36</sup> The number of cunning folk operating in Britain at any time is not recorded although Thomas in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* suggests that at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century they were comparable in number to the provincial clergy.<sup>37</sup> It seems probable that some cunning folk would have been transported to Australia for one reason or another. If so, they appear to have vanished from sight when they

reached here. The Norwich cunning woman Sarah Whisker, sentenced to transportation in 1846 for providing a potion to procure an abortion, died before she could be shipped to Australia.<sup>38</sup>

While no other cunning folk have yet been identified as candidates for transportation to Australia or as practitioners in this country, William Allison of New Norfolk, Tasmania, left a written record confirming that certain aspects of magical practice were known here. His notebook and almanac, now in the Tasmanian Archives, records the use of remedies that blend folk medicine and charms and suggest some acquaintance with magic.<sup>39</sup> The almanac was *Vox Stellarum* by Francis Moore, Physician, published in London in 1811. Allison was overseer at the property of Lieutenant Arthur Davies, RN, and had accompanied his master to Australia. Both men arrived in Hobart from London aboard the *Lang* on 28/12/1828.<sup>40</sup> By 1830, Allison was at the Davies property, *The Lawn*, five miles from New Norfolk.<sup>41</sup> He appears to have been a client of cunning folk rather than a practitioner, recording the recipes in his book. One of these, provided by an apparent cunning man named Moses Jewell, was said to cure “Streans, Bruises, sore Brests, Scalds, Burns, Cuts, Bruscs, Rhumaticks, Pains, foot rot in sheep, Strains in Horses legs or wounds By hunting.” This consisted of a gill of “Neach foot oil” (neatsfoot), an ounce of “Oile of Camile,” (camomile) and half a gill of “Oil of Turpentine.” The maker was instructed to heat the potion over a slow fire, bottle it warm “& cork it Close.” There is a faint echo in the heating and corking of this potion of the witch bottle recipe of Joseph Blagrave (see

page 96). Another remedy, said to be a “Sacred Charm” for the “Ague or Fever” involved the recitation of the words “Good Lord, deliver us thy Servants who putteth their Trust in the(e) Amen.” This concluded with the standard invocation of the cunning man or woman: “So be it.” From Benjamin Knopes of McGill’s Marshes, Van Diemen’s Land, on 16 May 1832 Allison obtained a recipe to cure “a Burn or Scald.” This required: “One Tablespoon of Slick’d (slaked) Lime finely sifted Put in half a Pint of Linseed oil spread on cloth put on the Part.”<sup>42</sup>

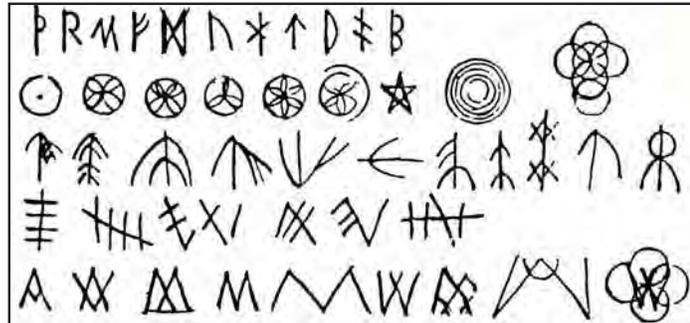
While there is an apparent lack of evidence to connect cunning men and women with Australian concealments, there are clear connections to building tradesmen in a number of concealed shoe discoveries. At Bathurst, NSW, a pair of late 19th-century boots found beneath the front room of a cottage in Russell Street are dusted with lime mortar and plaster, hinting at a concealment by either bricklayers or plasterers. In this case, the collusion of the carpenters who laid the floor over these boots is also indicated. The boots would have been in plain view of the carpenters engaged in constructing the floor or were perhaps placed there after the joists and bearers were in place but before the floor was laid. In either case, the concealment, and others like it, could not have been carried out without the full knowledge of the carpenters. These boots have the block heels that are typical of those worn by 19<sup>th</sup>-century stockmen, providing a glimpse into the pattern of employment in rural Australia at that time. Just as in the present day, it appears that rural workers of the period had to take employment where they could find it.

Other shoes and boots suspected to be those of building tradesmen have also been found and can be readily identified from the images in the Catalogue of Finds (page 224). Larger-sized rugged and battered boots splashed with lime mortar, paint or plaster are probable indicators of trade work. Another indicator of trade concealments comes from the finds made in public buildings such as courthouses and police stations where the incentive and opportunity for outsiders to make the concealments would appear to be very low. An outstanding example of this is the boot in the south-east pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (page 227). In spite of this link to building tradesmen, the majority of concealments do not have an apparent connection to the building trades, although this may be deceptive. In the absence of any contemporary documentary information, or indeed any other evidence, it is reasonable to surmise that at least some of these concealments may have been carried out by the people in residence in the houses where objects were placed.

In the UK, other folk magic practices overlapped the concealment of objects in buildings. Among these was the use of apotropaic marks which, it appears, shared a common purpose with concealments. The principal investigator of these marks was, and remains, Timothy Easton of Suffolk.

### 3.1.5 MYSTERIES IN THE MATERIALS

Careful examination of scribed and painted marks on stone, timber and plaster in a variety of old buildings in Suffolk and elsewhere in England from 1982 resulted in the independent architectural historian and artist Timothy Easton concluding that he was looking at a record of belief in witchcraft and malevolent forces from the



*A selection of building marks recorded by Timothy Easton. Some may be tally marks but most appear to be apotropaic in nature. These marks are common in old buildings throughout East Anglia and elsewhere in England. (Easton 1988).*

spiritual world. He set out his views on this matter in conversations during my visit to *Bedfield Hall* in 2006. Easton states that examination of a substantial number of buildings revealed patterns in the repetition of certain marks and their placement on the structures. Marks such as these are found in the same general areas as concealments. Some of these symbols have been deciphered but others retain their mystery. Easton's interest in old houses began at *Meare Close*, Tadworth, Surrey, a 17<sup>th</sup> century house in which he spent the first thirty years of his life. A previous owner, William Friswell, a landowner and gentleman farmer, had carried out a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century makeover in which crosses were carved on all of the doorways, fireplaces and cupboards. Easton was later to conclude that the marks had an apotropaic function and began to explore this phenomenon when he and his wife, Christine, bought their first home in Suffolk in 1972. This was a condemned row of three cottages, said to be 17<sup>th</sup> century, but which turned out to be one 14<sup>th</sup>-century house with an attached shop.<sup>43</sup> The process of researching and restoring this structure confirmed Easton's decision to continue his research into old buildings. Further recording of marks on many other houses, including the one in which he currently lives, resulted in a steady accumulation of knowledge and insight into both the construction of ancient buildings and the lives of the people who had once lived in them. Among his discoveries were the mysterious marks found on his own houses and on other buildings in Suffolk and elsewhere in England:

When we bought the house in the old market town of Debenham I was on the lookout for archaeological material and began to discover this in abundance. During the 1970's I recorded many of the buildings being restored in the town and in 1979 – 80 put on an exhibition called "Behind the Facade" in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Market Cross building. Much of the evidence of superstitious practices that I had observed was shown here.<sup>44</sup>



*Timothy Easton with the contents of a spiritual midden, Cutchey's Farmhouse, Long Thurlow, Suffolk, 1989. The objects were recovered from two middens found next to a chimney in the parlour chamber. The middens were topped up by accessing the attic space over the parlour. Easton is holding the lid of a small 17<sup>th</sup>-century barrel bearing John Cutchey's name. Objects in the middens date from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. (Timothy Easton)*

Easton has conducted research into the history and material culture of folk magic in East Anglia during the past four decades. In visits to old houses in the area since 1972 he has inspected a large number of concealment caches. In the process of this work, Easton has reached conclusions about the role of various groups of people in the numerous manifestations of magical practice that are found in East Anglia. Some of the groups identified by him are as follows:

<b>Professional practitioners</b>	Magicians who may have practised as doctors and who had an interest in alchemy. They may be responsible for the elaborate candle-smoke marks found in East Anglian houses from the second half of the 17 <sup>th</sup> century. These ceilings generally appear in the houses of the lower gentry, which indicates that either the fees were not affordable for smaller house owners, or that these tasks were only performed for clients who were considered worthy.
<b>Semi-professionals</b>	Cunning folk. Their role in rural, village and town life was to act on behalf of clients in all manner of problems that required supernatural power. Their tasks included the production of love potions and amulets, finding lost or stolen property, the preparation of witch bottles, the creation of charms and the casting of spells. Sometimes when their work misfired they found themselves accused of witchcraft by an aggrieved client.
<b>Tradesmen</b>	Carpenters, stonemasons, bricklayers, plasterers, thatchers etc. Tradesmen were responsible for the safety of the buildings they constructed by providing protection against lightning, weather, fire and supernatural forces.
<b>Lay practitioners</b>	Householders who were one or more adult members of a family group who had acquired an understanding of the use of folk magic to protect their home and family. They secreted objects in sealed voids (as did the builders), or continually added personal items to open voids over several generations (usually from the roof area) as a lure into spirit traps. These areas could also contain dead animals, dead birds or skeletal material which had been deliberately selected to act as a sacrifice or for their protective powers. <sup>45</sup>

This categorisation helps to identify the groups of people who were involved in concealments and in the variety of protective practices found in Britain. Easton coined the term “spiritual midden” to describe that category of concealment created by householders over a period of time:

It is necessary to distinguish the spiritual midden, which was an offering by the householder, from the builder’s deposit. The latter usually have only a few objects collected together, which perhaps represent what was to hand when the boards of an inserted floor were nailed down. These objects appear to have been deposited out of self-interest rather than for the occupier’s wellbeing.

Verbal evidence from builders working in small family firms in the 1950s records that this was a tradition passed from father to son and kept secret from customers and their own labourers.

The term spiritual midden has been misunderstood and wrongly applied to all types of caches, such as those under floors and plastered in walls. These can be done by workmen or the householder and possibly by a collusion of both groups acting together. The spiritual midden is very specific in that it refers to an access point where large numbers of objects can accumulate over many years, sometimes over generations, that is not closed off at the top. It is a sort of rubbish “pit,” but with a very specific ritual and spiritual purpose.

The great advantage of analysing these over other sorts of depositions is the chance to give a clearer idea of who was doing what, because the builders’ secretions were necessarily a one-off action at the time of construction and so had fewer items. The spiritual midden therefore had to be a “spirit trap” which was ever open and so purely for the use of the occupants.<sup>46</sup>

The use of the terms “spiritual midden” and “apotropaic marks” stimulated interest in practices of which very few people were aware until comparatively recently. These terms were first promulgated in England by Easton in about 1990 and have since gained a place in the language. Easton ties the introduction of both terms to a talk he gave twenty years ago, at a time when architects, historians and others in the heritage community focused on buildings as artifacts but neglected the lives of the people who built and occupied them:

It was at the winter conference of the Vernacular Architecture Group before 1991, shared with the Regional Furniture Society, that I first coined these terms and which led to a new interest amongst members in looking out for apotropaic items, marks and concealed objects. When I used the term “apotropaic” in conjunction with illustrations of scribed and painted symbols it was as if a light bulb of 1000 watts had been switched on. There were several curators of National Trust Houses and Museums who began to quote and illustrate this word (using newly discovered symbols of their own), which was new to most of them, despite it having been around since the ancient Greeks....<sup>47</sup>

In discussions during visits to his home at Bedfield, Suffolk, in 2002 and 2006 and in a number of articles published since he began this research, Easton described the two main categories of apotropaic marks he has found. One group of marks is related to Christian worship, and often linked specifically to the Virgin Mary, and the other makes use of marks that originate in magic rituals. These two poles of belief are called into

play in houses and other buildings in many areas of the United Kingdom. These marks have been found on joinery, masonry, plaster walls and ceilings and on furniture. The period in which they are found dates from as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century through to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They also occur in the United States.<sup>48</sup> Christian marks are usually based on invocations to Mary and persist until well after the Reformation was supposed to have quelled Catholic belief and worship. It is surprising to find these marks in East Anglia as it has long been considered the seat of Puritan sympathy and sentiment. The marks in question include interlinked double V's, for example "W." In these, the central upright arms of the letters cross over one another. This mark is believed to represent the Latin words "Virgo Virginum" which translates as "Virgin of Virgins." The popular Marian prayer, the *Memorare*, attributed to Father Claude Bernard (1558-1641) contains the phrase "I fly to thee, Mary, virgin of virgins, mother of Jesus Christ" in the edition of the *Coeleste Palmetum* of 1741.<sup>49</sup>

While it cannot be said whether this text was generally available in England, the letters VV were widely used on buildings in that country during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is now apparent that this symbol had an even older origin. Together with other marks of an apotropaic nature, it appears on the wall outside an entrance to the chapel at *Krak des Chevaliers*, a Crusader castle of the Knights Hospitallers in Syria. I saw and photographed this and other apotropaic marks during a visit to the castle in May 2010. Because *Krak des Chevaliers* was abandoned by the Crusaders



*Apotropaic symbolism at the entrance to the chapel at Krak des Chevaliers, Syria. From the top, the VV mark, the words "Ave Maria" and a pentagram. The daisy wheel symbol was also used in this building.*

in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter was occupied by members of the Muslim faith until the 1930s the double V and other marks would have been inscribed on the entrance to the chapel prior to the Crusader withdrawal on 7 April 1271.<sup>50</sup>

A full 200 years after the Reformation began, someone scratched two interlocking V's at the entrance to John Schorn's Church, St Mary's, at North Marston, Buckinghamshire, and then placed the date, 1737, next to them. I saw and photographed these marks in April 2006. The use of the double V indicates



*An apotropaic mark of 1737 at the entrance to St Mary's Church, North Marston, Buckinghamshire.*

that the old religion had survived in the heart of the country despite efforts to erase it from England. In the same category as the interlocking Vs are the letters AMR which it is suggested stand for the Latin “Ave Maria Regina” which translates as “Hail, Queen Mary.” It is not clear whether the people who used religious marks are also responsible for those marks which stand apart from literacy and which appear to invoke entirely different forces. Among these are the stylised outline forms of spectacles that have been scribed into timbers in roof cavities in such a way that they would be “visible” only to spiritual beings passing over the landscape. Spectacle marks have been interpreted by Easton as an effort to deflect the evil eye.

The most widely used of the non-literary marks is the so-called daisy wheel which consists of a circle scribed onto the surface of timber, plaster or stone. Within the circle is a group of arcs resembling the shape of petals. These are often incomplete and so are believed to make a statement on the imperfection of the nature of man and by inference of the beauty and perfection of God and his work. This deferential attitude by itself can be seen as another form of invocation to the Creator. Other marks are less transparent in their nature: runic shapes, circles and scratches which are not yet understood.<sup>51</sup> Many of these marks have been visible for centuries, others have been revealed during the course of recent building work in which later layers of materials were removed. In both cases, seeing the marks is not the same as understanding them. It is clear, however, that their purpose has puzzled and intrigued people for a very long time. Charles Godfrey Leland wrote to *Folklore* magazine in 1897 from Florence to ask about the marks he had initially noticed being scratched by women supplicants on ancient buildings in Egypt. These, he was told, were made by women hoping to become mothers. But he found something equally puzzling on his return to Europe:

I often found similar markings on stones, and they were invariably on buildings, market crosses, and similar monuments which had been erected previous to the fifteenth century. I found them in England, Germany, and Normandy.

His curiosity aroused, Leland closely examined the European marks and noted some distinguishing characteristics:



*Elaborate daisy wheels, Litcham, Norfolk. (Matthew Champion).*



*Two overlapping marks on roof cavity timbers, Kew Palace, London. (HRP).*

It is specially to be observed that these marks all have a generic character or family likeness, that they generally occur in groups, and, thirdly, that they are only found on ancient buildings.

Leland called for research into the use of marks on old buildings:

What is of equal importance will be to ascertain whether there exists in written or oral records any proof of such a custom or belief in Europe, and what details or circumstances are connected with it.<sup>52</sup>

The readers of *Folklore* offered no response to Leland's enquiry and it was not until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that serious notice was taken of this phenomenon. As a result of research conducted since the early 1970s, Easton and other British researchers have concluded that the purpose of the marks was to provide protection from evil. These marks are now described as *apotropaic* and most commonly occur in the same location patterns within buildings: at doorways or windows, on chimney breasts and in roof cavities.<sup>53</sup> There is an echo in the placement of the marks, and in the location of concealed objects, in the ancient Greek and Roman regard for the god and goddess of the threshold, crossroads and other liminal spaces from which it was thought that danger might spring. These were Janus, the two-faced god of entrances and beginnings, and Hecate, who protected borders and crossroads. To the ancient Greeks and Romans these were places that possessed supernatural power and therefore required divine protection. Spirits hovered around these places because they were voids in the continuum – neither in one place nor the other. W. Warde Fowler in his *Religious Experience of the Roman People* refers to the belief that the door of a house was a danger zone: “because evil spirits or the ghosts of the dead may gain access to the house through it.”<sup>54</sup> S.I. Johnston in “Crossroads” says that magic was often performed at thresholds as these were places where souls or ghosts gathered.<sup>55</sup>

Apotropaic marks occur in the same positions on buildings as do concealments of shoes, garments, cats and other items in old buildings in the United Kingdom and in old Australian buildings. It appears that the use of these marks was limited in Australia. While no systematic investigation of Australian buildings to determine whether apotropaic marks are found in this country has yet been carried out, they do not appear to have been used here in any significant number. At the present time, I am aware of four locations where these occur. A form of the daisy wheel was found in the foyer of the old Windsor Council Chambers on Brisbane's north side. The mark appears to be a purpose-made rendition of this motif, created in cement render just inside the entrance. The building was constructed in 1897



*The mark above is on the wall, inside the entrance to the former Windsor Council Chambers, Brisbane.*



*The daisy wheel mark in the stables at Shene, Tasmania. (Steve Watts).*

by William Parsons, of whom nothing further is known.<sup>56</sup> I found another, with a clear resemblance to English marks, in the 1851 stables at *Shene*, near Bagdad, Tasmania. Others occur at Lewisham, Tasmania, and at Collingwood, Victoria. Other categories of marks that have been interpreted in Britain as apotropaic include burn marks made with rush lights on fireplace lintels, and candle smoke marks on ceilings. Easton believes the candle smoke marks were made by taking a candle to the village church,

lighting it from the holy flame and carefully carrying it to the house where the smoke from the candle was used to “draw” symbols on the ceilings.<sup>57</sup> Apotropaic marks are found at perimeter entry points to a house and in those places in or near the building where food was stored, prepared or consumed and in buildings where farm animals were housed. Marks have been found on kitchen ceilings, in barns and on dairy doors.



*Rushlight burn marks on a fireplace lintel at the old Guildhall, Lavenham, Suffolk.*

Many of the marks are quite faint and can only be distinguished with the aid of an oblique light. Others have been gouged out with a rase knife. These have a blade which has a scoop or hook at the end and are commonly used for marking outlines of patterns and designs. Rase knives are used by carpenters and shipwrights, providing yet another link between building tradesmen and a practice which is not connected to anything that makes logical sense to the third millennium mind. But while most people now scoff at ancient beliefs relating to witchcraft, the thread of fear survives to the present day in parts of rural England. In East Anglia, Easton found a man and wife whose house concealed a secret:



*Rase knife. (Wynn Timmins)*

The couple who found the witch bottle in their hearth allowed a TV programme to be made (with contributions from Professor Ronald Hutton, Brian Hoggard, myself and others) but would not themselves appear. When all was completed they filmed a back view of the couple, desperately holding hands as a robed priest exorcised the unknown spirits while surrounded by lighted candles. The bottle was cemented in with the distinct intention that it should not be recovered. I could tell you countless stories like this.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.1.6 PROTECTION: D.I.Y. OR CALL IN THE PROFESSIONALS?

A network of legislation and social welfare protects individuals in western societies today but life was very different before a raft of safety nets was created by government and community organisations during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, we have laws that protect us from fraud, defamation, libel, assault, sexual harassment, stalking and many other practices that were common for centuries. We can telephone for an ambulance, the fire brigade or the police at any time of the day or night and be sure that they will respond. None of these safeguards to our lives, security, health and welfare existed until comparatively recently. Before then, individual members of society and families were at the mercy of a variety of forces that threatened them. Self-reliance was essential for survival.<sup>59</sup> In late-mediaeval and early modern Britain people employed a variety of methods, devices and practitioners of magic to protect themselves from the supernatural and evil forces that they believed swirled around them in the invisible underworld where spirits, witches, demons and devils colluded against them. One of the devices used for personal protection against evil forces was the witch bottle.

These objects were supposed to work by means of a “sympathetic connection” between the urine in the bottle and the contents of the witch’s bladder. With the bottle stoppered up and subjected to heat the power of the magic would rebound against the witch who had sought to do harm. He or she would suffer excruciating urinary tract pain. The use of a witch bottle was believed to be a way of identifying the person who had cast a spell on you. Unlike garments, shoes and other personal items concealed within buildings which, it seems, were intended as passive decoys to lure evil forces away from the occupants, witch bottles were designed to mount a counterattack, making them an offensive weapon in the war against witches.



*Witch bottles from Abbott's Inn,  
Hampshire. (HCCMAS).*

Joseph Blagrave of Reading (1610 – c.1682), an astrologer and herbalist, wrote in his *Astrological Practice of Physick* in 1671 that the intention was to “afflict the witch, causing the evil to return back upon them.” Unlike other objects found in building concealments, witch bottles have left their mark in the documentary archive. At a time when levels of literacy were very low, many centuries passed without a single written word about the placement in buildings of shoes, garments, domestic artifacts or cats.<sup>60</sup> But the witch bottle comes complete: this object has an explanation of its purpose and a description of the process of manufacture. There are also numerous eyewitness accounts of events that surrounded the use of witchbottles. The best-known description of the purpose and manufacture of a witch bottle was provided by Blagrave who outlined what to do when an illness was thought to be due to witchcraft:



*Joseph Blagrave, a portrait from Blagrave's Introduction to Astrology, 1682. (WL)*

...stop the urine of the Patient close up in a bottle, and put into it three nails, pins or needles, with a little white salt, keeping the urine always warm: if you let it remain long in the bottle it will endanger the witch's life, for I have found by experience that they will be grievously tormented, making their water with great difficulty, if any at all, and the more if the Moon be in Scorpio...<sup>61</sup>

It is not difficult to find evidence of these instructions being put into practice. Jason Semmens, assistant curator at the museum at Horsham, Sussex, a graduate student in history at the University of Exeter and the author of several books on Cornish folklore, has recorded a description, clearly based on Blagrave's instructions, of the use of a witch bottle in Cornwall in 1701. At St. Merryn, near Padstow, Thomasine Leverton had consulted a local cunning man about her fears that illness during her pregnancy was being caused by someone who wished ill of her. The unknown local conjurer wrote the following “prescription” which is now in the Cornwall Record Office:

For Thamson Leverton on Saturday next being the 17<sup>th</sup> of this Instant September any time that day take about a pint of your owne Urine and make it almost scalding hot then Emtie it into a stone Jugg with a narrow Mouth then put into it so Much white Salt as you can take up with the Thumb and two forefingers of your lift hand and three new nails with their points downwards, their points being first made very sharp then stop the mouth of the Jugg very

close with a piece of Tough cley and bind a piece of Leather firm over the stop then put the Jugg into warm Embers and keep him there 9 or 10 days and nights following so that it go not stone cold all that mean time day nor night and your private Enemies will never after have any power upon you either in Body or Goods, So be it.<sup>62</sup>

A century later witch bottles were still used to deal with suspected cases of evildoing by witches. In 1808 when several young women in Great Paxton, Cambridgeshire, fell ill with convulsions the father of one of them used a witch bottle to identify the person who had caused the harm:

He filled a bottle with a particular kind of fluid, stuffed the cork, both top and bottom, with pins, set it carefully in an oven of a moderate heat, and then observed a profound silence. In a few minutes the charm succeeded; for, he saw a variety of forms flitting, before his eyes, and amongst the rest the perfect resemblance of an old woman who lived in the same parish.<sup>63</sup>

The use of witch bottles was not limited to the provinces. The Old Bailey in London also heard similar accounts based either on Blagrave's writing or on what may have been knowledge shared by cunning men and women of the time. When Jane Kent, a woman of about 60, appeared on 1 June 1682 on an indictment of witchcraft, she was said to have caused the death of a five-year-old girl. The girl's father had sold her two pigs but refused to hand them over until payment had been received. When his daughter became ill he went to see "Dr. Hains of Spittle-Fields" who advised him to:

... take a quart of his Wives water, the pairing of her Nails, some of her Hair, and such like, and boyl them, which he did, in a Pipkin, at which time he Swore he heard the Prisoners voice at his door, and that she Screimed out as if she were Murdered, and that the next day she appeared to be much swelled and bloated.<sup>64</sup>

Another Cornish example, dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was found at Padstow in 1934 during renovations to the kitchen of a shop. Builders discovered a cod-liver oil bottle, with a label that dated it to the early years of the century, in the chimney. Eight slightly bent pins had been stuck in the cork and the bottle contained a malodorous brown liquid, thought to have been decayed urine.<sup>65</sup> An account of village use of a witch bottle, also seemingly based on Blagrave's description of the manufacturing process, is recorded in the journal of the Folklore Society in 1905. The Misses Beatrix Wherry and Hermione Jenkins reported on an interview with an anonymous woman who described how the illness of her niece had been dealt with by her brother in a Cambridgeshire village, also unnamed. The article is entitled "A Cambridgeshire Witch:"

There was my brother's little girl Florry as was very ill. They lived over at T. There was a witch there, Miss. Well, they put the child's illness down to her. So my brother he got a bottle and filled it with water and put in some of the child's hair and a lot of other things as I can't remember, then they corked it up and put it on the fire to boil. Then when the bottle burst that would hurt the witch.<sup>66</sup>

Other texts on witch bottles are by Cotton Mather (1663 – 1728), New England Puritan minister, in his *Late Memorable Occurrences* of 1691 and Joseph Glanvill, (1636 – 1680) the English writer, philosopher and clergyman, in *Sadducismus Triumphatus* in 1681. Several witch bottles have been found in the United States. Dr. Marshall Becker of West Chester University of Pennsylvania has recorded six in the northeastern states. Dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the bottles were in areas originally occupied by British settlers. The finds were at Essington and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Lewes, Delaware, Horn Point, Maryland, Providence, Rhode Island and Virginia Beach, Virginia. Four of the bottles appear to date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century with two possibly falling into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>67</sup> In making a witch bottle, the container of choice in 17<sup>th</sup> century England was a stoneware jug of a type known as a bellarmine. Commonly used to serve ale at inns, most of these originated in Germany and Holland and were decorated on the neck with a stern image said, perhaps erroneously, to be that of Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino (1542 – 1621), the interrogator of Galileo. After about 1700 glass bottles of various shapes and sizes were more commonly used. The folk magic researcher Brian Hoggard surveyed 661 museums, galleries, archaeological units and individuals throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2003 and found that in England alone 187 witch bottles were held in collections. The total found is now thought to be more than 200. Their distribution is largely concentrated in the south-east, particularly in East Anglia, London, and from Hampshire to Kent. They are also found in Cornwall, as we have seen, and in Worcestershire and as far north as Yorkshire.<sup>68</sup>

In London, witch bottles have been found in the Thames, in the bed of an old mill stream and in ditches in what were then rural or semi-rural locations. Most of these date from the mid-to late 17<sup>th</sup> century, although dating these objects is an uncertain science. There is an apparent difference between witch bottle placements in the capital and those found in, for example, East Anglia. There, witch bottles are commonly found buried, often quite deeply, beneath the hearth rather than in rivers, streams or rural locations. Most witch bottles are buried upside down, presumably to keep the cork moist and prolong the life of the spell. When found, the contents are generally an aggregation of rusted and decayed objects, clustered around the neck of the bottle.<sup>69</sup>



*A bellarmine witch bottle. (BA)*

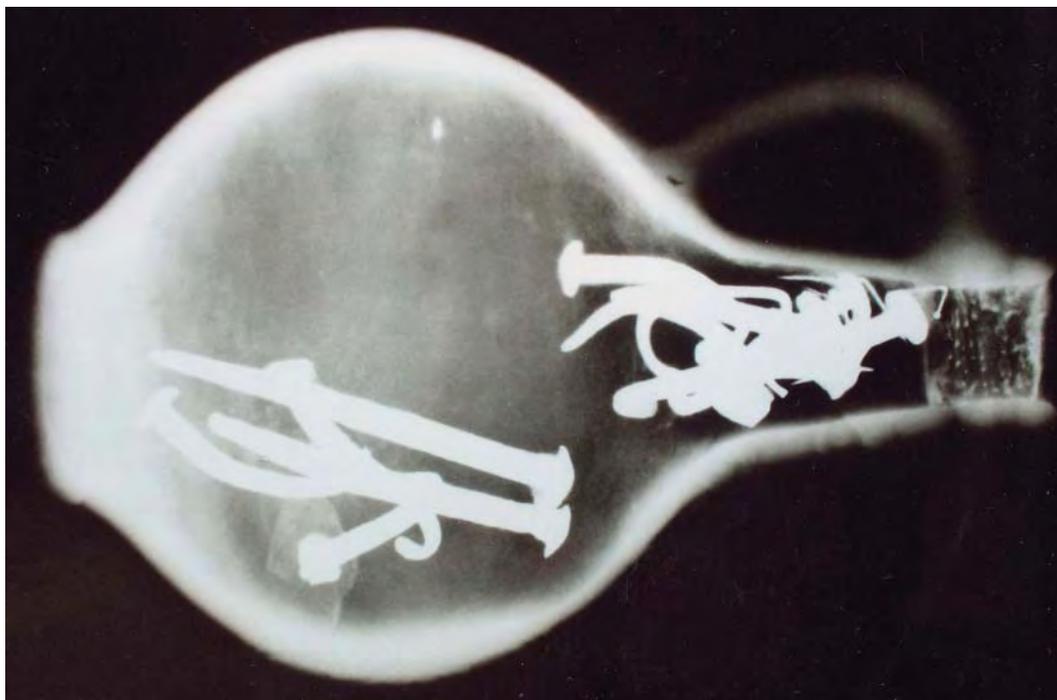
Some of the more recent witch bottle finds have been examined by Dr Alan Massey, a retired lecturer in chemistry at Loughborough University. The discovery of an intact witch bottle beneath a shop at 52 Greenwich Church Street, Greenwich, in 2004, on a site owned by the Greenwich Foundation for the Old Royal Naval College, provided Dr. Massey with the opportunity for thorough examination and analysis of an object of a type that had often been dealt with by amateurs. In those cases, the cork is removed, the contents tipped out to provide immediate satisfaction of the finder's curiosity and the dirty bottle washed for display to friends and acquaintances. The Greenwich bottle, when shaken, rattled and sloshed. Computed tomography scans showed it to be half-filled with liquid, which later analysis proved to be human urine. The bottle also contained bent nails and pins, a nail-pierced leather "heart," fingernail clippings, and what may have been navel fluff and hair. The presence of iron sulphide in the mixture suggested that sulphur (i.e. brimstone) had been added.<sup>70</sup> The magazine *British Archaeology* described the study of this bottle in an article published in 2009:

Liquid was drawn through the cork of the Greenwich bottle with a long-needled syringe. Complex chemical studies that included recording a proton nuclear magnetic resonance spectrum, and then gas chromatography/mass spectrometry analysis of organic acids by Richard Cole (Leicester Royal

Infirmary) and inorganic analysis by Helen Taylor (British Geological Survey), allow Massey to say that the liquid "is unequivocally human urine." Past claims for urine in witch bottles have rested solely on inorganic material.



Above left, *the well-manicured fingernails found in the Greenwich witch bottle.*  
 Above right, *the contents of the bottle immediately after it was opened.*  
*(BA, Dr. Alan Massey and GF: also image on following page).*



*A scan of the Greenwich witch bottle reveals some of the contents. The cluster in the neck of the bottle is the result of it being buried upside down, thus keeping the cork damp.*

Cole identified cotinine, a metabolite of nicotine: the urine had been passed by a smoker (probably of a clay pipe). Acting on a hunch, Massey tested a black solid in the urine, and showed it to be iron sulphide. “It is virtually certain,” he says, that sulphur in the jar had reacted with the iron nails. In other words, the bottle contained brimstone, recalling the passage in Revelations when “the beast” and “the false prophet” were “cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

Scientists then removed the cork, which disintegrated, and the rest of the contents: 12 iron nails, eight brass pins (one very severely corroded), quantities of hair, a piece of leather pierced by a bent nail, which “might just be described as heart-like” (paralleling cloth hearts found in other witch bottles), 10 fingernail parings (not from a manual worker, but a person “of some social standing”) and what could be navel fluff.<sup>71</sup>

It would be astonishing to find a bellarmine witch bottle in Australia but one made from an ordinary bottle or glass jar would be within the bounds of possibility. There is more than a century’s overlap between the European settlement of Australia and the witch bottles found in England in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Knowledge of witch bottles would have been carried here with convicts and settlers but we have no evidence that they used this information in Australia. The bottle found at Brooklyn, NSW, and now unfortunately lost, is perhaps an example of a more recent occurrence of counter-witchcraft. Other, earlier, witch bottles may await discovery in Australia.

The profusion of descriptions of the manufacture and use of witch bottles contrasts with the secrecy and dearth of documentation associated with concealments in building voids, the implication being that the concealment ritual carried great fear.

### 3.1.7 PUTTING IT IN WRITING: CHARMS AND CURSES

Charms and curses employ the written word and symbols that are thought to have magical power to provide protection or to attack an enemy. If a society's instruments of justice could not be employed on behalf of its citizens an appeal to divine patrons might offer better hope of redress. The powers of magic were available to all, sometimes with the assistance of people who provided a service by invoking spiritual forces from the other world. The motives are usually malign and their expression violent. They may seek, for example, to wreck an opponent's chariot in the circus, to compel a person to submit to sex or to take revenge on a thief. Curse tablets, written on paper or scribed into small sheets of lead or alloys, were known as *defixio* in Latin and *katadesmos* in Greek.<sup>72</sup> *Defixio* derives from the verb *defigere* which is "to fix", "to fasten" or "to nail down," thus expressing one of the functions of the curse, to "fix" its victim and prevent them from carrying out certain tasks or physical functions. *Katadesmos* derives from the verb *katadein*, to "tie up" or "bind down." These objects appear in contemporary texts, including those of Pliny the Elder, who wrote in the first century AD: "there is no one who does not fear to be spellbound by imprecations."<sup>73</sup> Such fear extended to the highest levels of ancient society. In AD 19 Germanicus, adopted son and heir to the emperor Tiberius, died in suspicious circumstances. Germanicus himself, according to the historian, Tacitus, believed that he had been put under a spell. Examination of the house revealed evidence of the magic that slew him:

... explorations of the floor and walls brought to light the remains of human bodies, spells, curse tablets, leaden tablets engraved with the name Germanicus, charred and blood-smeared ashes and others of the implements of witchcraft by which it is believed that the living soul can be devoted to the powers of the underworld.<sup>74</sup>

Curse tablets are thought to date from 600 BC or earlier. Many Roman tablets have been discovered in Britain. Major finds have been made in the City of Bath, Somerset, where more than 100 have been discovered at the sacred spring of Sul-Minerva, and at the village of Uley, in Gloucestershire, where 80 curse tablets were discovered during excavations of a temple dedicated to Mercury. Others have been found at Lydney, Gloucestershire, Brean Down, southwest of Bristol, Pagans Hill, south of Bristol, Caerleon, Wales, Chesterton, Warwickshire, Leintwardine, Herefordshire, Leicester, Leicestershire, and in London.<sup>75</sup>

These objects have been investigated by the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents at Oxford under a research project initiated by the British Academy and the results placed on the Internet. Curses were originally for the eyes of gods alone, but digital publication now disseminates them more widely, allowing a large group of people to study the ancient world through their evidence.

Curses were typically scratched on very thin sheets of lead or lead alloy that were then rolled, folded, or pierced with nails. The piercing was intended to “fix” or set the curse. The finished tablets were usually placed beneath the ground: buried in graves or tombs, thrown into wells, springs or streams, or otherwise nailed to the walls of temples. Many of these objects have survived because they were scratched onto lead, a durable material under the right circumstances, and then placed in tombs or an underground location – both factors that contribute to their survival and make them liable to discovery by archaeologists. Graveyards were seen as points of intersection between this world and the underworld and tombs were regarded as postboxes where messages could be conveyed to the dead.

Although lead has a long life in ideal conditions, its location in wells, tombs and other subsurface locations can result in severe deterioration. Tablets recovered from these sites are often in poor condition with the surface of the lead having oxidised, corroded and fissured. Usually the ends of the folded sheet and the outer surfaces are worst affected, but the poor condition of the main written surfaces can make the curse illegible. The tablets are difficult to unfold or unroll without causing irreversible damage to the brittle, corroded metal. As the corrosion products are toxic and can be inhaled or absorbed through the skin, curse tablets contain a noxious power above and beyond that which was originally intended.<sup>76</sup> Unlike many historic documents which have recorded the names of the great and the musings of ancient philosophers, curse tablets bring to life the troubles of ordinary men and women. They give us the words of people on the margins of ancient society – women, provincials, and slaves. Somewhere in the period AD 150 to AD 275 someone named Honoratus scratched an appeal to the god Mercury into the surface of a lead tablet found at Uley:

I complain to your divinity that I have lost two wheels and four cows and many small belongings from my house. I would ask the genius of your divinity that you do not allow health to the person who has done me wrong, nor allow him to lie or sit or drink or eat, whether he is man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free, unless he brings my property to me and is reconciled with me. With renewed prayers I ask your divinity that my petition may immediately make me vindicated by your majesty.<sup>77</sup>



*The Roman curse from Telegraph Street, London, requests unpleasant consequences for Tretia Maria. Seven nails were used to pierce it – a procedure which may have been intended to increase the power of the curse. (BM P&EE 1934 11-5 1).*

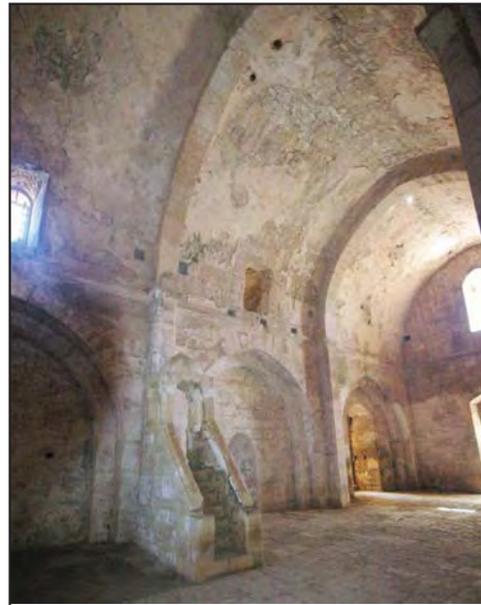
Another, undated, Roman curse was found in Telegraph Street in the City of London in 1934. Now in the British Museum, it invokes a curse which may have been intended to silence a blackmailer: “I curse Tretia Maria and her life and mind and liver and lungs mixed up together and her words thought and memory thus may she be unable to speak the things that are secret....” The tablet is pierced with seven nails, driven through from the reverse.<sup>78</sup> Many centuries after this curse was made, someone at Wilton Place near Dymock, Gloucestershire, put a curse on one Sarah Ellis. Her name is written backwards, as is sometimes the case with Roman curses, on a lead tablet found in 1892 in the cupboard of an old house. The curse is adorned with astrological symbols associated with the moon and invokes the Supreme Daemon of the Moon, Hosmodai, and other spirit names, before cursing Sarah Ellis: “...make this person to Banish away from this place and country amen to my desire amen.”<sup>79</sup> The use of text in a mixture of Latin and Greek links this tablet with those made by Romano-British people more than 1,500 years before. These often drew on a “magical vocabulary” or *voces mysticae* and mystical symbols resembling letters, series of repeated vowels, the writing of the alphabet and names of deities and terms for divine attributes from the religions of the eastern Mediterranean. This “magical gibberish,” replicated on the Wilton Place curse tablet, served to lend the text a mysterious or arcane aura, but it was perhaps also thought that the gods and spirits understood this language.<sup>80</sup> The fact that the Wilton Place message was scratched onto a tablet of lead is another link to the ancient rituals practiced in the Roman period. While Roman gods are no longer invoked, an appeal is made to other supernatural forces in a world beyond human reach or understanding. Astrological symbols were also used on charms written on paper which, rather than calling evil upon an enemy, were intended to provide protection – often for a farmer, his cattle and farm. Charms on paper reflect the same reliance on mystical and mythical beings and astrological symbols as curses. Clearly

the product of a professional in their field, written charms often mingle Latin and Greek text to impress gullible clients. They may be found where they were slipped into gaps in masonry or the timbers of a barn or farmhouse, or placed in bottles within the walls. Some charm texts are enciphered and reading them requires cryptographic skills. Merrifield, in *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, describes rites performed in rural areas of Wales in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by cunning men who specialized in providing charms for local farmers.<sup>81</sup> Charms and curses of the modern period, with their conjectural links to the magic of the Roman invaders of Britain, raise the possibility of an ancient lineage for other ritual practices that survived in that country until well after the European occupation of Australia. As grudges and enmities were as much a part of life in 18th and 19th century Australia as anywhere else it is possible that written curses and charms may have been used here although none has yet been recorded.

## 2.2 CONCLUSION

Deliberately concealed objects have been widely found in the United Kingdom, Continental Europe, North America and, more recently, in Australia. The pattern of concealments elsewhere adheres closely to the situation uncovered in Australia: shoes are well-worn, most commonly singles, often the footwear of children, and typically found in association with fireplaces, chimneys and liminal spaces such as doors, windows, subfloor areas or roof cavities. They were placed beyond the reach of daily household life. This close adherence to a formulaic process of concealment, without evidence of any contemporary document, appears to suggest a powerful and durable oral tradition.

Finds of concealed shoes date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 13<sup>th</sup> century English cleric John Schorn appears to have given this practice impetus with his legendary feat of casting the Devil into a boot. While the custom has been associated with building tradesmen and folk magic practitioners of various kinds there appears to be no known connection with Freemasonry. Other devices associated with evil spiritual forces include witch bottles and apotropaic marks. Apotropaic marks have been widely found in the United Kingdom and Ireland and, notably, in a Crusader castle, *Krak des*



*The interior of the former Crusader chapel at Krak des Chevaliers, Syria, after conversion to a mosque. In The Monuments of Syria, page 187, Ross Burns dates this building to post 1170.*

*Chevaliers*, in Syria. Because the *Krak* was taken by Islamic forces the apotropaic marks found on the wall adjacent to the entrance to the chapel can be dated to before the date of the fall: 7 April 1271. Apotropaic marks and text thus shown to have been extant before this date include the so-called daisy wheel, the linked double V's representing "Virgin of Virgins," the pentagram and the words "Ave Maria." While the mark now commonly known as the daisy wheel is an ancient Syrian motif its use in traditional architecture of the area is very different to that seen at the *Krak des Chevaliers*. Apotropaic marks are now beginning to be found in Australia.

Witch bottles have been identified at various locations, notably the south-east of England and in the north-eastern United States. None has yet been found in Australia.



*The mark generally known as the daisy wheel – one of a cluster of marks found at the entrance to the chapel, Krak des Chevaliers, in northern Syria. The occupation of the Krak by Islamic forces in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century indicates that the marks were in use prior to this period.*

## FOUR: SECRETS IN THE VOID

### ABSTRACT

The following text closely examines the circumstances of a concealment in Dawes Point, Sydney, as a case study to determine how much information can be derived from objects and the environment in which they are found. The role of cats in concealments is analysed and oral history dating from circa 1917 provides an understanding of the purpose of concealments taking place in Devon at that time.

### 4.1 CASE STUDY: ANALYSIS OF A CONCEALMENT

I have closely examined the concealment of a shoe and part of a lace collar in an 1830s masonry house of Colonial Regency design on the western side of Lower Fort Street, in the Sydney suburb of Dawes Point. These objects were tucked behind a lath and plaster wall, thus making this a possible plasterer's concealment. The discovery of the objects by the student son of the owner during the course of cleaning up after builders had been at work in the attic space gave me my first example of an Australian concealment. A close look at this find also serves to demonstrate the information that is available from objects that are ostensibly mute. The information available is of two types: that which is *embodied* in the material, manufacture, form, style and quality of the object and that which is *embedded* in it

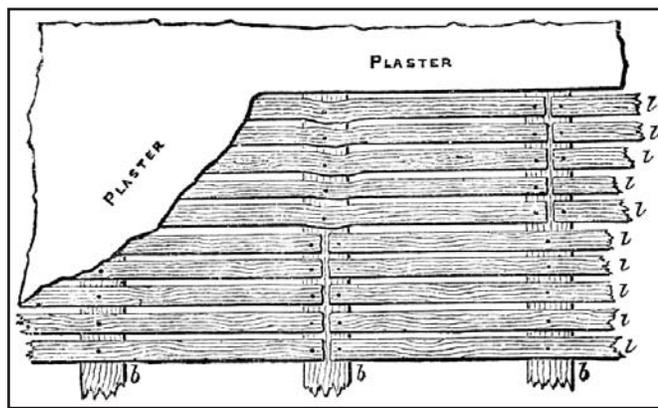
by the processes of wear and tear, use and misuse, and by the effects of the environment in which it was placed and the period of time in which it occupied that space. *Embodied* information may suggest when, and possibly where, the article was made and indicate the status and income level of the owner. *Embedded* effects on an object can suggest the length of the period in which it was used before concealment. Although far from being a precise measuring aid, wear and tear and repairs may serve as a guide to the prosperity or otherwise of the person or family involved and to the socio-economic circumstances prevailing. Garments, shoes and artifacts are often dateable objects. Fashion and style are great aids to the researcher as they provide an indication of the period in which an item



*No. 37 Lower Fort Street, Dawes Point. The arrow indicates the location of the cache. (Ray Stevens)*

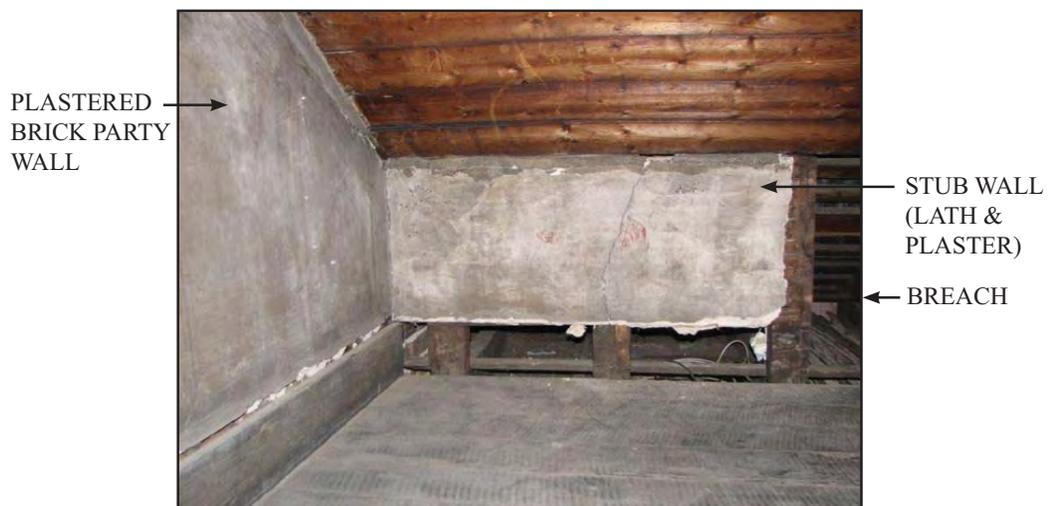
was manufactured. Other stories can be derived from the materials from which the objects were made. By cross-matching this information with land title data and, where available, census returns, directories of residents and other documentary sources, it is sometimes possible to identify the family in residence at the time of the concealment. Thus, old shoes can be said to encapsulate the biographies of their wearers.

The records that can be consulted are more numerous in the period 1850 – 1930 but this research is still possible for the earlier period, particularly in Australia's larger cities. In some cases the names of individual members of a family can be ascertained, raising the possibility of identifying the person who first owned a concealed shoe or garment. The small cache at 37 Lower Fort Street was found in a void shaped like a right-angle triangle.

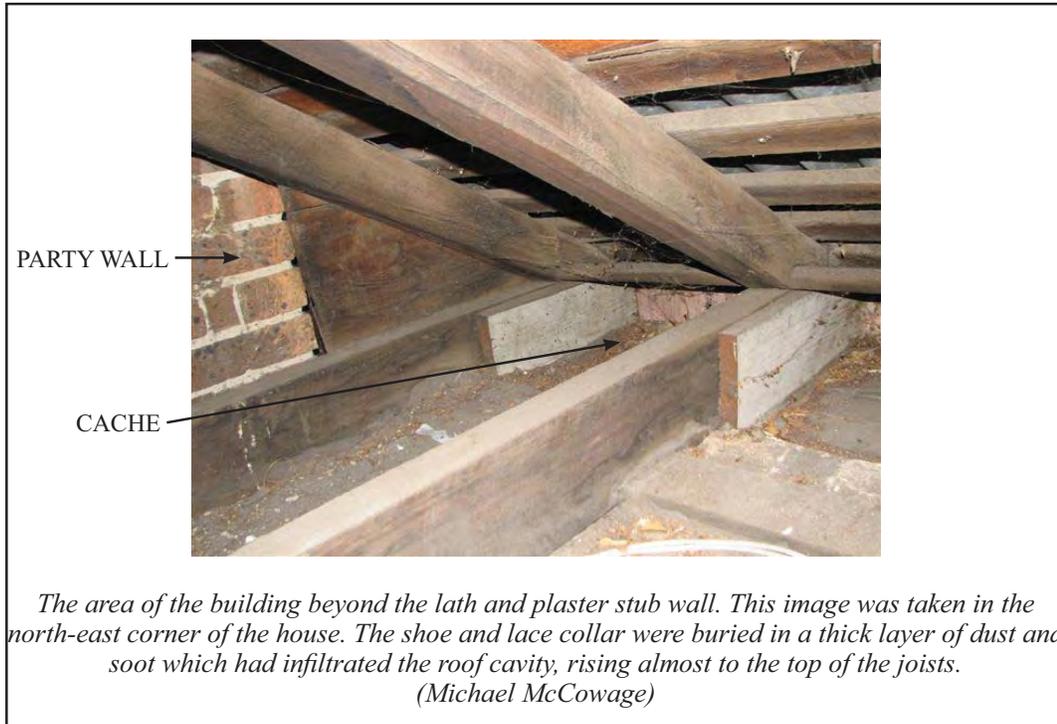


*The construction of a lath and plaster wall. from Advanced Building Construction, plate 359, p212. Wet plaster is pressed into the gaps between the laths as it is spread over the surface, creating keys that hold the material in place.*

angle triangle. The location of the find was in the front north-eastern corner of the building, close to the front wall of the house and to the party wall between No. 37 and the adjacent house on the northern side. The base of the void consisted of the lath and plaster ceiling of the room beneath, with part of the area being the top of the front masonry wall and the timber lining to the overhang.



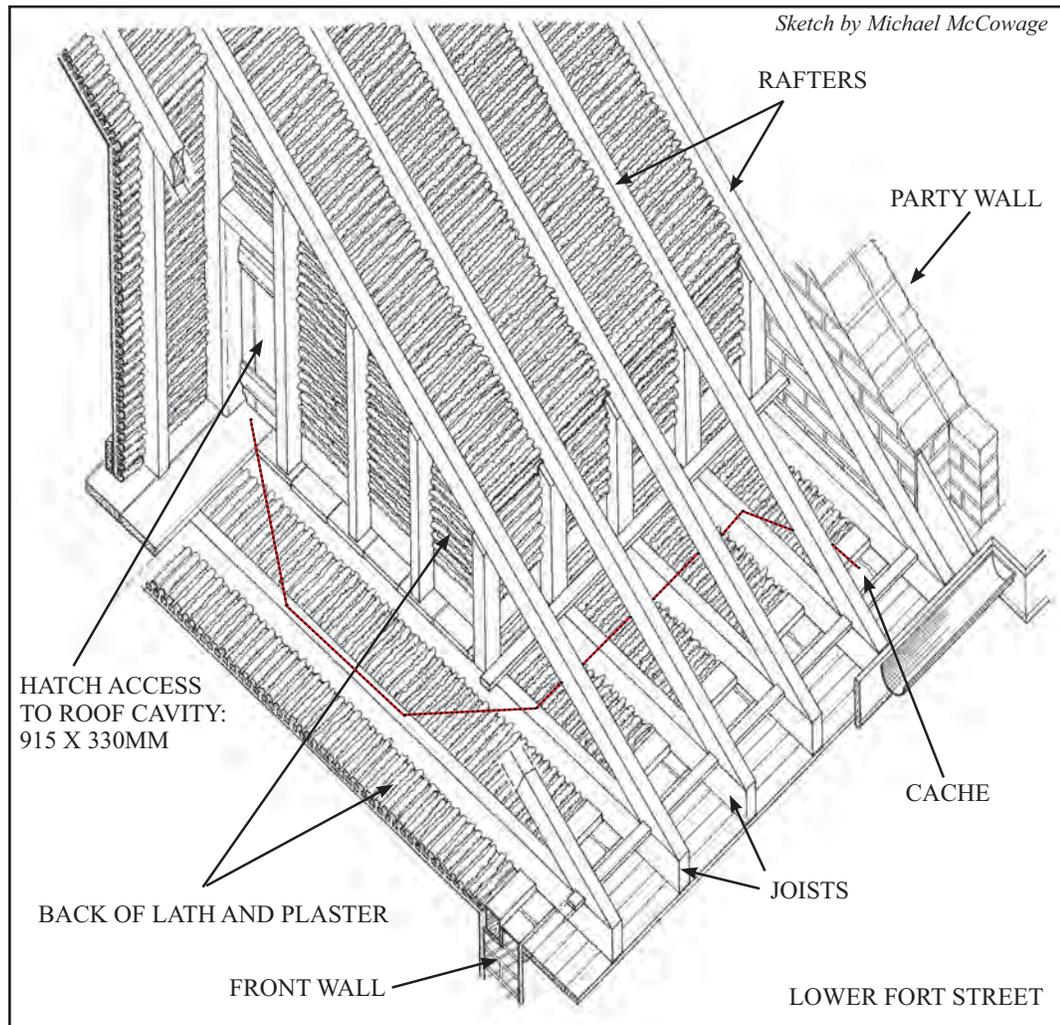
*The storeroom near the corner of the roof cavity where the cache was found. This room has a hatch that opens into the roof cavity. The ceiling slopes down towards the Fort Street frontage of the building and is now timber lined. The lath and plaster stub wall was breached on the right-hand side and it was through this aperture that Nicholas White entered to vacuum out the residue of more than 170 years of dust and soot. The cache was in the left-hand corner behind the stub wall. (Michael McCowage)*



The upright length of the void – standing at right angles to the base – was formed of a lath and plaster stub wall that sealed off an otherwise useless and confined space at the perimeter of the roof cavity. The upper part of the void – the sloping plane of the triangle – consisted of the corrugated galvanized steel roofing. Both objects were in a space between two of the joists from which the ceiling of the room beneath depended. The shoe from this cache is the ankle boot of a small child and dates from before 1850. It was made for the left foot and measures 130mm long. The lacework is half of a woman's lace collar and is of a style popular in the period from 1850 to 1865, according to Lindie Ward and Rosemary Shepherd, curators at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum.<sup>1</sup> Narrowing down the date of this collar is difficult as styles remained constant for some years. *Victorian and Edwardian Fashion: A Photographic Survey* (1981) by Alison Gernsheim has two photographs of similar collars, including one of Queen Victoria with the Prince Consort by J.E. Mayall in 1861.



## ANATOMY OF A CONCEALMENT



*In this view, the roof covering has been removed to show the north-east corner of the house as it was when the objects were concealed. The site of the concealment is indicated. Entry to the roof cavity was through the hatch. The person who made the concealment, assuming it was not done during roof replacement, had to balance on top of the joists, then stoop down and crawl across the top of the joists through a very confined space. The red line shows the way from the hatch to the cache. Stepping onto the surface of the lath and plasterwork would have been a risky and probably a damaging move. Headroom in the location of the cache went from a maximum of 500mm to nil. The cache was in a cavity that, while accessible to a degree, was not welcoming to human visitors. The find of half of a pair of shoes and half a lace collar raises interesting questions which cannot be answered at this time. It is possible that the other half of the collar may have been concealed but was sucked into the vacuum cleaner unrecognised. Equally, it may be that only half of the original whole collar was concealed, the other part being retained and thus forming a contract.*

The boot is nicely made of woollen fabric with a toecap of patent leather or kid. June Swann believes that it dates from 1830 to the early 1840s.<sup>2</sup> Three loops, trimmed with a fabric that may once have been green, have holes through which faceted buttons of black Bohemian glass provided fastening over the small foot inside. This is a smart and well-made item, crafted for the middle-class market, and it would not have been cheap. There is nothing to tell us if it had been manufactured in the Colony of NSW or whether it made the long voyage from England. But it does say something about the people who bought it and their lives in the Sydney of the 1830s and 1840s. This is not a concealment initiated by a laborer or junior clerk. The boot is suitable for a child of eighteen months to two years old – or perhaps a little older as people were smaller then. At that stage of life a child's feet grow quickly and shoes did not fit for long. But this particular item is well worn, suggesting useage by a number of children. It was therefore



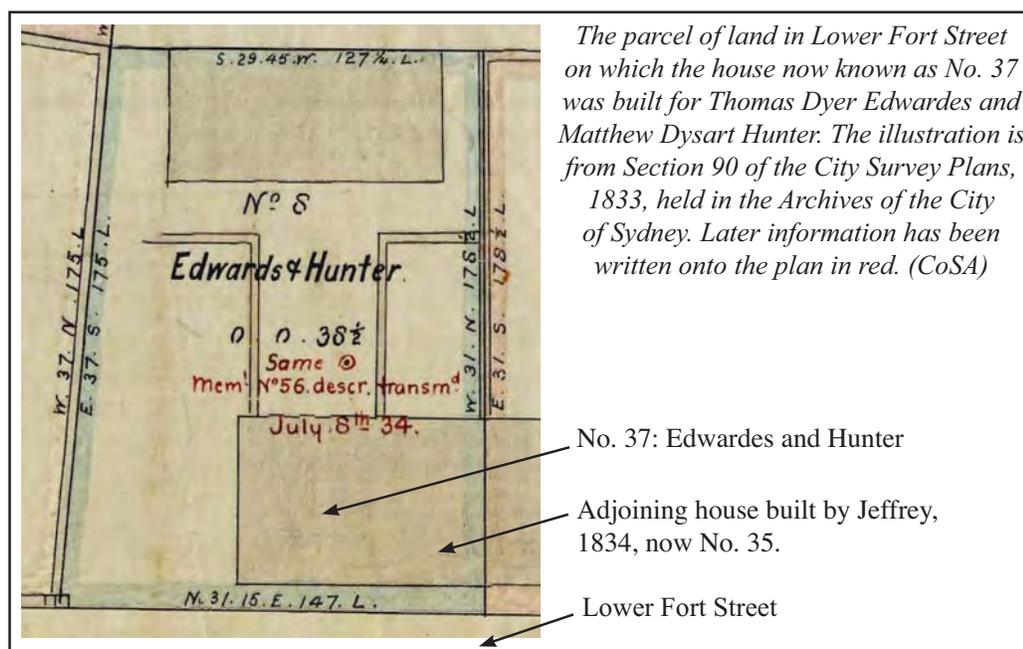
*The Dawes Point boot: well-worn and much-used, it may have a poignant history.*

either passed down through members of a family or else, as still happens today, handed on to the children of friends or other family members. Handing down is not something that necessarily happens immediately the first child stops wearing a pair of shoes. When shoes are kept within the original family, passing down from one child to the next, the process can take a number of years, perhaps to be then repeated in another family until the shoes are beyond the use for which they were made. Concealment is the ultimate end use for an old shoe, which in the process of repeated family connections, may have been considered to have gained in spiritual power. It follows from all of this therefore that the family to which this particular shoe belonged was not so well off that it could afford new footwear for a child who would not be wearing it for long. These were people who were aware of the value of their money and were certainly not reckless with it but who, in the very first place, bought a stylish pair of shoes for a child who was very precious to them. The quality of this object suggests a child who was loved, cherished and cared for. This shoe was from a family somewhere in the reasonably comfortable middle zone of Sydney society.

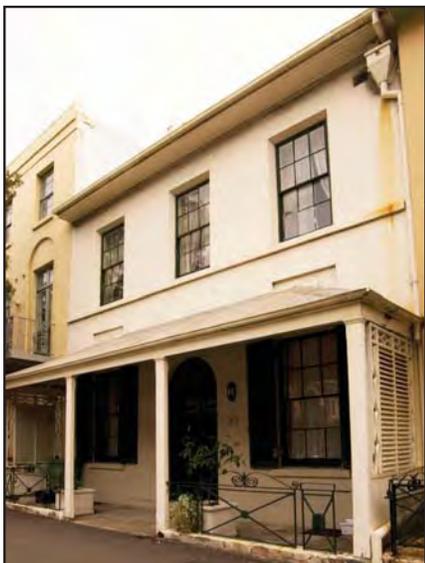
The house in question was built in 1833 on an allotment of land overlooking a substantial stone wharf, three-storied warehouse and offices completed in 1829 by Timothy Goodwin Pitman, an American settler, who arrived in the colony in 1824 and established business as a merchant.<sup>3</sup> The warehouse served as a retail store where Pitman invited the public to purchase goods, straight off the ship, that included:

Gunpowder, Imperial, Hyson, Hyson Skin, and Souchong Teas, White Sugar, Sugar Candy, Preserved Ginger, Slop Clothing, Yellow Nankeens, Grass Cloth, Grass Cloth Hankerchiefs, Black Silk and Colored Satins, Crape Dresses, Ladies' and Gentleman's Black Kid, and Norway Doe Gloves, Cider, Liquers, Champagne, Negrohead and Brazil Tobacco, Tar, Pitch, Bengal Twine and Lamp Cotton. Tea, Coffee, sets Elegant China, Camphor Wood Trunks, Anchors Various Sizes.<sup>4</sup>

Pitman married Eliza Foster, another free settler, in 1826.<sup>5</sup> The Pitmans did not have any children and Eliza died in 1830, aged 20.<sup>6</sup> Pitman himself was seriously ill by 1830 and died before 1834.<sup>7</sup> His Fort Street properties were sold, including the vacant allotment on which a house was constructed for Thomas Dyer Edwardes and Matthew Dysart Hunter.<sup>8</sup> While it has not yet been possible to identify the house from several descriptions of properties built in this part of Lower Fort Street in the early 1830s the beauty of the location is a common thread among advertisements of the time: "The situation is most desirable and healthy, commanding a view of Darling Harbour, and the port of Sydney."<sup>9</sup>



By about 1840 it becomes clear that the house was associated with the bonded stores constructed on the roadway near Pitman's wharf and occupied at that time by Thacker Mason & Co.<sup>10</sup> A gangway led from the rear of the house, occupied by Mashfield Mason, partner in the firm, to the two-storey sandstone warehouse below.<sup>11</sup> The house was in Mason's name by 1842.<sup>12</sup> He had taken up residence there some time before August 1840 when he married Ann Moore, the daughter of one of his neighbours.<sup>13</sup> The Masons had three children between 1841 and 1844 and all appear to have survived infancy.<sup>14</sup>



*No. 37 Lower Fort Street today.*



*William Fane De Salis, aged 49, by  
Camille Silvy, London, 1861.  
(De Salis family archives)*

Judging by appearances, Mashfield and Ann's life in Fort Street was comfortable. Not long after the marriage, Ann sought domestic help via an advertisement in the *Sydney Herald* for "a man accustomed to wait table; also, a woman as cook."<sup>15</sup> In June, 1841, she required a butler.<sup>16</sup> The house was well furnished with furniture imported from London, an oblique pianoforte by Sebastian Erard of Paris, valuable oil paintings, and a cellar of choice wines. We know this because all of the contents were advertised for sale before Mason and his wife left the Colony for London in 1845.<sup>17</sup> The house was transferred to his partner, John Thacker. The chain of ownership for the period 1845 – 1860's appears to show rapid turnover but those recorded as owners, including A.C. Daniel and William Fane De Salis, were directors of the trading company conducted from the house. It had been established by Thomas Edwardes as an agency of the major Asian trading firm of Jardine Matheson and continued to operate under various names for many years. After returning to England, De Salis became chairman of the P & O Company and other major banking and commercial organisations.<sup>18</sup> While they were in business in Sydney, Edwardes and De Salis were taking their first steps towards serious success in commerce. Both left large estates.<sup>19</sup>

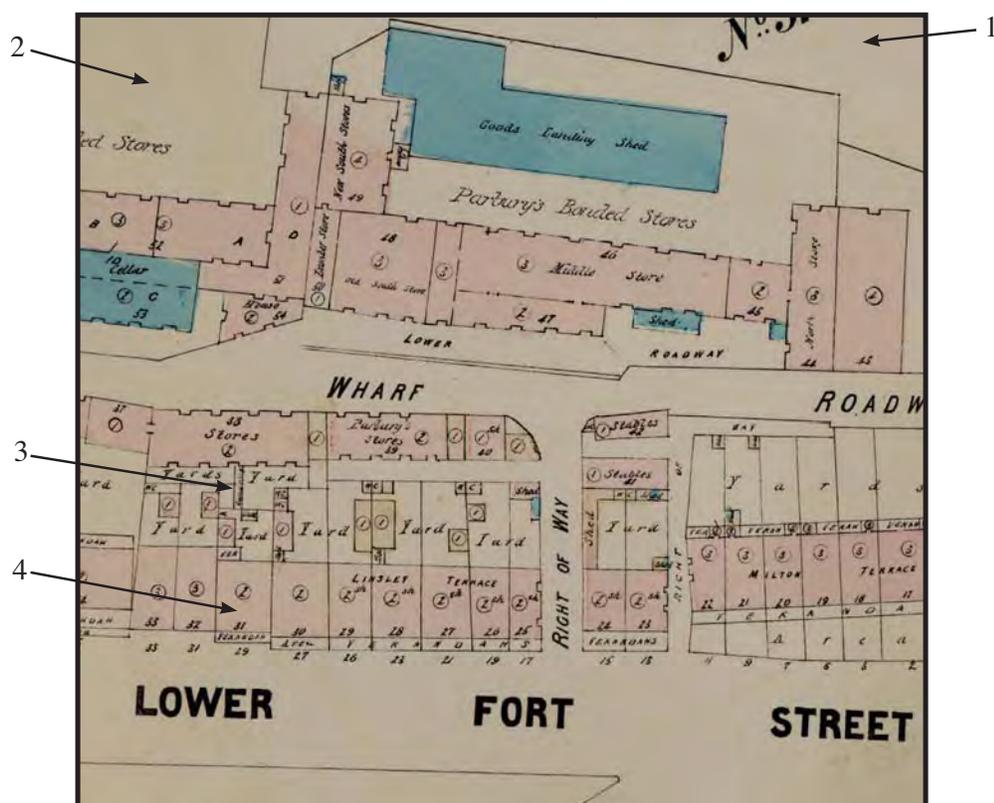
A description of the eastern side of Lower Fort Street in 1839 stated that "...a number of respectable dwelling houses have lately been erected having a fine appearance from their uniformity of build and are mostly occupied by opulent persons."<sup>20</sup>

The roof on No. 37 at present is old corrugated metal, almost certainly dating from some time in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The roof was shingled until after 1856 but in 1861 was of slate, probably imported from Wales. Slate was the preferred roofing material of the time but was significantly more expensive than hand-cut local shingles. A good slate roof could serve for more than a century but shingles were much less durable.



3

This 1840s view of Lower Fort Street, Dawes Point, and Sydney Harbour has been attributed to Joseph Fowles. It shows the area in the period a few years after No. 37 was built. An arrow points to the location of the house which has not been illustrated by Fowles. (SLNSW ML 66)



Part of a plan of Sydney in 1880 by the surveyor Percy Dove. Arrows show, 1, the waters of Darling Harbour; 2, the wharf built by Timothy Goodwin Pitman in 1829; 3, the gangway at the rear of the house used by Mashfield Mason in moving between the house (which was then No. 29 Lower Fort Street) and the stores below; 4, the house where the objects were concealed. Numbers on the house plan indicate that it had two levels and was No. 31 on an allotment plan. There is a WC and a small shed in the back yard. The verandah was not original. (CoSA).

Despite the appeal of slate, by 1891 No. 37 had been re-roofed with corrugated galvanised iron.<sup>21</sup> It is possible that the objects found tucked in a corner of the roof cavity might have been placed there during one of these conversions. The concealments in this house could be attributed to one of the following:

- Tradesmen involved in roof replacement in the 1850s or later in the century
- Tradesmen who constructed the lath and plaster walls in the attic space
- One of the residents of the house (who might also have colluded with tradesmen)

The shoe and piece of lace were found by Nicholas, son of the then owners, Keith and Margaret White, in a space opened up by building tradesmen who had breached the lath and plasterwork during renovations in 2003. Nicholas removed dust and soot that had filled the interstices between the ceiling joists to a point almost level with the tops of the joists. This is detritus that would clearly have taken many years to accumulate as the particles drifted in through gaps in the roofing system, gradually covering the objects that had been placed there. The soot would have come from steamships in the harbour and from steam trains passing across the adjacent Harbour Bridge before the railway line was electrified. If, as appears likely, both objects were concealed at the same time, the concealment could have occurred as early as 1850 – if the lace was made at that time – or as late as post-1865 if the suggested later date is correct. Identifying the family group or individual associated with this concealment has not been a simple matter and it is by no means certain that this has been achieved. Occupants of the house for much of the period in which the concealment is most likely to have occurred are noted in the following table:

TABLE 4.1

RESIDENTS OF No. 37, LOWER FORT STREET	
1834 – 1840	Thomas Edwardes & Edward Dysart
1840 – 1845	Ann and Mashfield Mason
1845 – 1850	Not known
1850 – 1858	Rev. Alexander Salmon
1859 – 1862	Caroline, Edward & Siegfried Franck
1860 – 1863	Edward Campbell
1863 – 1871	George and Mary Hurley
1872 – 1873	Charles Tiffin
1877 – 1880	Walter Church
1880 – ?	Edward Dawson

Source: Ford's *Sydney Directory* for 1851, *Sands Sydney Directories 1858 – 1880*, Sydney City Council assessment books 1845 – 1880 and personal and government notices in the *Sydney Herald* and *Sydney Morning Herald* 1830 – 1880s.  
Later occupation was not researched.

This investigation of the concealments at No. 37 Lower Fort Street will focus on the occupants of the house with the longest tenancy and the people who had the most reason to fear from supernatural attack. It has not proved difficult to identify suitable candidates. Those who best fitted the above criteria were George and Mary Hurley, residents of the house from 1863 to 1871.<sup>22</sup> The first record of Hurley's presence in Sydney appears to be that in which the birth of his son, George, was registered in 1852.<sup>23</sup> There is no trace in the NSW State Records of the birth of George Hurley or his marriage to Mary. He is perhaps the George Hurley, born at Alveston, Warwickshire, in 1823 and who married a Mary Ann, surname unknown, at Leaming or Leamington, Warwickshire, in 1848.<sup>24</sup> David Vincent's *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750 – 1914* (1989) makes it clear that although literacy was steadily increasing in the period in which the Hurleys grew up, belief in magic and the supernatural was still rife at this time. While around half of the population could read and write, superstitious practices covering all aspects of the uncertainties of life still held fast among a great many people. The majority of these related to health and the preservation of life. Cures associated with whooping cough, to provide a single example, included passing the afflicted child three times before breakfast under a forked blackberry bush, or nine times under the belly and over the back of a three-year-old donkey, carrying it through the smoke of a brick kiln or making the child wear a string with nine knots, a caterpillar in a bag or a spider in a nutshell.<sup>25</sup> There were a great many other equally efficacious remedies. It would have been extremely unlikely if Hurley and his wife had arrived in New South Wales with no knowledge of magical practices of one kind or another. They would have found in Sydney an environment in which folk magic permeated aspects of daily life to an extent which is suggested by Maureen Perkins's examinations of almanacs in *Visions of the Future: Almanacs, Time and Cultural Change* (1996) and *The Reform of Time: Magic and Modernity* (2001). While the overt record of folk magic and superstition in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Australia is scant indeed, the widespread popularity of almanacs suggests a very different cultural *milieu* and one in which supernatural forces were believed to influence or control many aspects of everyday life and health. Perkins states that although almanacs containing astrology were published in Australia historians have presented a picture of a colonial culture anxious to shake off all taint of superstitious cultural baggage. She asks:

Is it, then, a fruitless task to look for examples of popular belief amongst the early settlers and convicts? The existence of almanacs closely modelled on the English genre suggests otherwise.<sup>26</sup>

In Sydney, Hurley soon revealed himself to be something of a huckster, an ambitious and energetic young man with civic, commercial and religious affiliations. But his hopes for success were curtailed by personal tragedy which must have struck deeply and perhaps provided the motive that impelled him to seek aid from the other world.

Misfortunes inflicted on George Hurley and his wife, Mary, in the late 1850s made me suspect that the Lower Fort Street concealments were precipitated by trauma and fear. Dating of one of the objects appears to provide an association with the Hurleys. The boot, which according to June Swann, could be as early as the 1830s could equally date from the 1840s. But the lace collar, with its period of possible use ranging from 1850 to the mid-1860s, suggests a later concealment, using a contemporary piece of lacework and an old shoe that may have had some nostalgic link with either Mary or George Hurley and could then have been passed on to their children before being put to use in averting evil. George and Mary took up residence in Lower Fort Street in 1863 and stayed until the 1870s.<sup>27</sup> The house in that period was owned by Alexander and John Campbell. The Hurleys are the only tenants with a reasonably large family known to have lived there in the forty years after the house was built. Since a number of children had worn the boot it appears that it may have been connected to a family with numerous children. The children of George and Mary Hurley and the dates of their births were:<sup>28</sup>

TABLE 4.2

George	1852
Charles	1854
Louisa (1)	1856
Louisa (2)	1858
Joseph	1859
Francis	1861
Edward	1863
Mary	1866
Cecil	1874

Source: personal notices in the *Sydney Morning Herald* 1852 – 1885; NSW Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

During his residence in the house Hurley was the proprietor of a wholesale drapery store at 85 York Street, Sydney, an importer of fancy goods with a store at 410 George Street and an auctioneer. He was also for some years, an alderman of Sydney City Council, elected after a campaign in which his slogan was “Vote Early! And for Hurley.” Hurley appealed to voters in the Council’s Brisbane Ward with an advertisement in which he posed a question and provided the answer:

If you wish to be represented by a man of sterling worth – of integrity of purpose – whose character, both morally and socially, is unquestioned and unimpeachable – by one who possesses the manners, ability, and education of a gentleman, and one who will be a credit to your choice, then vote for Hurley.<sup>29</sup>

Hurley was clearly a civic-minded citizen and as such was a member of the laity that supported the Catholic Church in Sydney. In 1859 he was one of a number of prominent businessmen on a committee formed under Church auspices to raise money for the completion of *St Mary's Cathedral*.<sup>30</sup> The house in Dawes Point to which he moved with his family, despite its elegant appearance, was not large internally. Additional living space was obtained by creating bedrooms with lath and plaster walls in the roof cavity. Access was by a steep and narrow staircase. While it is not possible to accurately date this work the lining of the attic space would have been the result of a decision to provide acceptable housing for human habitation. Lining would not have been necessary in a space used to store goods and chattels. If the Hurley children, or those of any other occupants, were required to sleep in the attic space their parents may have felt nervous about exposing them to the risk of evil forces passing across the harbour which was so very close to their home.

George and Mary Hurley had good reason to be fearful for the lives of their children. Before moving to Lower Fort Street from George Street they had sustained a string of deaths in their family. Their first child, George, born 1852, died in March 1854, aged just eighteen months, after an illness of "a few hours." Twelve months later their second and "only child," Charles Henry, died at the age of three months "of bronchitis." In December 1857, Louisa, their "only and beloved child" died of "convulsions, caused by the intense heat of Saturday" at the age of one year and nine months.<sup>31</sup> By the time they moved to Fort Street, Mary had given birth to six children, of whom only three had survived. At least one other child of the Hurleys died: Mary, born 1866, had a twin brother. The births of these children on 12 August in that year were announced in the *Sydney Morning Herald* but I can find no official record of the life or death of this Hurley son.<sup>32</sup> Mary Hurley bore nine children of whom I am aware. Five survived to maturity.

This was not an unusual story of family life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The risk of death, especially of children, was ever-present in life. This is not to diminish the pain and grief of this family by saying that their loss was ordinary or commonplace, but to point out that they moved to Lower Fort Street against a background of concern for the survival of their children. The fear of further infant deaths must have been very much on their minds. A cough, a chill, runny nose, a thorn, or any one of a number of common conditions that barely cause a ripple today could mark the commencement of a decline that might take a child from this world. The house, poised at the top of a rocky prominence overlooking the harbour and with waterviews to the east and the west, was much more exposed to the elements and the sky than their previous residence in the busy commercial hub of 1830s Sydney. Concealing personal objects in a building void at the top of the house to decoy evil away from their children, at a time when this was widely believed to be an effective prophylactic against harm, may have given the Hurleys an increased sense of security and comfort, knowing that they had done all they could to provide for the safety of their family.

While the precise nature of their fears and the evil in which they may have believed remains obscure, a description of the theoretical basis of misfortune caused by beings from the spirit world provides a possible clue. There is an account, originally 17<sup>th</sup> century in origin, in a popular magazine, *The Supernatural Magazine for 1809*, in which the imagined creatures that inspired fear in people at that time were described. The account came from the case of Dr. John Pordage (1607 – 1681), rector of Bradfield, Berkshire, astrologer, alchemist and mystic, who was charged by a church authority with entertaining a conjurer, having conversations with angels and with describing apparitions of spirits. In his defence, Pordage said there had been “strange and wonderful apparitions” at his house in 1650. These, he said, had been sent by the Devil, with the consent of the Lord, to test his faith. Pordage described his belief in the existence of two spiritual worlds “extending and penetrating throughout this whole visible creation” and which sought to influence the material world about us, the one to do good and the other evil. The “dark world” had its princes who were attended by fearful spirit servants:



*John Pordage by William Faithorne, 1683. (NPG D22902)*

Concerning the shapes and figures of the Spirits, you must know that they are very Monstrous, Terrible and Afrighting.....appearing in the shapes of Lions, Dragons, Elephants, Tygers, Bears and suchlike Terrible Beasts. Besides, the Princes and those that attended them, tho all in the shapes of men, yet represented themselves monstrously misshapen, as with Ears like those of Cats, cloven Feet, ugly Legs and Bodies, Eyes fiery, sharp and piercing.<sup>33</sup>

There is no way of knowing whether the Hurleys knew of this magazine, or whether it was available in Sydney in the 1850s, but the re-publication of Pordage’s description of evil spiritual beings may have given a new and sharper focus to the practice of secreting objects in houses and other buildings, especially among those more impressionable members of society who passed on folk beliefs from generation to generation. There was, it seems, a view of the spiritual world and its connection with the material world that caused shared concerns to flow through the daily life of the people, ever-present perhaps but rarely expressed. And with warnings about the Devil emanating from the pulpits of the various denominations it was little wonder that people were afraid of danger originating in the world of the spirits. If the concealments at No. 37 Lower Fort Street were made with the knowledge of George Hurley, as seems possible, he appears to have found no conflict with his Catholic faith.

Hurley's presumed resort to folk magic to protect his home and family, while maintaining his life as an active and respected member of Sydney's Roman Catholic laity, may be better understood if viewed as part of a personal approach to religion which was not unusual at that time. As Christianity passed from the pulpits to the pews and from the churches to the cottages, it underwent many alterations and distortions to suit popular needs and tastes. James Obelkevich in *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825 – 1875* (1976) questioned whether the results of this process remained within the Christian framework or fell outside it.<sup>34</sup> No distinction was seen between beliefs that are today regarded as mere superstition and those that are part of religious belief. Obelkevich points out that religious observance, by way of church attendance, could be combined on the same day with any one of a variety of folk practices and beliefs:

Nor was there any inconsistency when a woman washing a tablecloth after a Methodist tea meeting was frightened at seeing a diamond shape in the folds – a superstitious portent of death.<sup>35</sup>

Richard Godbeer, paraphrasing Jon Butler in *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianising the American People* (1990), says:

..... people who used magic tended not to see their behaviour as antagonistic to Christian faith. Instead, they saw the two as complementary: in order to “satisfy their spiritual needs” they turned sometimes to one, sometimes to the other.<sup>36</sup>

The beliefs of a great many people thus remained a mixture of religious belief and superstition, not surprising when so many of Christianity's festivals and saints had been superimposed on long-standing pagan traditions. Superstition drove the need to interpret the events of everyday life through a prism of fear and suspicion. Thus events which would today be viewed as random, innocuous and innocent of any significance or diabolical origin were scrutinised for possible malevolent instigation. At the time that Hurley occupied his house in Lower Fort Street even the collision of a bumblebee with a window pane was likely to be viewed as an omen of bad fortune. No event was too trivial to be unrelated to forces which lay beyond rational explanation:

Frequent discussions were everyday gossip about the powers possessed by some of the neighbours who had an “evil eye” and who could produce bad luck among others by simply wishing it to happen. Bad omens were plentiful and too serious to go unnoticed.<sup>37</sup>

There is another possible reason why Hurley, if indeed he was the concealer, may have

turned to magic to protect his family. The consecutive deaths of three infant children may have resulted in the conclusion that prayer was ineffectual and that an indifferent God was paying no attention to the series of tragedies in this family. Organised religion, whether Roman Catholic or any other faith, was based on a reliance on the fatherly hand of a God who ruled all people and all things. Prayer was an appeal for the indulgence of a supernatural being who might or might not be inclined to help. After the deaths of his children it may have seemed to Hurley that as a supplicant he was not being heard. But magic offered the prospect of taking charge, of reaching into the world of the supernatural to alter the course of events in this life. Magic placed the power of the universe in the hands of ordinary people. Godbeer described the divergence between the two forces thus:

Magical skill enables people to harness supernatural power and use it for their own purposes: they can predict the future, protect themselves against harm, heal the sick, and strike down their enemies. Religious belief assumes the existence of a supernatural authority (usually personified) that controls the world according to its own will; people can attempt to influence this divine power through prayer and other devotional exercises, but there is no guarantee that their desires will be fulfilled or their requests granted.<sup>38</sup>

I have investigated the lives of the people who resided at 37 Lower Fort Street in the period from 1834 – 1880 and there is no-one else who suffered to the same extent as George and Mary Hurley. It is difficult to envisage the energetic young men, busy making their fortunes, who occupied the house before 1850 or the Reverend Salmon who followed them as being responsible for this concealment. Caroline, the wife of the merchant Siegfried Franck, gave birth at the house to a son, Harry, in 1859. Ten days later Caroline was dead, probably of complications following the birth.<sup>39</sup> This was a very sad time for Franck and his brother and sister-in-law, who shared the house with him. But Caroline's death was an unfortunate single event, with no resemblance to the curse that seemed to hover over the Hurley family. Some people who made their mark on Australian architecture lived in this house for a time. The Reverend Salmon is notable for instigating the importation from Scotland of an iron church and its subsequent erection in Macquarie Street.<sup>40</sup> Charles Tiffin, formerly Colonial Architect of Queensland, died in the house in 1873.<sup>41</sup> At a time when birth and death took place in the home, the house at No. 37 Lower Fort Street saw its share of entrances and exits from this world. There were numerous births, more than a few deaths and even a marriage<sup>42</sup> at the house but nothing that appears likely to cause as much pain as fate inflicted on the Hurleys. While the objects found in concealments such as those at No. 37 Lower Fort Street are mute and not accompanied by any explanation of their purpose or intent they may nevertheless have provided us with a glimpse of a story of birth, life, death and belief in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Sydney.

## 4.2 THE CAT IN THE CAVITY

The practice of concealing cats in voids in buildings is known to have taken place in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe for at least five centuries. Domestic cats originated from an ancestral wild species, *Felis silvestris*, the European and African wild cat. The domestic cat is now considered a separate species, identified as *Felis catus*. In appearance, domestic cats are similar to their wild relatives, and many of their behaviours such as hunting and other activity patterns remain essentially unchanged from their ancestral form. Cats were first domesticated in Egypt around 2000 BC. As a revered animal and one very important to Egyptian society and religion, the cat was afforded the same mummification after death as humans. Some elements of Egyptian beliefs may have been associated with cats when they began to spread throughout the Mediterranean. The Romans introduced the domestic cat to Britain by AD 300, possibly with knowledge of the religious and magical status of the animals in the Egyptian society from which they had come.<sup>43</sup> Cats have long been associated with magic and with witches. Their aloof and somewhat other-worldly nature, as well as the fact that they roamed about during the night when witches and evil spirits were thought to be at large, gave them a reputation that resulted in the death of a great many cats. They were believed to be the familiars of witches and to act on their command to carry out evil missions against humanity. A familiar was a creature such as a cat, rodent or insect that could gain easy and unnoticed entry to a house, there to do the witch's evil bidding. Cats were also used in magic rituals.<sup>44</sup>



*Witches and their familiars, confronted by Matthew Hopkins, a contract "witch finder" in a village in East Anglia. (Glanville 1681)*

In the late Middle Ages cats fell on hard times. They were burnt on Shrove Tuesday in the Vosges and at Easter in Alsace. In the Ardennes, they were thrown into bonfires on the first Sunday in Lent or roasted on the end of long poles or in wicker baskets. In Transylvania and Bohemia, a black cat was buried under a tree to stimulate its growth. Black male cats were killed and buried in the fields to prevent evil spirits from harming the crops. These accounts indicate that in the Middle Ages cats were regarded as animals with a highly charged magical value, able to enrich the harvest and protect crops and herds from evil.<sup>45</sup> By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier, cats were being concealed in building voids in Austria and Germany. The German academic, Dr. Petra Schad, working with the Institute of

Archaeology at the University of Bamberg, has recorded finds of concealed cats in houses in both Germany and Austria. A particularly interesting series of finds took place in the district of Ludwigsburg in 1999 after carpenters renovating a half-timbered house in the town of Markgroningen discovered the bodies of two cats in separate voids in the building. They lay beneath the floorboards on different levels of the building. Both corpses lacked the left paw: one cat had the broken paw placed beside it.



*One of the concealed cats recorded by Dr. Petra Schad in the Ludwigsburg district of Germany. This one is from a house in the town of Bonnigheim. (Petra Schad)*

Newspaper publicity produced a flood of similar finds from throughout Ludwigsburg. In these, caches of cats were found in seventeen houses. The total number of cats discovered was twenty-three. In the state of Baden-Württemberg fifty-four finds were reported from thirty caches in twenty-eight houses. The dates of the concealments (which are generally later than the construction dates of the houses) ranged from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In a paper on the finds, Dr. Schad attributed the concealments to a belief in the need for protection from witchcraft:

Many proverbs and sayings refer to cats in a superstitious way, quite often branding their deceitfulness. Black cats are regarded as harbingers of bad news. It was only in 1940 that children in the Spessart were reported to believe in the imminent metamorphosis of an old woman into a cat. The idea of lycanthropy has been around for ages in many different civilisations. A great number of witch trials of early modern history testify to it. Throughout the districts of the Duchess of Württemberg 450 women were accused as “witches” and 116 of them finally executed from 1497 to 1750. The apparition of witches or the devil under the guise of a cat is often mentioned in witch trials. In 1615 Barbara Henz (from Markgröningen) was accused of having entertained the devil in feline shape. At Marbach/Neckar, where there was also found a mummified cat in a house dating from 1707, fellow prisoners claimed in a witch trial of 1740 that the accused woman had been repeatedly visited by a black cat.<sup>46</sup>

X-ray examination of the bodies of two cats revealed that their necks had been broken. Other finds made in the buildings examined included a number of “afterbirth pots” containing placental material which Dr. Schad described as a mediaeval tradition.<sup>47</sup> The location of the finds in the Ludwigsburg houses, either beneath the floor or behind ceiling panels (depending on how you consider their position) suggests association with building tradesmen. All were beyond the reach of everyday life in the buildings.

ENTITLED  
**THE FOLK-LORE**  
 OF  
**THE CAT**  
 BY  
**Edward Lovett** (of the Folk-Lore Society).  
*Author of "THE FOLK-LORE OF THE HORSE,"  
 "THE FOLK-LORE OF THE WAR," etc., etc.*

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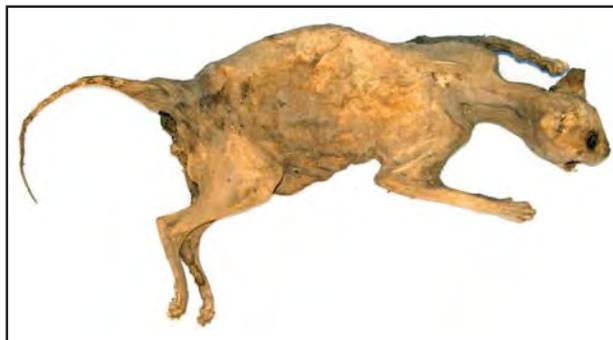
Above, a concealed cat found during renovations on the 400-year-old house at Ugborough, Plymouth, which Richard Parson and his family occupy. A large number of concealed cats has been found in British buildings but there are no figures available on these finds. (Plymouth Herald)

Left, Edward Lovett's leaflet promoting his lecture on cats in folklore. It is clear from the leaflet that he was aware of the practice of concealing cats in building voids but Lovett made no other written reference to this matter. (CM)

Concealed cats in British buildings are also well known and the practice has been on record there for a considerable time. Edward Lovett issued a leaflet to promote a lecture entitled "The folklore of the cat" in circa 1920. The topics listed for his talk included "cats built up alive in the walls of houses."<sup>48</sup> Margaret Howard of the Institute of Archaeology at the University of London published an article entitled "Dried Cats" in 1951 and recorded finds in England, Ireland, Scotland, Gibraltar and Sweden. Howard's article lists a total of twenty-five cats. Since then a great many more has been found in the UK although no reliable and comprehensive figures are available. The earliest English find Howard records is that of a cat discovered in 1950 by the Ministry of Works in a house built by Christopher Wren between 1666 and 1672 in the Tower of London. The body was found in a subfloor location, lying against a joist beside a fireplace in an upper-level room. Howard attributes cat concealments to the ancient ritual of foundation sacrifice in which tribute was paid to the gods or later, the Devil, in propitiation for the disturbance that a building caused to the earth.<sup>49</sup>

It was hardly to be expected that a traditional cultural practice carried out in Europe from at least as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century would make its way to Australia but the fact that this custom traveled around the world became apparent soon after I began intensive research in 2004. The first cat concealment reported to me was the find made at *Her Majesty's Theatre*, Ballarat, during renovations there in the 1990s. The most recent concealments of which I am aware took place in two adjacent terrace houses in Miller's Point, Sydney, in about 1904 – more than 450 years after those recorded in Germany. The earliest Australian finds that are dateable come from the Primitive Methodist Church of 1863 at Woodchester, South Australia, and from the 1866 Anglican rectory at Birregurra, Victoria. Concealed cats in both Australia and in the United Kingdom may be “posed” so that they appear about to spring, as in the case of the cat found by Rob Thomas underneath the family home at 55 Upton Street, Launceston, some years ago: “... lying on its side, frozen in a very aggressive, quite ferocious pose. It had its mouth open with one paw up. It was as if it was about to kill something and had been frozen in time.”<sup>50</sup>

Concealed cats found in the British Isles sometimes have a dead mouse in their mouth. The cat found beneath *Her Majesty's Theatre* (page 339) was accompanied by a number of rats. Both the cat and its companions can be seen in a display mounted in the foyer of the theatre. Concealed cats are found in much the same locations as shoes. To date, however, while I have no record of a cat concealment within the structure of a chimney many have been found in close proximity to chimneys, either in the roof cavity or under the ground floor. Beneath a suspended hearth slab is a favoured spot but cats are also found under front or rear doors where they may have been posted as guardians of the entrances to a house. In recording finds of cats as concealments I disregard those where access was possible to a live animal. Cats are known for crawling under buildings when distressed or ill and seeking quiet places where they often die, hence



*Australian concealed cats.*  
Top, Ballarat, Victoria. Centre,  
Woodchester, South Australia.  
Bottom, Blayney, NSW.

I have recorded only those finds where the animal could not have made its own way into the find spot. In one case I drove to Forbes, in central-western New South Wales, to investigate a purported cat concealment but access to the location of the cat was quite easy and the find was discounted. Because we have no contemporary documentary explanation of the rules relating to concealments we can only speculate on the reason for the choice of cats over shoes when concealments were being planned. Both appear to serve much the same purpose. But cats may have been used in situations where personal objects were not available. Tradesmen working on buildings where they were not aware of the identity of the future occupants, in rural areas where the owners were not on site, or in cases where they felt the owners would not be willing to provide shoes or other items for concealment, may have fallen back on the use of a cat. The cat found at *Glengallan Homestead* (page 414), near Warwick in Queensland, may be a case in point. In this example, we have tradesmen working at a location that was then quite remote, their employer a wealthy landowner and a family which was almost certainly not accessible to them for either social or geographical reasons. By concealing a cat under the floor of the drawing room at *Glengallan* their obligation to provide protection would have been fulfilled without the knowledge or cooperation of the future occupants of the house.

Of the various concealed cats found since I began research the most intriguing by far is the discovery of two cats in sealed subfloor voids beneath the kitchens of two adjoining terrace houses in Argyle Place in the Sydney suburb of Miller's Point (page 243). This find will be discussed in detail later in this thesis.

#### **4.2.1 INFORMATION DERIVED FROM CAT CONCEALMENTS**

Unlike shoes, concealed cats can provide very little information to assist the researcher. Shoes can be dated but cats, as enigmatic in death as in life, tell us very little. There is, it appears, no way to date cat concealments other than by reference to the date of construction of the house or building in which they are found. This provides the earliest possible date for a concealment but nothing more. There may be information contained within the structure of a building that suggests a concealment at some time after the construction period. It is usually easy to tell if floorboards have been taken up. A find close to a flooring patch may be indicative of a concealment taking place some time after construction. But there is no way of accurately dating this or other forms of surface disturbance to walls, floors or brickwork. I have seen nothing to indicate that cat concealments occurred while the animal was alive; indications are that the opposite was the case. Cat corpses found to date appear to have been carefully positioned and some may have been posed in a seemingly watchful state. But more research is required on concealed cats in order to answer the following questions:

- How were they killed? X-ray examination of the bodies of concealed cats in Austria has revealed broken necks.<sup>51</sup> The same practice may have been in use here but this has yet to be established. Drowning is another possibility.
- Were chemicals used to preserve the body? There is no information available on this. But it is perhaps worth noting that the original owner of the Richmond, NSW, house in which a concealed cat was found had some expertise in tanning hides.<sup>52</sup> On balance, I believe that preservation was not part of the process.

#### 4.2.2 A POWERFUL TRADITION

There are remarkable features to the concealment of objects in old buildings. Despite the lack of any written descriptions of the purpose of this practice and the way in which it should be carried out its observance demonstrates a high degree of uniformity. So far, no variations in the custom have been detected in concealments between those carried out in the UK and in Australia the same time. Within the Australian colonies concealments so far investigated display no significant variations from region to region or within a considerable period of time. Those performing the concealments appear to have clearly understood the requirements and to have carried them out with considerable care. It is apparent that a powerful oral tradition was at work here. The conclusion is inescapable: we have virtually nothing in the way of contemporary documentary explanation contrasted with a practice that is widespread, ancient and durable. Also intriguing is the rapid disappearance of this custom in the period from 1930 to circa 1940. It is noteworthy that despite numerous radio interviews in which some means of contacting the author of this paper was provided I have not heard from anyone with inside information about this matter. Some of the interviews featured audience participation in the form of talk-back segments. I had hoped that sooner or later I would hear from an old carpenter, bricklayer or plasterer with memories of concealments being performed, perhaps when he was an apprentice, but no such person has yet come forward. It appears that this research has come a generation or so too late to find anyone with first-hand experience of this ancient practice. The alternative to this suggestion is the possibility, perhaps slight, that it survives among a few people who maintain the tradition of secrecy. Timothy Easton knows of at least one builder who continues to make concealments in England to the present day.<sup>53</sup>

There is a glimpse of the mindset at work among those who concealed shoes in a rare and perhaps unique document in the records of the Northampton Museum and Gallery. It is in the form of a letter from the folklore researcher Margaret Baker who wrote to the Museum in 1982 to pass on some literary references to concealed shoes. She had found these in the course of other research, and after receiving earlier assistance from June

Personal account from Bill Brown, Church Cottage, Stockleigh Pomeroy, Devon. Mr. Brown was 73 in 1973 when he told us this story, so would have been about 18 when it occurred. He is a farm worker and hedger, of a family with Devon links dating from the Elizabethan period. His mother was a 'wise woman', both his parents were very reticent about superstitions; as Mr Brown put it the old folk were 'afraid to talk' lest some punishment come on them for it!

He was hedging with his father about 1917-18 at Compton Castle, Paignton, near an old windmill base. There were also two ruined cottages. At lunchtime they sat by the wall and poked among the stones. About 3 feet from the ground where the stone footing met the cob wall, tucked into a "crenellation" was an old half boot. Mr. Brown, senior, could only be persuaded to reply to his son's enquiry about the boot's purpose that 'it was something to do with witching'. He would never say a further word on the subject.

Conversation with Bill Brown, September 30, 1973, Stockleigh Pomeroy.

\* and that it was "ill-wished".

*An extract from the letter Margaret Baker sent to Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, 16/10/1982. (NMG)*

Swann at the Museum, was motivated to provide references which she thought might be useful. Baker recounted details of a conversation she had had on 30 September, 1973, with Bill Brown, a farm worker and hedger, at his home, *Church Cottage*, Stockleigh Pomeroy, Devon. Brown, it was said, was from an old Devon family with local connections dating back to Elizabethan times. He described his mother as a "wise woman." This is a term that was also used to identify cunning men or women – the practitioners of folk magic in the countryside, villages or towns of England. Brown's mother, therefore, was one of these and the family would have been alert to evidence of magical rituals in their area. There was, according to Brown, great reticence on the parts of his parents to speak of anything connected with superstitious beliefs and practices.

According to Baker's account, Brown's parents were afraid to talk about such things lest some punishment be meted out to them. Brown was 73 at the time that Baker spoke to him. He told her that in about 1917 or 1918 he was hedging with his father at *Compton Castle*, Paignton, near an old windmill base, close to two old ruined cottages. At lunchtime they sat near the wall of one of these and poked among the stones. About three feet from the ground, where the stone foundation and the upper wall of cob were joined, they found an old half boot, tucked into what Brown called "a crenellation." When he asked his father why the boot might be in such a place, Brown was told that it was "something to do with witching" and that the place was "ill-wished." No further information on this matter could be extracted from the older man.<sup>54</sup> The term crenellation is generally used to describe battlements, embrasures or loopholes surmounting the walls of a castle or stronghold but it can also identify a cavity or indenture. In the building context described, it appears that Brown is referring to a gap or recess in the stonework of the old cottage's foundation wall.

Born in Canada in 1928,<sup>55</sup> Margaret Baker became the well-known author of a number of books on folklore including *Folklore of the Sea*, *The Gardener's Folklore*, *Discovering the Folklore of Plants*, *Discovering Christmas Customs and Folklore* and *Folklore and Customs of Rural England*. She also published under the anagram Kate Bergamar and some years ago was living as Margaret Gray on the south-eastern coast of England.<sup>56</sup> *Folklore and Customs of Rural England* was published in 1973 and it was possibly during research for this book that she spoke to Bill Brown. Her letter conveys an impression of an organised, systematic and reliable person. It is likely, therefore, that Brown was a source that she considered authentic and trustworthy. His description of the shoe found in the cottage as connected with “witching” may be the only authoritative account of the purpose of concealed shoes that we will ever have. At the time of Brown’s conversation with his father, concealed objects were still being placed in buildings throughout Britain in significant numbers. The fact that the practice was still very much alive when Brown attempted to question his father about it gives this report an authenticity that derives from first-hand knowledge of a custom that appears to have no other known surviving witnesses or descriptions. And Brown’s account of the incident testifies to the oral characteristics of the practice and belief which had survived in his memory from circa 1917 until 1973.

### 4.3 CONCLUSION

The discovery of so many objects in building voids throughout Australia, together with a background of similar finds in Great Britain, takes these finds beyond any possibility of innocuous or accidental placement. While there is no evidence to suggest that this practice began with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 it would be logical to assume that it was an early import to New South Wales. The survival of this ritual, even during its terminal phase, into a period when people were driving motor cars and listening to jazz on their wireless sets suggests that ancient beliefs retained some of their power well into the modern period. So widespread, so persistent and so consistent is this custom that it seems reasonable to conclude that this was a practice that was deeply embedded in the belief systems of Australians until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other than Lovett’s cursory mention of cat concealments, there appears to be nothing in the contemporary documentary evidence, whether in Australia or elsewhere, which explains, describes or refers to this behaviour. Historians, with a general professional tendency to rely primarily on archival sources, failed to notice it because the textual evidence was absent. Those professionals whose work is concentrated on the physical qualities of houses and other buildings and on the artifacts found in, under and around them also failed to see the pattern.

Archaeologists missed their golden opportunity to make this discovery. In the

past members of the profession opted for the convenient path of suggesting ritual purpose for obscure objects found during the course of excavations. Assigning a ritual purpose to inexplicable and enigmatic objects became something of a professional joke and as a result there has long been reluctance by archaeologists to ascribe function to such artifacts. And, to be fair, the majority of archaeological work is carried out on structures and sites where there is little prospect of finding and identifying concealed objects. Conservation architects, intent on the fabric of the buildings on which they worked, disregarded artifacts whose purpose was mundane, obscure or not relevant to the task at hand. Shoes, cats and old garments were and are regarded as inconsequential by these professionals whose gaze is focused on building structure and design. And, as charms, the objects selected for concealment are subtly indistinguishable from the more mundane contents of a house or any other building. The case study described in this chapter suggests that personal circumstances, particularly in situations where traumatic family experiences occurred, may have played a role in stimulating the concealment of objects that may have been thought to offer some protection from the possibility of unpleasant events.

This research serves to underline the need for professionals in the fields of history, archaeology and building conservation to be aware of the fact that not all history is to be found in the documentary archive, and that careful consideration needs to be given to assessing the significance of artifacts discovered within the structure of buildings. Rigid adherence to previous research parameters has resulted in a blinkered approach to the study of buildings and their early occupants. Artifact-based research has now revealed that folk magic played an important role in the lives of a great many Australians in the period 1788 – 1930s, as it had in the British Isles for many centuries past. The case study conducted in this chapter has raised the possibility of child and family mortality as a precipitating factor in concealing objects in houses and other buildings. Other factors, including stress from a variety of causes, may be identified as a result of further work in a new field of research which is wide open to additional investigation.

## FIVE: ANALYSIS

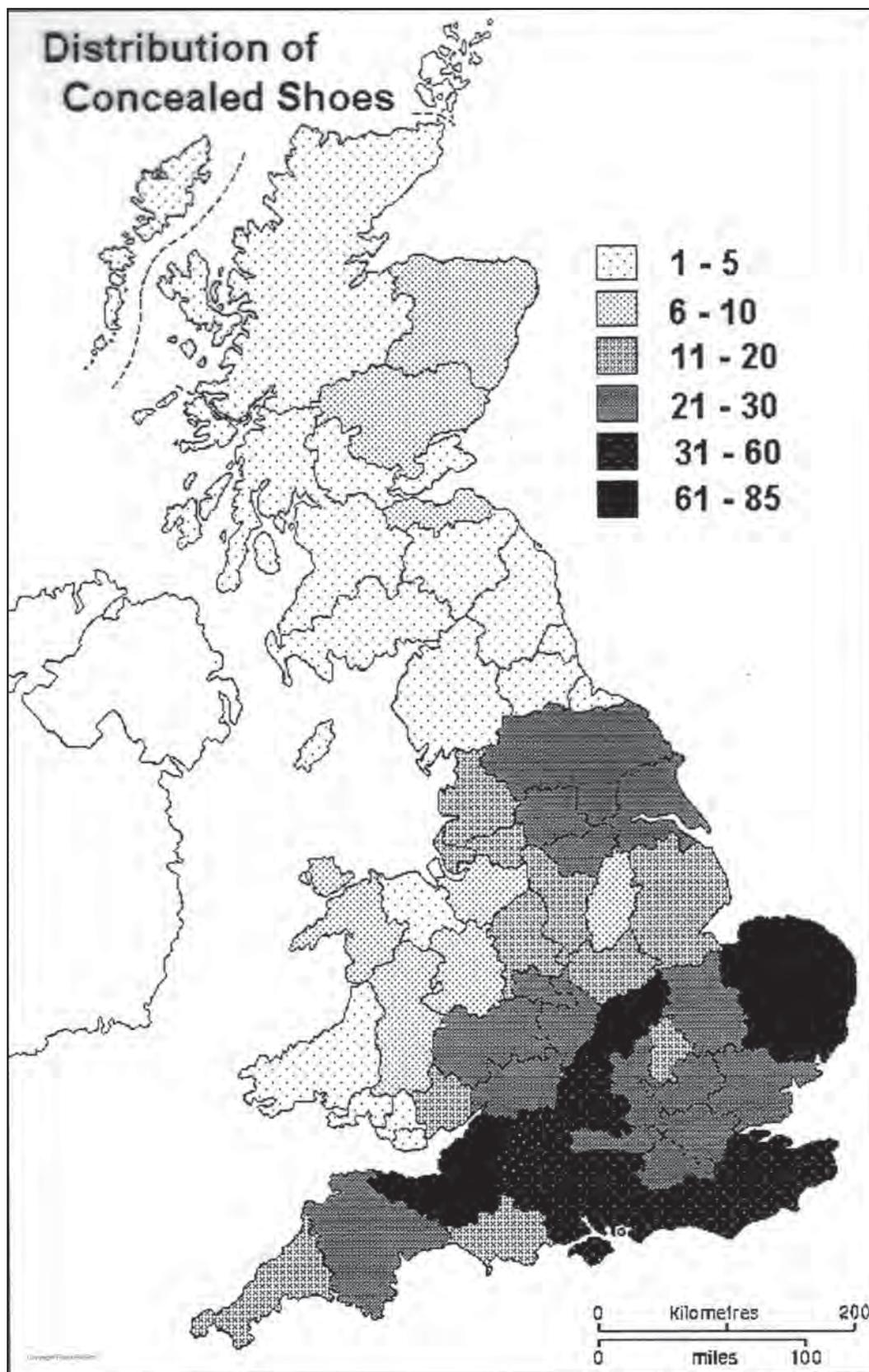
### 5.1 SITE STATISTICS

Since I began looking for concealed objects in old houses I have located caches of these objects at 119 locations throughout Australia. For some years I endeavoured to visit every site where finds were made. This resulted in trips to South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland. Extensive travel within New South Wales was made possible by a grant from the NSW Heritage Office (2007). I managed to visit fifty-nine sites but it eventually became clear that I would not be able to reach every one of them. Site visits are valuable research tools and are recommended for future research wherever possible. While the owners of buildings where finds were made are thoughtful and well-informed people they cannot be expected to have the insight that follows some years of intensive documentary and on-site research in Australia and the United Kingdom as well as personal communications with other researchers in the UK.

Because many of the concealment sites contained more than one object the total number of objects in these concealments is considerably greater than the total number of sites. As in the United Kingdom, the base location of the researcher appears to influence the number of sites in the tally. This is apparent from the UK map on the next page. Areas with a high concentration of finds (shown in black) correspond with the locations of researchers. The ability of owners of buildings to reach the researcher because of proximity, ease of contact and economy arising from telephone calls over shorter distances all appear to contribute to this apparent collection bias. Proximity to the researcher may contribute to the reality of the appeal when it is made by radio interview or television news.

In the Australian context, the greater representation of New South Wales sites is probably a reflection of these characteristics combined with the larger population base in that state, together with the NSW Heritage Office grant for travel within the State. The comparatively low number of finds in Queensland may reflect the different nature of the traditional houses of the State. The great majority are of timber and are commonly constructed on stumps, thus reducing the available voids in which concealments could be placed. Other voids such as roof cavities are accessed on an irregular basis but are more likely to have been examined and any objects found therein removed over the years. Subfloor and chimney voids are better long-term locations for concealments and these are less numerous than in the traditional timber houses of Queensland.

The statistics for the locations of concealed objects of all types within buildings at all sites so far examined in Australia are on following pages.



*This distribution map is based on the records of the Concealed Shoe Index, Northampton Museums and Art Gallery, Northampton. Source: Pitt, 1997.*

## ANALYSIS OF CONCEALED OBJECTS IN AUSTRALIA

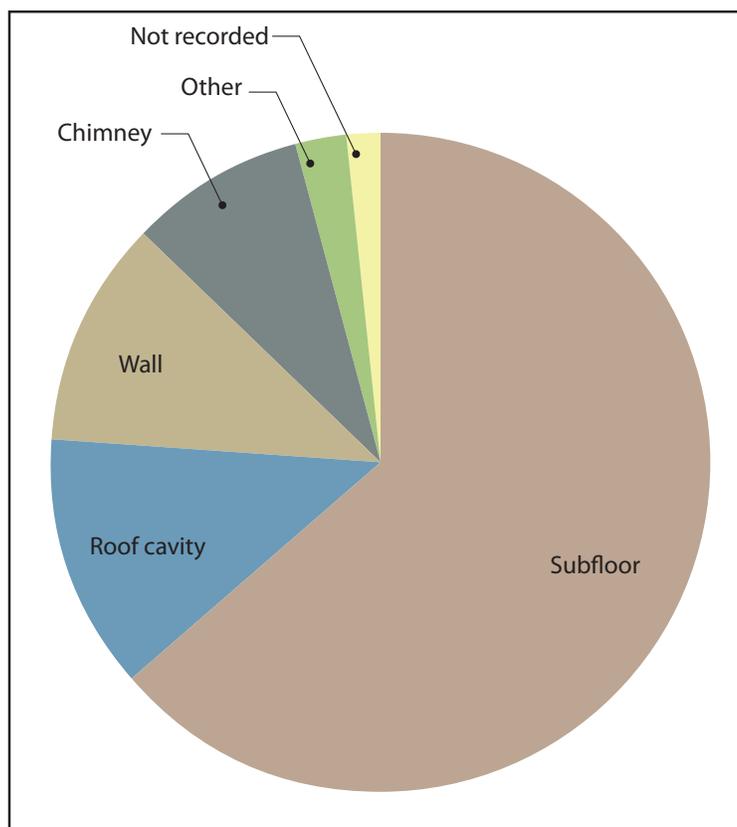
TABLE 5.1

LOCATIONS OF OBJECTS WITHIN BUILDINGS	
Subfloor	78
Roof cavity	19
Wall	13
Chimney	10
Other	1
Not recorded	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>123</b>

Source: Catalogue of Finds.

Some buildings contained multiple deposits and these are counted separately.

In some cases, objects had been placed in different locations in a building.



### LOCATIONAL ANALYSIS

Source: Catalogue of Finds

Many subfloor deposits were in close proximity to chimney bases and hearths.

## 5.2 NOTES ON POSITIONAL ISSUES

The figures for the location of objects within buildings add up to more than the total number of sites identified because some sites contained, as for example at Windsor, NSW, a cat under the floor and a shoe on the smokeshef in the chimney flue (page 293). In the table (6.1) on the preceding page “other” locations refer to the child’s shoe in the Sydney Harbour Bridge pylon (page 277), the cache in the disused bread oven at Anthill Ponds, Tasmania (page 295), and the shoe in the verandah awning at Yarraville, Victoria (page 357). “Not recorded” relates to identified concealed shoes in public collections where no record of their placement in buildings exists. Of the comparatively small number of sites that contain shoes and boots which can be visually identified as those of tradesmen the judgement has been made on size, condition and surface layers of materials such as lime plaster, mortar and paint seen on the boots. Of these, eight were found beneath the floor, two in roof cavities, one in a chimney and one in an unrecorded location. Although exact figures are not available, many finds of shoes and some other objects are made today by building tradesmen who have been tasked to replace floors, carry out renovations, deal with rising damp or demolish old and unused chimneys. Others are made by pest exterminators or building surveyors. It should be noted that subfloor shoe concealments are often associated with chimneys in what appear to be placements made with intent. The figure for chimney concealments refers only to finds occurring within chimneys, either in the flue or in a void within the structure.

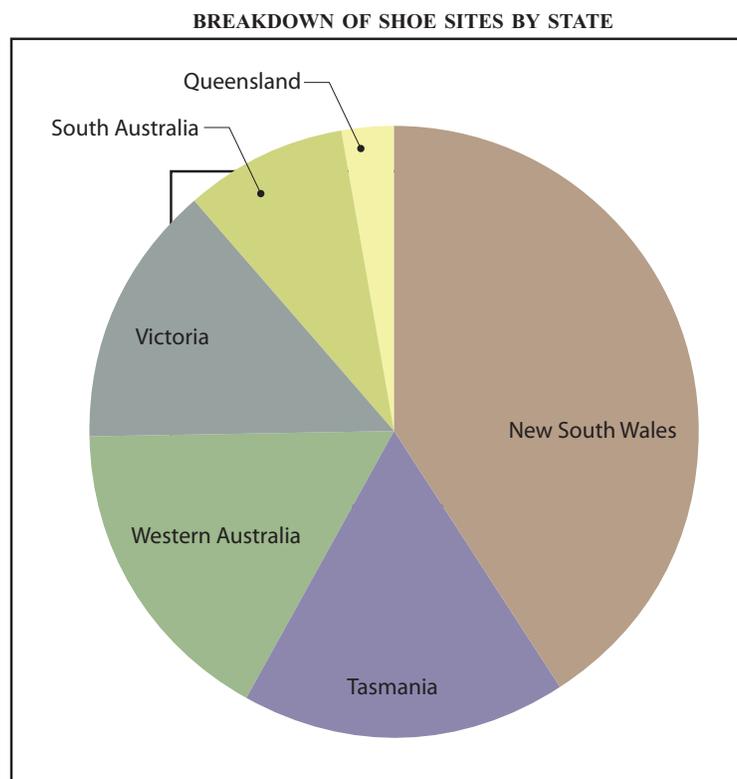
### 5.2.1 SHOE FINDS: THE BREAKDOWN

Shoes were the objects found in the greatest number of sites. The breakdown of shoe sites by state is as follows:

**TABLE 5.2**

SHOE SITE TOTALS BY STATE	
NSW	36
Tasmania	20
Victoria	13
South Australia	8
Western Australia	15
Queensland	3
TOTAL	95

Source: Catalogue of Finds



Source: Catalogue of Finds

### 5.2.2 GENDER/AGE ANALYSIS OF SHOE FINDS

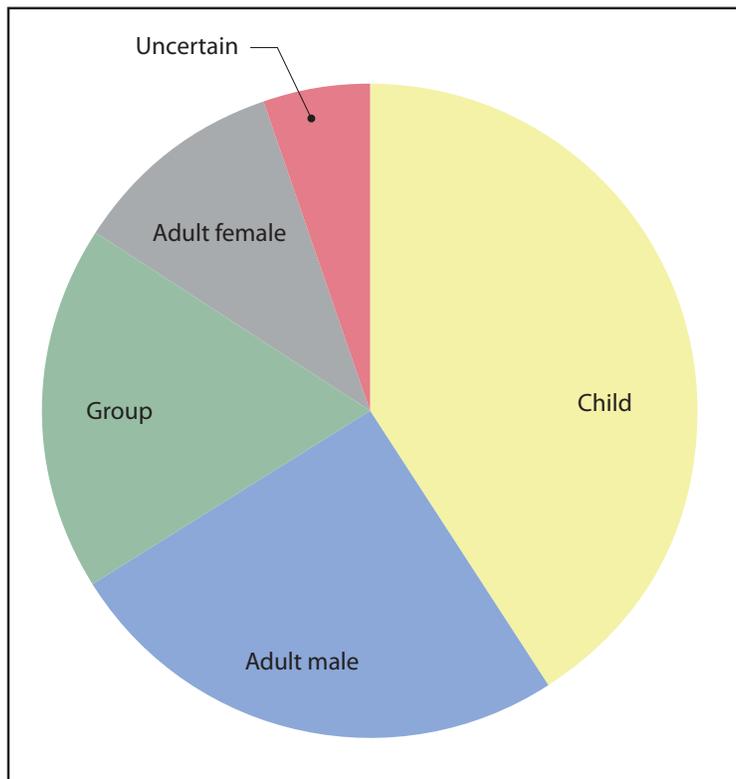
Shoes found at the sites broke down into sexes and groups as shown in the table below. In this tally, pairs of obviously male or female footwear count as one find. Family groups of shoes were not sorted or counted by sex.

**TABLE 5.3**

GENDER/AGE ANALYSIS OF SHOES	
Adult male	24
Adult female	10
Child	39
Group	17
Uncertain	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>95</b>

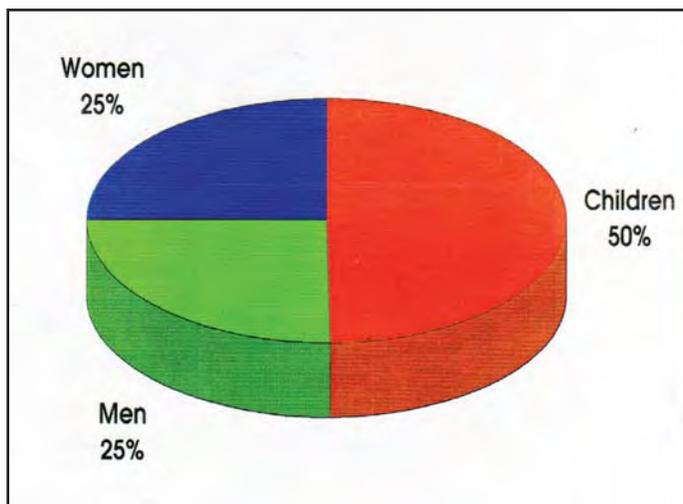
Source: Catalogue of Finds

SHOE FINDS BY GENDER/AGE



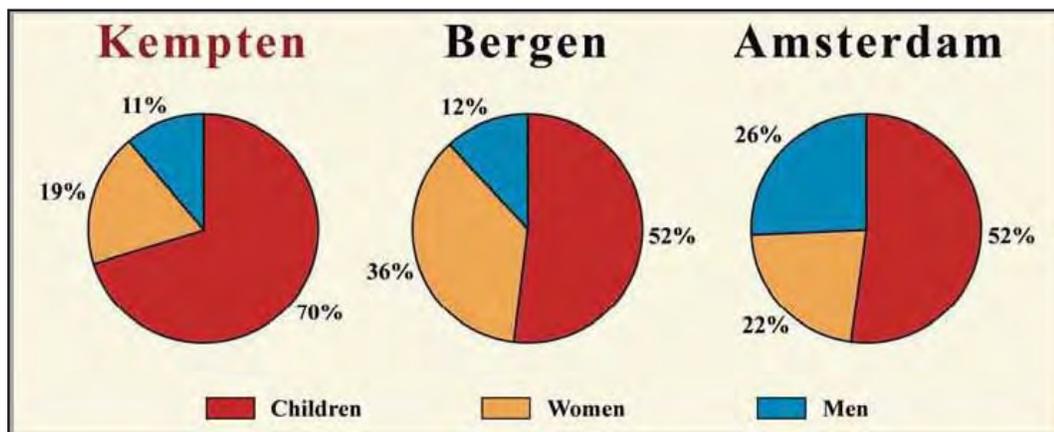
Source: Catalogue of Finds

UK SHOE FINDS BY GENDER/AGE



Source: Pitt, 1997

## EUROPEAN SHOE FINDS BY GENDER/AGE



Source: Atzbach, 2007

Analysis of the gender/age balance of Australian sites and comparisons with similar studies in the UK and at Kempton, Germany, Bergen, Norway, and Amsterdam, Netherlands, suggests a distinct similarity of concealment practice in this respect. The outstanding characteristic of the charts on this and the preceding pages is that finds of children's shoes comprise at least half of all concealments recorded in the studies under comparison. Shoes of men and women do not appear to have been given the same weight in selection for concealment. This may be the result of a cultural preference for the use of children's shoes for this purpose, based on a belief in their greater efficacy as apotropaic objects, or a result of the larger families common during the period up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and a consequent greater availability of children's shoes.

### 5.2.3 MISCELLANEOUS FINDS OTHER THAN SHOES

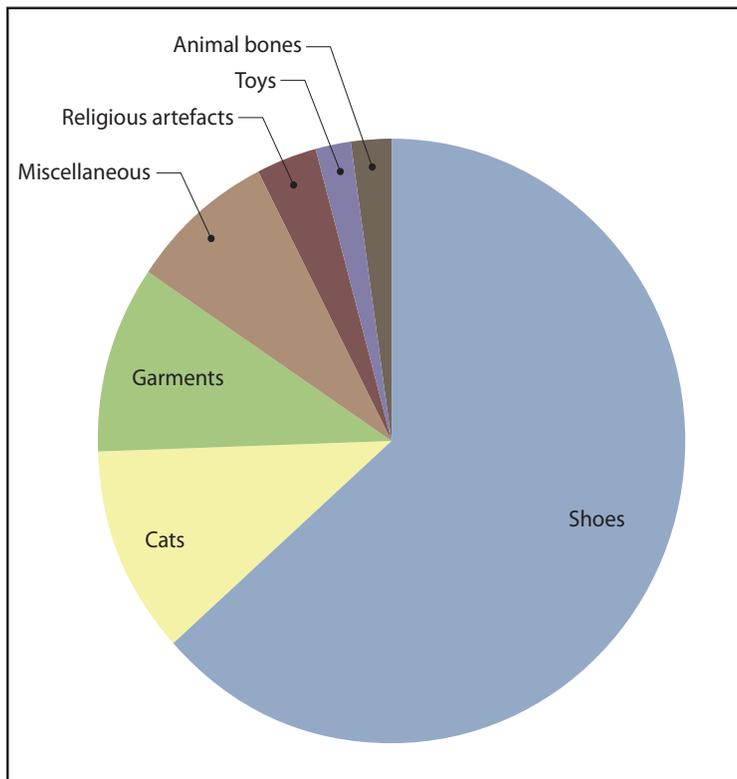
Australian finds of objects other than shoes resulted in the following breakdown of sites.

TABLE 5.4

SITES WITH OBJECTS OTHER THAN SHOES	
Cats	17
Garments	12
Religious artefacts (marble bible, bible, rosaries)	5
Animal bones	3
Toys	3
Miscellaneous*	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>52</b>

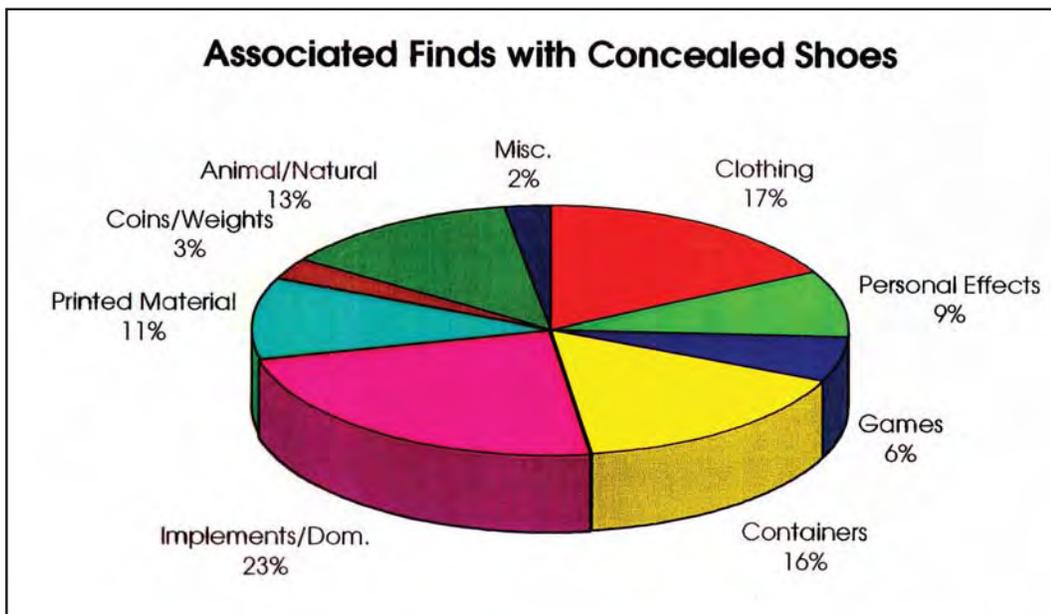
\* Parasol, book covers, leather leggings, bottles, teaspoon, shoe last, cotton reels, gunpowder flask, coins, cutlery, baby powder tin, horseshoe, printed matter. Source: Catalogue of Finds.

**BREAKDOWN OF ALL OBJECTS**



Source: Catalogue of Finds

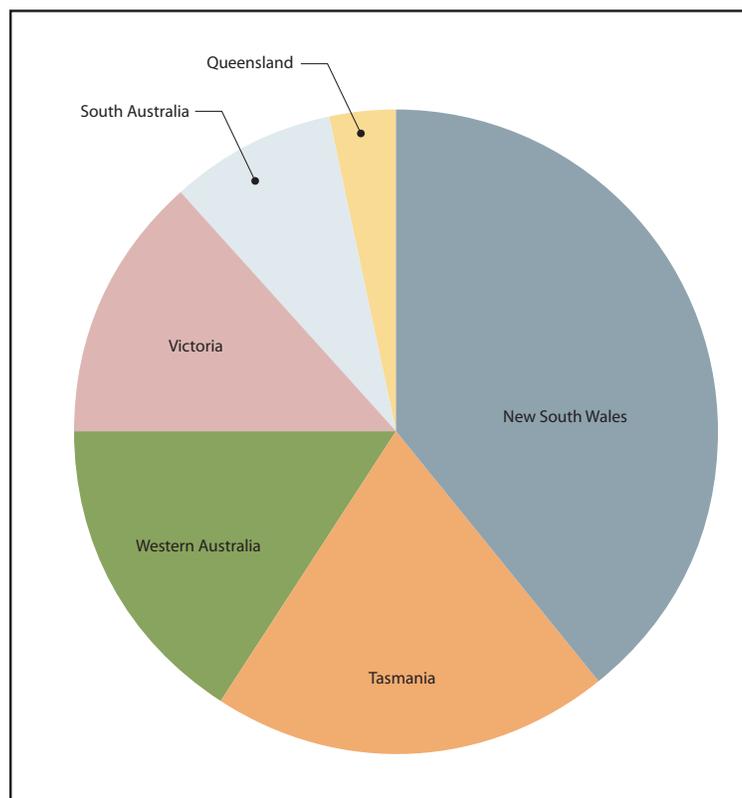
**Associated Finds with Concealed Shoes**



Source: Pitt, 1997

The diagram above provides a visual breakdown of non-shoe artifacts recovered from caches in the UK where a larger base of finds provides a greater variety of objects.

ALL SITES BY STATE



Source: Catalogue of Finds

TABLE 5.5

TOTAL OF ALL FIND SITES BY STATE	
New South Wales	47
Tasmania	24
Victoria	16
South Australia	10
Western Australia	18
Queensland	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>119</b>

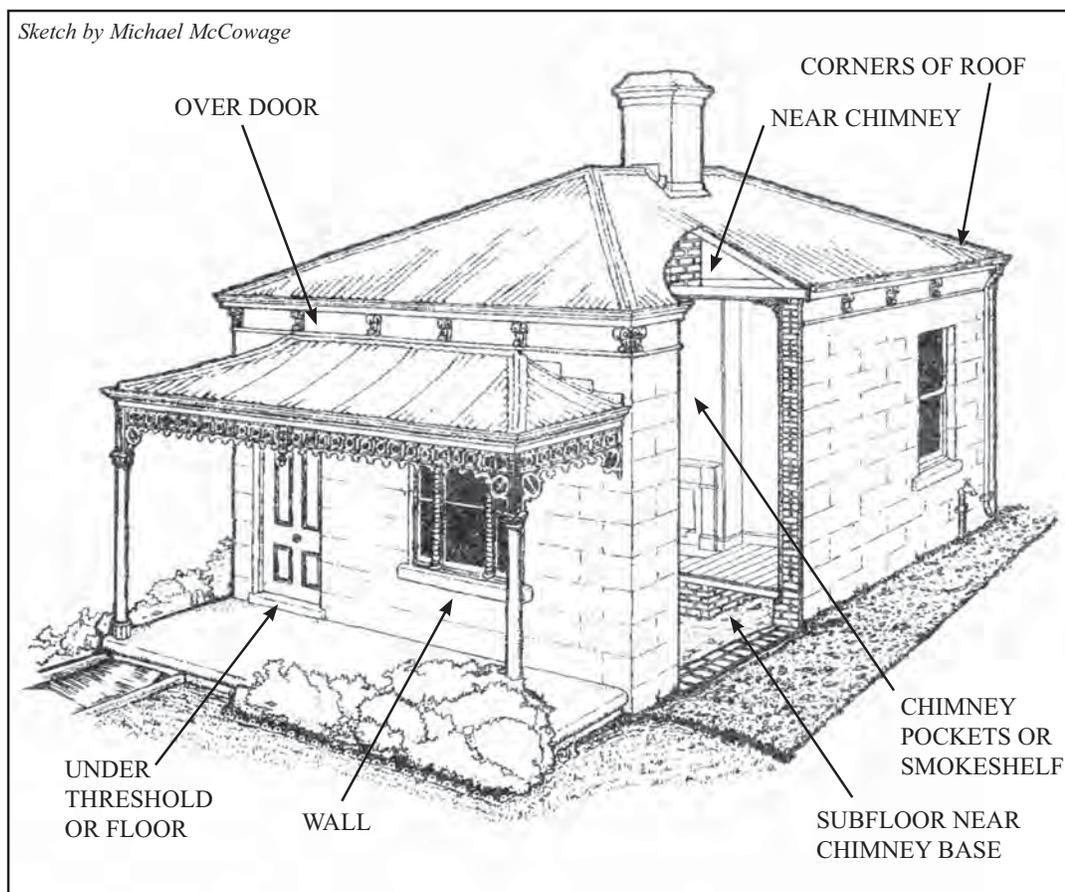
Source: Catalogue of Finds

#### 5.2.4 ANALYSIS: SHOE SITES

Concealed shoes are found in a number of typical locations, most commonly in a subfloor cavity, often near a chimney or the hearth. In some cases they have been built into the voids, often known as pockets, which usually exist on both sides of the flue and were therefore probably placed by bricklayers. Shoes are also found on a smokeshef within the flue – a location that raises the possibility of placement by an occupant of the house. An object on the smokeshef is well out of reach of daily life but placement there may not require building skills of any consequence. The reason for this is that many of our earlier buildings had open hearths with a basket grate. Concealing a shoe within the flue would then have been a simple matter of crouching down on the hearth and reaching up inside the flue to find the smokeshef at the back of the flue. Victorian houses were commonly fitted with cast-iron register grates after about 1850. In these, the smokeshef is accessible by removing the mantelpiece and grate.<sup>1</sup> This is a more difficult process than the one previously described. Shoes found on a chimney smokeshef may have been placed there before the post-construction installation of a grate and mantelpiece as a response to fashion. Shoes may also be found resting on the earth beneath the floor, often close to the fireplace hearth, or tucked under the floorboards in an upstairs room. But proximity to the fireplace is common and shoes found in upstairs locations appear to respect this rule. In timber houses shoes may be found in wall cavities close to a fireplace. The space between the outer cladding of weatherboard and the inner skin of timber or lath and plaster provides a convenient hiding place in a timber wall. In this case, the concealment is most easily made during construction of the wall.

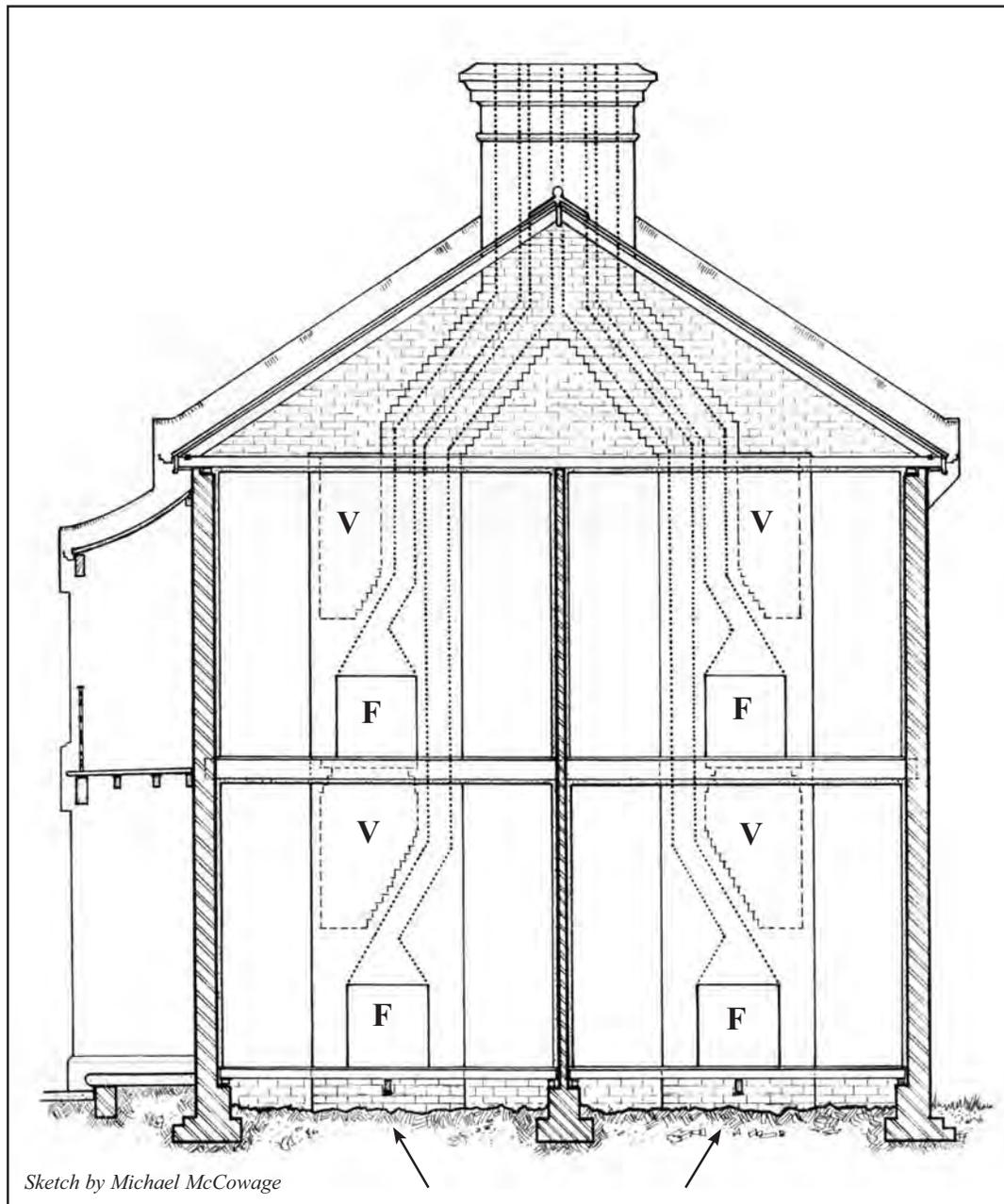
Patterns of concealment gradually became apparent during the course of this research. Significant groups or categories were noted as the body of finds examined during site visits grew. These included the boots and shoes of tradesmen, the footwear of infants, children and adolescents, and the shoes of family groups. A strong representation of large, dirty and well-worn boots, some of them splashed with lime mortar or plaster, indicates the consistent involvement of members of several trades in this practice. Other concealments of shoes that are clearly not those of tradesmen point to concealments made by tradesmen. This can be deduced by the discovery during recent renovations of objects in voids that would have been accessible to members of building trades during the course of construction but not to the occupants of the buildings. An example is the well-worn and much-repaired child's shoe found in a pocket of a chimney demolished in Australia Street, Camperdown, NSW (page 236), by the bricklayer Darryl Webb. Finds with similar characteristics have been noted in several other locations. The pivotal role of chimneys and fireplaces in the concealment of objects within buildings, especially those that are domestic in character, has become apparent. The following pages contain sketches illustrating concealment locations in Australian houses with particular emphasis on chimneys and fireplaces.

### 5.2.5 LOCATIONS OF CONCEALED OBJECTS: COTTAGES



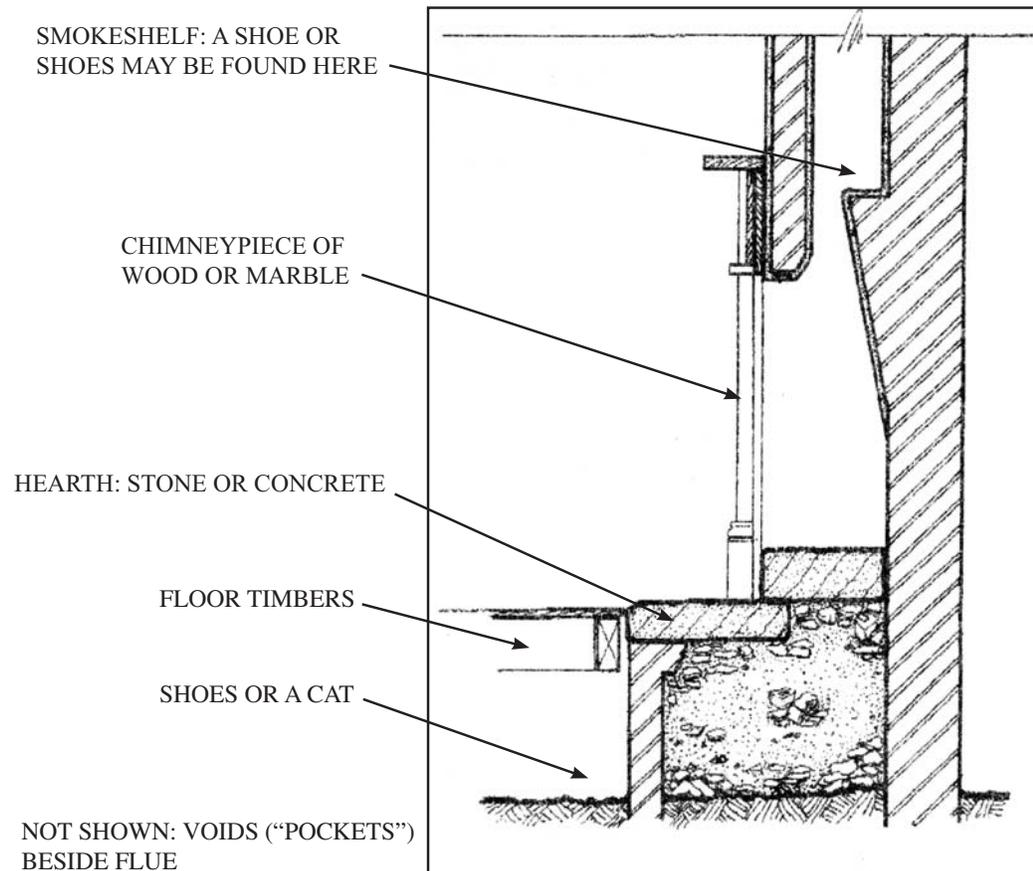
*This sketch of a 19<sup>th</sup> century cottage with its cutaway view of internal spaces shows some of the main locations in houses where concealed objects have been found in Australia. The locations of concealments correspond with ancient fears of evil forces threatening liminal spaces. There is no suggestion that any one house will have objects in all of the locations shown. The source of this information is the research conducted to compile the Catalogue of Finds in Appendix One (page 224).*

### 5.2.6 LOCATIONS OF CONCEALED OBJECTS: TERRACE HOUSES

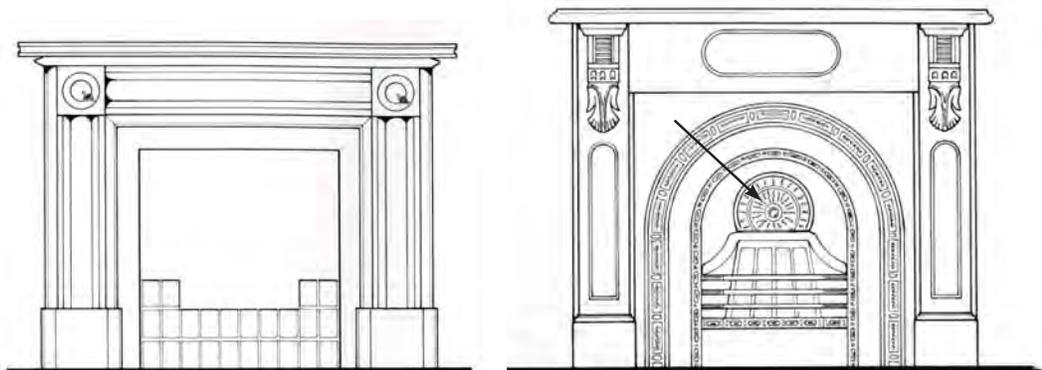


*This cutaway view of one of the houses in a row of 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces illustrates some of the secret voids that every house contains. The large letter **F** indicates fireplaces. Dotted lines rising from the fireplaces trace the course of the flues through the structure of the building. The letter **V** shows the locations of voids or pockets within the brick structure of the chimneys. In some cases, these are accessible from the roof cavity which is entered via a ceiling trapdoor. Voids that are open in this way are sometimes used to add fresh objects from time to time, thus forming a spiritual midden. The arrows indicate subfloor locations adjacent to the bases of the chimneys where shoes or cats are most often found. Concealed objects may also be found in the roof cavity, either close to the chimney stack or, in some cases, in the corners of the roof.*

### 5.2.7 LOCATIONS OF CONCEALED OBJECTS: FIREPLACES AND CHIMNEYS



Above, a profile of a chimney and fireplace. This sectional view shows the construction of a typical masonry chimney and fireplace in Australia during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the widespread use of cast-iron register grates. The fire was set on the base of the hearth, often using cast-iron firedogs, or in a cast-iron basket grate. Following the introduction of register grates in the second half of the century, objects could be inserted through the flap at the top of the grate. Below left, a front view of the fireplace above. Below right, a typical fireplace of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The flap, known as a register, through which objects could be inserted and dropped onto the back of the hearth is indicated by an arrow.



Sketches on this page by Michael McCowage

### 5.2.8 IDENTIFICATION

After many site visits in widely separated areas of Australia I have been able to identify characteristics of concealments found so far:

- Liminal spaces were preferred locations for the placement of concealed objects. These include chimneys, hearths, doorways, windows, subfloor regions and roof cavities.
- Objects were positioned beyond the reach of normal household activity and most often are found in what can be described as a sealed void. Finding them may involve the partial demolition of the structure of the building, either by taking up floors, opening up walls, by gaining access to the voids within the structure of chimneys or by examining the interior of a chimney flue. Some objects may be placed in roof cavities to which access may be gained through a ceiling trapdoor, or located under floors and accessible, though usually with considerable difficulty, through trapdoors in the floor. Roof cavity and subfloor concealments are usually located well away from trapdoors. Subfloor concealments are often found close to the bases of chimneys.
- Concealed shoes may be singles or pairs but singles are more common.
- The majority of shoes found are those of children or young people.
- Concealments may relate to one or more members of a family and in some cases the number of shoes found appear to relate to all of the members of the family in residence at the time. Such caches may contain adult shoes and the footwear of several children. I cannot be certain whether children's shoes of different sizes may be those of different members of the family or shoes that have been placed over a period of years.
- The great majority of shoes are badly worn. In some cases shoes have been worn to the brink of destruction.
- Shoes have often been repaired, sometimes more than once. Repairs are frequently of an amateur nature.
- Shoes, garments, cats and other items (such as children's toys and domestic artifacts) are all found in the places referred to in the liminal spaces listed at the top of this page. There is thus no pattern of placing different types of items in different voids or areas of the building. This statement is qualified only by the unsuitability of chimney smokeshelves, where intense heat often occurs, for the placement of either cats or garments.
- Laces are often removed from shoes, perhaps for reuse.
- There appears to be no particular pattern to the right- or left-footedness of concealed shoes in Australia or elsewhere, or to the colour of concealed shoes.
- Objects are found in a wide variety of buildings and in cities, provincial towns and rural areas throughout Australia (Catalogue of Finds, page 224).

### 5.3 THE STORY IN THE LEATHER

The shoes that have emerged from dark and silent voids in old houses and other buildings since this research began tell a story of a very different Australia from the one that we inhabit today. Battered and, in some cases, hard-baked assemblages of leather, nails and laces, these are the shoes that Australians wore in all of the decades from the 1820s to the 1930s. They range in size from 130mm to 230mm, the shoes of the joyful young, of the women who struggled to care for their families and of the men whose lives were filled with hard, grinding labour. Most poignant, perhaps, is the footwear of children to whom walking on their own two feet was a wonderful novelty. These are little shoes and boots that were dragged through the dust and the mud, splashed in puddles and used to kick balls in streets and paddocks in every state of Australia. This is the footwear of children whose lives have long since been lived. There are also the boots of bricklayers



and stonemasons for whom life was filled with constant, backbreaking toil. Tradesmen wore these boots on building sites that ranged from neat brick and stone cottages to the grand houses of the moneyed classes to which they would never belong. They worked ten-hour days, six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. Shoes had to work harder then: walking to work, doing a long day's labour and walking home again. You can see all of this in the sturdy boots of the tradesmen that have been found in houses and churches in many areas of this country. There are no messages with these boots and shoes: nothing to tell their stories but the



Top, *child's shoe, Hartley Vale, NSW, 1859 – 1860*;  
above, *workman's boot, Mudgee, NSW, circa 1860*;  
below, *child's shoe, Camperdown, NSW, circa 1890*.



evidence in the leather. It speaks of hard-scraped lives in an Australia where poverty was

no stranger: home-done repairs with scraps of leather roughly sewn to the uppers of shoes that have burst at the seams, and of tiny little shoes that are so worn they must have been used by several of the children in a family. Money was tight and shoes were expensive, so they were worn to the very end of their days. With no more wear left in them, these shoes and boots were stripped of their laces and put to another use. The shoes listed in the Catalogue speak of poverty beyond the experience of most people today. The facts described above might point to concealments by people at the lower extremity of society at the time but many of the shoes found were expensive and well-made. The shoes tell us that this custom was carried out across a broad band of Australian society.



*Woman's boot, 1840s,  
Battery Point, Tasmania. The  
tongue has become detached.*

While many of the shoes found offered no particular enlightenment, other than that they exhibited the primary characteristics of concealed objects, a few stood out from the rest. These included the group of thirty-eight shoes and boots plus leather leggings, a straw hat, a man's Akubra hat, two parasols and documents discovered in voids at *Woodbury* at Anthill Ponds in the Tasmanian Midlands (page 295). The *Woodbury* cache is notable for the sheer number of objects concealed, making it the largest group yet found in Australia. The survival of this practice until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century is confirmed by the fragments of a child's shoe or boot, found in the core of the south-east pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (page 277) while the pylon was being prepared for the Bridgeclimb enterprise. Other 20<sup>th</sup>-century finds include the woman's shoe of circa 1935 found in the chimney at 121 Mitchell Street, Stockton, NSW (page 275), and the woman's shoe of the mid-1920s found beneath upper-level floorboards at 16 Grantham Street, Burwood, NSW (page 235). All of these locations are discussed in more detail in the Catalogue of Finds (page 224).

#### 5.4 QUANTIFYING FINDS

No attempt has been made to produce a tally of the total number of shoes found as this was considered unlikely to add to understanding of the practice. It is not always possible to be definite in stating the number of shoes found at a site. In some cases subfloor voids had not been fully explored. In others there is no way of knowing whether additional concealments exist without demolition of part of the building structure – a research technique of dubious validity. In others, pilfering by tradesmen is known to have occurred. Numbers of shoes at the various locations where they were found, where this is known, are given in individual site records in the Catalogue. Whether there is one shoe or numerous shoes at a site does not alter the validity of the find.

#### 5.4.1 VARIETIES OF LOCATION: ALL FINDS

It was considered at first that a pattern might appear in terms of the type of building in which objects were secreted. This did not happen. While it is clear that the vast majority of buildings in which objects were placed were dwelling houses no further typology has become apparent. Buildings other than houses in which objects have so far been found are as follows:

- Asylums: Destitute Asylum, Adelaide, South Australia
- Bridges: Sydney Harbour, SE pylon, Sydney, NSW
- Churches: Catholic, Balmain and Temora, NSW, Perth, Western Australia; Primitive Methodist, Woodchester, South Australia
- Community halls: Goulburn, NSW
- Convents: Northbridge, Western Australia
- Convict Barracks/Immigration depots: Sydney, NSW
- Commercial buildings: Fremantle and Perth, Western Australia
- Commissariats (convict): Taranna (Port Arthur), Tasmania; Moreton Bay (Brisbane), Queensland
- Courthouses: Maryborough, Victoria, Banco Court, Supreme Court, Melbourne, Victoria
- Gaol: Richmond, Tasmania
- Inns/Hotels: Hartley Vale, NSW; Epsom, Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania; Stanley, Tasmania, Port Fairy, Victoria, Adelaide, South Australia
- Lighthouses/associated buildings: Geraldton, Western Australia
- Police Stations: Mitcham, South Australia
- Rectories, Anglican: Birregurra, Victoria
- Royal Mint, Melbourne, Victoria
- Schools: Watervale, South Australia; Horrocks, Western Australia (schoolroom on a country estate)
- Shops/shoe factory: York, Western Australia
- Theatres: *Her Majesty's*, Ballarat, Victoria

To date, sixteen pairs of shoes have been found – a larger total than I had anticipated in the course of this investigation. Thirteen sites contained what appear to be the boots or shoes of building tradesmen. Other sites contained shoes of children or adults that had probably been concealed by building tradesmen. These were identified by the location of the objects in building voids that would not have been readily accessible to residents of the dwellings.

### 5.4.2 MEN'S WORK?

The hands of members of several building trades can be seen in many of the concealments I have examined. Among these was the (presumed) bricklayer's boot discovered in the chimney breast in the library at *Burrundulla*, Mudgee, NSW.



*Burrundulla*

In this case, the instigators were the bricklayers who in constructing the chimney in the library left out a brick at a point where its omission would do no harm to the stability of the structure. The boot was squeezed into this cavity. Finishing off the chimney with three coats of plaster (scratch coat, float coat and set coat) was the task of a team of plasterers who must have been complicit in the concealment. They could hardly have avoided seeing the boot crammed into the gap on the side of the chimney breast and it would have been up to them to make good the irregularity resulting from the insertion of a boot into a void created by omitting a brick. (See page 272 for an image of the boot). We know that plasterers worked in the library, the site of the concealed boot, because the handwritten specifications that have survived in a bound volume kept in this room make this clear. Two trades were thus involved in this concealment. Designed by William Weaver for the Honorable H.G. Cox, the contract for the construction of *Burrundulla* was awarded to Henry and Robert Hudson, builders, of Redfern, Sydney, and signed on 22 January 1864.<sup>2</sup>

It is open to question as to whether the Hudsons laid the bricks used in the construction of such a large house. Builders at that time often started their careers as members of a trade before becoming entrepreneurs. If the Hudsons had been bricklayers earlier in their



*The specifications for the construction of Burrundulla.*



*The library at Burrundulla.*

working lives, the comparative remoteness of the site may have induced them to act as their own tradesmen or perhaps to lead a team of local laborers in the work. *Burrundulla* is notable for the fact that it has an unbroken line of ownership by members of the Cox family since its construction in 1865. Jeremy Cox, the present owner, is a member of the sixth generation of his family to occupy *Burrundulla*. If the family was ever aware of this concealment all knowledge of it had been lost by the time of its discovery in early 2004. Fittingly, the discovery was made by plasterers engaged to repair the ceiling close to the chimney breast where the boot was concealed.

Other concealments have links to the plastering trade. At Lower Fort Street, Dawes Point, NSW (page 243), the child's shoe discovered by Nicholas White was behind a lath and plaster wall, close to attic bedrooms. The location behind this wall raises the possibility of involvement by the plasterers who constructed the wall and who, it would seem, could hardly have failed to notice the shoe and the lace collar that were eventually discovered there when the wall was breached in 2003. The position of the objects in the building was the north-east corner and was not associated with a chimney. But the location, high in the



*Petrine, Henry and Jeremy Cox. Henry is a member of the 7th generation of Coxes to live at Burrundulla.*

house and seemingly close to the sky, was between the main body of the Harbour and the children of the merchant who occupied bedrooms in the attic at that time.

The circumstances of individual finds may provide distinct clues to the trade backgrounds of builders. At *Elizabeth Bay House*, Sydney (page 247), a team of slaters renewing the roof in July 1935 was photographed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the result published in that newspaper's women's supplement on the 18<sup>th</sup> of the month. The men appear neatly dressed, and in the manner of the time, came to work in what were probably trousers from their second-best suits, waistcoat and a reasonably stylish pullover, all topped with felt hats. The house was not occupied at that time and was in the process of being prepared for use as a reception centre. From 1926 to 1940 the house was owned by Elizabeth Bay Estates and had been occupied for some years from 1928 by a floating population of artists, including John Longstaff, Wallace Thornton and Wolfgang Cardamatis. But these people were obliged to leave when the building was leased by a partnership of Mrs. A.A. Hall and Mrs. L.A. Minnett. Extensive repairs and repainting prepared the old house for its new role.<sup>3</sup> The slaters thus had no residents available in the building to contribute a shoe or shoes. The discovery some thirty years later of a pair of very worn tan leather Oxford shoes of circa 1930 in the roof cavity of *Elizabeth Bay House* raises the possibility that they were placed there by the slaters. Certainly, the date and style of the shoes provides a fit with the clothing worn by the men and the date in which the work was performed. This is one of the two situations in which photographs were taken of the tradesmen who may have been involved in concealments. The other image shows stonemasons at work setting the final stones on top of the south-east pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge (page 277). Remnant pieces of a child's shoe were found in the filled core of the pylon while it was being prepared for the use of the BridgeClimb operation. The shoe was cut apart by a diamond saw slicing a passage through the centre of the pylon. Pieces of the heel were collected and placed in storage at the BridgeClimb office while a small portion remained, buried in the mass of the pylon's core. The photograph showing the stonemasons involved in the final stages of work on this pylon, taken on 2 September 1931, may include the men who made this concealment in one of Sydney's greatest landmarks. Both the Harbour Bridge and *Elizabeth Bay House* finds, with the photographs referred to, are included in the Catalogue of Finds.

Subfloor shoe finds include many that indicate placement before floorboards were fixed. One such find, in Bathurst, NSW (page 229), is splashed with lime mortar, suggesting that this was a concealment by bricklayers. The cooperation or involvement of carpenters would have been necessary in subfloor concealments made by other trades on a building site. The process of constructing a timber floor involves setting out the bearers and joists, levelling the joists and fixing them in place. This creates a great deal of movement within the space in which the work is being carried out. Shoes left on the ground, adjacent to a chimney or wall, by bricklayers or stonemasons – the first men on

the job after the excavators – would have been considered a nuisance in the normal course of events. If the placement occurred before the carpenters commenced the construction of the floors, they could not have failed to notice shoes sitting on the earth, just below where they were working. It would be reasonable to expect that subfloor shoes would have been put in place after the carpenters set out and secured the joists and bearers. But the possibility of respect by carpenters for placements by members of the masonry trades cannot be ignored. Other finds linked to bricklayers include the child's shoe built into the structure of a late-Victorian chimney in Australia Street, Camperdown, Sydney (page 236). The circumstances of the find, by the bricklayer Darryl Webb who discovered it during the course of demolishing the chimney, were the exact opposite of the original concealment which must have been made by members of the same trade.

The involvement of carpenters can be seen in a number of locations. At Elizabeth Street, Hobart, Tasmania (page 318), where five pairs of shoes were found immediately beneath the timber floor of a circa 1870s cottage, the carpenters who laid the floor could not have failed to notice the shoes which were immediately to hand and in clear view. Appropriately, this find was made by the carpenters who took up the much-deteriorated original floor. Other concealments can be linked to carpenters, including the sailor's cap found within the wall cavity of a 1927 timber community hall at Goulburn, NSW (page 254). It is sometimes members of the same trade who find these concealments but without



*When the old kitchen floor was taken up in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century cottage in Elizabeth Street, Hobart, carpenters found numerous shoes. This photograph was taken by the owner of the house, Jennifer Earle, shortly afterwards. When this concealment was being made carpenters nailed down the floor over the shoes. Details are in the Catalogue of Finds, page 254.*

exception the modern-day tradesmen say they know nothing of the reason for the practice, although some of them have found shoes in other sites. The Catalogue of Finds contains other probable trade concealments. Quite how this practice came to be connected to some of the principal trades of the building industry is open to surmise and further investigation. This task is beyond the scope of this thesis and may involve



*Splashed with mortar and worn to destruction – are these the boots of one of the workmen who built the house at Bathurst, NSW, where they were found under the floor? For details see the Catalogue of Finds, page 229.*

lengthy and detailed research in the records of British guilds associated with the building trades. If, as is entirely possible, the concealment of objects is associated with the building trades, it appears to have spilled over into the general community. Many of the objects found have been concealed without any apparent connection with the building trades. This applies in particular to objects concealed within roof cavities and, in a number of cases, to those placed in subfloor voids. Almost every house is provided with a trapdoor in the ceiling of one of the lesser rooms or passages. These provide comparatively easy access to anyone brave enough to climb a ladder, venture into the darkness and scramble across the ceiling joists. But concealments in roof cavities can also be made quite easily by climbing a ladder to the trapdoor and flinging a shoe into the void. Access to subfloor areas is also enabled in those houses with a trapdoor in the flooring timbers. Trapdoors in floors may be covered with a rug or located in one of the lesser rooms of the building. Subfloor crawl spaces are even less inviting than roof cavities and entering them is not a pleasant experience. They tend to be confined and claustrophobia-inducing spaces, are often damp and may be occupied by spiders, cockroaches, rodents and occasionally snakes. To reach a number of voids beneath the rooms of a house is likely to require a difficult journey, often by crawling while struggling to hold a torch, through an unpleasant, unwelcoming and rarely-visited part of a house. A high level of motivation or necessity is required of anyone entering such spaces.

### 5.4.3 CONCEALMENT LOCATIONS WITHIN BUILDINGS

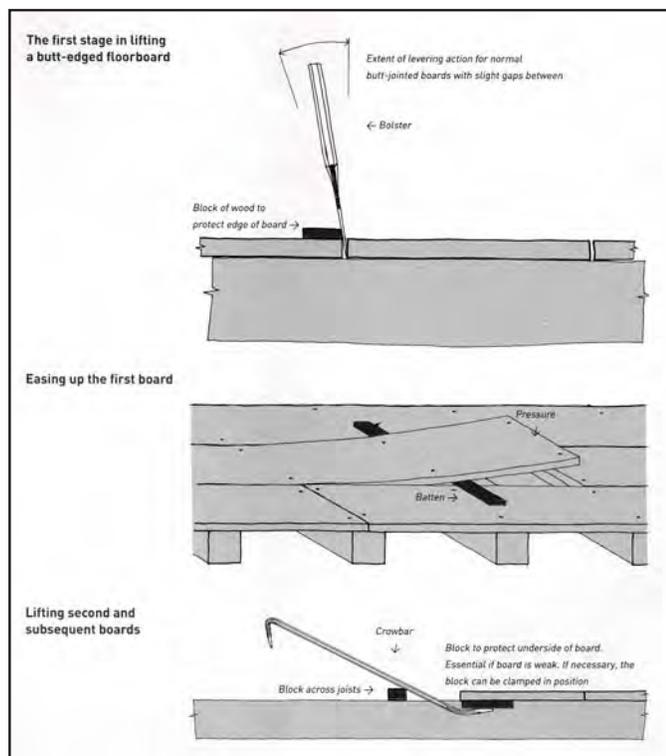
There is a consistency in the locations of concealments within Australian buildings that reflects the situation found in the United Kingdom. This suggests the importation of an off-the-shelf custom, transplanted without significant change onto Antipodean soil. The locations of finds within a building also reflect the comparative ease with which individual concealments were made. This in turn can suggest whether concealments were made by the residents of buildings or by those whose occupation as a member of one of the building trades made concealments possible. By far the greatest number of concealments was found beneath nailed-down floors. The total of these was 70 from 119 sites recorded. To place objects beneath floors requires making the concealment before the floor is completed, accessing the subfloor area through a trapdoor, or by lifting floorboards. Subfloor voids fall into two main groups: 1. those beneath ground floors where the void is above the level of the earth below the building and 2. those which exist on upper-levels of buildings and are in the comparatively small cavities between floorboards and the ceiling of the room below. These voids are commonly about 150mm deep but may extend laterally for some metres. Concealments can occur within either of these subfloor void types. Placing objects beneath ground-level floors is comparatively simple if the building has been provided with a trapdoor for access to the subfloor region. Inserting trapdoors post-construction or alternatively simply lifting boards for the insertion of shoes or other objects is a task that requires skill and the use of tools that are not necessarily kept in many households. Chisels, saws, hammers, pinchbars and nail punches are tools commonly used in such processes. Floors that have been correctly laid are not easily pierced to insert trapdoors without significant damage to the floor timbers and leaving a permanent record of the process. Up until about 1870 floorboards in Australia were generally rectangular in profile and butted then cramped together and nailed. Specifications for carpenter and joiner's work for flooring an 1865 house required the flooring to be: "...of Stringy Bark free from all imperfections to be 6" x 1" and to hold one inch thick full when delivered, to be well and carefully dressed, shot and wrought to a uniform thickness, laid perfectly close, and secured with two nails at each joist..."<sup>4</sup>

Lifting floors of this type was not an easy matter, particularly when the boards were of hardwood, two metres or more in length, butted up hard against their neighbours and well nailed down. But later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when tongue-and-grooved flooring became the norm, the task of breaking through a timber floor became even more difficult. A specification of 1883 for the construction of a house at Paddington, NSW, required the carpenters to lay the floor using: "... best 6" x 1" tongue and groove Kauri pine flooring with neatly mitred borders around hearths, lay down close & even with straight joints, with 2½ inch nails to each joist punched & all floors cleaned off at completion of contract."<sup>5</sup> In this system, each board is provided with a projecting tongue on one

edge and a corresponding groove on the other. When laid, the tongues and grooves fit neatly together, locking individual boards into a whole. Tongue-and-grooved boarding provides extra strength and stability to floors. Lifting any one of these boards involves the destruction of either the board in question or one or both of its neighbouring boards. All of the preceding information suggests that many subfloor concealments would have been put in place before floors were nailed down over them. The logical conclusion from this is that tradesmen would have been actively involved, or at least complicit, in a large number of subfloor concealments. It is however possible that some concealments were made by the occupants and users of houses or other buildings who gained access to the subfloor area through existing trapdoors. While the constructing and laying of timber floors is a job for carpenters it would be a mistake to assume that every concealment under a timber floor was carried out by these tradesmen. Other trades, or indeed a member of the incoming household where a house is under construction, may have placed the objects on the ground and left it to the carpenters to lay the floors over the top. But a considerable number of subfloor concealments of shoes, cats and sundry other objects appears to be the work of one or other of the building trades.

It has been suggested in the case of the objects concealed beneath floors at *Hyde Park Barracks*, Sydney (page 279), that these concealments were carried out by inmates

– people who had little or no building trade skills and questionable access to tools but who, nevertheless, managed to prise up heavy hardwood floorboards which had been firmly nailed down. The *Barracks* housed thousands of convicts between 1819 and 1848 and afterwards served as an immigration depot for Irish orphans and the wives and children of convicts. It later became an asylum for infirm and destitute women. The technique of lifting butt-edged boards, the same as those at *Hyde Park Barracks*, from a floor has been described in a technical leaflet issued by the Society for the Protection of



*Lifting butt-edged floorboards is a difficult task, even with the correct tools. The diagram is from Care and Repair of Old Floors, technical pamphlet No. 15, from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, London.*

Ancient Buildings, London, and reprinted in Australia by Heritage Victoria. The preamble to the description of the process makes it clear that this was no easy matter: “Lifting the first board without damage is usually much more difficult than the remainder. It is not an operation which should be rushed into – it requires ingenuity, preparation, care and patience!” The Society suggested that the tools required were “a six inch bolster (preferably two of these), wooden blocks of various thicknesses, a flat hardened steel plate, a hammer, a ½-inch batten about eight inches longer than the width of the board, nail punches, a hammer and a crowbar.”<sup>6</sup> The crowbar shown in the accompanying sketch is what would normally be described in Australia as a pinchbar. Not only is lifting such boards difficult, especially without the right tools, but it is also far from silent. The availability to the occupants of *Hyde Park Barracks* of the tools for this work needs to be considered in terms of the everyday regimen in force there when convicts were housed in this building. The *Hyde Park Barracks Museum Guidebook*, published by the Historic Houses Trust after considerable research, describes the daily routine:

A bell called the men lodging at the Barracks to muster every morning at daybreak (Sundays and holidays excepted). They were delivered to their overseers and searched at the gate before being marched to their daily labours.

Men required to work at the Barracks and invalids incapable of work remained behind. These men swept the yard and aired and cleaned the central dormitory building, shaking out the bedding and folding the blankets.

Working hours were sunrise till sunset. During summer, there was one hour for rest from 8.00 am to 9.00 am for men working outdoors. The men were returned for their main meal in the middle of the day, typically fresh and salted meat and bread. After one hour in the mess-room, the bell was again rung and the men were mustered and marched back to work. Overseers ensured the men were returned to the Barracks before sunset. Day constables searched them at the gate for stolen or illicit items like liquor.<sup>7</sup>

The impression conveyed is one of a highly organised and regimented society. On the face of it, neither the tools nor the opportunity to use them would have been readily available to the convict inmates of the *Barracks*. The mainly female occupants of the later years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have been hard-pressed to lift or cut through hardwood flooring. But the ingenuity of confined men and women was considerable and the fact remains that a good many objects were placed beneath the floorboards of this building over a period of many years. The question of quite how the *Hyde Park Barracks* concealments were carried out requires further research which is beyond the scope of this thesis. But it may be a task for the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales which manages the *Barracks* on behalf of the State Government. Whether the boards lifted to make concealments were

at *Hyde Park Barracks* or any other building in Australia there appears to be a strong possibility that this work was carried out by those who possessed trade or similar physical skills. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia the task in the great majority of such cases would have fallen to members of one or other of the building trades.

#### 5.4.4 THE MISSING SHOE

The great majority of finds of concealed shoes in Australia are of single shoes. No particular pattern of left or right has emerged in these finds. Total numbers of left and right shoes are approximately equal. However, repeated discoveries of single shoes in Australian concealments suggest an indication of a purpose or methodology which is not so far apparent. The act of concealment requires a number of preceding decisions, the first being to perform the act. This would be followed by decisions on the location of the concealment, whether to conceal one or more shoes and in the case of a pair of shoes, which happened to be on hand at the time, to conceal one or both. If one shoe from a pair was selected for concealment was the other shoe discarded or did it have some other purpose? If a pair of shoes was on hand, which would presumably be the case, why choose to conceal only one? What was done with the other, now missing, shoe? Researchers in the United Kingdom and in the Netherlands have advanced two theories in an attempt to explain the missing shoe. June Swann, writing in *Costume* in 1996, provides an account of the investigation of a number of single shoes found in a well at *Chenies Manor*, circa 1460 and 1526, at Chorleywood, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. Investigators of this find were told by a local woman that the tradition in discarding worn-out shoes was that one should go to water and one to fire.



*Child's leather ankle boot, recovered from the flue of an 1880 cottage, Winchelsea Estate, Lincolnshire. Inside the boot was a miniature bible, published by David Bryce and Son, Glasgow, 1901. As is often the case, this concealment consisted of a single shoe. Here, magic and religion intersect. (Adam Daubney, County Archaeologist, Lincolnshire: Portable Antiquities Scheme)*

Thus, if this lady's statement is correct, wells and chimneys would have been the preferred locations for concealments.<sup>8</sup> This is one possible explanation for the distinct tendency for finds of single shoes, raising the question of the fate of the other shoe. In Australia, while household chimneys are extremely common throughout our history, wells and subterranean tanks are now very rare. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century rural properties were

frequently supplied with water from galvanised steel rainwater tanks but there is nowhere to conceal a shoe in these. A shoe sitting on the brick and timber tank-stand would hardly be concealed. A better possibility for concealment would be the subterranean tanks (often erroneously called wells) that were common in our cities and towns in the period before municipal water supplies. These were brick-built, frequently with a low domed top that is often all that is visible above ground, and were found in backyards close to the house. They were filled by rainwater piped from the guttering of the house. A cast-iron hand pump brought water to a tap, either outside the back door or in the kitchen, where it was collected in a bucket or other container. But very few of these tanks remain. The opportunity to ascertain if shoes were placed in wells or tanks in this country has thus largely been lost.

Dr. Carol van Driel-Murray of the University of Amsterdam's Archaeology Department has suggested another possibility for the use of single shoes in concealments. Driel-Murray has researched and written about Roman footwear and clothing for many years and in *Stepping Through Time: Archaeological Footwear from Prehistoric Times until 1800* (2001) notes that shoes were often deliberately deposited in wells and waterholes during the Roman period. In prehistoric times, she writes, shoes were deliberately placed in bogs. Roman deposits in wells and waterholes show a distinct preference for the use of the left or "sinistra" shoes. The practice of placing shoes in wells, she believes, was: "... a form of signature accompanying requests to the gods, and it is possible that the right shoe was retained by the dedicant as a reminder of the 'contract.'" Wells generally have a better survival rate than ancient buildings. While early buildings are usually obliterated by the passage of years wells tend to be filled and may survive largely intact. Although it may be thought that anything found in a well would probably be the result of an impromptu form of rubbish disposal, Driel-Murray cites evidence for deliberate placement of shoes in wells which were considered to be entry points to the underworld. One such find, at Venray, Netherlands, was placed behind the structural timbers of a well, providing firm dendrochronological evidence of a concealment of exactly AD 230. Another Netherlands find, of the deliberate placement of a pair of shoes beneath a house at Midden Delfland, was undated but is thought to be 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The find was made during excavation of the house terp – an artificial hill or mound on which houses were constructed in the flood-prone Netherlands. Driel-Murray believes that concealments of this type convey cultural messages and that "footwear possesses a social function besides that of protecting the feet from cold and damp."<sup>9</sup>

Other possibilities on the purpose of the shoe that was not concealed have been suggested, in an altogether different archaeological context, by John Chapman in *Fragmentation in Archaeology: People, Places and Broken Objects in the Pre-history of South-eastern Europe* (2000). Chapman's research was on the ritual fragmentation of material culture in Mesolithic, Neolithic and Copper Age deposits in Balkan settlements.

He suggests that broken pottery and other artefacts were deposited as part of a process he terms “enchainment” in which a link was created between individual members of a society:

The two people who wish to establish some form of social relationship or conclude some kind of transaction agree on a specific artifact appropriate to the interaction in question and break it into two or more parts, each keeping one or more parts as a token of the relationship.<sup>10</sup>

If a form of this practice was involved in the concealment of shoes the idea relates back to van Driel-Murray’s theory of a contract. In this, the person who concealed a shoe would hold the other half of the pair, the “fragment” of the whole pair, to seal the bargain. Chapman relates this theory to the Roman custom of *tessera hospitalis*, in which the two halves of a single object were kept by two parties to an agreement or a commitment.<sup>11</sup> Applying this theory to the concealment of shoes raises an intriguing question: if the persons who made the concealment believed that they were thus entering into a contractual arrangement, whom did they understand to be the party with whom the contract was made? There remains also the possibility that splitting up pairs of shoes is akin to the ritual destruction of weapons which were thrown into rivers and bogs in Britain and elsewhere in Europe over many centuries. By “killing” swords and other weapons, they were sent into the other world where they would continue to be available to the warriors whose deaths had left the weapons without owners. Merrifield in *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (1987) postulates that this destruction “by irrevocably renouncing its normal use” devoted the object to the intended supernatural purpose.”<sup>12</sup> There is therefore a possibility that the breaking up of pairs of shoes prior to the concealment of single shoes can be compared to earlier practices involving the destruction of objects with an intended ritual purpose.

### **5.5 CONCEALMENTS: A ROMAN ORIGIN?**

Shoes placed in wells and pits in the Western Roman Empire raise the possibility of this practice having been spread by members of the invading armies or the succeeding administration in the period between AD 43 and AD 410 when most of Britain was under Roman rule. Shafts that provided a means of depositing sacrificial objects within reach of the gods of the underworld are referred to by Merrifield who provides numerous examples of the practice in Roman Britain.<sup>13</sup> However, archaeological or documentary reference material for the concealment of shoes in buildings of the Roman period, either in Britain or, as far as I have been able to ascertain, in Italy or elsewhere in the Empire, appears to be lacking. Driel-Murray has urged archaeologists to investigate possible concealment

locations in Roman buildings, including hearths and chimneys. In a ground-breaking paper read at the eighth annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference at the University of Leicester in 1998, Driel-Murray urged her colleagues to pay close attention to shoes in the archaeology of Roman sites and to look for them under thresholds and in hearth constructions:

There is something uncanny about feet, footprints and shoes. Throughout prehistory, foot vessels, foot amulets and footprints engraved on rocks attest the symbolic power of the foot and shoe. The foot is a liminal extremity, on the cusp between us and the soil from which it was so long believed that we sprang; it is no coincidence that metamorphosis begins with the feet, and it is in their feet that mermaids, centaurs, satyrs and the Devil himself are distinguished from humankind. Feet are on the frontier and it is around frontiers that rituals accumulate.<sup>14</sup>

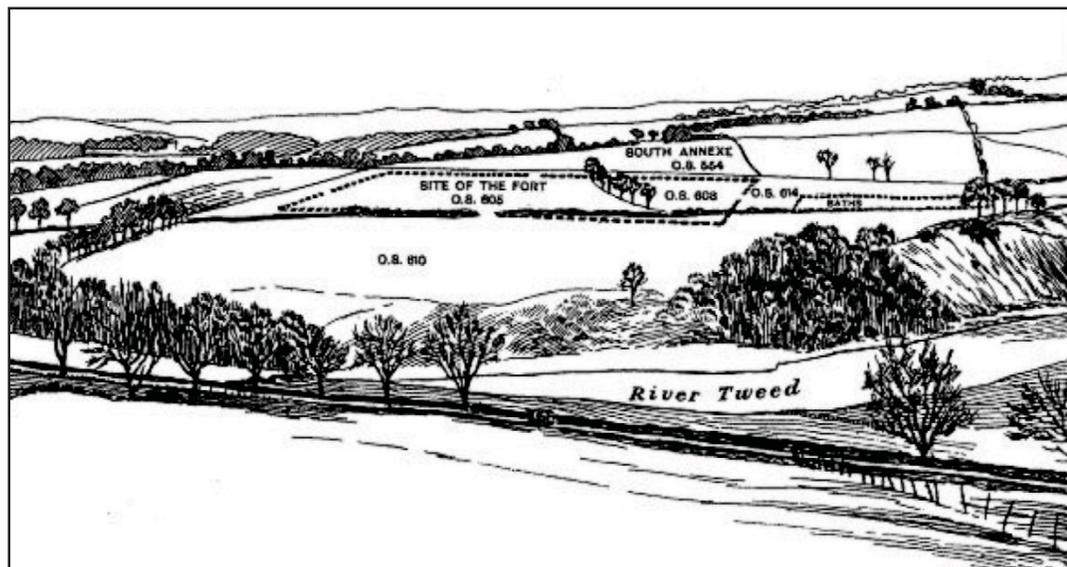
Professor Michael Fulford of the University of Reading has carried out extensive excavation work at the site of Silchester, one of the few Roman towns in Britain that failed to flourish after the departure of the occupiers. Fulford's work has included studies of ritual behaviour of the residents of Silchester and other Roman towns and cities in the UK, including Neatham, Baldock, and Portchester. This study has been largely concentrated on pits and wells – the evidence for which survives better than that of houses. In a paper entitled “Links with the Past: Pervasive ‘Ritual’ Behaviour in Roman Britain” Fulford cites numerous cases of unusual underground depositions, including those of flagons, jugs, mugs, vases, dishes and the bones, skulls and skeletons of cattle, dogs, cats and humans – both of children and adults.<sup>15</sup> Fulford refers to inevitable “ambiguities” between rubbish and ritual and cites the work of Dr Simon Clarke of Shetland College, University of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Clarke has referred to shoes placed in Roman wells as personal votive acts, which might be symbolic of a journey either in prospect or successfully completed.<sup>16</sup> The context in which he recorded this belief was an excavation carried out at the Roman fort near the present-day village of Newstead in the Scottish borders. The fort, known as Trimontium at the time of its construction, was occupied at some period between the first and third centuries by Rome's Twentieth Legion. The name



*Aerial view of the site of the Roman fort of Trimontium with the village of Newstead and the three hills that gave the site its Latin name. (RCAHMS DP 050251)*

Trimontium is a compound of two Latin words, the prefix *tri-* indicating three, coupled with the ending *montium* or *montium* which means “of the mountains.” The name can be readily translated as “the place of the three mountains,” which can be identified as the Eildon Hills.<sup>17</sup> Altars uncovered at Trimontium indicate that the gods worshipped there were Apollo, the sun-god and patron of music, his sister Diana, goddess of the moon and hunting, Jupiter, king of the Roman pantheon, the ancient Italian rural god Silvanus, and lastly, the *Campestres*, or “goddesses of the parade-ground.” These were all Roman gods, indicating that the defenders of the fort were Roman and thus a very long way from home.<sup>18</sup> On the uncomfortable verge of the Empire, and facing an implacable foe, the men posted to the fort at Trimontium appear to have sought comfort in religion and ritual. The fort was first excavated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by James Curle and the results published in *A Roman Frontier Post and its People: The Fort of Newstead in the Parish of Melrose* (1911). Curle’s account of a very professional excavation is meticulous in its attention to detail and the scholarship recorded is of a high standard for the time. Curle knew a great deal about Roman military architecture and had studied and excavated forts in both Britain and Continental Europe. At Trimontium he carried out an excavation that, for the first time in Britain, investigated the purpose, structure and contents of numerous pits and wells found within and outside the perimeter of the ditches and walls surrounding the fort. This was partly the result of necessity. Very little was left of the buildings of the fort:

...the remains of their stone-work were so scanty as to make it almost impossible to recover any of their details. Long centuries of cultivation and systematic quarrying had well nigh brought about their utter destruction. Walls were in most cases reduced to foundations. Hardly a doorway of any kind could be traced.<sup>19</sup>



*The site of the fort at Trimontium. (Curle, 1911, plate V)*

Work began on 13 February 1905 and continued until 19 May 1909. Excavation resumed on 22 December 1909 and ran through until mid September 1910. A total of 107 pits or wells was excavated:<sup>20</sup>

From all of them, but more especially from those of considerable depth, there came a great mass of black earthy matter, having a curious well-marked smell. The same dark-coloured deposit was present at the bottom of the deeper ditches, especially those of the early fort on the west front. Vegetable fibres and animal bones entered largely into its composition. Branches, often with the bark undamaged, stems of heather, leaves of trees, fronds of bracken, reeds, and water plants were plainly recognisable. Bones of animals were almost invariably present, blue vivianite crystals gathering on them when they were exposed to the air. The soft damp mass, from which all air was excluded, had had a remarkable preservative power. Terra Sigillata preserved its brilliant glaze and brass its golden yellow, while iron tools and weapons, covered with a black oxide, seemed little the worse for their long immersion. Pieces of cloth, rope, and leather were recovered almost undamaged.<sup>21</sup>

Finds in the wells were puzzling. Skulls of men, women and dogs, the beak of a raven, numerous shoes, bent and broken swords, armour, parade helmets and rotary querns were among a great variety of objects found at various levels within the excavation.<sup>22</sup> We know now, although Curle did not, that skulls, bent and broken swords, querns and other objects much the same as those found in the pits at Trimontium are regular finds in subterranean and watery deposits elsewhere in Britain and in Continental Europe.<sup>23</sup> The querns were particularly strange as a number of them were in perfect condition. Curle hypothesised a calamity which had forced the sudden abandonment of the fort but that hardly explained why querns would need to be dumped:



*A parade helmet from a Trimontium pit. (NMS 000-100-036-815-C)*

It is easy to understand how many worn-out objects might find their way along with the broken dishes into what were naturally receptacles for rubbish. Odds and ends of value might have now and then dropped in accidentally. But there are circumstances that rather point to deliberate concealment. Among the objects which could hardly have found their way into the pits by chance are the querns. Fragments of these were of course among the rubbish. But in each of the Pits X, XIX, XXII and LXI there was a complete quern, lying with one stone above the other and having the iron spindles still in position. All four are of the volcanic stone from Niedermendig near Andernach on the Rhine. Such things could not have been thrown away as worthless.<sup>24</sup>



*The sword from Pit LVIII, Trimontium, dates from AD 80 – 100. Merrifield states on page 112 of *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* that the act of bending or breaking a sword was to “transfer it from the physical to the spiritual plane.” (NMS, X.FRA 139)*

In a pit, No. LVII, adjacent to the fort’s baths, Curle found further mysteries. These included: “...a battered helmet mask, and four swords, three of which were bent and broken, while in Pit LVIII was another sword with the hilt doubled down on the blade.”<sup>22</sup> Grasping for an explanation, Curle suggested that a sudden retreat from the fort was the reason for the objects in the wells:

Pit XVI held what can only be described as the contents of a camp smithy — weapons and tools, hub rims for wheels, spears with blunted points, pioneers’ axes with worn edges, implements to be sharpened, old metal ready to be forged and welded into something new. It is hardly possible to apply any explanation other than concealment to this curious deposit.<sup>25</sup>

Modern archaeologists have found no evidence of a military or other disaster at Trimontium, although the fort was abandoned in circa AD 100 and again in circa AD 180. Although Curle’s use of the word “concealment” has a different meaning to the usage employed in this thesis it is possible that the two meanings intersect. Curle had encountered a mystery and was not able to interpret it with the theoretical tools at his disposal in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pits and wells with much the same contents as those found at Trimontium have been discovered at a number of sites within the United Kingdom and in Continental Europe. These are now considered to have ritual purposes – but on occasion to serve as rubbish pits. The same pit could, at different times, be the recipient of votive offerings or of objects with a protective purpose, placed deep within the earth as gifts to the gods, while on other occasions it provided a convenient dumping site for the detritus of a military camp or settlement.<sup>26</sup> Many of these pits contain objects with which we are familiar in building caches created almost 1,500 years later. Numerous shoes were among the objects found in the wells of Trimontium. Some of these were the footwear of women and children rather than the men who made up the great majority of the occupants of the fort.<sup>27</sup> In a bias towards the shoes of children, the Trimontium finds share one of



*Roman shoes from the pits at Trimontium. Left, male, calceus, between AD 90 and 110. Right, probably young female, circa AD 100. (NMS, X.FRA 78 and X.FRA 114)*

the attributes of shoe concealments in building voids many centuries later – a similarity which may provide a tentative link between the ritual practices of the Roman invaders of Britain and the concealment of shoes and other objects in the modern period. We know the shoes at Trimontium were Roman, not only from the context in which they were found, but also because they survived. In prehistory and later in those areas not conquered by the Romans, skins were treated with oils and fats or by methods such as smoking, none



**Finds.** Several pairs of shoes, one (Plate XX., Fig. 5) very perfect, the nails in the sole arranged in a decorative pattern, also some bones and fragments of amphorae. Cleared out 18 April, 1906.

*Top, One of the shoes from Pit XXV at Trimontium and above the extract from Curle's excavation report on this find. Curle, 1911: 122. The shoe is a calceus or caliga, and dates from between AD 80 and 180. The pattern of the hobnails left a decorative footprint in soft soil. (NMS, X.FRA 94)*

of which produced long-lasting and waterproof leather. But true tanning using vegetable extracts resulted in leather that survived well in damp, anaerobic conditions. The Romans introduced this technique to Britain, resulting in a sharp increase in the survival rate of leather goods. But shoes and other leatherware from previous periods, tanned by primitive methods, survived only in exceptional circumstances.<sup>28</sup> The ritual use of shoes by Romans in Britain is confirmed by the circumstances of the Trimontium finds. There is as yet no distinct and confirmed link between prehistoric and Roman placement of shoes in bogs, pits and wells and those that began to occur in houses and other buildings of the British Isles from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, although the circumstantial evidence is suggestive. Placement of these and other objects in the UK, both in bogs and wells (where they are considered to have a votive purpose) has been well documented.<sup>29</sup> If the knowledge of rituals associated with shoes had faded from memory in Britain after the termination of Roman rule it would seem remarkable for these to be spontaneously revived a thousand years later.

Tracing British shoe concealments in buildings back to the Roman period is a task that may be beyond both the available archaeological resources and the archaeological record itself. Even if concealed shoes could be located and identified, if indeed they exist, in the few surviving Roman structures in Britain (the baths at Bath, Hadrian's Wall and the remnant portions of the London Wall) there would still remain the question of continuity throughout the many centuries after the departure of the Romans and the first confirmed finds of concealed shoes in Britain in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The houses of the great majority of Britons until the 16<sup>th</sup> century were roundhouses or huts made from wattle and daub, combined with poles lashed together with coarse twine and thatched with turf, heather, bracken or straw. These buildings had a central hearth from which smoke escaped through a circular hole in the roof. Surviving houses in Britain that date back further than the 12<sup>th</sup> century are very rare.<sup>30</sup> The possibility of a Roman ancestry for the concealments of shoes and other objects in buildings is nevertheless very intriguing, raising the question of whether Australian concealments are part of a tradition dating back 2,000 years or more. In order to consider all of the possibilities of the finds, both in the United Kingdom and in Australia, a strictly rationalist approach to the analysis of archaeological finds will clearly have to be modified. Clarke has argued that what we would call the supernatural did not exist as a separate sphere in the ancient world: "Gods and spirits were not paranormal activity as far as Newstead's ancient population was concerned. They were part of the natural world, invisible perhaps, but as real to them as weather fronts, economic cycles and magnetic fields are to us."<sup>31</sup>

The placement of shoes and other objects in ritual pits at Trimontium, while it is tempting to attempt a link to the concealment of shoes in voids in Britain many centuries later, may not be connected other than as a common human response to crisis or stress by the invocation of measures aimed at exerting spiritual power. However, at least one ritual

practice that is known to have occurred in Rome and Greece at least 2,000 years ago and which was taken into Britain survived there for many centuries after the departure of its initiators. It was still being practiced there until as late as the early 20th century. The text on charms and curses, included in Chapter Three, page 101, describes this ritual.

If one Roman ritual survived in Britain until the 20<sup>th</sup> century others may also have done so. There is also an additional indicator of long-term survival of a very different ancient cultural practice, which while not of Roman origin, was contemporary with their occupation of Britain. I refer here to the building technique known as wattle and daub. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, third edition, 1965, states that the origin of the term “wattle” is obscure but its application is as a description for the practice of winding thin, supple branches of certain trees between upright posts set into the ground at intervals of about 900mm. This framework was then daubed with mud to which lime, dung, straw or animal hair was sometimes added. The resulting earthen surface was often plastered to a smooth finish and given a coat of whitewash. Vitruvius refers in disparaging terms to wattle and daub in Book III, 93, of his *Ten Books on Architecture*, written circa 25 BC. Wattle and daub came to Australia and was in use from the earliest days of European settlement until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The acacia was found to be ideal for this form of building and as a result has been known as the wattle since it was used to provide housing for European convicts and settlers at Sydney Cove. This is a documented example of a process known to, and used by, the Romans and which, after arriving in Australia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, survived here for another 160 years.<sup>32</sup>

## 5.6 CATS

After shoes, cats were the next most numerous find in Australian concealments. The total number of cat finds was seventeen. It has to be stressed that these were not strays that had crawled into voids and died there: the animals had been placed, most likely after a sacrificial killing, in cavities that offered no access. Further research on the carcasses, perhaps using x-rays and forensic methods, would be necessary in an effort to identify possible causes of death. These may include strangulation, drowning or, perhaps less likely, poisoning. The discovery of numerous dead cats in sealed voids in old buildings suggests that animal sacrifice for what appears to be ritual purposes took place in Australia until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This practice, in various forms, has a very long history. A collection of papyri acquired in Egypt in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by Jean d’Anastasi contained many documents describing magic spells now considered to be of Greco-Roman origin. One such spell describes how a cat should be killed in order to send it into the other world where “the dead cat is capable of attracting a daemon.”<sup>33</sup> The cat was killed by drowning and while it was being placed in a tomb or place of burial the

water in which it was drowned was sprinkled about the place while the person performing the ceremony uttered these words:

I conjure you, the daimon that has been aroused in this place, and you, the daimon of the cat that has been aroused with spirit, come to me on this very day and from this very moment, and perform for me the (requested) deed.<sup>34</sup>

The use of cats is a form of concealment that differs in its nature from those made with shoes, garments and other artefacts. The latter appear to have a protective role, serving as decoys and so standing in for the occupants of buildings in which they were found. The purpose of concealed cats seems to differ somewhat and, like witch bottles, to have a rather more threatening, aggressive or retaliatory character. Merrifield suggests that the “quasi-magical imitation of a hunting cat” was intended to repel what he terms “spiritual vermin” – the underworld familiars of witches – which may have taken the form of rats and mice.<sup>35</sup> It is surprising to find that such beliefs may have survived in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Sydney in circumstances that suggest a link to fears generated by an outbreak of the plague. This matter will be explored shortly.

Several people who contacted me about finds of concealed cats described the circumstances of the concealments and how they were discovered. These provide indications of the locations of the carcasses within the buildings that conform with prescribed locations for other concealed objects. The disposition of the carcasses, their attitudes and the association of dead rodents with one of the cats bears a clear resemblance to cat finds in United Kingdom caches. Rob Thomas told of the cat he found in his family home at 55 Upton Street, Launceston (page 324). He lived in the house with his mother from 1977 to 1996 and as a young boy explored parts of it that adults rarely if ever saw. Built in the 1840s and added to in 1871, the old house stood on a site that sloped down the hill from the street. Beneath the house, Thomas made his way through a very small old door and into a space that became more and more confined as he approached the front of the building. With headroom of a metre or less, tapering down to almost nothing, this was not a space into which adults would normally venture. Quite close to the front of the building, on a dirt floored-space beneath the hearth of the drawing room fireplace, Thomas found the body of a cat:

It had all its skin and its tail and legs but no fur and was lying on its side, frozen in a very aggressive, quite ferocious pose. It had its mouth open with one paw up. It was as if it was about to kill something and had been frozen in time. It wouldn't have been like that if the death had been a natural one. I can't imagine an animal dying in that frozen position. I think it must have been posed.<sup>36</sup>

This cat was concealed beneath the front of the building and as such is located close to the most convenient surface point of access, namely the front door. The attitude that Thomas describes is typical of some concealments in England where the creature is poised as if ready to attack. Sometimes the cat is found with companion animals — dead rats or mice. The pose may include a dead rat in the cat's mouth. British researchers suggest the rodent companions represent the prey that the cat is meant to pursue in the other world, thus protecting the house and its occupants.<sup>37</sup>

One example of companion rodents is known in Australia. This is the cat found at *Her Majesty's Theatre*, Ballarat, Victoria (page 339), and now preserved in a case in the foyer, which has as its accoutrements a number of rodent companions. In the Perth suburb of Burswood (page 383), Kallan Short began renovations to the old house he and his wife bought in 2001. The house appears to date from around 1900 and the back



*The Ballarat cat and companion rodents.  
(Her Majesty's Theatre)*

verandah had been enclosed to form a kitchen and dining area. This part of the building was demolished to allow for the construction of a new addition to the house. When the floorboards were taken up Short was surprised to find the body of a cat, directly under the original rear door of the building: “It was in coiled position, with the upper portion leathery and well preserved and the side facing down rotted away. The skeleton was well preserved. While it is possible that the cat had crawled in there by itself I could not identify any entry point.”<sup>38</sup> In this case, the cat has been placed at another common access point. Unaware at the time of the possible significance of the find, Short sent the carcass to the tip along with the debris from the demolition work. Another find came from a house in the country near Wagin, WA (page 396). Built in 1904 on the Dumbelyung Road, two kilometres from Wagin for the publican of a local hotel, the house was suffering from damp problems when Jenny Lebens bought it in the early 1980s:

When we lifted the floor to dig some soil out to try to alleviate the rising damp problems, we were surprised to find the leathery body of a cat with skin still intact and not significantly damaged. We wondered at the time how it could have found its way in there as the foundations were stone and to the best of my knowledge did not have holes big enough for an adult cat to climb in.<sup>39</sup>

There is no clear statement of the location within the room of this find but other reports describe cats being found in close proximity to the hearth or the base of the chimney in a significant room where family gatherings took place. John Logan of Montrose, Victoria,

wrote to tell me about the old house he demolished at Wandin many years ago. It had been built by people from Guernsey in the English Channel Islands, probably in the 1870s:

With the floorboards up I discovered in the cavity formed below the floor level by the footings and the foundations for the chimney there was a dirt mound, evenly formed, and on that was the carcass of a cat. It was stretched out as if it had died of fright. It was totally dried and the fur was missing. I would say it was put there when they built the house. It looked that old.<sup>40</sup>

Anne Wood of Birregurra, Victoria (page 341), reported an intriguing find. Renovations underway at the rear of their 1867 house uncovered the very old and very dry body of a cat. The carcass was discovered under the back doorstep. As with other cat finds, this carcass was despatched to the local tip with all the building rubbish.<sup>41</sup> The house owned by the Woods was designed by the prominent Melbourne architect Leonard Terry who acted as Diocesan architect for the Anglican Church. In Birregurra Terry designed *Christ Church* and the adjacent vicarage. The Woods' house had been the Anglican parsonage until 1989 when they bought it from the Church. Born in Yorkshire in 1825, Terry arrived in Melbourne in 1853 and began what proved to be an outstanding career, designing grand residences, banks, retail stores, warehouses and ecclesiastical buildings, principally for the Anglican Church.<sup>42</sup> The discovery of a concealed cat in a building that had been associated with the Anglican Church is interesting. In the UK, where folk magic and religion have co-existed throughout the centuries, concealed cats have been found in churches.<sup>43</sup> A find of this nature in Australia, together with other finds of cats and shoes in Australian churches, suggests that these two strands of belief continued their association in this country during the 19th century. It is possible that the Church authorities knew nothing of the ritual carried out at their Birragurra parsonage. It may have been the work of the tradesmen who built the vicar's house – part of the mystery of their craft and, as such, concealed from outsiders.

In the case of the cats concealed in adjoining houses in Argyle Place, in Sydney's Miller's Point (page 266), there is a glimpse of the possible reasoning behind the choice of these animals. Of the row of four shop-fronted terraced houses on the site two are known to have contained concealed cats. While the date of initial construction is not known the group of houses received a make-over in about 1906, emerging with a distinct arts and crafts appearance in a photograph of 1907.

The first cat find was reported to me by Dr. Ling Yoong, owner of No. 8, following the telecast of ABC-TV's *Rewind* programme in October 2004. She described the circumstances of the find that occurred when tradesmen working on her behalf replaced the timber floor of the kitchen. I visited the site towards the end of 2004 when Yoong showed me the now-intact room and stated that the brick walls of this space would have made it impossible for the animal to crawl into the subfloor area of the room after the

building was completed. The cat had been discarded before she became aware of its significance and made contact with me. Some months later Yoong emailed me again to report that another cat had been found in the adjoining residence:

Thu, 13 Jan 2005 14:57:56 +1100

Hi Ian

Guess what?

My neighbour at 10 Argyle Place had to lift their floorboards before they tile over it and there was a cat under the floor boards - they did not take a photo. They left the cat in place. I think there must be a cat under each of the 4 terraces. This really substantiate (sic) the story.

Ling<sup>44</sup>



*The group of shops and residences in Argyle Place, Sydney – two of which contained concealed cats in subfloor voids. The cats were found in the residences underneath the triangular shapes on the pediment. Details of these finds are in the Catalogue of Finds, Appendix One. The photograph was taken on 2 November 1907. (State Library of NSW image GPO1 no. 10316).*

The site of these finds is 500 metres from the place where the plague epidemic of 1900 was first detected. The unfortunate victim was a 35 year old van driver named Arthur Payne whose house at 10 Ferry Lane, Miller's Point, was swiftly guarded by police and Payne, his wife and three children, a servant and a visitor were shunted off to the Quarantine Station at North Head.<sup>45</sup> The plague triggered a major Government

response and resulted in the compulsory acquisition of properties and numerous demolitions within the worst-affected zone. It was known at the time that rats and mice were carriers of the bubonic plague. Fleas that live on these animals act as vectors and transfer the infection from the rodents to humans. The initial report on the outbreak, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 25 January 1900, quoted Dr. Ashburton Thompson, president of the Board of Health:

.... it has for a long time been a puzzle to know how rats communicate the disease to man. As the result of constant observation, there seems to be very little doubt indeed that the infection is conveyed from the rats to man by the intermediary agency of fleas and other like insects. Therefore preventive measures must be directed against rats and fleas and similar pests.<sup>46</sup>

**THE BUBONIC PLAGUE.**  
**SUSPICIOUS CASE IN SYDNEY.**  
 —  
**A FAMILY QUARANTINED.**  
 —  
**INTERVIEW WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH.**  
 —  
**THE CHANCES OF CONTAGION.**  
 —  
**NO NEED FOR ALARM.**

*The first news of the plague.*  
*Sydney Morning Herald,*  
*25/1/1900.*

Although the role of rats and fleas in spreading plague was understood among health professionals at that time it had not yet been absorbed by the wider community. This information was disseminated by means of posters warning that the rats were the cause of the disease. George McCredie, an architect and consulting engineer who had been appointed chief organiser of the State Government response to the outbreak, issued the posters on 1 March 1900 warning in both English and Chinese of the dangers posed by rats:

Plague is present in Sydney. It has been introduced by diseased rats and there is a danger of it spreading further.<sup>47</sup>



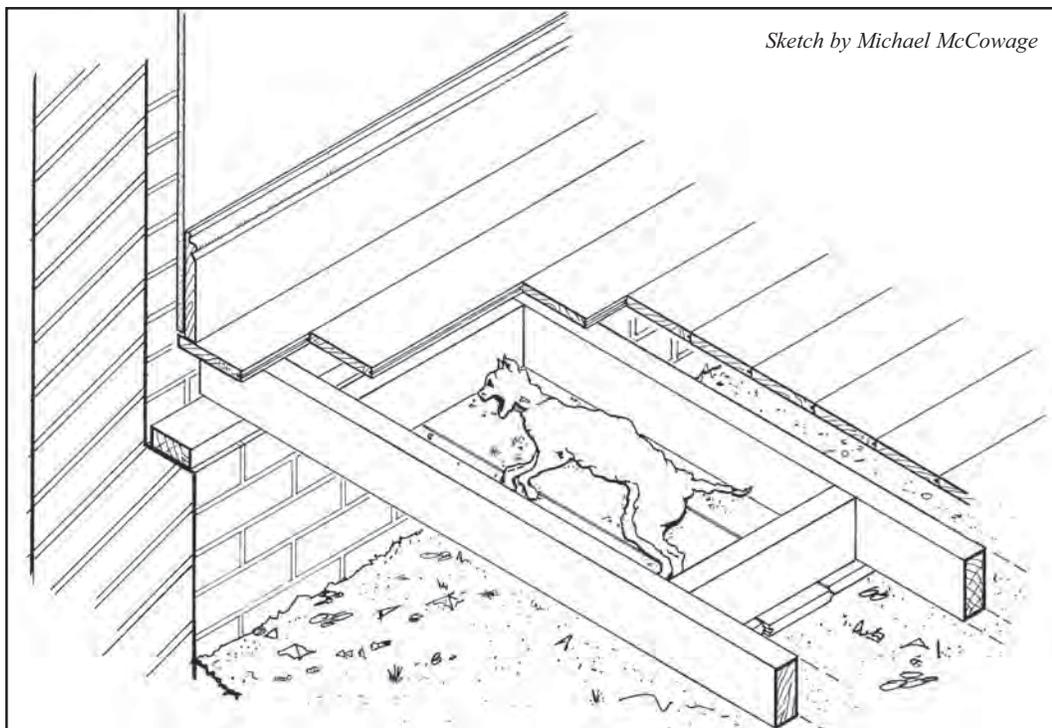
Teams of ratcatchers under McCredie's supervision fanned out over the city, concentrating their activities on the slum areas where rats were most numerous. More than 44,000 rats were dispatched by the time the programme was concluded. The human toll was

*Some of the 600 rats killed by professional ratcatchers working in plague-stricken areas of Sydney on 17 July 1900. (SR 12487\_a021\_a021000010)*

also significant. Between 19 January and 9 August 1900, 303 people contracted the disease. Of these, 103 died.<sup>48</sup> With a one-in-three chance of dying if you contracted the disease, it would be understandable if the plague sparked deep-seated fear of domestic rat infestations. Although the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote that there was “no need for alarm”<sup>49</sup> the public response for a time came close to panic. Billy Hughes, MP for the area where the plague began, wrote that on the day the *Herald* report was published:

Before noon, alarm bordering on panic had spread throughout the community, and by nightfall the trains to the mountains were crowded with citizens fleeing from the infected city.<sup>50</sup>

The Millers Point cat finds are particularly interesting as the concealments took place at a time when fear of the plague was still very strong in Sydney. Cases of the plague occurred in Sydney and other maritime cities around Australia for many years afterwards. The proximity of the Argyle Place houses where the cats were concealed to the plague’s ground zero is noted. Particular care was taken with the cat placed under the floor at No. 10 Argyle Place. It was in a purpose-built box made by fixing floorboards to the bottom of the floor joists. The kitchen floorboards acted as a lid to the box. Of the other dwellings in the group, one was extensively renovated by speculators who cannot now be contacted



*This cutaway view of the cat in the purpose-built box beneath the floorboards of the old kitchen at 10 Argyle Place, Miller’s Point, was drawn after a site inspection and conversations with the owners who were present when the old floor was taken up. After discussions with Dr. Yoong about the cat found at No. 8, the owners of No. 10 decided to leave this cat in-situ and the new floor of tiles was laid on top.*

and the remaining shop/residence, at present an antique store, has not been examined for subfloor or other concealments. The outbreak of plague within close proximity to these houses, both geographically and in time, raises the possibility that there was a purpose behind the concealment of cats in renovated buildings so close to the site of the original infection. Paul Cowdell in *Charms, Charmers and Charming* says that the connection of rats to evil spirits has long been known. He refers to beliefs about rats as harbingers of evil and omens of death in Worcestershire in 1909.<sup>51</sup> There was good reason to see them in this light in Sydney in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Merrifield observed that: “The great obsession of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was with witchcraft, and witches were supposed to work their evil by means of familiar spirits that often took the form of rats or mice.”<sup>52</sup>

Merrifield recorded additional thoughts on cat concealments in an unpublished manuscript for a book planned to be a cooperative effort with Swann and Easton. This project was terminated by Merrifield’s death on 9/1/1995. In October 1994 he wrote:

Animal sacrifice survived into the post-mediaeval period as a protective device, and the dried bodies of cats are often found in roofs and chimney-pieces. Sometimes they have been set up after death holding rats or mice in hidden places, and rationalised as deterrents to vermin. The original purpose, however, is likely to have been deterrence of the witch’s familiars, which often took the form of rats, mice or birds.<sup>53</sup>

The discovery of one cat close to the site of the Sydney plague outbreak might be overlooked as mere coincidence but the second cat, placed on a specially-constructed platform in an adjoining house, carries the story further. This was a concealment with intent, made at a time when fear of the disease continued to grip the residents of Sydney. These concealments took place in a period when ancient beliefs may have overlapped with



*Concealed cats are arranged in a cruciform shape in this concealment dating from 1617. The find was made in a house at Vaihingen an der Enz, southern Germany. (Petra Schad)*

new scientific understanding that placed the blame for the plague squarely on the rats that infested the slums of Sydney. I suggest that the cats were chosen and concealed for their

supposed ability to function in the underworld and, perhaps, to deal with the diabolical forces that may have been considered to be instrumental in the spread of the plague. Lingering fears of the underworld as a source of evil may have influenced the precautions taken by either the builders or the occupants of the houses in question. The Millers Point finds take cat concealments in this country into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and suggest the survival in post-Federation Australia of mediaeval beliefs in dark spiritual forces.

## 5.7 GARMENTS

Finds of garments of various types totalled twelve. These consisted of a variety of objects ranging from half a woman's lace collar in an 1830s house in Dawes Point, NSW (page 243), to a straw hat in an early 19<sup>th</sup> century house at *Antill Ponds* in the Midlands of Tasmania (page 295), convict shirts from Sydney and from Granton (pages 282, 313), Tasmania, two pairs of trousers in a lighthouse at Geraldton, Western Australia (page 386), and a sailor's cap found within the walls of a community hall at Goulburn, NSW (page 254). Other finds included a convict jacket from the old Port Arthur *Commissariat* at Taranna, Tasmania (page 335), and a waistcoat of circa 1830 discovered in the roof cavity of the former *Good Woman Inn*, Hobart (page 315). Gloves were found beneath the floor of a house



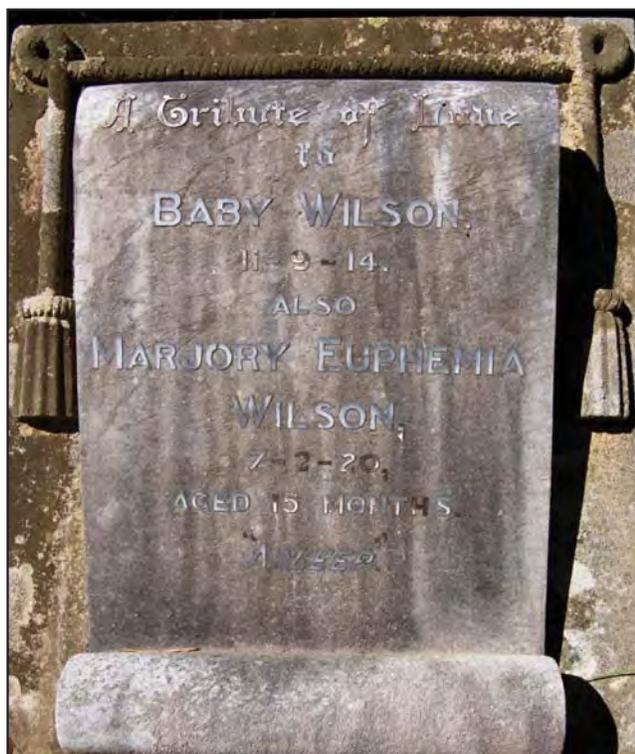
*This cap from HMS Dart was found within the wall of a community hall at Goulburn, NSW. (GWMM)*



*Embroidery patterns and baby's cap from the Blackheath cache in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney.*

at Lindisfarne, Tasmania (page 325), and *St Mary's Cathedral*, Perth (page 394). There is a possibility that the baby's bonnet and embroidery pattern found in a box beneath the floor of a house at Blackheath, NSW (page 232), are associated with child deaths. The house was owned for a time in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Alexander and Winifred Wilson who were married at the Sydney suburb of Woollahra in 1912.<sup>54</sup> In the small local cemetery on the outskirts of Blackheath a tombstone records

the deaths of two infants, born to Winifred Wilson, in 1914 and 1920 respectively. The death of “Baby Wilson,” who was buried before christening, is not recorded by the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages so the likelihood is that this was the death of a new-born infant and considered, officially at least, as not of sufficient matter to place in the registry. A tiny grave adjacent to the headstone may be that of this child. The other death, that of Marjorie Euphemia Wilson, took place when she was 15 months old and is duly officially noted.<sup>55</sup> I am



*“A Tribute of Love”– the Wilson headstone at Blackheath cemetery, NSW.*

aware of one other concealment, that carried out at 37 Lower Fort Street, Dawes Point, NSW (page

243), which appears to be associated with child mortality. The role of family deaths, not necessarily those of children, in precipitating the concealment of protective objects requires further investigation. This avenue of enquiry has been stimulated by preliminary research into the history of an early boot found under the kitchen floor of *Lott’s Cottage*, York, WA (page 397). The boot, that of a small child, and dated to circa 1811 – 1815,<sup>56</sup> appears to have been concealed many years after manufacture. European settlers occupied Western Australia from 1829, reaching the site of York not long afterwards.<sup>57</sup> John Lott arrived in the Colony in 1837 and settled in York shortly afterwards where he married



*Margaret Lott  
(Gwen Langsford/  
Residency Museum  
collection)*

Margaret Kelly in 1842. Of the ten children they had in the following twenty years, four were dead, either through illness or accident, before 1890.<sup>58</sup> The cottage in which the boot was found, located in Northam Road on the outskirts of York, dates from circa 1850s.<sup>59</sup> The boot, therefore, was concealed at least thirty years after it was made. Its retention long after use, a period in which it was kept in near-perfect condition, indicates strong family and sentimental associations. If perceived as a powerful family talisman it may have been called into play following the string of deaths that occurred among the Lott children. These included those of James, aged two, in 1857, George in 1885, Edward in 1886 and Ellen in 1888.<sup>60</sup>

Other researchers have come to much the same conclusion in regard to a possible link between concealments and the death of children and other family members. Eastop, in describing the discovery of various artefacts, including a baby's cap of circa 1740-1770, found in a wall cavity at 26/26a East St Helen's Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, makes the connection to child mortality:

The presence of the baby's cap is significant because deliberately concealed garments are often children's clothing. This leads to speculation that such garments may have been hidden to protect the household against infant deaths and/or to promote fertility/fecundity.<sup>61</sup>

The promotion of fertility, if indeed this is a function of such concealments, appears to suggest an anticipated connection between the object and the objective, imparting a metaphoric underpinning to the practice. The use of caps or hats in concealments also provides a link to beliefs associated with the magical power of the mind and the psyche. Other caches containing the clothing of children have been found in Australia. These include one of the pairs of trousers in the lighthouse at Geraldton, WA, (referred to on the previous page) and the young boy's coat from Cessnock, NSW (page 239). As with shoes, concealed garments found to date are in very poor condition: worn, dirty, ragged and, as in the case of the waistcoat from the *Good Woman Inn* (page 315), lacking part of their substance. The waistcoat has had half of the black silk from its front cut away. It is difficult to see this as an expression of the ritual cutting occasionally found on shoes and garments discovered in British concealments. But while this may have been a matter of not wishing to waste black silk, or perhaps a contractual matter, only half of the on this garment was preserved. Taking all of it may have rendered the charm ineffective. The condition of concealed garments can mitigate against their recognition when they are found by people, often builders, who may be unaware of their purpose. The waistcoat in the roof of the *Good Woman Inn* (page 315) and the convict garment in the Port Arthur *Commissariat* at Taranna (page 335) were both almost condemned as old rags.

There are correspondences between the places in buildings where concealed shoes and concealed garments are found. The exception, very probably for entirely logical reasons, is that concealed garments are not found in chimney flues. It is notable that confirmed convict garments in public collections survived because they were concealed in the buildings where they were found. Significant finds of concealed convict garments include the shirts from *Hyde Park Barracks* (page 279), Sydney, and from the supervisor's cottage at Granton, Tasmania (page 313), and the waistcoat from the Port Arthur *Commissariat* (page 335). Suspected or possible concealed convict shoes have come from the Moreton Bay *Commissariat*, Brisbane (page 401), and the cottage at Granton (page 313). All of these finds, plus others discussed elsewhere in this chapter, are illustrated and described in the Catalogue of Finds (page 224).

## 5.8 CONCLUSION

Throughout Australia, 119 sites where shoes, cats, garments and other objects were concealed in building voids have so far been located. A significant proportion of these appears to have been associated with members of the building trades. While the history of this practice has never been documented, other than by the artefacts themselves, re-examination of the discovery of shoes and other objects in Roman ritual pits in England and the Scottish borders hints at the possibility of a custom that has ancient origins. Other Roman practices survived until comparatively recently, including the manufacture of curse tablets, and the use of wattle-and-daub building construction which lingered in rural Australia until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Perhaps the most surprising result of this research is the implication that ancient beliefs and practices, with roots extending far into the past, had lasted until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Concealed cats found in Australian houses reinforce this conclusion – in particular, the cats found in adjoining shop-fronted terraced cottages in Sydney's Miller's Point. We have no contemporary accounts of any spellcraft used during the concealment of cats, shoes, garments or other objects in either the British Isles or Australia, but the cat spell from the Greek Magical Papyri provides a possible template for a form of words that may have been used before the concealment process became routine.

As to the question of choice of object for concealments, there are theories but no explanation. It is doubtful whether availability alone would have been the reason for the use of shoes instead of garments. There may be an as-yet-unknown factor at work here as, on the face of it, garments are as reflective of the person as shoes. But shoe concealments outnumber garments by a factor of almost seven to one. With cats, the ratio is five-and-a-half to one. The immediate conclusion to be derived from this is that shoes were considered more effective as talismans against evil but this may be too simple by far. The lower figure for cats may be a product of lesser availability. Finding a cat on a building site, at just the right moment, would not be easy. Cat concealments may have been opportunistic: with no shoes available from the building's owners or occupants and a cat on hand the decision may have been one that made itself.

By considerable margins, subfloor concealments at liminal points and the shoes of children are the most noticeable features of this practice. The locations of concealments, typically doors, windows, chimneys, subfloor zones and roof cavities, suggest a continuing fear of danger posed by such spaces. There appears also to be an association with building work, exemplified in the case of *Woodbury*, Antill Ponds, Tasmania (page 295), where shoes and leggings were bricked into the old bread oven and other objects were tucked away behind a lath and plaster wall constructed in an attic bedroom. These caches convey an innuendo of a propitiary offering, made to compensate for the disturbance created by the work, although the possibility of a link with family tragedies associated with this

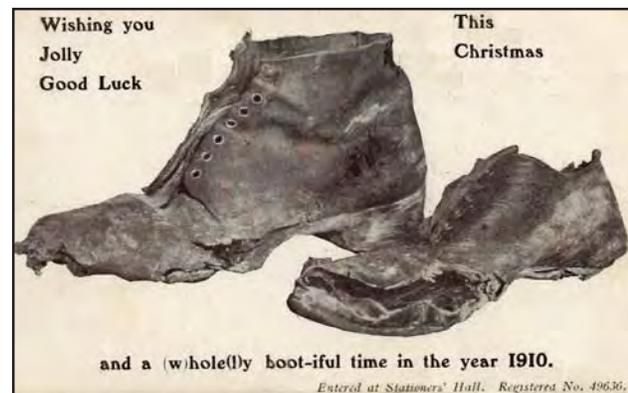
house cannot be ruled out at this stage.

While the fear of evil spirits, witches and demons may have inspired this practice and kept it alive for many centuries, it appears to have taken a somewhat different form during the later period of its practice. Increasingly, I am coming to the view that in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia the fear of child mortality, the deaths of more mature offspring and family members may have been a contributory factor in the survival of this practice. Other sources of stress, such as the continuing conflict with Aborigines in Tasmania during the first half of the 19th century, may have been elements in this practice. Cat concealments in adjoining houses in Miller's Point, Sydney (page 266), may have been a response to the outbreak of the plague which began very near the site of the concealments. Stress, danger and death were thus elements contributing to the use of folk magic in the houses and buildings of Australians in the period between 1788 and 1935.

The preceding paragraph had been written before I read Clark's *Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (1982) in which he states that aspects of folk religion were deployed "at times of crisis of personal misfortune, allowing some pragmatic means of coping with threatening and stressful events."<sup>62</sup>

Among the strands of information arising from the examination of Australian concealments is the presence in the Catalogue of Finds of shoes that were placed in voids years after the period in which they were made. These include the elegant boot of a woman, found at Marine Terrace, Battery Point, Tasmania (page 303), the child's boot from Lower Fort Street, Dawes Point, Sydney (page 243), and the early boot of a small child found at Lott's Cottage, York, Western Australia (page 397). The possibility is that these objects were regarded as powerful talismans, long cherished and honoured as symbols of home and domestic life, and were brought into play at a time of crisis, after the deaths of children or other family members. At such times and with fear of death a part of everyday life the invocation of spiritual forces, whether by means of religion or the practices of folk magic, may have seemed to offer the only protection available to people who felt themselves to be at the mercy of the fates.

While this ritual clearly had a firm grip on people for many centuries, observance tapered off in synchronisation with the rise in education and scientific thought. Concealments after about 1900 would have been made because it was considered "lucky" to do so. As it became unfashionable to refer to magic or to witchcraft, practices that had once been carried out in an effort to sustain life and health and to repel demonic beings were increasingly described by a more acceptable term: they thus became "lucky" rather than magical.



*A postcard issued in England in 1909 portrays old boots as "lucky" and reflects the changing attitude to concealments that appeared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

(NMG)

## SIX: CONCLUSIONS

The research carried out for this thesis has established the presence in Australia of a previously unknown ritual practice carried out in secrecy in the period 1788 – 1930s. Deliberately concealed shoes, garments, cats, children's toys and trinkets and a variety of other objects have been found and recorded in old houses and other buildings at locations in six states of Australia. I am not aware of finds of concealed objects in the Northern Territory where a low population base in the 19<sup>th</sup> century may have precluded significant observance of this practice. Close examination of many of the sites recorded herein, and of the objects found within them, has been carried out. The conclusions arrived at are based on these visits and the objects found at a considerable number and variety of sites. While documents or any form of explanation have not been found at any sites so far recorded in Australia the objects themselves, their positions within buildings and the historical context at the time in which they were concealed have revealed more information than might have been expected. The sites of the finds made to-date are widely dispersed, both within capital cities and throughout regional areas within the various states. Had these finds been clustered, for example within a particular area or areas, it would have been possible to attribute such concentrations to local word-of-mouth or to the activities of one person or a small group of individuals. But the distribution is extensive: sites are scattered and seemingly isolated throughout cities, suburbs, towns and rural areas. This dispersion indicates a depth and breadth of understanding of this practice and suggests considerable antiquity. This is not a practice that began spontaneously as a result of circumstances or situations occurring in Australia: it has ancient roots and these have been traced to Britain and from there, very tentatively, to ancient Rome and Greece. The Romans in Britain placed shoes and other objects in pits and wells for ritual purposes, as described in Chapter Five: Analysis. If this is the origin of modern concealments we have as yet no proof of the link although circumstantial evidence, also quoted in Chapter Five, raises intriguing possibilities. A Mediterranean origin is speculative: the roots of this practice may lie in the depths of antiquity. Merrifield, in *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, describes numerous ritual placements of a variety of objects, and of the skulls of people, in rivers, streams and bogs in Britain during the Bronze Age. These, he suggested, were acts of propitiation to gods of the earth and the underworld. The presence of large quantities of neolithic stone axes in the Thames pointed to an even more remote origin for such cult activities.<sup>1</sup> These votive offerings bear a resemblance to the sacrifice of shoes, garments and, particularly, cats which were, it appears likely, killed immediately before their placement in building voids.

The practice of concealing objects in buildings in England has been dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. How and when and why this practice originated remains an issue yet to be resolved although some strands of the history of the practice are visible. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century

and for several centuries afterwards John Schorn was venerated as someone who achieved power over the Devil by “casting him into a boot.” The first recorded finds of concealed shoes overlap with Schorn’s incumbency as rector at North Marston, Buckinghamshire, with the custom steadily gaining pace in succeeding centuries when Britain was subjected to fear of witches, the plague and the ordeal of the English Civil War. The practice arrived in Australia with convicts and emigrants, perhaps as early as 1788 but certainly by the 1820s. The accumulation of finds of the same kinds of objects in the same locations within buildings has formed a distinct pattern. It is clear that something unusual had been taking place, passing without notice by archaeologists and architectural or social historians. An enigma of this custom lies in the fact that it appears to have been both secret and widely known. It was secret in the sense that it appears never to have been recorded, explained or described in any widely-accessible contemporary written document, either in Australia or in the United Kingdom. This lack of contemporary explanatory documentation, a marked feature of the practice of concealments, distinguishes it from the manufacture of witch bottles. There are published recipes for witch bottles but no known contemporary documentary records about concealments, other than the rather cryptic reference by Samuel Pepys to the kidney stone passed by his mother and dropped into her fireplace – an event which may or may not have any significance in the context of this discussion.

The lack of documentation may reveal a quality of this ritual: it was perhaps too dangerous to record. Alternative explanations go to the other extreme: everyone knew about it so there was no reason to write it down. I suspect the former theory may be closer to the truth. In England, concealments escaped the attention of the diligent band of collectors working in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to record folk magic practices on behalf of the Folklore Society. But in limiting research to the countryside, where the Society researchers (themselves drawn from society’s elite) may have found difficulty relating to unsophisticated members of rural communities, the opportunity to discover this ritual was missed. There was also a failure to be open to wider possibilities. Gillian Bennett in *Traditions of Belief: Women and the Supernatural* (1987) relates that in asking who were “the folk” in folklore the answer was commonly “old codgers and granny women.”<sup>2</sup> According to Bennett, folklorists of the time were intent on unearthing what were felt to be cultural relics from a less advanced period:

Just as fossils remained in the earth to show earlier life-forms, so cultural fossils might remain hidden in the thought of sophisticated societies, which would show traces of earlier beliefs and customs. The folklore of the people was just such a survival.<sup>3</sup>

Preconceived and self-limiting ideas thus hindered the search for surviving ritual practices in England. In Australia, site visits to cache locations and careful examination of the objects found there have raised the possibility of identifying a social group linked to

concealments. The significant number of finds associated with members of several of the building trades suggested that it was a practice known to and frequently performed by tradesmen, although there is no information on how or when this association came about. The circumstances of the concealments examined so far are such that they lead to the conclusion that the practice of concealing shoes, garments and dead cats within the fabric of buildings was, for some time at least, a secret ritual of the building trades. If this is correct, it appears to have spilled over into the community at large. A large number of finds in Australia has no apparent connection with members of the building trades. However, shoes which are not those of the builders themselves may have been contributed by members of a family and concealed by tradesmen.

So widely was this practice disseminated, despite its lack of explanatory documentation, that it can only have been of long standing. In today's world, with the electronic media and the Internet, fads and fashions can be spread around the globe in a very short period of time. But the distribution of a ritual such as I have described would have taken a very long time in the period under discussion. An established tradition extending over centuries would have been necessary to enable the slow, steady dissemination of the beliefs that underpinned this practice, extending it not only throughout the community at large but also among members of individual trades such as carpenters, bricklayers, stonemasons, plasterers, roof slaters and possibly other branches of the building industry. In the early third millennium, newspapers, periodicals, electronic media and the Internet would have to be harnessed to achieve a comparable result. To spread this practice so very widely in a time when transport and communications systems were primitive in the extreme, aided by no more than the spoken word, is quite remarkable. It appears that a powerful oral tradition was at work, that it operated over an extremely long time-frame, and that in the period before about 1900 and perhaps for some time afterwards, motivation was strong. Concealments of all of the variety of objects found in Australia are also known and widely distributed both in time and location within the British Isles. A number of concealments found in various locations throughout Australia can be linked to convicts, either as identified or anonymous individuals or groups, or British settlers or their children. Folk magic practices and beliefs were widespread throughout Britain until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it would have been remarkable if British convicts and settlers had left the comfort provided by ancient cultural traditions at home before embarking on perilous journeys to the other side of the world. There is also the fact, as demonstrated by Pitt in 1997, that a surge in concealments occurred in Britain during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus increasing the probability that the practice would spread to the Australian colonies at a time of high emigration to this country.

While I have not been able to identify Australian concealments dating from the period 1788 – 1820 the practice becomes apparent here from the 1820s onwards. The comparatively small number of pre-1820 structures surviving, due in part to the initial low population base in the Australian colonies and the fact that those buildings which

have survived have all been subject to conservation or renovation before recognition of the practice of concealment, has mitigated against the informed discovery of concealed objects from the early Colonial period. Mundane artefacts such as shoes and dead cats would have been discarded by tradesmen and, in all probability, by the conservation architects who worked on these buildings during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and earlier.

The deliberate concealment of shoes in houses was first identified in England in 1955 in John Nevinson's rather tentative letter to *The Times* and it was not until much later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that awareness of these concealments began to spread. It would be many years before tradesmen became aware that the old shoes and other objects which they regularly found during building renovations or demolition had a story to tell. The locations of concealments, typically at doors, windows, chimneys, subfloor zones and roof cavities, suggest a continuing fear of the danger posed by liminal spaces. There appears also to be an association with substantial renovation or building work, exemplified in the case of the shoes and leggings placed in the old bread oven at *Woodbury*, Antill Ponds, Tasmania (page 295), when it was closed up. There are echoes in this of a propitiary offering, made to compensate for the disturbance created by the work of the bricklayers.

The custom of concealing objects within Australian buildings was identified by this writer and first publicised in 2004, resulting in numerous finds being put on record. Before this date old shoes, dead cats, garments and other objects found within the structure of this country's old houses and other buildings were simply viewed as random artefacts or puzzling rubbish with no particular significance. June Swann, on British Arts Council lecture tours of Australia in 1993 and 1997, mentioned concealed shoes in an interview on ABC Radio in Hobart during her first visit.<sup>4</sup> But Swann's reference to concealments on a popular radio programme did not result in recognition of the practice as having any historic significance and did not come to my notice until long after I began this research. Today, understanding of concealments is widely dispersed throughout Australia. I receive on average one or two reports per month alerting me to the discovery of new finds. The total number of Australian reports represents an accumulation of finds, including those made at some time in the past and which were noted, recorded or placed in private or public collections, together with those that came to light as a result of renovations conducted in the period of this research. Chance clearly played a significant part in compiling this data: there are almost certainly a good many other finds which have not yet been drawn to my attention and even more that are still locked away in closed cavities in old buildings. The period in which objects were concealed in Australian houses and other buildings, on the basis of finds so far recorded, ranges from circa 1820 to the mid 1930s and possibly later. But there is no reason to suggest that 1820s finds represent the initial phase of this practice in the Australian colonies. The more probable circumstance is that the custom arrived with the convicts and military personnel who were sent to establish a British penal settlement in New South Wales.

The shoes of children are the most common finds in concealment caches throughout Australia. This may simply be due to the larger families that were common at the time. There is, however, an alternative way of seeing this and I am therefore going to propose a theory relating to the higher proportion of the shoes of children and young people in the concealments that I have recorded. It is important to note that an academic dilemma arises here and it is grounded in the lack of contemporary documents to help us to understand this practice, either in relation to the significance of children's shoes or any other object. All we have are the artifacts. So, what follows is entirely theoretical. But if we take a step across this informational void, leaving aside for the time being the justified misgivings that arise from such a move, a possible explanation for all those children's shoes begins to take shape. And it leads to a plausible explanation as to the reason for all concealed objects found in Australia. The missing link in the following chain of deduction may be available to us at some later stage.



*Child's boot, circa 1860s, found in the wall of a cottage at Deloraine, Tasmania. (Julie Reicha)*

In regard to the many finds of children's shoes I offer the following suggestion. My theory is that children's shoes were used in an attempt to harness the power of the good and the innocent, by using the shoes of pre-pubescent children to protect houses from evil. Taking this rationale a little further, it suggests by implication a motive for concealments: protection from the forces of darkness emanating from the underworld. The evil that was feared was supernatural, although we have no way of knowing at this time how it was imagined by those who made the concealments. Finding so many children's shoes in concealments provides a link that ties this practice to ancient folk magic rituals relating to witches, demons and evil spirits. And it suggests that when objects are being

concealed magic is at work. The discovery of so many children's shoes in concealments is an element in the paradox in 19<sup>th</sup> century society's attitudes to children. Children were valued and honoured for their innocence and purity but were also put to work in mines, mills and factories under appalling conditions. In 1883 inspectors at James Miller's South Melbourne rope works found ten year olds working sixty hours a week. Young children, extensively employed in the



*Child's ankle boot, circa 1860, a subfloor find at a former coaching inn, Hartley Vale, NSW.*

tobacco industry, worked similar hours as did those in the clothing and other industries. They were paid a pittance, and often nothing for the first few months. Their health suffered from cramped, unsanitary, and poorly ventilated conditions. In Melbourne in 1882 a Dr Beaney described how a woman brought her daughter for examination: “She had been in a factory twelve or eighteen months already, and she is only thirteen now. She is like a little old woman, pale and shrivelled, and suffers from palpitation of the heart.”<sup>5</sup>

A contrasting view of children prevalent in 19<sup>th</sup> century society was reflected in the popular Pears Soap advertisements. These used images of children to represent childhood traits of innocence, youthfulness, freshness and cleanliness. The use in concealments of objects associated with children and childhood represented the employment of powerful societal talismans, offering the hope that these would provide the means by which goodness would prevail over evil.<sup>6</sup> The images of a young boy and girl on the ball found beneath the miner’s cottage at Kalgoorlie, WA (page 389), recorded in the Catalogue of Finds, play into this scenario.



*Childhood innocence: protection against evil? The face of a little girl on a Victorian indiarubber ball, found beneath the floor of a former miner’s cottage in Kalgoorlie, WA. (Jack Baxter)*

The innocence and beauty of childhood reflected the very opposite of everything associated with the unspeakable demonic forces that lay at the heart of many people’s fears at the time. Hymns of the period, and for centuries before, reflect apprehension of the time when “...phantoms of the night appear.” John Leland’s 1792 hymn, *The Day is Past and Gone*, was typical in its expression of fears of evil in the hours of darkness:

Lord, keep us safe this night,  
secure from all our fears;  
may angels guard us while we sleep,  
till morning light appears.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, darkness brought danger, unspecified in the hymn, but easily recognised at the time as emanating from demonic and evil forces and beings who scurried away from the light of dawn.

The story of concealed objects was eventually discovered in Australia (long after it might have been found) by noting similar occurrences elsewhere in the world, by long and careful research in Australia and the United Kingdom, and by a determination to understand something that on the surface appeared enigmatic, mysterious and inexplicable. Had this custom been found earlier, we might have had a better understanding of the intensely

painful emotional realities of transportation, emigration and family life in Australia at a time before the comfort and intellectual expansion provided by modern medical science, communication, education and travel.

The discovery of this practice opens a new window on the past, revealing the hopes and fears of people, both immigrant and native-born, in Australia's formative years. It is evident that beliefs that 21<sup>st</sup> century Australians would consider absurd were a vital part of the fabric of life in the Australian colonies during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Understanding this has the potential to provide new insights into the lives and belief systems of Australians of European origin in the period from 1788 to the 1930s. The power of this ritual and its underlying beliefs in magic and supernatural forces had faded away by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Education, science and the development of communications made the world a very different place. David Vincent, in *Literacy and Popular Culture* (1989) describes the social and technological changes that occurred in England and their effects on popular culture in the period from 1750 to the First World War. While faith in religion survived this transformation, folk magic and its concomitant belief systems moved to the periphery of people's lives, surviving only in vague references to black cats, good luck charms and the like. The reason for this may lie, at least in part, with the very different nature of the two systems. While religion is an open and public attempt to communicate with and propitiate a god, magic operates in secret and seeks to manipulate supernatural powers for personal advantage.

This story has many remarkable facets, and I suspect that not all of them have yet been revealed. But it is clear that for a great many years Australia's old houses and buildings contained and kept a mysterious secret with the power to alter our view of history. The truth is out now but much research remains to be done. And the task of reinterpreting social history remains. The rediscovery of ancient beliefs that survived well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century has the potential to provide a new understanding of the state of mind of Australians in the period before the 1930s. I believe that this practice tells us something about Australians in the period from 1788 to the 1930s of which we would otherwise have been unaware. In the shoes of their children and all the members of their family, tucked carefully into voids in the houses where they lived, those Australians have sent us a message that they have expressed in no other manner. They were afraid that their children would be taken and they took steps to protect them from unseen and unknown horrors. Cracked, broken and worn they may be, but these old shoes and boots have stories to tell. Unaccompanied by any written explanation, they speak nevertheless of a time when people lived in fear of the scratch, the infected tooth, the rotting appendix or the fever that would carry away their children. Further research raises the possibility of other discoveries and new insights into the secret lives of Australians when this country was young. In the United Kingdom and elsewhere, efforts could be made to trace this practice further back in time, to seek answers to questions raised in this thesis and to explore the use of concealments in Continental Europe, North America, New Zealand and elsewhere

in the English-speaking world. We should know more about the concealment of cats and how they were killed and about the inter-relationship between organised religion and folk magic. In Australia we should look for other folk magic practices that survived in the United Kingdom until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and which may have travelled here.

There are numerous questions about this practice that remain without answers. Why do so many concealments consist of only one shoe? What happened to the other shoe? Does the single, concealed shoe signify that a contract had been entered into? If so, with whom or what? Did the breaking up of the pair of shoes and the concealment of one in a void beyond ordinary, everyday reach represent the ritual killing of shoes, thus sending them into the world of the spirits? Are there Australian witch bottles from the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> centuries waiting to be found?

Further research inevitably raises the issue of the need for a continuing record of finds of concealed objects throughout Australia. I have carried out this role since 2004 but any consistent research programme from this time onwards should involve a systematic record of finds. This would usefully be a website where members of the public could forward details of finds which would be vetted before being posted on-line. In my view funding for this purpose should be sought from a Federal Government agency: the issue is national history and identity. Data recorded in this manner would include images of finds, an image of the location, details of the find, its present location and some means of contacting the present owner of the object. Artifacts could thus be available for continuing research. Such a resource would enable international scholars to compare Australian finds with research programmes conducted elsewhere.

The finds made in voids and caches throughout Australia provide valuable personal, historical and artifactual information and are probable indicators of the depth and extent of this practice in other parts of the world. In the case of the shoes found, these constitute a catalogue of Australian footwear of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the light of the lack of explanatory contemporary documentation of concealment, the objects found assume enhanced significance, making their identification, retrieval and recording a matter of some importance. Some of the garments found constitute the only record we have of particular items of convict clothing. We owe the survival of these unique garments to those anonymous persons who concealed them in the Commissariats and houses occupied by members of the colonial administration. We would have been so much the poorer as a society had these garments not come down to us in their time capsules in the buildings where convicts and their overseers lived and worked. Rainer Atzbach, writing in the context of discoveries in Germany, put the case for the careful recording of finds of concealed objects in old buildings:

These sealed time capsules represent an important source of research on the past. They not only provide a rounding off of the known spectrum of finds; but due to their good preservation, they also permit completely new insights

into their production and use. Almost as important is their direct connection to historically tangible people, recorded in written sources as inhabitants of the houses. Hardly any other source permits such an intimate look into the past.<sup>8</sup>

At least two informed observers have reported that objects continue to be concealed in British buildings to this day, although these concealments are almost certainly performed without understanding of the origin of the practice. In East Anglia, and perhaps in other parts of the British Isles, a number of builders secrete objects in old houses. Easton gained the confidence of two older members of local building firms who told him of continuing concealments:

I have two first-hand accounts given to me by operators in the building trades of the secretion of objects under floors and behind cast iron fireplaces. Both men had worked for a time in the 1950s and '60s in traditional East Anglian family firms and had witnessed what the other relatives were doing.<sup>9</sup>

Matthew Champion of Fakenham, North Norfolk, is a consultant on historic buildings and from time to time acts as a project manager for English Heritage in conservation work on their East Anglian properties. He advises that:

... local builders, all over East Anglia, still put concealments in modern jobs. That said, they appear to do it more often when working on older properties rather than new. If you ask them why they do it – they will just say that it is traditional. Any obvious and overt ritual meaning has been lost. They do it, not because it will offer protection to the property, or the inhabitants, but simply because it has always been done.<sup>10</sup>

While many questions remain, a start has been made on decoding this practice. After more than 220 years of European habitation of this country we now know that an ancient and secret ritual was transplanted onto Australian soil and that it thrived and survived here until at least the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As this research was drawing to a close preliminary evidence for the use of apotropaic marks on old Australian houses and buildings began to emerge. The 1851 stables building at *Shene*, Bagdad, Tasmania, was found to contain the first “daisy wheel” apotropaic mark discovered in Australia. Another has been found at Collingwood, Victoria. At Lewisham, Tasmania, a consecration cross on a door in an inn of 1825 is a further indication of the role of magic in everyday life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia. Concealed objects and apotropaic marks are beginning to reveal a history that has not so far been found in the documentary record. These finds raise the possibility of other discoveries of the same variety. The need for further research is clearly indicated. The story of the role of folk magic in everyday life in Australia in the period from 1788 to circa 1935 is emerging from material culture and it is there that further discoveries may be awaiting the researcher.

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## SIX: CONCLUSIONS

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#### APPENDIX ONE: CATALOGUE OF CONCEALED OBJECT FINDS

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