

Concealed shoes

With original descriptions by Alison and further information from Northampton Museum

“When we moved into number 16 in 2002, we found the cellar had not been touched.

The steps leading down from the kitchen were made of brick and Yorkshire flags. We were able to use this room as a concrete floor had been laid, whereas the room under the living room had never been touched.

It had another set of steps but they stopped halfway, the floor was made of dirt and soil like substance. It had a grill in the ceiling, quite ornate really, which apparently they used to open from the living room to let ash from the coal fire down, there were still traces of ash on the floor.

It was after we knocked the stairs out and started moving all the bricks that we came across the shoes. There were four shoes, three of them were quite decent condition but the fourth wasn't worth saving.

When we had the cellar renovated, we thought it would be nice to put the shoes back, so we put them in the false ceiling where hopefully they will be safe for the next century”

It is not uncommon to find shoes hidden in the front of fireplaces protecting the house and its occupants from evil influences

It is believed that shoes were chosen because they take the shape of the wearer

They are also vaguely bowl shaped – leading people to believe that they held something of the essence of the person who wore them

The shoes are usually strong, sturdy and hard-wearing but are neither ultra fashionable or finely made

The shoes were usually well worn and usually only one worn out shoe was buried so that the shoes could not be stolen and worn.

The shoes found in the Church Street House were from the middle of the 19th century – the construction methods indicate a date after 1855 and it is likely that they were placed there significantly later to allow the time for them to be in a unwearable condition.

It is not clear if they were worn by a woman (with large feet) or a man (with small feet) !

The shoes were sent to the Shoe Museum at Northampton, who reported on them



Black leather Balmoral boot with rounded off square toe and low heel. Possibly with patent leather toecap. Stitching lines around edge of vamp and quarters indicate that a leg joined to it but it is not possible to say what form this took, though it is likely that it was either a lace or an elastic sided boot.

Heavily worn sole with brass rivets around the edge. Rivetted construction became common after 1853 when a patent was issued to Crick of Lancaster for this method of construction.

A second line of nails on the sole probably indicates that the sole has been repaired. It is also likely that the heel was repaired at least once



Black leather Balmoral boot with rounded off square toe and low heel. Toecap with punched decoration (brogued). Remains of leather lining of leg still in place. The leg had a back strap covering the back seam. Stitching lines at the edge of the leg section surviving at the heel indicate that this may have been an elastic sided boot

This became a popular style soon after its introduction in about 1840 and many examples survive. Rivitted construction as in shoe 1.

The sole does not appear to have been mended although it is likely that the heel has been

Black leather boot. Broad oval toe originally with toe cap (now missing). Low heel. Vamp with tab with rounded end. Remains of leg section. Rivitted construction. It is likely that this was a man's pull on boot, probably mid calf length or longer of Wellington boot type.



Wellingtons at this period were leather boots to be worn under trousers. By the 1850's they were becoming less fashionable but were still worn by many men, as they were strong and waterproof. Rivetted construction as in shoe 1.

The sole does not appear to have been mended though it is likely that the heel has been

The details of the shoes are held on the concealed shoe register in Northampton Museum.

These were the first they had recorded from the Bolton area