

# Outside In: Making Sense of the Deliberate Concealment of Garments Within Buildings



## Abstract

The practice of deliberately concealing garments within the structure of buildings is described. These finds provide a means of exploring how space was conceived and experienced in the past, and how these deliberately hidden garments mediated, and continue to mediate, the relationship between people and the spaces they occupied, and may continue to occupy. The Deliberately Concealed Garments Project was set up in 1998 to locate, document and analyze garments found hidden within buildings. Concealments have preserved many textiles in the UK, mainland

Europe, Australia and North America. The significance of these caches rests not only in the finds themselves, as rare items of dress, but also because of what they reveal about perceptions of built space. The concealments are believed to serve a protective function, not against the weather or immodesty, but against incoming malevolent forces. As apotropaic (evil-averting) agents they protect from within rather than as outer coverings or internal divisions. The paper discusses how garments concealed within buildings transform space through the work of metaphor.

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## Introduction

Textiles shape space in many ways: as coverings to protect against the weather or to uphold ideas of modesty; by providing thermal or acoustic insulation; and as decoration. This paper describes a group of textiles that broadens understanding of how textiles shape space. These textiles are garments which have been discovered within the fabric of buildings, and which appear to have been deliberately concealed there. These concealments, which are normally uncovered during building work, bring together textiles, architecture and archaeology and challenge assumptions about how textiles have been used to shape space.

This paper starts by introducing the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project (DCGP) and describes some notable finds.<sup>1</sup> Characteristic features of once-concealed garments, their discovery and their location are identified. Ways of understanding concealment practices are then analyzed, focusing on metaphoric associations of the garments.

## *The Deliberately Concealed Garments Project*

Garments have been found within the structure of buildings in Australia (e.g. Car 1989), North America (e.g.

Wade 1986; May, personal communication; Schwartz, personal communication) and northern Europe, e.g. the “Mühlberg ensemble” (Atzbach, n.d.).<sup>2</sup> Concealments have preserved many textiles including rare examples of sixteenth and seventeenth-century dress. Examples include the 1540s doublet and hose (with codpiece) found in Alpirsbach, Germany (Stangl and Lang 1995; Fingerlin 1997); a youth’s linen doublet of c. 1600 found in the Reigate Cache, UK (Stanton 1995; Eastop 2000); and the remains of a child’s doublet, c. 1600 found in Abingdon Cache 1, also in the UK (Figure 1). For the history of dress, other notable finds include a once very common but now very rare eighteenth-century tie-on pocket (Figure 2), which when found contained a child’s cap, coins of various dates, trade tokens, receipts and hop petals, also found in Abingdon (Harrison and Gill 2002); a pair of stays, dated to the 1620s, making them the second oldest pair in England (Figure 3), and a pair of pantaloons, possibly of the same date, both found in the Sittingbourne Cache, UK.

Building on the pioneering work of June Swann, who documented shoes concealed within buildings (Swann 1969, 1996), a research project was set up by the author in 1998 to locate, document and

analyze garments found within buildings (Eastop 2001). Some of these finds may be the result of accidental loss but others appear to have been deliberately concealed. Garments selected for concealment appear to have been heavily worn, and when found they are often heavily soiled, creased and sometimes fragmentary. Some seem to have been deliberately damaged before being hidden. For example, a man's waistcoat found by a chimney stack in house in Nether Wallop, Hampshire, UK, appears to have been deliberately cut and torn; this would have made the garment less serviceable and the fabric less easy to use for other purposes (Duffield 2004).

Nearly all caches are revealed during building work, rather than in planned architectural or archaeological investigations. For example, a pair of moccasins was found during demolition work in 1934; they had been placed in the cornerstone of the Ponca-Nez Percé Industrial School at White Eagle, Oklahoma in 1880 by Child Chief, a Ponca chief (Wade 1986). In another North American example, a building contractor uncovered several garments (four single shoes, two gloves, a jacket, a corset and a bow-tie) as well as an umbrella frame, five bottles and some pamphlets, while repairing a timber-clad house in Saltville, Virginia, USA. The concealments were discovered within the front wall above and alongside the front door: the shoes were found in one space between the studs, above the front window; the jacket and corset were found in another space; the umbrella in another. A cigar box containing papers was



Figure 1

The fragmentary doublet found in Abingdon Cache 1, shown with a replica made by Dr Maria Hayward.

Figure 2  
The tie-on pocket found in Abingdon  
Cache 2.



found tied to the beam over the front door. (Schwartz, personal communication).

Walled in caches include garments plastered into walls, for

example, the two pairs of trousers found embedded in the plaster of the Lighthouse Cottage, built in 1876 at Bluff Point, near Geraldton, Western Australia. The man's

trousers were thought to be of the same date as the building, but the drop-front of the boy's trousers suggests they were of an earlier date (Car 1989).

Another walled-up example is the Brixham Cache, found behind wooden paneling in a house in Devon, UK. Two caches were found by a local builder while renovating the house. He discovered them within the straw insulation placed behind the seventeenth-century paneling of the cross passage (Figure 4). One cache, consisting of the fragmentary remains of a pair of seventeenth-century breeches and a linen cloth fitted with a patch pocket, possibly an apron (Figure 5), was found tied together with straw above the front door of the house. The other, found above the door leading from the cross passage into the main room, was an assemblage of smaller items including an animal bone, an iron key and a barbed fish hook (Figure 6).

The location of caches within buildings may be significant but categorizing their precise location is not without problems. Garments identified as roof finds include a pair of boots found in a thatch (Swann 1996: 56) and the Abingdon doublet (Figure 1). The latter was found under attic floorboards near a chimney stack added to a timber-framed house, and could therefore be classed as a chimney find, a roof find or as an under floorboard find. One of the aims of the DCGP is to encourage the systematic documentation of caches and garment finds, including the recording of their location in the internal voids of buildings.



**Figure 3**  
Conservator Kate Gill examining the pair of stays found in the Sittingbourne Cache.



**Figure 4**  
View of the cross passage of a fourteenth-century house in Brixham, Devon, showing the door leading from the cross passage into the main room.



**Figure 5**  
Part of the Brixham Cache: the fragmentary pair of breeches and a linen apron were found above the main entrance to the house.



**Figure 6**

Part of the Brixham Cache: the animal bone, scraps of cloth and leather, marble, part of an ox shoe, key, and a fishing line were found above the door leading from the cross passage into the main room.

The systematic recording and analysis of “under floor” finds has been reported (e.g. Steane and Bloxham 1997; Brooks 2003). In these instances, the finds were understood to have been accidental losses rather than deliberate concealments. The under floor “excavation” of a bedroom at Nunnington Hall in Yorkshire, UK, uncovered more than 1,000 objects, including chess pieces, playing cards and a scrap of leather used as a wall-covering material. The pins, needles and bodkins found near the window suggest that this was the brightest spot for sewing, while the pins

found alone in another corner of the room suggest they may have been used for fastening clothes rather than for needlework (Brooks 2003).

The systematic investigation of the Lott family farmhouse in Brooklyn, New York, USA, provides another well-documented example (Bankoff *et al.* 2001). The much altered and extended set of farm buildings was started in the 1720s, and recent archaeological investigation uncovered corncobs, a cloth pouch tied with hemp string, half the pelvis of a sheep or goat and an oyster shell under the floorboards in a slave’s living

quarters. These finds have been linked to the African origins and the spiritual lives of slaves (*ibid.*). The practice of concealment seems to have been widespread in terms of both geography and time, but the reasons for concealment are likely to be culturally diverse; detailed analysis of local cultural traditions is required to understand the specificities of such practice. This study focuses on an analysis of garments found hidden within buildings in the UK.

### Ways of Understanding the Finds

To date no contemporaneous references to the hiding of garments within the closed spaces of buildings has been identified, suggesting that the very lack of documentation is a feature of this practice. It is possible that no documents have chanced to survive or that the many people who made such deposits felt no need to record this feature of their lives or they were unable to write. This means that it is impossible to give definitive answers to the question: why did people hide things within buildings? However, as practices of deliberate concealment seem to have extended over many years, it is likely that several different and concurrent traditions are involved.

Various suggestions have been made. Caches have been linked to foundation sacrifices and thereby possibly to Free Masonry (Swann 1996: 67). Others are associated with “folk-magic” (Thomas 1971). Most explanations accord them a protective function; thus, they are linked to the ritual protection of buildings by the burial of “witch-bottles” (Merrifield 1987) and

animal bones (Moore-Colyer 1993), the immurement of cats (Howard 1951), and by the apotropaic marking of buildings (Easton 1999; Lloyd *et al.* 2001). What follows is an attempt to understand the underlying rationale for garment concealments, using spatial, metonymical and metaphorical analysis.

### ***Spatial analysis***

June Swann made the first detailed spatial analysis of garment caches in her study of boots and shoes found concealed within buildings (Swann 1996: 60–2). Her study shows that shoe finds have been uncovered in a huge range of buildings, but more than fifty percent of those she recorded are from domestic buildings (Swann 1996:57). Of more than 1,100 shoes and boots analyzed by Swann, the largest percentage (26.2 percent) was found near chimneys, fireplaces, hearths and ovens; the second most common location was under floors or above ceilings (22.86 percent); the third was walled in (18.8 percent), with the roof being a close fourth; the fifth was under stairs (5.42 percent). She also noted that in many instances the location of the cache is unspecified, as the objects come to light during building demolition (Swann 1996: 60) rather than during planned architectural or archaeological investigations.

A similar analysis of eighty cache sites in the UK in which textile fragments and garments (other than shoes) were found produced similar results (Eastop and Dew 2003: 10–11). In twenty-nine of the eighty reported cases

(approx. 36 percent) the site of the find could not be listed because it had not been recorded; twenty-one caches (approx. 25 percent) were found in voids (three in ovens; eight by stairs; ten under floorboards); sixteen (approx. 20 percent) were found near chimneys or fireplaces; eleven (approx. 13 percent) were found in attics or roofs; and, three (approx. 4 percent) were found within walls. If the caches found in ovens are linked to the chimney and fireplace category, rather than to the void category, the number of finds in each is eighteen and nineteen (just under 25 percent).

Deliberate concealments of shoes and boots appear to have been made when major alterations were made to buildings (Swann 1996: 59). This may help to explain the presence of caches near brick chimney stacks which were often later additions to older, timber-framed buildings. For example, two deposits were found alongside a chimney flue behind the upper wall of a house in Winston, Suffolk, UK (Easton 1995; Swann 1996: 60). The larger group, which included animal bones, fifteen shoes and other clothing, appears to have been “inserted through a hole in the brick wall inside the hall hearth and sealed over when full” (*ibid.*) The smaller deposit was made on the other side of the hearth and was left unsealed. The larger part of the Sittingbourne Cache was also found either side of a brick chimney stack (Figure 7).

Evidence collected to date suggests that concealments were made at the juncture of old and new parts of a building, in voids, and at points of entry or access



Figure 7  
Chimney stack during demolition work; many items from the Sittingbourne Cache were found in the voids either side of the chimney stack.

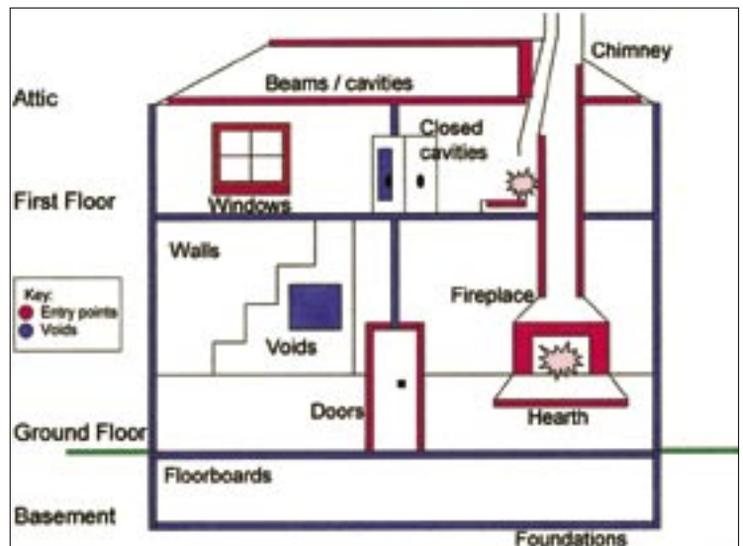


Figure 8  
Diagram showing common locations of cache sites in the UK.

(doorways, windows and chimneys) (Figure 8). Chimneys were always open to the outside elements, and therefore could be an access route for malevolent forces (Easton 1999).

The Saltville, Brixham and Sittingbourne finds show that

some buildings contain more than one cache.

**Metonymical analysis:  
garment as metonym**

Most garments found in caches show signs of heavy use, with fabrics stretched, creased and

repaired. Worn garments may have been selected for concealment because the capacity of cloth and leather to deform to accommodate the body means that garments bear the imprint of the wearer. June Swann argues that shoes have been selected for conceal-

ment because they “stand in for the person;” the shoe “retains the shape, the personality, the essence of the wearer” (Swann 1996: 56). The intimate association of a garment with its wearer means that it can be viewed as part of the wearer, such as a father’s favorite cardigan standing for the now deceased man (Attfield 2000: 149–50). A metonymical link is made when the garment, understood as a symbolic part of the wearer, comes to represent the person who wore it.

Finds reported from Saltville, VA, USA (Schwartz, personal communication) include a group of homemade cloth dolls found with shoes within the walls of a house. The dolls appeared to represent a family (man, woman, children and a baby). The finding of a “family” of dolls is consistent with the twenty-eight examples of footwear caches “which seem to be a “family” of shoes: one or more men’s, women’s and a range of children’s sizes” (Swann 1996: 64). This suggests that some concealed objects may have served as symbols or surrogates for the family of the person who hid them.

***Metaphorical analysis:  
garment as metaphor***

Metaphors facilitate understanding by enabling people to generate networks of associations between themselves, and between themselves and objects and other domains. The versatility of these associations relies on the choice of grounds (similarities and/or analogies) and topics (unconventional referents) selected to generate the meaning transfer. In language, this quality arises

because various associations of the “vehicle” (the source or conventional referent) are selected (and not others) on the basis of the “topic” or the surrounding co-text (Goatly 1997: 35). For example, the meaning of the expression “the thread of her argument” depends on recognizing similarities between a thread and an argument. Objects can be understood as “material metaphors” where the “co-text” can include other objects or natural phenomena, persons, actions, speech, or the timing of events (Tilley 1998).

Metaphorical associations are made between the home and the body (e.g. Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Tilley 1998). The saying “the hearth is the heart of the home” is one manifestation of this widespread association. Understanding the meaning of this expression depends on recognizing similarities between a heart and a hearth. If the concealed objects are understood as material metaphors, this metaphorical association may suggest that the concealing of garments was a way of clothing (and possibly thereby protecting) the body of the home.

This association results from the process known as metaphoric entailment (Lakoff 1987). Lakoff argues that many metaphors rely on folk models of bodily experience, whereby the physical experience of one’s own body acts as a source for mapping the outside world. For example, the source domain for anger in the English language is heat (e.g. heated argument; inflammatory remarks; smoldering resentment). The source domain of heat may have arisen because people feel

hot when angry (Lakoff 1987: 387–9).

Lakoff identifies two sets of correspondences between a source domain (e.g. the body) and a target domain (e.g. anger). The first is the ontological, which is based on recognizing a correspondence of form or feature, such as the container-like properties shared by one's own body, by a garment and by a building. The second is the epistemic, which relies on knowledge of the source domain and corresponding knowledge of the target domain (Lakoff 1987: 386). For example, correspondence is drawn from the knowledge that garments protect the body of the wearer and that a house protects its inhabitants. Knowledge of the source domain (the body) is linked to the corresponding knowledge of the target domain (the house), such as the common capacities of containing and protecting. Metaphoric entailment arises from making such logical, step-by-step correspondences. The principle of entailment rests on a network of correspondences taken as truth. Proposition A entails proposition B if B is true in every situation in which A is true (Lakoff 1987: 131). For instance, take the proposition A, that the wearing of garments protects the wearer; and, proposition B, that houses protect their inhabitants. A logical correspondence is drawn between a garment protecting its wearer and a garment protecting a house. Thus, worn garments may be understood to protect both inhabitants and house. This network of entailment shows that both the body and the house are conceived of as containers

needing the protection offered by garments. As noted above, the "mapping" of the house according to the body is widespread; in the case of garments concealed within buildings, the entailment process helps to show how space and its vulnerability may have been viewed.

Entailment relies simultaneously on two forms of correspondences (similarities): those based on appearance (ontological) and those based on shared knowledge of common properties (epistemic). Drawing on two types of similarities can help to explain apparent inversions: a garment worn on the *outside* of body is metaphorically entailed with a garment hidden *inside* a building. On a practical level, when garments are hidden within a building, they are protected from use and disposal. The protective garment is therefore protected. Metaphorically the used (and sometimes deliberately damaged) garment inhabits a space within a building which is closed to the everyday experience of its inhabitants. The inversion of used or purposely damaged garments to protect people and buildings by "inhabiting" voids may be felt to give these objects power beyond that attributed to them in everyday experience.

### ***Technology of enchantment: garment as agent***

As noted above, the hiding of garments has been linked to the burial of "witch-bottles," animal bones, cats and the marking of buildings. These actions have been explained as offering protection by disabling or diverting witches

and other malevolent forces which might enter via doors, windows and chimneys. Belief in witchcraft was consistent with Christianity in late seventeenth-century Europe, when evidence of devils and witches was collected in order to support certain views of divinity (e.g. Glanvill 1966 [1689]). Beliefs in the capacity of concealed objects to divert or capture malevolent forces is consistent with Gell's ideas of the technology of enchantment (Gell 1992) and the idea that objects may be attributed agency (Gell 1998). According to this interpretation, these garments may have been viewed as social agents concealed within a building.

Gell's theory of agency is founded on "folk" notions of agency (1998: 17). Thus, agency is what is *perceived* as intentional consequence. "Whenever an event is believed to happen because of an 'intention' lodged in the person or thing which initiates the causal sequence, that is an instance of agency" (ibid.) For objects to have agency, personhood must be conceived of differently. Rather than being "something singular or discrete," personhood is understood as "extended or distributed" (Gell 1998: 22). This notion is based on the premise developed by Strathern (1988), that a Melanesian individual can be understood as the sum of their relations. Gell applies this idea to landmines, arguing that they are material forms of a soldier's (or a state's) distributed agency, extended spatially and temporally (Gell 1998: 21). Similarly, the efficacy of voodoo sorcery and idol worship is explained in terms of distributed personal agency,

where objects are understood to act as agents (Gell 1998: 102, 133). Thus, a garment concealed within a building may have been understood (and may continue to be understood) to have this sort of distributed personal agency, extended spatially within the building and over time. When a cache of boots and shoes was discovered at the Colby Estate in Pembrokeshire, the farmer's wife immediately demanded that they be boarded up again (Brooks 2000). Ensuring the safety of home is a widespread concern; examples include the placing of *Mazzuzahs* at the entrances to Jewish households, and the painting of protective eyebrows above window openings in Morocco.<sup>3</sup>

Concealing a garment changes the meaning of the building. It may reflect fear that the house and its inhabitants are at risk of malevolent external sources, while at the same time enchanting the building because the concealed garments are attributed agency. In the act of concealment the concealer gives agency to the garment. The power of these garments may be reduced if the concealment or the agency of the objects is discussed. Secrecy is an important aspect of magic as technology (Gell 1988). The oral history recordings made in the 1960s by George Ewart Evans in East Anglia, UK reveal the longevity of rural traditions (1956, 1966), such as the hanging of stones in stables in order to protect horses from malevolent forces. It has been suggested that concealing objects within buildings may have been something that was done but not discussed (Swann 1996: 65–7).

It is also possible that people believed that the desired effects of concealment would be hampered if the concealments were mentioned (Swann 1996: 67). For instance, in some places children were not referred to by their names but as “pot lids.” This is consistent with the logic of “sympathetic magic” (Thomas 1971) when referring to them by name was thought to put the children at risk because it might draw them to the unwanted attention of witches (Smith 1998).

### Finders' Interpretations

As noted above, the mass of material evidence about concealments is in marked contrast to the dearth of written commentary by those who concealed artifacts. In order to gain a better understanding of how concealments are understood, the responses of those who have found and/or reported deposits of garments have been recorded as part of the DCGP (Eastop and Dew 2006). Finders may become concealers when they return objects to hiding places, or when they replace removed objects with substitutes (Swann 1996: 60).

The responses of eleven finders noted in the Northampton shoe records indicate that the finders of concealed artifacts attributed a protective or propitiatory function to the finds. Three reports indicate that the concealments were made to keep malevolent forces away. One boot was thought by the finder to be a fertility symbol. Six finders made it clear that it is important that the items are returned to the find-place or are retained in the house in which they are found. In the case of the Brixham Cache

described above, the builder recognized the finds as important and during the oral history interview (conducted as part of the DCGP) he stated his view that the finds should be re-concealed after they had been documented. (Wessex Film and Sound Archive 2005)

The significance of a find is in the finder's eyes rather than in the intentions or agency of the people making the cache. The concealers' intentions as perceived by the finders take precedence. The effects of contemporary evaluations are sometimes made explicit in conservation reports (Eastop 1998). In the case of the Alpirsbach garment finds, the decision was made to retain all soiling thought to predate the date of concealment; soiling that was thought to have occurred post-concealment was not considered significant. A different view was taken for the Reigate doublet, where the point of significance was determined as the point of discovery, so only post-discovery soiling was removed (Stanton 1995).

### Concealments as "House Memory"

Concealment practices draw attention to the unseen, and largely ignored parts of buildings. These include the voids within some walls (e.g. the space behind the laths in lath and plaster walls), alongside chimneystacks or in disused bread ovens or under floorboards. The discovery of a cache highlights spaces presumed to be empty voids, in a similar way to the casts made by Rachel Whiteread of the space under

chairs and tables. These sculptures draw attention to "taken-for-granted" domestic spaces, which she calls the "hidden interspace" (Whiteread and Blazwick 1992: 9). It is argued that her work "makes the negative space—the container of memories—visible" (Bloemink and Cunningham 2004: 139).

Nobel makes a similar observation in his essay "The meaning of what remains." In this analysis of Whiteread's work he argues that "Emptiness activates memory, or anyway the attempt to imagine what the memories of space might be. This is because there is something psychologically unsustainable about an empty space" (Noble 2005: 67). Viewed in this way, the concealed clothes become an "inside out" memory. Noble also argues that filling a void creates an awareness of the inside and thereby turns a void into space:

*[It] is arguable that the only comprehensible way to think of empty space is to think simultaneously of emptiness and the physical mass that contains it. Emptiness without containment is literally incomprehensible, like trying to imagine the universe before the big bang. So emptiness depends on its opposite, the absence it signifies can only be comprehended through the physical presence of boundaries that define it. (Noble 2005: 66)*

### Conclusion

Garments concealed in buildings may be viewed as potent agents because of the mix of metaphors invoked. The absence of written

commentary allows for greater play of metaphoric associations. The use of metaphor allows garments to serve as agents, or to put it another way, garments gain agency through the use of metaphor. Objects concealed in buildings may be viewed as a form of material memory. They memorialize their concealment and something not known about the intention of the concealer, possibly related to the physical state and position of the object. These material memories are forgotten, or not known about, except possibly in the belief that objects may exist in all old buildings. The extraordinary nature of these finds means that they provide notable models for exploring the interdependence of materiality, metaphor and agency. Deliberately concealed garments can be understood to shape space conceptually as well as materially.

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### Notes

1. For more information about the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project (DCGP) please see the project website <http://www.concealedgarments.org> and the project's touring exhibition, called "Hidden House History."
2. Such finds are referred to as *Depotfunde* in German.
3. As shown in the ethnography display at the British Museum, Room 24, in case 6, labeled "Life's ordinary dangers" (visited January 31, 2006).

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