Ritual, Recycling and Recontextualization: Putting the Concealed Shoe into Context

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The concealed shoe is, possibly by design, shrouded in mystery. All that is known for certain on this subject is that a large number of shoes, usually old and damaged, were concealed in various, unconventional locations within buildings throughout England, and that this practice was particularly popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Other than these few facts, all other information on the subject is speculation. With no contemporaneous written sources on the practice of concealing shoes, this article will utilize the archaeological evidence in order to ascertain the motivations behind the act of concealment. An analysis of two case studies of concealed shoe caches from North Yorkshire, with a particular focus on their locations and conditions, will hopefully prove invaluable in the investigation into this unusual practice, together with an examination of the relevant folk beliefs and superstitions of the period. It will also be questioned where the concealed shoe stands in relation to our everyday classificatory systems. As a marginal, mutable object, the concealed shoe boasts a highly complex biography, calling into question the pertinence of such categories as valuable/rubbish, and particular attention will be given to the shoes' numerous recontextualizations, from practical footwear, to apotropaic device, to archaeological artefact; transitions which I have dubbed 'ritual recycling'.

It was in the 1950s when June Swann, former Keeper of the Boot and Shoe Collection of Northampton Museum, first noticed a recurring pattern in the finds being donated to her department (Swann 1996, 56). A wide range of footwear, dating primarily from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, was brought to her attention, having been discovered in unusual locations within buildings. It appeared that these shoes had been deliberately concealed, and Swann took it upon herself to gather as much data as possible on this unfamiliar, previously unstudied phenomenon. As the numbers of these finds multiplied, it became increasingly obvious that the concealing of shoes was a widespread practice. In 1969, Swann listed 129 such shoes; by 1986, the number had grown to 700 (Merrifield 1987, 133); by 1996, 1100 such finds had been recorded, the vast majority of them found in England (Figs. 1 & 2).

The evidently widespread practice of shoe concealment — despite having attracted a wealth of scholarly theories and modern interpretations — still remains a mystery to us, simply because no contemporaneous written record has been found explaining the practice. Why were such shoes concealed and what were the concealers hoping to achieve? The subject of the concealed shoe is an enigma, and it is this very mystery that makes concealment such an intriguing subject. With no written sources to utilize, it is the shoes themselves that will offer the most useful testimony. Thus, using the archaeological evidence (including two new case studies) together with any relevant folkloric sources, I hope to unearth the motivations behind this seemingly illogical, mysterious practice. The core aim of this article is to ascertain the purpose of these concealed shoes and to put them into context using all the resources at my disposal.

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Figure 1. *Shoe discovered in a fireplace, Corfe Castle, Dorset*, c. *1650–75. (From Merrifield 1987, fig. 42; © courtesy of Batsford.)*



Figure 2. *Shoe found in the chimney breast of a cottage in Peaslake, Surrey*, c. *1670–80. (From Merrifield 1987, fig. 43; © courtesy of Batsford.)*

The case studies

Case study 1 is from Ilkley and case study 2 is from Otley. Both towns, only six miles apart, are situated in Wharfedale, North Yorkshire. In limiting myself to two case studies, I aim to provide very concise reference points from which to explore the more general subject of shoe concealment, by comparing (and contrasting, if necessary) these specific examples to the vast catalogue of concealed shoes already compiled. In my choice of location — North Yorkshire — I hope to rectify the geographic biases so glaringly evident in previous studies. The works of Dinah Eastop (2001), a leading scholar in textile conservation, and archaeologist Ralph Merrifield provide the primary corpus of material on ritual concealment, but the vast majority of their case studies are in the southern counties of England. Such a south-centric focus may lead one to believe that shoe concealment was not practised in northern England, however, a map of Otley (Fig. 3), highlighting the number of concealed shoes discovered in the relatively small town, should certainly put that misguided notion to rest.

The location of case study 1 is Lane End Farmhouse, Middleton, Ilkley, in which two shoes, concealed separately, were discovered: a man's court shoe and a child's 'clog' (Fig. 4). For the sake of brevity, only one will be present in this article (hereafter ILKLEY 1). The building itself (Fig. 5) is a late seventeenth-century farmhouse, part of the Middleton Estate and, according to the records compiled by Swann, 42.6 per cent of concealed shoes have been found in rural cottages and 10.9 per cent in farm buildings (Swann 1996, 57),[1] so this is certainly not atypical. Also in keeping with Swann's records are the dates of the shoes; both are of Victorian style and, as the graph shows (Fig. 6), the years between 1800 and 1899 were by the far the most popular for the practice of concealing shoes (Hoggard 2004, 179).

ILKLEY 1 (Fig. 7) is a child's leather shoe (or 'clog'), with wooden soles and seven sets of eyelets. The shoe measures 17.4 cm in length, 6.2 cm in width at its widest point, and 8.9 cm in height at the heel. The condition of the shoe is old and worn, with a large hole in the toe. It appears to have been a straight shoe as was common for nineteenth-century children's shoes (Swann 1996, 65), but there is more wear on the left side implying that it may have been worn more often on the left foot. The leather upper is nailed onto a wooden sole, which is a common style for shoes that were meant to be hard-wearing, and there are no adornments. This style of wooden-soled clog was particularly popular amongst the working classes in the northern counties of England during the eighteenth century (as Dr Pococke wrote in his *Travels through England*: 1750 [1888], 44–5), and it remained widespread throughout the nineteenth century also, only fading out of use in Lancashire and Yorkshire at the beginning of the twentieth century (Riello 2006, 34). ILKLEY 1, therefore, probably dates to no later than 1900. It was discovered on a ledge up inside the chimney breast (Fig. 8) by the farmhouse's previous owner in *c.* 1996.

The cache of case study 2 was discovered in 1994 in the roof space of 2–4 Market Street, Otley. This building seems to have originally been a barn or workshop before the town's redevelopment in the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, the body of the building was removed when cellars were dug and the building enlarged and, as the shoes in this cache date mainly to the 1860s, perhaps they were concealed during this renovation. The cache consists of a family

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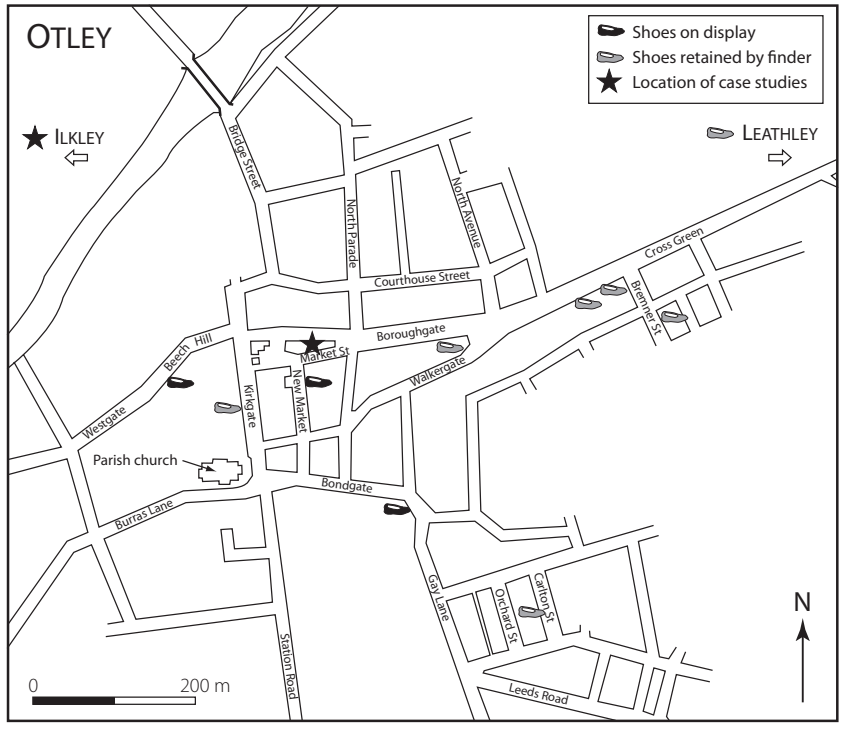


Figure 3. *Locations of concealed shoes in Otley. (Adapted from a map provided by Otley Museum.)*



Figure 4. *Shoes found in Lane End Farmhouse, Ilkley. Top: a child's 'clog' (ILKLEY 1: see also Fig. 7); bottom: a man's court shoe. (Photograph by C. Houlbrook.)*



Figure 5. *Lane End Farmhouse, Ilkley. (Photograph by Kate Armitage.)*

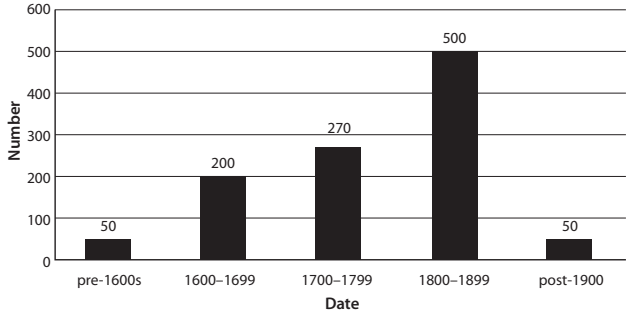


Figure 6. *Graph showing the dates of the concealed shoes currently discovered. (Based on the figures provided by Hoggard 2004, 179.)*

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Figure 7. *ILKLEY 1: a child's leather shoe (or 'clog'), with wooden soles and seven sets of eyelets. (Photograph by C. Houlbrook.)*

of five shoes (Fig. 9): a child's shoe, a woman's button boot, a man's court shoe with a black cotton bow, a man's court shoe with a latchet tie front, and a lace-up boot. Records at Northampton Museum list at least 28 examples of footwear caches that include shoes of men, women and children, which Eastop terms 'families' (2006, 247), so it is certainly not uncommon to find such large caches of shoes concealed together. For this article, however, only two shoes will be examined (hereafter OTLEY 1 and OTLEY 2).

OTLEY 1 (Fig. 10) is a child's leather ankle-strap shoe. It measures 17.5 cm in length, 4.5 cm in width at its widest point, and 6.4 cm in height at the heel. The material is brown leather with no adornments, the condition is old and worn, and, like ILKLEY 1, it seems to have been a straight shoe. The square-cut throat and the toe shape suggest that it was probably made in the 1860s, and the crudeness of the design implies that it was made for a working-class child, as do the numerous hobnails in the sole; Pehr Kalm, writing in 1748, observed that the shoes of labourers were 'strongly armed with iron ... knocked full of nails



Figure 8. *Fireplace in which ILKLEY 1 was found. (Photograph by Kate Armitage.)*

under the middle of the sole ... so that they can go with these a long time before they are worn out' (Kalm 1748 [1892], 244–5). OTLEY 1 was discovered in the roof space of a townhouse in Otley during renovations; the Keeper of the Otley Museum collection, Christine Dean, asked the builders to search for shoes while they were renovating. They had already disposed of one, but after her enquiry, five more were discovered.[2] OTLEY 1 was then donated to Otley Museum, where it was restored in 1994, catalogued as O/MP/ft/1, and placed into storage.

OTLEY 2 (Fig. 11) was also donated to Otley Museum in 1994, catalogued as O/MP/ft/5 and placed into storage, but, unlike the other four shoes of the cache, this shoe was left in its original state. Despite only the quarters and heel remaining, we can identify it as a lace-up boot, most likely a woman's, and probably also from the 1860s. The neat stitching on the heel appears to be the work of a sewing machine, and as the machine introduced for stitching boot uppers was not invented until 1857 (Harding 1934, 2), OTLEY 2 cannot have been made before this date. It appears to be a fairly standard working-class shoe with hobnail repairs, but its condition remains in such a poor state that no other noteworthy aspects of it can be ascertained or described.

Evidence of ritualistic behaviour?

It has been observed by Brück that, in the realm of archaeology, an action which appears irrational or non-functional is often equated with ritual, i.e. 'ritual is identified by default' (2006, 284). Therefore, while

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Figure 9. *Family of shoes (O/MP/ft/1–5) found in Otley. (Photograph by C. Houlbrook.)*



Figure 10. *Two views of OTLEY 1 (O/MP/ft/1), a child's ankle strap shoe, and a detail of its hobnailed sole. (Photographs by C. Houlbrook.)*



Figure 11. *Two views of OTLEY 2 (O/MP/ft/5), an unrestored lace-up boot, showing its hobnailed sole. (Photographs by C. Houlbrook.)*

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it is certainly true that the concealment of old shoes appears, at first glance, both irrational and non-functional, it would be negligent to assume that the practice of concealment can be classified as ritualistic behaviour based on this one observation. In order to determine whether or not the practice of concealment can be considered a ritual action, I must first clarify my criteria for ritualistic behaviour.

In the 1950s, anthropologist Nadel wrote that ritual is the 'formalism of action', action which exhibits a 'striking or incongruous rigidity' (1954, 99). For Firth, '[r]itual may be defined as a kind of patterned activity oriented towards control of human affairs, primarily symbolic in character' (1951, 222); for Goody, ritual refers to 'a category of standardized behaviour (custom) in which the relationship between the means and the end is not "intrinsic", i.e. is either irrational or non-rational' (1961, 159); and for Schechner, ritual is defined as an efficacious performance (2002, 613). Evidently, definitions of ritual are multi-faceted and there are no 'watertight lists of criteria', to use Brück's term (2006, 283). However, if I am to put the concealed shoe into context, an effort must be made to propose my own definition. And so, for this article, ritual is assumed to be a repetitive, habitual pattern of consciously and deliberately performed symbolic actions, employed for a specific function — usually to control, propitiate, protect from, or communicate with the supernatural.

With this definition in mind, it will now be my task to consider whether the practice of concealing shoes can indeed be classified as 'ritual', in order to more firmly contextualize the custom. That this practice was 'repetitive' and 'habitual' is certainly testified to by the sheer number of concealed shoes discovered, but a number of other questions must be considered.

Lack of written evidence

As has been noted previously, there is an absence of contemporaneous literature on the subject of the concealed shoe. A number of explanations may account for this. Perhaps it was a custom considered too banal to be worthy of attention or explanation; equally, it may have been viewed as an embarrassingly uncouth and ignorant practice, a subject outside the realms of polite society. Perhaps this was primarily a lower-class practice, and the absence of written sources is due to a lack of literacy on the part of the concealers themselves, as Eastop (2007b, 66) and Hoggard (2004, 167) suggest. Even the statistic that 9.4 per cent of concealed shoes have been discovered in manor houses and mansions (Swann 1996, 57) may not disprove that theory, as the concealers in these more wealthy households may not have been the upper-class occupants, but their servants.

Merrifield, however, rightly asks why would the learned men of the nineteenth century have written such a vast corpus of works on other superstitious beliefs, many of which were largely confined to the lower classes, and yet have ignored this practice, which was so obviously flourishing between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries? (1987, 133). The answer is simple: the secrecy surrounding this practice was an integral, rather than incidental, part of the practice itself. Swann, having failed to uncover any solid evidence for the motivations behind this practice, wrote that that she 'eventually realized that ... the secrecy continually encountered suggests that the superstition, if disclosed, ceases to be effective' (1996, 67). The importance of secrecy is certainly in keeping with other rituals. Luhrmann, writing of modern-day wiccans, notes that magical practice 'requires secrecy in order to be effective', and that the 'reasoning behind this hinges on the partly unspoken assumption that power is a tangible emanation, somehow connected to oneself, which dissolves in the open, public air' (1989, 251). Lack of written evidence, therefore, may actually *aid* me in my classification of the concealed shoe as a ritual object; the practice of concealment was kept secret because it was a ritual that would lose its power once made public.

The locations of the shoes

According to my definition, for the act of concealment to constitute ritualistic behaviour, each action must have been performed 'consciously and deliberately'. Although I cannot claim certainty, it seems highly unlikely that accidental losses can account for my case studies, especially considering their locations. That OTLEY 1 and 2 would accidentally find themselves in the roof space with three other shoes, none of them paired, seems implausible; that ILKLEY 1 could have been carefully placed on a narrow ledge within the chimney breast by pure chance seems even less likely. If they were concealed deliberately, however, then what was the purpose of their concealment?

The locations of the shoes provide us with a vital clue. OTLEY 1 and 2 were concealed within the roof space, while ILKLEY 1 was deposited in the chimney breast. These are both very common locations for concealed shoes, with 26.2 per cent of recorded concealed shoes discovered in/near chimneys, hearths and ovens, and 22.86 per cent discovered under floors or above ceilings, with the roof space being the fourth most popular place for concealment (Eastop 2006, 246). One thing unites these different locations: their liminality.

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The roof space of a building, with its peripheral location separating sky from house, represents marginality (Lloyd *et al*. 2001, 69). The chimney also inhabits that indeterminable, transitional area between inside/outside; a grey area that is, according to Mary Douglas, dangerous; '[d]anger lies in transitional states', she writes, 'simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable' (1966, 96). However, from the perspective of a person living in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was not necessarily the liminal nature of the roof space and the chimney that made them hazardous; there was a far more practical reason.

The outside world was rife with dangers, populated with malevolent forces that the home required protection from (Reay 1985, 116). Scot, writing his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* in 1584, listed the plethora of forces to be feared: 'bull beggars, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies ...' (Scot 1584 [1964], 139). These were forces threatening the safety of households across the British Isles for many generations after Scot's time, and the fear certainly stretched into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the vast majority of concealed shoes were deposited. These forces were believed to infiltrate the household from outside, and it was held that the peripheral areas of the building provided access for them. As James I wrote in his *Daemonologie* of 1597, concerning popular beliefs of witches' familiars:

> some of them sayeth, that being transformed in the likenesse of a little beast or foule, they will come and pearce through whatsoeuer house or Church, though all ordinarie passages be closed, by whatsoeuer open, the aire may enter in at (James I 1597 [1924], 39).

It was the marginal areas of a structure, therefore, such as the roof, that were considered the most vulnerable to these outside threats (Lloyd *et al.* 2001, 57), and the chimney, providing the perfect access point for external forces, was viewed as particularly assailable. As Johnson writes, the witch, a liminal figure, was often accused of entering houses through similarly liminal areas, particularly the chimney (1996, 160–61). This explains why so many protective charms and objects of this period inhabited these marginal areas. Dried cats and horse skulls, common apotropaic devices, are often discovered in walls, chimneys or roofs, such as the horse skull found in a cavity beside a chimney in South Ockenden, Essex, and the mummified cat in the thatch of a cottage at Pilton, Northamptonshire (Merrifield 1987, 128–9).

Similarly, witch-bottles — bellarmine flasks containing the hair, nails and urine of a victim seeking to counter-attack a witch's spells (Thomas 1971, 544) — were often buried under thresholds or beneath the hearthstone of a house (Evans 1966, 78). Numerous examples of inscriptions invoking the protective power of the Virgin Mary have also been discovered marked into doorways, roof beams and fireplaces (Easton 1999), and it was for the same protective function that herbs, such as vervain and dill, were usually hung above the threshold (Thomas 1971, 543). These apotropaic devices were used to defend a household against magic and yet, in a sense, they are objects of folk magic themselves. The irony of this did not go unnoticed at the time. As Richard Bovet observed in his *Pandaemonium,* 1684: men and women 'often became witches, by endeavouring to defend themselves against witchcraft' (Bovet 1684 [1975], 53), and this fine line between magic and protection does seem to have caused anxiety, especially within the Church (Maxwell-Stuart 2005, 69ff.). However, the sheer quantity of such apotropaic finds implies that, with or without approval from the Church, concealment was still a practice very widely accepted and utilized throughout England.



Figure 12. *Model votive shoe, Tell Brak, Syria. (From Mallowan 1947, pl. VII; © British Institute for the Study of Iraq.)*

The symbol of the shoe

The protective devices discussed above may appear to have a more obvious preternatural function than the seemingly innocuous object of the shoe, but given the comparability of their concealed locations, it seems fair to assume that the shoe served a similarly efficacious and apotropaic purpose — and, as *the* most commonly discovered concealed object in England (Hoggard 2004, 178), the shoe must have embodied a significant amount of symbolism. It is therefore our aim now to investigate the beliefs behind this symbolism.

The shoe has been an object of ritual significance since as early as 3400–3200 BC, when a limestone votive shoe (Fig. 12) was placed in the 'Eye-Temple' of Tell Brak, modern-day Syria. From this time onwards, the

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Figure 13. *Punch cartoon, 1854, depicting Queen Victoria 'Throwing the Old Shoe' after her soldiers as they depart for the Crimean War. (From* Punch*, or* The London Charivari*, March 11 1854, vol. 26, p. 100.)*

shoe crops up as a ritual object time and time again in a vast range of cultures, and van Driel-Murray credits this to the foot being 'a liminal extremity, on the cusp between us and the soil ... Feet are on the frontier and it is around frontiers that rituals accumulate' (1999, 131). And so it is the liminality of the shoe itself that resulted in its prominence in worldwide superstitious beliefs, such as its intrinsic association with luck. As Radford and Radford write, it is considered unlucky to put your left shoe on first (1948, 158), to find a knot in your shoe lace (1948, 306), and to place a new shoe on a table (1948, 305). It is, on the other hand, considered *good* luck to throw an old shoe after somebody as they begin a journey (Fig. 13); as John Heywood wrote in 1598: 'And home agayne hytherward quicke as a bee, Now for good lucke caste an olde shoe after mee' (Heywood 1598, 1.9.37–8 in Farmer 1906, 21).

The shoe is also associated with concepts of fertility; if a woman places a shoe on a table it foretells the birth of a child (Radford & Radford 1948, 305); in Lancashire, if you try on the shoes of a woman who has recently given birth then you too will soon conceive (Merrifield 1987, 134); and the practice of throwing shoes at a wedding may stem from some notion of deterring demons who cause barrenness (MacCulloch 1920, 476). The shoe's association with fertility may explain why so many concealed shoes, such as ILKLEY 1 and OTLEY 1, belonged to children and why, of the concealed objects in Otley Museum's records, 65 per cent of them were children's. Perhaps the concealed shoe was designed to ensure fertility, or perhaps it was meant to protect the children of the household; a north German superstition, for example, maintains that so long as the child's first shoe is kept in the house, the child will come to no harm (van Driel-Murray 1999, 136).

The shoe's primary purpose does seem to have been protection. This can indicate protection against illness; in the northern counties of England, for example, laying shoes across each other would prevent cramps, rheumatism and nightmares (Henderson 1879, 1550). However, the shoe's main protective function, cross-culturally, appears to be against malevolent supernatural forces. In India, the shoe is placed heel upwards on the roof of a house to ensure such protection (MacCulloch 1920, 476), and in order to defend their crops against evil forces, they are advised to '[t]ie ... an old shoe on a choice fruit tree or vine' (Maloney 1976, 116). African-American folk-beliefs prescribe burying a shoe under the full moon to keep the devil away (McCarthy 2001, 43), and they also advise wearing red pepper in your shoes to protect against hoodoo spells (Puckett 1926, 289).

It can hardly be doubted that the shoe is considered a symbol of protection, but the question remains: *why?* One theory is that, in popular belief, evil spirits did not like the smell of burning leather. In Britain, fairies were believed to be repelled by strong odours, such as garlic or the burning of an old shoe (MacCulloch 1914, 202), and as Radford and Radford write, it was a widely held belief in early England that '[t]he smell of burning shoes keeps off demons and serpents' (1948, 306). This theory would certainly fit with my case studies; all of the shoes at both Ilkley and Otley were made primarily from leather, and it may explain why so many concealed shoes, such as ILKLEY 1, were deposited in/near chimneys, fireplaces and hearths, locations which suggest the metaphorical burning of the shoes.

Another theory regarding the protective function of the shoe is put forward by Merrifield. He hypothesizes that the tradition stems from the tale of John Schorn, a parish priest from Buckinghamshire and one of England's unofficial saints, who was believed to have conjured a devil into a boot (Fig. 14) (Merrifield 1987, 135). The shoe, therefore, became a type of 'spirit trap' in popular belief (Hoggard 2004, 179), and this may be due to its bowl-like shape which can act as a

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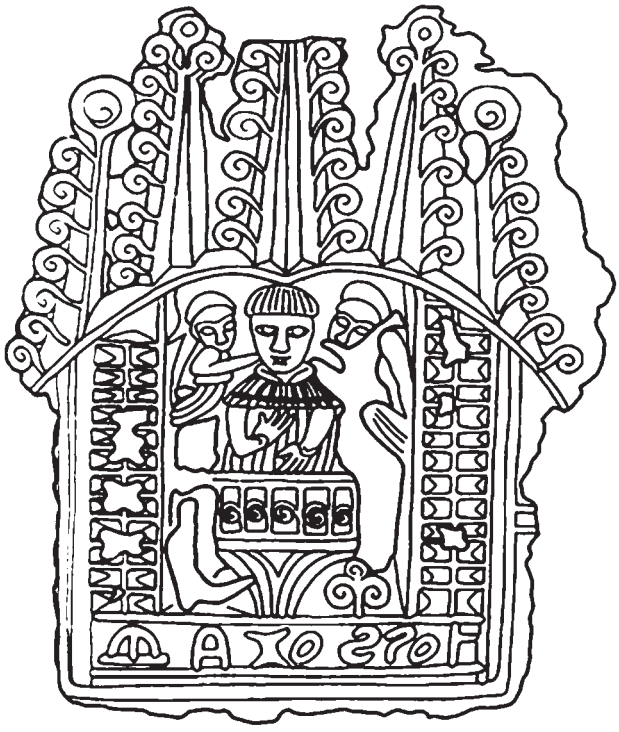


Figure 14. *Fifteenth-century pewter pilgrim badge depicting John Schorn with the symbol of the boot in the lower left-hand side. (From Merrifield 1987, fig. 6; © courtesy of Batsford.)*

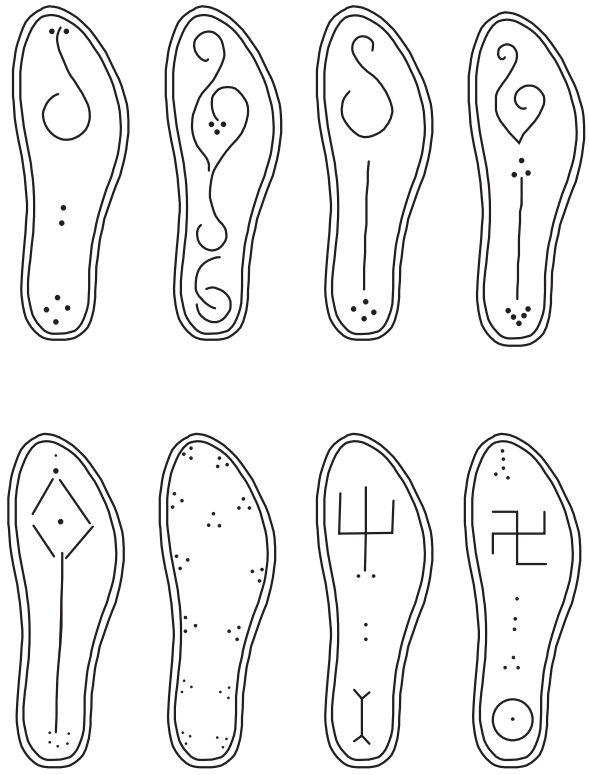


Figure 15. *Diagram of third- and fourth-century* AD *Roman soles and nailing patterns. (From van Driel-Murray 1999, fig. 1; courtesy of C. van Driel-Murray.)*

type of container (Brooks 2000, 68). However, the shoe is also believed to act as a 'lightening [sic.] conductor', to use Easton's phrase, in diverting the supernatural force from entering the house (1999, 23); the evil spirit 'sees' the shoe and, believing it to be a member of the household, attacks the shoe instead, thus becoming trapped. But why would the spirit perceive the shoe as a member of the household?

The shoe and the wearer

Shoes are highly personal items. Van Driel-Murray believes that '[a]s bearer of the individual's imprint, the shoe functions as a signature — a spiritual graffito' (1999, 136); even in ancient Rome, the soles of shoes were personalized with what van Driel-Murray considers to be 'good luck symbols', such as circles, 'S'-shapes and tridents, fixed into the sole by the pattern of the hobnails (Fig. 15), which would, in turn, leave the wearer's symbol, their 'signature', in the earth as they walked. A shoe, therefore, is intrinsically linked with its wearer, and that the concealed shoe represents a member of the household is a theory originally put forward by Swann. 'Why the shoe?' she asks; because it is 'the only garment we wear which retains the shape, the personality, the essence of the wearer' (1996, 56). By retaining the foot's shape, the shoe becomes a metaphorical symbol of the wearer, imbued with their essence. This metonymical link with the wearer, however, makes the shoe more than just a diversion or a lure; it is a protective force in itself, endowed with the person's power.

Other items of clothing are imbued with a similar power, and nowhere is this more evident than in the fairytale told by Hartland: when fairies came to steal a newborn baby near Selkirk, the mother covered herself and the child with her absent husband's waistcoat; the fairies subsequently left, causing no harm. As Hartland writes, the 'suggestion seems to be that the sight of the father's clothes leads "the good people" to think that he himself is present watching over his offspring' (1891, 98). The same could indeed be true of shoes, and this may explain why so few — a mere 2.19 per cent of those recorded in the concealed shoes index in Northampton (Swann 1996, 59) — appear to be new, while the remaining 97.81 per cent were old and damaged, much like the shoes of my case studies (Fig. 16). ILKLEY 1 (Fig. 16c) has a seemingly

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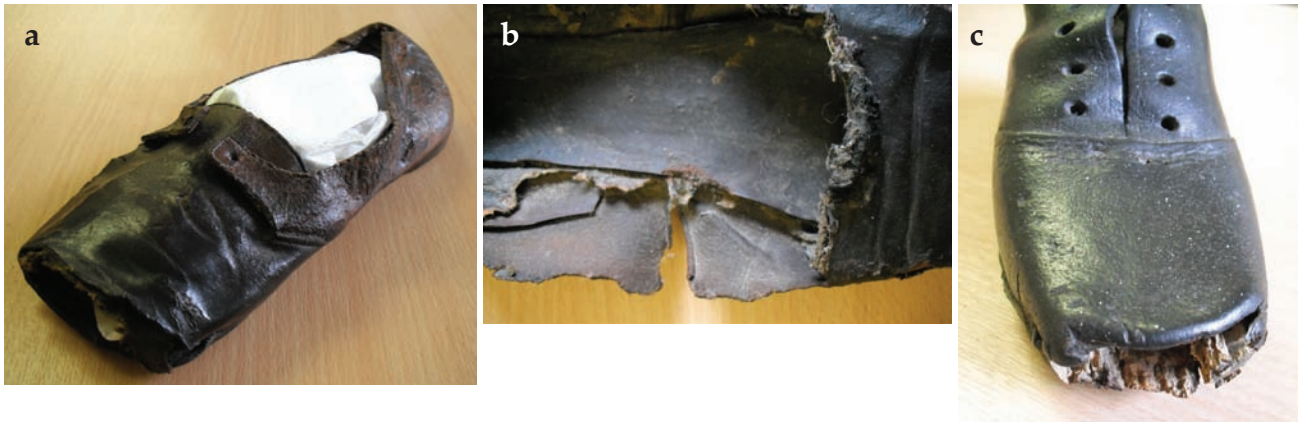


Figure 16. *Evidence of damage to concealed shoes: a) O/MP/ft/4, a man's shoe from Otley with a hole in the toe; b) torn areas in an adult's shoe found in Lane End Farmhouse, Ilkley; c) ILKLEY 1, a child's shoe with a damaged toe. (Photographs by C. Houlbrook.)*

unserviceable hole in the toe, OTLEY 1 (Fig. 10) was in poor condition before restoration, and OTLEY 2 (Fig. 11) is so badly damaged that it is barely recognizable as footwear. Perhaps shoes are only imbued with the wearer's essence and protective power if they have been worn by them for a long time and their imprint is thus unambiguous (van Driel-Murray 1999, 137).

However, there is a simpler explanation for the old and damaged conditions of the concealed shoes. Shoes were expensive items; on average, a pair of shoes cost a week's wages (Swann 1996, 59). These were not items casually thrown away, but will have been repaired, modified and altered until they were no longer serviceable; then, and only then, would they have been discarded — or recycled as a concealed shoe. Perhaps this too explains the prominence of children's shoes; children's shoes were used so often because children outgrow their footwear much more regularly than adults do. A child's shoe will quickly become redundant; dispensible enough to be utilized in ritual. I do not believe, however, that old shoes were used in such a way only because they had *lost* their value as footwear, but also because they had *gained* value, as old and well-used, by being imbued with their wearer's essence. It was perhaps for both reasons simultaneously that the old and damaged shoe was recycled as a ritual object.

At this stage I believe there is very little doubt that the concealed shoe *can* be considered a ritual object. While there may be much ambiguity over the original meaning of the practice, the essential criteria of ritual — as outlined in my definition above: 'a repetitive, habitual pattern of consciously and deliberately performed symbolic actions, employed for a specific function; usually to control, propitiate, protect from, or communicate with the supernatural' — are certainly evident in the practice of concealment. There is indeed a repetitive, habitual pattern of consciously and deliberately concealing shoes, which are indubitably symbolic objects, for the probable, efficacious purpose of protection against supernatural forces. The concealed shoe, therefore, can be classified as a ritual object.

The redundancy of dichotomies

The concealed shoe may be classifiable as a ritual object, but any other labels archaeologists may hope to apply to it remain precarious. Archaeology long ago abandoned the stringent classificatory terms 'sacred' or 'secular', 'numinous' or 'profane', and the study of the concealed shoe does much to strengthen the wisdom of this abandonment. A cursory glance at the custom of concealment reveals that such stringent terms are not always accurate, and they are certainly not always mutually exclusive. Would the original concealers of the shoes in Ilkley and Otley have distinguished between the numinous and the profane in all of their actions? Probably not. As Goody observes, 'attempts to see ... the sacred–profane dichotomy as a universal part of the actor's perception of his situation are misleading' (1961, 160); for the actor (or concealer) no such dichotomy may have existed. Or, as Insoll points out by reminding us that '[r]itual ... can be both sacred and secular' (2004, 10), it is not necessarily a case of either/or; an object may be simultaneously numinous *and* profane.

This is clearly evident in Mackenzie's interpretive study of the looped string bag (*bilum*) of the Telefol people of central New Guinea, in which she examines 'the ways in which the string bag is variously used and understood within differing social contexts'

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(1991, 1). The string bag is utilized as a practical tool, as a container or baby carrier; simultaneously, it also acts as a spirit catcher, a shrine, a fertility aid, and a weapon to protect against supernatural forces (1991, 11). Mackenzie discovered as she studied the *bilum* that no object exists in isolation; no object is static or fixed, but is instead adapted and re-interpreted as it shifts from one context to another. In this sense, the concealed shoe and the *bilum* are much alike; through the process of ritual recycling, the shoe's purpose is revised. ILKLEY 1 and OTLEY 1 and 2 were not *originally* created as apotropaic devices, but to serve the decidedly profane purpose of physically protecting the foot. Only when they could no longer serve this function were they then imbued with the power to protect against supernatural forces. Apotropaic powers are not inherent to an object; an object is appointed that power, given that agency by the users/concealers themselves.

This theory of attributed agency was put forward by anthropologist Alfred Gell (1998), who writes in detail of the protective agency of objects of art which are imbued with the power to protect their agents. Once the concealed shoe is attributed with Gell's concept of 'agency', however, I am also forced to consider the object/subject dichotomy. Up until this point, I have been labelling the concealed shoe an 'object', but it has been proposed by scholars such as Kopytoff (1986) that when something is given such agency, it becomes a 'subject' instead. An object, it is believed, can have no agency. And so, according to this theory, the concealed shoe is viewed as an active, almost anthropomorphized subject rather than an inert, passive object; it *does*, rather than has things *done to* it. However, 'object' and 'subject' are not fixed states; the concealed shoe fluctuates between the two. It is only when the shoe is imbued with protective power that it becomes a 'subject'. Before this, when it was used only as an item of footwear, the shoe was still a simple 'object'; it had neither power nor agency. Therefore, the concealed shoe can be perceived as both an 'object' and a 'subject', depending on its context.

A similar dichotomy which the concealed shoe calls into question is that of 'value' and 'rubbish'. Is the concealed shoe a valuable object or an item of rubbish? Simply put, the answer depends on the individual perspective of the viewer. As Mackenzie writes, 'value is not inherent ... but multivalent and variously realised' (1991, 21). Today, such discovered shoes have no actual material, monetary value. To some finders, the concealed shoe may just be a dirty, cobweb-covered scrap of twisted leather found in the dark recesses of their attic, fit for nothing but the rubbish bin. To other people (myself included), such a shoe is a prized archaeological find. And to the original concealers themselves, a similar ambiguity may have been evident in their perceptions of the concealed shoe. Why were they chosen for concealment in the first place? Because they were old, damaged and no longer fit to be worn. They were rubbish. But they were *valued* rubbish (Easton 1999, 23).

The shoes may have lost their exchange value, and they may have lost their use value, but through the process of ritual recycling, they retained their esteem value as ritual objects. Because of their inherent properties, they attained new worth as numinous, apotropaic devices. They transition from 'valuable' to 'rubbish', and return to 'valuable' once more, revealing that these states of value are fluid, highly malleable and completely subjective (Thompson 1979, 10).

The biography of the shoe

The processual notion of the 'biography' of an object goes back to Kopytoff, who believes that an object's life-cycle should be viewed similarly to that of a human's: as a series of 'ages' from 'birth' to 'death' (1986, 66–7). An object's biography, however, can prove far more complex and convoluted than that of a human. The shoes from Ilkley and Otley, for example, are not static, immutable objects; their life-spans are far from linear, frequently shifting from one context to another, and then reverting back again. They reach the 'death' of one stage, and are 'reborn' in another.

During its life-span, the concealed shoe undergoes a wealth of such 'recontextualization' (Thomas 1991, 8), as an object that is constantly being adapted, reutilized and redefined. However, it is important to remember that these processes of adaptation, reutilization and redefinition are *human* activities (Steiner 2001, 211); the concealed shoe does not recontextualize itself. Henceforth, the biographies of the Ilkley and Otley shoes are intrinsically linked with the people they come into contact with: their wearers, their concealers and their finders (Gosden & Marshall 1999, 169; Hoskins 2006, 81).

I have already discussed the concealed shoe as a ritually recycled object; when they could no longer serve their original utilitarian purpose, they were appropriated as apotropaic devices. This, however, is certainly not the only transition which the concealed shoe undergoes. Following re-discovery, a concealed shoe is recontextualized yet again, taking one of three paths. It can be disposed of as rubbish, such as the shoe discovered at Market Street, Otley, which was discarded before Christine Dean rescued the remaining five. Many such finds, in fact, are regarded as rubbish and subsequently discarded, their 'biographies'

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ending in the rubbish tip (Eastop 2007b, 66). However, there are two other paths a concealed shoe can take following discovery: it can either be retained by the finder and kept *in situ*, or donated to a museum.

ILKLEY 1 was retained by its finder who, when she moved from the farmhouse, left the shoe *in situ*. Two years later, the new resident of the farmhouse, Kate Armitage, placed ILKLEY 1 on a shelf above the fireplace in which it was originally concealed (Fig. 8). When questioned about the choice of location, Kate Armitage explained that she wished the shoe to be kept as close as possible to its original place of concealment; it was hidden there for a reason, she believes and, as unfathomable as that reason may be to her, she does not want it to be removed. Like the previous owner of the house, Ms Armitage also maintains that if she ever moved from the farmhouse, she would not take the shoe with her: it is a part of the house (Kate Armitage pers. comm. 15 April 2011).

It is not unusual for a concealed shoe to be retained by its finder; out of the 31 concealed garments in the Otley Museum records, 17 were returned to their finders. Some finders seem to leave (or return) the shoes *in situ* out of respect for the original concealers; Bernadette Gillow, the live-in property manager of Ightham Mote in Kent, in which eleven concealed shoes have been discovered, admitted to having some anxiety over disturbing the shoes: 'it's a bit like opening a tomb, isn't it?' (Gillow, quoted in Brooks 2000, 68). For others, however, it is the belief that removing a concealed shoe will result in bad luck that motivates them to keep/return the shoes to where they were discovered.

When a cache of boots and shoes was found in Colby Estate in Pembrokeshire, for example, the farmer's wife demanded that they be boarded up again immediately (Brooks 2000, 68) and Swann recounts the experiences of another finder who 'reported that while the boots were out of the house for exhibition, they had nothing but bad luck, the death of pets, flooding and the shed fell down. They now wished to leave the boots strictly alone, no publicity, no photography' (Swann 1996, 65). The custom continues to be observed, and in this cycle of continuity, finders thus become concealers themselves (Eastop 2006, 250), and ILKLEY 1 retains its value as a concealed shoe.

In some instances, however, when the original concealed shoe is not retained by its finder a substitute can be resorted to. Swann writes of how, when an eighteenth-century over-shoe was removed from its concealed location, a worn rugby boot was used to replace it, and in 1989 when another shoe was removed and sent for identification, a red plastic wellington was concealed in its place, to allay the fears of the family's young son who had heard that the shoe had been used to repel witches (Swann 1996, 58–60). This concept of substitution leads to a further recontextualization; the worn rugby boot and the red plastic wellington have both entered the process of ritual recycling. There is a certain domino-effect to this process: when the biography of one shoe changes (the concealed shoe is no longer concealed), the biography of another shoe is altered (the modern shoe is concealed, employed as a replacement).

As for the shoes which are removed from their places of concealment — OTLEY 1 and 2, for example, were donated to Otley Museum — they also undergo recontextualization, entering 'another social sphere' (Eastop 2007a, 201). These shoes transition from concealed objects to *displayed* objects; they have been removed from *situ* and are therefore no longer valued for their apotropaic powers. OTLEY 1 especially can be perceived as having lost any of the agency it was once imbued with; unlike OTLEY 2, which has retained its old and damaged appearance, OTLEY 1 was restored and is therefore now lacking in the 'essence' of its wearer. Instead, it is now valued as a historical artefact, to be studied by textile conservationists and archaeologists of folklore. Once more, this shoe has been re-appropriated and recontextualized; from footwear, to apotropaic device, to archaeological evidence. It has entered yet another of the multitude of stages that the concealed shoe passes through during its life-span. And I doubt it will be the last.

Conclusion

Although it can never be stated with any certainty why the original participants of this practice chose to conceal these shoes in their homes, it is hoped that this article has offered some insight into the enigmatic practice of concealment and into the beliefs of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century concealers. Undoubtedly, the material evidence of the shoes themselves, together with their physical locations, was an invaluable tool in contextualizing the custom of concealment. Archaeology, therefore, has proven itself — yet again — to be a highly applicable discipline in the study of ritual and folkloric practices. However, the concealed shoe has, in exchange, gone a long way in testing archaeological theory, standing as it does in a very liminal location — both figuratively and metaphorically.

The study of concealment has led to a critique of dichotomic classifications, from the 'sacred-or-profane' opposition, which has already been largely abandoned in archaeological scholarship, to the divisions we all make on a daily basis, such as 'rubbish-or-value'.

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The study has also resulted in questions concerning biography and agency, continuity and substitution, and the concept of ritual recycling. This article was not intended to answer all of these questions, but only to pose them, in the hope that they will continue to be addressed and that the subject of concealment can be considered in greater depth in future studies.

Notes

1. 42.6 per cent of concealed shoes were found in cottages, 26 per cent in urban buildings, 10.9 per cent in farm buildings, 9.4 per cent in manor houses and mansions, the remaining in town halls, public houses, churches, etc. (Swann 1996, 57).
2. Correspondence between Ms Christine Dean and the Keeper at Northampton Museum, 14 April 1994.

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