

Introduction

Buildings contain many secrets and hidden histories concealed from the human eye. We may think we know our homes intimately and then one day renovations, the cleaning of an old chimney, or the investigation of an obscure corner of the rafters, reveals objects that intrigue, raise questions, and sometimes unsettle.¹ Old clothes, shoes, bones, desiccated animals, human bodies, money, figurines, bottles, playing cards, books, newspapers, old documents, knives, horseshoes, animal hearts, holed stones, bits of old iron, and prehistoric stone tools have all been found over the centuries. Some were intended to be recovered by their concealers, some were left for posterity, some were never intended to be revealed again, and some were merely accidental losses. In the past some such finds were considered curious enough to be deemed newsworthy, particularly with the rise of regional and local newspapers from the mid-nineteenth century. In 1921, for instance, the *Lancashire Daily Post* reported that during the renovation of the now Grade II listed Admiralty Cottage, Broadstairs, workmen found under the floorboards some coins of George III, some old visiting cards, a pack of playing cards and an old military pike head.² A few items found their way into the curio collections of the numerous local museums that sprang up across the country, but many such finds went unrecorded or were thrown away as household rubbish.

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

By the late 1990s, university academics were finally starting to take an interest in the work of these pioneers. Inspired by June Swann's endeavours, in 1998 Dinah Eastop set up The Deliberately Concealed Garments Project, based at the Textile Conservation Centre, which

¹ This research for this book was kindly funded by the Leverhulme Trust as part of the research project, 'Inner Lives: Emotions, Identity, and the Supernatural, 1300-1900'. Grant reference: RPG-2015-180.

² *Lancashire Daily Post*, 20 May 1921.

was then part of the University of Southampton. With the project receiving significant funding from various sources, including the then Arts and Humanities Research Board (the AHRC today), the subject of concealments was finally being recognised through academic peer review.³ Over in America, the historian and ethnographer Robert Blair St. George's book *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture* (1998), made a significant theoretical contribution by considering concealed finds in relation to the venerable idea of the home as analogous with the human body, with its openings and vulnerabilities to external threats. Around the same time the anthropologist and historical archaeologist Amy Gavin-Schwarz published important reassessments of the archaeological interpretation of everyday ritual and methodological approaches to folkloric material culture.⁴ And, in 2004, the initial results of Brian Hoggard's postal survey of over 600 British museums, archaeology units, and builders firms was published in an academic collection of essays that emphasised the importance of the continued belief in witchcraft and magic beyond the era of the witch trials.⁵

The third wave of research was defined by the first raft of PhDs and postgraduate dissertations to emerge on the topic between 2010 and 2015.⁶ Those by Ian Evans, Cynthia Riley Auge and M. Chris Manning shifted the parameters significantly by looking at the migration (or not) of British concealment practices to Australia and North America. While colonial era American sources had long confirmed the use of witch bottles and other British apotropaic practices like horseshoes, awareness of the material evidence was limited.⁷ Australia was a blank canvas until Evans' extensive and ongoing fieldwork generated a wealth of material finds that mirror most of the British evidence of building deposits. In 2014 the first PhD study of English concealments, Freya Massey's, 'Ritualisation and Reappropriation: Special Deposits and Ritual Activity in Domestic Structures in Early Modern England', produced the most extensive and methodologically rigorous survey of the data since Merrifield's book, with a focus, like Auge, on the relationship between objects, homes, and their inhabitants in early modern society. In the same year a thematic issue of the journal *Historical Archaeology*, guest edited by Christopher Fennell and M. Chris Manning, and dedicated to Ralph Merrifield, brought together a series of papers on material aspects of domestic magic in colonial and modern America that included an article by Tim Easton on spiritual middens. The following year Ronald Hutton put together a state-of-the-field edited

³ <https://www.concealedgarments.org/>

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

⁵ Brian Hoggard, 'The archaeology of counter-witchcraft and popular magic', in Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt (eds), *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, 2003). See also, Hoggard, *Magical House Protection: The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft* (New York, 2019).

⁶ Jonathan Duck, 'The Profane and the Sacred: Expressions of Belief in the Domestic Buildings of Southern Fenland, circa 1500 to 1700 AD', PhD thesis, University of Leicester 2015; Ian J. Evans, 'Touching magic. Deliberately concealed objects in old Australian houses and buildings', PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, NSW, 2010; V. Lloyd, 'The ritual protection of buildings in East Anglia, 1500-1800', MA thesis, University of Durham, 1997; Freya Massey, 'Ritualisation and Reappropriation: Special Deposits and Ritual Activity in Domestic Structures in Early Modern England', PhD thesis, Sheffield University, 2014; M. Chris Manning, 'Homemade Magic: Concealed Deposits in Architectural Contexts in the Eastern United States', MA dissertation, Ball State University, 2012; Cynthia Riley Auge, 'Silent sentinels: Archaeology, magic, and the gendered control of domestic boundaries in New England, 1620-1725', PhD, University of Montana, 2013.

⁷ As well as Robert Blair St. George, Christopher C. Fennell has been a pioneer here. See his, *Crossroads and Cosmologies: Diasporas and Ethnogenesis in the New World* (Gainesville, 2007).

collection on British concealments and building marks that reached across the three waves of British researchers.⁸

After an early flurry of interest in the first half of the twentieth century, research on the European continent has been slower and more sporadic. The work of Rainer Atzbach in the early 2000s introduced a more rigorously critical archaeological approach to the interpretation of organic concealed finds in central Europe, and Peter Carelli's 1997 reassessment of thunder stones as domestic deposits in Scandinavia gave new impetus to the deposition of prehistoric stone tools in historic contexts.⁹ A flourishing body of original research on European material has been appearing over the last few years, though.¹⁰ Baltic scholars have been particularly active, and most recently the archaeologist Sonja Hukantaival has pushed forward the study of building concealment traditions with a detailed survey of the rich literary and material evidence in Finland. She makes a welcome call, echoing Gavin-Schwarz, for historical archaeologists to be more sensitive to expressions of folk religion and its rituals in the material record of the past.¹¹

In the meantime, the spread of the internet has proliferated public knowledge about and engagement with the subject through websites such as those maintained by Brian Hoggard, the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project, and the History Pin Concealed Revealed virtual museum. Back in the 1970s and 1980s most of the limited body of published research was in specialist newsletters that have now been digitised and made freely available.¹² In recent years social media platforms have also enabled the regular dissemination of finds shortly after discovery by professionals and members of the public. But the democratisation of knowledge enabled by the internet has also generated new challenges to those researching in the field. Informed suppositions developed over the decades are now bandied around as accepted facts. The theory of survivals, which will be discussed in the next chapter, permeates online discourse about building concealment traditions. Since 2004 the term 'witch

⁸ 'Manifestations of Magic: The Archaeology and Material Culture of Folk Religion', *Historical Archaeology* 48(3) (2014), 1-200; Ronald Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain: A Feeling for Magic* (London, 2015).

⁹ See the collection of essays in Ingolf Ericsson and Rainer Atzbach (eds), *Depotfunde aus Gebäuden in Zentraleuropa: Concealed finds from buildings in Central Europe* (Berlin 2005); Rainer Atzbach, 'The concealed finds from the Mühlberg-Ensemble in Kempten (southern Germany): Post-medieval archaeology on the second floor', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 46 (2012) 252-80; P. Carelli, 'Thunder and lightning, magical miracles. On the popular myth of thunderbolts and the presence of Stone Age artefacts in medieval deposits', in H. Andersson, P. Carelli, L. Ersgård (eds), *Visions of the Past: Trends and traditions in Swedish medieval archaeology* (Stockholm, 1997), pp. 393-417.

¹⁰ See, for example, Marion Dowd, 'Bewitched by an Elf Dart: Fairy Archaeology, Folk Magic and Traditional Medicine in Ireland', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 28 (2018) 451-73; Iris Nießen, 'Building Sacrifices and Magical Protection: A Study in canton of Grisons (CH)', in Christiane Bis-Worch and Claudia Theune (eds), *Religion, cults & rituals in the medieval rural environment* (Leiden, 2017), 325-36; Morten Søvnsø, 'Votive offerings in buildings from rural settlements. Folk beliefs with deeper roots', in Bis-Worch and Claudia Theune (eds), *Religion, cults & rituals*, pp. 227-47; Beatrix Nutz, 'Peasants and Servants': Deliberately Concealed Garments, Textiles and Textile Tools from a Rural Farm Building', in Milena Bravermanová, Helena Březinová and Jane Malcolm-Davies (eds), *Archaeological Textiles – Links Between Past and Present NESAT XIII* (Liberec-Praha, 2017), pp. 207-16; Lenka Uličná, 'Modern Genizot: "Sacred Trash" Reconsidered', *Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo* 7 (2019), 143-154.

¹¹ Sonja Hukantaival, *For a Witch Cannot Cross Such a Threshold': Building Concealment Traditions in Finland c. 1200-1950* (Turku, 2016); Sonja Hukantaival, 'The Goat and the Cathedral – Archaeology of Folk Religion in Medieval Turku', *Mlratör* 19 (2018) 67-83.

¹² Timothy Easton has, for example, helpfully made digitised copies of his articles available: <https://independent.academia.edu/TimothyEaston>

mark' to describe various incised marks found in wooden and stone structures has become pervasive in digital and print media, even though the leading experts on the subject dislike the term. The viral spread of misleading terms with regard to popular 'tradition' is not a new phenomenon. We see it with the term 'witch post', and as will be discussed later, with the popularity of 'witch balls'.¹³ We do not see such cultural issues as necessarily problematic, though, but rather as an aspect of ethnographical and historical processes that need recording and study. The invention and reinvention of traditions regarding building magic and ritual is ongoing and central to this book. Interpretations and terminology need to be challenged but not necessarily as a censorious, debunking mission.

Rise of the modern home

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

The fabric of the interior of houses, as well as the structure, also undoubtedly changed significantly for many. To begin with, the removal of central open hearths and the adoption of lateral wall fireplaces began in the fourteenth century in London and had become widely adopted by the seventeenth century, giving rise to the age of chimneys in domestic architecture. As interior spaces became increasingly divided up from the old open hall structure, fireplaces multiplied in homes, heating different parts of buildings with different functions, such as cooking and sleeping areas. The hearth and chimney provided new social and psychological focal points as well as potential concealment spaces and entry points. The creation of first and second stories in domestic buildings began in urban areas in the late medieval period to maximise space and create rentable living quarters, though many rural homes remained ground floor structures into the modern era. A second floor required the addition of stairs and this, again, created new domestic spaces, while living and sleeping quarters moved closer to the roof.

¹³ On the problem of 'witch posts' see Owen Davies, 'The Material Culture of Post-Medieval Domestic Magic in Europe: Evidence, Comparisons and Interpretations', in Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer (eds), *The Materiality of Magic* (Paderborn, 2015), pp. 402-3.

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

Floors in early medieval homes were generally of beaten earth and clay or compacted chalk. The placing of flag stones and tiles (under which things could be buried), began to spread during the sixteenth century. While wooden planks had long been used as flooring between ground and upper floors in multi-story buildings, suspended timber ground floors began to proliferate in vernacular housing during the eighteenth century for damp-proofing.¹⁵ Such wooden floors provided an insulation gap, but also a greater fire risk. Until tongue-and-groove joinery became a common flooring practice, the boards were nailed or pegged down to the joists and so they contracted and expanded due to heat and moisture. Gaps opened and closed between the boards for accidental and potential deliberate concealment and disposal on a seasonal basis. In some buildings attic boards were not nailed down at all. Investigations at a Tyrolian farmhouse dating back to the sixteenth century found that the space under the extensive attic floor had been used as a disposal and concealment site for centuries by simply lifting up the boards, which had never been fixed. Finds ranged from a late sixteenth-century pilgrims badge to plastic hairpins and ice cream punnet spoons. Public refuse disposal in the area was introduced only as late as 1974 and the use of voids in the farm and its buildings was clearly part of domestic waste disposal activity – what Rainer Atzbach has described as ‘inner-house middens’.¹⁶ Beatrix Nutz, who has assessed the evidence from the Tyrolian farmhouse, observes well, though, that ‘to throw something away is a conscious decision too’.¹⁷

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

It was not only architecture and building practices that changed the way people experienced and interacted with their domestic environment. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also provide clear evidence of how Catholic devotion began to spread from church to the home. The rise of print, technical advances in ceramic production, and miniaturisation, meant that religious imagery, texts, and objects, once only found in religious establishments, were domesticated.¹⁹ Piety was represented in the display of pipe-clay images of the saints, for

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

¹⁶ Nutz, ‘Peasants and Servants’, pp. 207-16; Atzbach, ‘The concealed finds from the Mühlberg-Ensemble’, p. 275.

¹⁷ Nutz, ‘Peasants and Servants’, p. 214.

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

¹⁹ David Gaimster, ‘Pots, Prints, and Protestantism: Changing Mentalities in the Urban Domestic Sphere, c. 1480-1580’, in David Gaimster and Roberta Gilchrist (eds), *The archaeology of Reformation, 1480-1580* (Leeds, 2003), pp. 122-44; Alexandra Walsham, ‘Domesticating the Reformation: Material Culture, Memory, and

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

Come the Reformation and Protestant populations were warned that such objects were pernicious Catholic 'superstition' and not to be tolerated. Still, in Protestant popular culture the private ownership of the Bible, which was encouraged by the Protestant churches in contrast to Catholic obscurantism at the time, became the preeminent and often only religious symbol in the home. It also became an important aspect of domestic protection. The Bible was considered to have talismanic properties. It was reported from nineteenth-century Wales, for example, that on the larger farms a Bible was locked in a chest to protect the house from harm.²² Other pious literature served a similar purpose. Well into the nineteenth century, cheap, printed pious broadsides known as Heaven or Saviour's letters were pasted on British cottage walls for the protection of women in childbirth and more generally against witchcraft. They contained apocryphal legends, prayers, and a chain letter instruction that the text had to be copied and passed on to be efficacious.²³ But personal Bibles also held sentimental and emotional value, which might have led to their secretion rather than because they were thought to have protective properties. This is the more likely explanation for a curious cache reported in the 1820s. Builders pulling down a ruined building near Maidstone, Kent, in 1823, found in the wall a large earthen vase with a closed lid, wrapped in folds of leather and linen cloth. Opening the vase they found a Bible in old font, and on the blank pages various memoranda of a gentleman's travels that appeared to date to the mid sixteenth century. There were also two coins, one Roman, and the other a copper coin of Elizabeth's reign.²⁴

So, what we think of as the 'normal' house today has its origins in the architectural, economic, and religious developments of the early modern era. But we also need to understand the development of the house in terms of cultural and inter-personal

Confessional Identity in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Quarterly* 69 (2016) 566-616; Abigail Brundin, Deborah Howard, and Mary Laven, *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 2018).

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

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

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

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

²⁴ *The Cambrian*, 18 October 1823.

relationships.²⁵ Generational shifts in the lives of an ever expanding rural and then urban population were shaped as architectural developments and building practices transformed the domestic sphere and how inhabitants felt about their homes and each other - the ways in which they were negotiated as emotional, social, and gendered spaces.²⁶ The creation of separate bedrooms, for example, generated new geographies of privacy. As Irene Cieraad's work illustrates, the expansion of glass windows and the nature of their design changed women's domestic relationships with the public gaze.²⁷ In his influential essay 'Bridge and Door' (1909) the pioneering German sociologist Georg Simmel explored how house doors, and also their multiplication internally, created further levels of domestic decision-making as to leaving them open or closed. This was, in turn, revealing of social connectivity and the liminality of external and internal thresholds. Such developments also had an influence on relations with the supernatural or preternatural world. Relations with neighbours suspected of witchcraft, and the opportunities for bewitchment were determined, in part, by levels of access to parts of the home or related buildings.²⁸ The same developments likewise determined the focal points for external spirit threats, with any gaps, holes, or external visibility of the interior, however tiny, proving vulnerable entry points.

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

Aboveground archaeology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Under floorboard archaeology is now properly recorded and detritus redefined as assemblages. One of the major advances in the discipline was the Australian excavation of the Hyde Park Barracks in the early 1980s, which uncovered some 80,000 items from under the second and third floors of the main Barracks building, revealing the depositional variations from accidental loss and concealment, as well as the hoarding strategies of rats as unwitting curators of the past.³¹ Work on various sites in Central Europe during the early 2000s has provided further important insights and approaches.³² Excavation under the floorboards of the convent of the order of St Clare in Ribnitz, for instance, revealed around 7000 finds from the 'nuns' dust' dating mostly from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, including the usual loss objects such as pins, nails, book clasps, cutlery, rings, and textile fabrics, as well as food waste, rats and mice. Several devout texts and personal prayers on pieces of rolled or folded paper were more likely deliberately placed in specific locations.³³ In England, more recently, the blog of the Archaeology National Trust Southwest, sub-headed 'discoveries from under floors and turf, stories of past lives, the ordinary and extraordinary', provides a vivid account of the finds recovered from pulling up floorboards at National Trust properties. Knole House, a National Trust property in Kent has been subject to extensive surveying of its historic graffiti, ritual marks, and above ground archaeological finds.³⁴

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

³⁰ See, for example, Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (ed.), *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings* (Farnham, 2010). ... Handbook material culture.

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

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

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

³⁴ <https://archaeologynationaltrustsw.wordpress.com/category/under-the-floor/>; Nathalie Cohen and Frances Parton, *Knole Revealed: Archaeology and Discovery at a Great Country House* (London, 2019). See also <http://blog.underoverarch.co.nz/2018/03/under-the-ground-over-the-ground-and-under-the-floor/>.

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

contemporary desire to read ritual into revealed concealments. Move on over a century and one of our correspondents in the building trade explained in a similar vein:

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

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

What may look like a ritual deposit of items in a wall cavity or void may just be a whimsical selection of rubbish left by builders or previous occupiers. The tinder box found bricked up a chimney of a cottage in Mortimer West End, Hampshire, was likely a lark or the result of an unintentional loss when builders modernised the property in 1900.³⁷ Such losses and pragmatic depositions can appear quite bizarre at first. Several instances have been recorded over the last few years in Georgia, USA, for instance, where stashes of hundreds of human teeth have been found in the wall cavities of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century buildings.³⁸ This was not some macabre ritual of dark magic, however, but an insanitary if convenient means of disposing of human waste in buildings that were formerly occupied by dentists.

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁰ *Irish Press*, 23 June 1937.

⁴¹ P. Armitage, 'The use of animal bones as building material in post-medieval Britain', in D. Serjeantson and T. Waldron (eds), *Diet and Crafts in Towns: The Evidence of Animal Remains from the Roman to the post-medieval periods* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 147-60.

⁴² <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/builder-discovers-terrifying-secret-behind-160626821.html>;

http://gothamist.com/2015/06/24/inside_tenement_museum_walls.php#photo-1. Thanks to Malcolm Gaskill for these references.

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

The Treasure Act of 1996 replaced the centuries-old law of Treasure Trove in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Scotland had its own variant statute covering the matter. Dating back to medieval times it was the duty of coroners to hold an inquest over the finding in the ground or other hiding place of any old gold and silver in the form of coins, bullion, or plate where the original concealer was clearly long-deceased and unidentifiable. The role of the jury was to determine whether such gold and silver valuables were deposited with the clear intention of recovery. If so, then the treasure belonged to the Crown. If it was determined that the treasure was buried or concealed without any intention to recover it then the valuables belonged to the finder or the owner of the land or property where they were found.

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

Builders sometimes got into dispute when finding such stashes. When Glasgow contractors tore down a tenement and took away £122 hidden in the chimney, the owner shadowed the builder day and night until it was returned to him.⁴⁹ The challenge of determining whether concealed gold and silver coins in houses were treasure trove is well illustrated by the inquest conducted by the coroner for the North Riding of Yorkshire in 1896. Four labourers on the huge estate of Lord Feversham were engaged with pulling down an old thatched cottage. Underneath the thatch they found thirty gold coins dating between 1509 and 1625. The place of concealment had been marked by a piece of white mortar. Lord Feversham's solicitor contended, therefore, that the evidence showed the coins were not hidden in a secret place: 'as men in those days could not avail themselves of savings banks they would naturally concoct some place to keep their money, and the mortar mark indicated where it had been placed for security.' So, according to this specious argument, there was no right of treasure trove as the coins had not been hidden per se, and the coins were merely kept as in a domestic safe in modern terms. He argued, furthermore, that the labourers had no claim as Lord Feversham merely employed them as simple workmen on his property. The solicitor

⁴⁴ *The Sun*, 30 July 1794.

⁴⁵ *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 24 November 1827.

⁴⁶ *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 20 February 1848.

⁴⁷ *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, 3 January 1889.

⁴⁸ *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 27 May 1907.

⁴⁹ *Wicklow People*, 3 December 1910.

representing the Crown made no great speeches and merely instructed the jury to use their common sense. After deliberating for a quarter of an hour the jury returned with the verdict that the coins were not treasure trove but that the finders' rights belonged to the four labourers.⁵⁰

Lord Feversham's solicitor was quite right to point out that before the rise of popular deposit banking and personal insurance during the nineteenth century it was commonplace to conceal money and other valuables around the home to prevent them being easily stolen by thieves. Consider the South Bedfordshire carpenter engaged in splitting up old beams from farm houses his boss had been commissioned to demolish in the vicinity of Park Street in 1886. In one he found two skilfully drilled holes covered with wooden plugs in which were hidden over a hundred coins from the reigns of Henry VI to Henry the VIII.⁵¹ As well as to prevent thievery, there were other reasons to conceal gold and silver coins, such as fending off avaricious family members. In 1923 in the case of a marital dispute heard before the Southend Police Court, a woman unwittingly destroyed her husband's savings. Fed up with all her relatives staying in their crowded house and sponging off him, he was in the habit of hiding money up the chimney - until she lit a fire one day.⁵² Some venerable concealed coin hoards were also, no doubt, the result of robberies in the distant and more immediate past.

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

⁵⁰ *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 18 March 1896.

⁵¹ *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 23 February 1886.

⁵² *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 26 November 1923.

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

⁵⁴ *Morning Post*, 21 May 1886.

⁵⁵ *Cornishman*, 4 June 1919.

⁵⁶ *Nottingham Evening Post*, 1 April 1940.

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

Things lost and stolen, things concealed as pranks or for waste disposal, things secreted as a result of hoarding and personal banking; if we are looking for ritual explanations for any concealments then there is a lot of background noise to eliminate before detecting evidence for ritual. The concealment of any object attracts multiple explanations that we cannot divine from the material evidence alone, unless there is a literary record of its deposition. Consider, for example, the two Bibles, one dated 1812 the other 1821, found in the thatch of a fisherman's cottage in Porthleven, Cornwall, during demolition work in 1940. Were they placed there to protect the home from lightning or evil spirits? Were they stolen goods stashed in the thatch and never recovered? Perhaps they were deposited there mischievously by children rebelling against a stifling religious household.⁵⁸ We just do not know, and a ritual interpretation is no more or less convincing than the others. In a recent assessment of approaches to building concealments three Australian historical archaeologists have provided a welcome take on the issue. They concluded that, 'the murkier middle ground – a space that allows us to accept that such beliefs might be possible, but also to question them critically – is a much more difficult locale to inhabit.' This is very true as interpretations have become entrenched and little questioned. They went on to suggest that, 'archaeology is perhaps the only means we have to explore this space, since it is one about which the documentary and oral histories remain frustratingly silent.'⁵⁹ As this book seeks to show, though, the documentary evidence is not as silent as has been assumed. There are ample archival sources to help contextualise and reappraise the material evidence, if you know where to look and how to analyse them. The aim of this book, then, is to re-assess the archaeology evidence, apply the necessary historical research, and cast a contemporary folkloristic gaze over the material. Such a multidisciplinary approach requires us to consider the terminologies used by different disciplines, and to situate the different classes of finds in novel contexts.⁶⁰ We will think in terms of folk science as well as folk religion and folk magic, and explore the relevance of different registers of belief and emotion, such as luck, wellbeing, and memorialisation. The material finds will also be considered holistically in terms of their individual and collective object biographies, from their concealment to their uncovering and curation.⁶¹ What these approaches reveal is an ongoing story of the reinvention and re-enchantment of the material past.

⁵⁷ *The Scotsman*, 15 September 1860.

⁵⁸ *Western Morning News*, 7 February 1940.

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

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

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