Down among the dead men

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Hidden in the woods, a few miles east of Andover, stands a stone cross, as tall and thin as the trees around it. The weathered inscription on its southern face, still decipherable, is a memorial to Edgar, King of Wessex, who went hunting in these woods with the Earl Æthelwald. It tells how the king learned that his minister had betrayed him, taking the lovely Ælfthryth to be his own wife when he should have delivered her as a royal bride, and how Edgar took a kingly revenge, spearing the faithless earl as they rode together beneath the trees. Such a terrible act was not easily forgotten, and so the place 'beyond the time of memory' was known as Deadman's Plack.

Or so thought the lord of the manor, Lt. Col William Iremonger, who had the cross erected in 1835. Historical criticism was in its infancy then, and nobody thought there was anything unusual about a local tradition surviving underground for nine centuries after the Anglo-Saxon period, and then only making itself known through a place-name which is not Old English at all, but compounded from ME *dede-man* and *plack*, a dialect form of late ME *plek*. In any case, historical critics have not dealt very kindly with the legend of Edgar, Æthelwald and Ælfthryth, seeing it as one of the slanders directed at a forceful queen consort and dowager.[1] Nevertheless, the monument is still there, as is the place-name which it commemorates: and after all, there must be some reason why this enclosure in the woods is called Deadman's Plack. Most place-names are unobtrusive, and go about their business of denomination without calling attention to themselves. But any name beginning with Dead Man is hard

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1. A transcript of the inscription can be found in O'Leary 2011, 128. Scepticism about the legend first appears in Freeman 1871, 15–25; the current edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.n. Ælfthryth, continues to dismiss these 'romantic additions'.

to ignore. It seems intended as a prompt for some kind of story or recollection. Exactly what we are supposed to be recalling, however, is not so clear.

Names of the type 'Deadman's + (landmark)' (with a few variations in the qualifier, such as Dead Men or Dead Woman) occur throughout the English-speaking world. In England alone there are about 300 examples, of which the earliest forms date from the thirteenth century, while new names of this type are still occasionally being coined. But most of the rural English names seem to have originated before 1700. There are seven or more interpretations to account for them, each of which is supported by a mixture of scholarly conjecture, folk tradition and (more rarely) evidence contemporary with or close to the original coinage of the name.

You might not think this from the onomastic literature, which explains Dead Man names in a much more straightforward manner. O. G. S. Crawford laid down the law in 1938: 'place-names with "Deadman" originated with the discovery of human bones there, and not…any particular "fatality" that was known and remembered' (Crawford 1938, 436). This remains the default position in more recent publications, such as *The Place-Names of Leicestershire*.[2] How much evidence is there for it?

Certainly there are some locations in which the name-type is associated with Anglo-Saxon burial places. In Surrey 'the land in the vicinity of the Mitcham cemetery had been known for centuries in the Court Rolls of the Manor as Dead Man's Close' (Bidder 1905–07, 10). In Leicestershire 'the fieldname Dead Man's Grave is still used by local people to refer to a field just inside Wymeswold parish on the side of the Fosse Way. This field is where an Anglo-Saxon cemetery was discovered in the 1960s' (Trubshaw 2005, 22). In Cambridgeshire 'by… the well-known Anglo-Saxon cemetery of Little Wilbraham…the road is *Dedcherlway c*.1274, cf. *le Dedcherlfeld of Little Wilburgham* 1337' (Reaney 1943, 30).

Apart from these three examples, however, the correlations are less convincing. The presence of Dead Man names in the same parishes as Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, as at Grantchester and Guilden Morden, tells us nothing without confirmation that the field-names are actually at the same place as the cemeteries (Reaney 1943, 22, 355). It would be satisfying if Dead Man Quarry in Kimberley were the site of a cemetery,

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2.   Cox (1998–2011) finds the name to be evidence for ancient burials at I, 214, II, 242, II, 278, III, 74, III, 223, IV, 29, IV, 84, IV, 90, IV, 102, IV, 157/199, and IV, 161, making eleven otherwise unknown Anglo-Saxon cemeteries; rather a lot, even for Leicestershire.

but all we know is that 'bones and weapons have been found here' (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1940, 309). 'Bones have been dug up' at Dead Men's Ait in Offenham in Worcestershire, while at Church Lench in the same county 'a lingering tradition of a burial…survives' at Deadman's Cross (Allies 1856, 90; Chafy 1901, 185).

The discovery of bones doesn't necessarily mean that an ancient site has been unearthed; there are other, more sinister interpretations. Deadmans Hill, in the West Riding parish of Stonebeck Up, 'received its present appellation from the horrible circumstance of three human (headless) bodies having been discovered here in 1728 buried in the peat. They were supposed to be the remains of three Scotch pedlars who, after disposing of their goods, came to a foul end while traversing the lonely road out of Nidderdale into Coverdale.'[3] The discovery is recorded in the township books of Middlesmoor—13/4d for the coroner, 6d for carrying the biers, etc.

Discoveries like this usually went unrecorded, but at several places Dead Man names are linked with battles known from history. A hollow in Hadley Wood called Dead Man's Bottom is associated with slaughter at the Battle of Barnet during the Wars of the Roses in 1471 (Cass 1890, 46). At Stoke in Nottinghamshire, where the forces of Henry VII routed those of Lambert Simnel in 1487, the casualties lay in Dead Man's Field (Brown 1896, 96). During the Civil Wars, in the first Battle of Newbury, Prince Rupert's cavalry descended on the troops of the Earl of Essex in Dead Man's Lane just outside Theale (Harper 1899, 162). Two years later, a Royalist force arriving to support the siege of Nantwich was surrounded in the village of Acton; 'the death roll was only 54; these were buried in the "Dead Man's Field", on the right as you go down Monks' Lane, beyond the Moat Field' (Moore 1930, 17).

The weakest link in all these interpretations is their jump from place-names recorded in the nineteenth century to events two, three or even four hundred years earlier. And some of these conflicts come from an even remoter, mythical past. 'At the ominous field in Over Stowey called "Dead men"…the old rustics, in times past, have associated war and bloodshed so profuse, that the gore flowed out and reached to "the second shuttle of the gate"'.[4] Dead Man's Green at Checkley was the scene of a great battle between Danes and English, 'where the dead strewed the ground, and where a human skeleton has been dug up'

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3.   Speight 1906, 568–69. The name is first recorded in 1840: Smith 1961–63, V, 220. A lively if inauthentic rendition of the story can be found in the *Spectator* (January–June 1919), 97.

4.   Greswell 1903, 277. The field is named on the TA: *VCH Somerset* VI, 160.

(Redfern 1886, 457). Unfortunately, this was originally Dadland Green; it is not a Dead Man name at all, but a folk-etymology (Horovitz 2005, 225). So much for the ancient battle.

Typical of these myth-making narratives is one from Rye, where a trackway 'was, in ancient times, called Dead Man's Lane, from a tradition that near to it was fought, in an age long gone, a great battle, in which many were slain, and their bones thrown into it. All we can say is, that many bones were formerly found on this spot, and that an adjoining field is called King's Field, from the kings who were engaged having fought in this place, as report saith'.[5] They tell much the same story a few miles to the west, at Winchelsea, where Dead Man's Lane is used as a local variant for what is Hogtrough Lane on the maps. The name is traced back to an assault on the town made in 1359 by the French, who massacred the local population while they were at prayer. 'The slain were buried in St Giles' church yard, which was thereupon enlarged, and the lane near is called to this day, Dead Man's Lane' (Cooper 1850, 80–81). And at Newport on the Isle of Wight it was the French, once again, who descended on the town and destroyed it in 1377, after which—as the county historian wrote in 1781—'a party of the French, indiscreetly coming towards the Castle, down a narrow lane, fell into an ambuscade, and were mostly cut off. The lane is still called Deadman's Lane' (Worsley 1781, 32). In this case the name (*Dedmannestret* in 1416) can be carried back to within a generation of the attack, which is known from historical sources, but no connection between the two—and, indeed, no reference to the ambuscade itself—was made until centuries later.[6]

Conflict makes for a good story, as we saw in the legend of Dead-man's Plack. It might be expected that other stories of murder and tragedy would be just as flimsy, but the evidence suggests otherwise. The parish register of Malmesbury records, under 1633, the burial of 'Thomas Taylor of Draycot Cerne, who was murthered betwixt Cicester and Malmsbury', and the editor says that 'the place is still called Dead Man's lane' (Thomas 1840, 239). To the north of Rugby, where the Lutterworth road crosses Watling Street, stands Gibbet Hill. The original gibbet carried a murderer who was convicted of killing William Banbury here in 1676, and a nearby field is Dead Man's Corner (Palmer 1976, 27). And in Staffordshire 'a violent death is recorded in a document which mentions Deadman's Grave in Cheddleton in 1689' (Horovitz

5. Holloway 1847, 595. The name is first recorded in 1742 (Monod 2003, 54).
6. Kökeritz 1940, 176, regarded the link as 'simply a legend made up in the course of centuries to account for the name of the street'; and the resemblance to the Rye and Winchelsea stories certainly suggests a migratory legend.

2005, 59). This sounds like contemporary evidence for a link between Dead Man names and places where murders were committed; and fortunately, we have another example, also from the seventeenth century, although this time the scenery is fictional. After Christian and Hopeful have passed the Delectable Mountains, the older of the two pilgrims warns his friend that 'at the entering in of this passage, there comes down from *Broad-way Gate*, a Lane called *Dead Man's Lane*; so called because of the Murders that are commonly done there' (Bunyan 1960, 125).

Murder was a private business, capital punishment a very public one. At Rugby, Dead Man's Corner was linked with the gibbet as well as with the original scene of the crime. Two roads were nicknamed Dead Man's Lane because they are said to have led to the local gallows—Rookery Lane at Handsworth, and St Edmund's Lane at Bures.[7] At Spalding 'Swan Street was originally called Dead Man's Lane because this was where they took miscreants to hang them'.[8]

Hanged men are landmarks in memory; that is why so many field-names, for centuries after the appropriation of capital punishment by the centralised state, have continued to use *gallows* as a formative element. But not all hangings are executions. In Cornwall there is 'Dead-man's grave, a pool on the high-road between Penzance and Sancreed, near which a man was buried who hung himself to a neighbouring thorn-tree' (*Antiquary* 16 (1887) 273). At Okeford Fitzpaine in Dorset, a man was found hanging in a holly tree, later marked by a cross and known as Dead Man's Tree (Graham 1954, 19; Palmer 1973, 97). More recently, a report from Carter's Copse near Gosport says that 'Rabbit Skin Jack, a poacher, haunts the Copse. He apparently hung himself in "Dead Man's Hollow" within the Copse, using his bootlaces'.[9]

Tradition is often confused about whether the place marked by a Dead Man name is one where the suicides killed themselves, or where they were buried, or both. Dead Woman's Grave at Albrighton in Shropshire was said to be named 'from a woman, who had committed suicide by hanging herself in a skein of yarn, having been buried according to the

7.   <http://birminghamhistory.co.uk/forum/showthread.php?t=9392> and <http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/assets/Publications/Bures-Arger-Fen.pdf> (accessed 6 January 2014), although in both sources 'it is said' that a gallows was at the end of the lane, which is a little unsatisfactory.

8.   Wickenden 2008, 102. The place-name first appears as Deadman's Lane 1689 in a deed of Spalding Baptist Church (Lincs RO: 14-Bapt; I owe this reference to Colin Baslington of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society).

9.   <http://www.gosport.gov.uk/sections/your-council/council-services/leisure-amenities/countryside/heritage-area/> (accessed 6 January 2014).

ancient custom in the cross roads there'.[10] At Yoxford in Suffolk, the name of Dead Men's Corner had multiple explanations. The only thing on which they seem to agree is that there were two men buried there, but whether they were participants in a suicide pact, or duellists, or Gypsies hanged for sheep-stealing, or ghosts laid after haunting Darsham Rectory, was a matter of opinion. A correspondent wrote to the *East Anglian Magazine* in 1952 'the tale, as I know it, is that early in the nineteenth century two men quarrelled. One shot the other and then hung himself on an oak tree which still stands about half way between the bridge and the main road'. All parties agreed, however, that there had been men buried at the spot; their bones were disturbed during road-works in the 1930s (Westwood and Simpson 2005, 708).

In reality, suicides do not go hanging themselves from trees by the roadside; tradition, with its foreshortened perspective, has conflated their lonely deaths with their lonely, isolated graves, as if the one must necessarily have taken place at the other. But there were people who really did die unseen at exposed places in the landscape: vagrants, travellers overtaken by night or cold weather, stragglers fleeing their homes in time of plague. These are the 'scenes of medieval tragedy' which Reaney invoked in his discussion of Dead Man names.[11] The hazards of travel did not end with the Middle Ages; in the early eighteenth century, a man was found dead on the Long Mynd, in an area disputed between two parishes, and the place where he was found (apparently Deadmans Bach on the upper reaches of the Broad Brook) was claimed by Church Stretton because they had buried him, and Woolstaston had not.[12] Dead Man's Hill, a strip of Norfolk heathland extending from the parish of Cawston into that of Marsham, is supposed to have been claimed after the discovery of a body for which Cawston took responsibility.[13] Mike Behrend, whose listing of Dead Man names in East Anglia is one of the most comprehensive regional surveys, thought that Deadman's Field in Little Waltham could be linked with the reference, in the parish registers, to 'a stranger dyed at Jn. Smith's Stonage'.[14]

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10.   Vaughan 1883, 40. Horovitz 2005, 58, treats this as a Staffordshire name, under Codsall. It seems from *Kelly's Directory* 1900, s.l. Tong, that the name was current in 1746.

11.   Reaney 1943, 354, reiterating the phrase from Reaney 1935, 598; by the time of the later work, however, he had come to prefer the ancient cemetery interpretation.

12.   *VCH Shropshire* VIII, 170.

13.   <http://www.cawstonparish.info/heath.htm> (accessed 6 January 2014).

14.   <http://www.hiddenea.com/oddburials.htm> (accessed 6 January 2014).

The discovery of the dead was particularly frequent at places along tidal rivers or the coastline, where the swirl and eddy of waters would regularly bring drowned bodies to the shore at the same place. Downstream of London, places at Deptford and Rotherhithe were called Dead Man's Creek because the bodies used to wash up there. Dead Man's Hole at Tower Bridge takes its name from 'corpses that found their way in to the murky river; suicide jumpers, by accident or dumped, often found their way to this particular part of the river. Once fished out of the Thames, bodies could be laid out to await identification'. At Whitstable, those lost at sea would wash up at Dead Man's Corner.[15]

At the other end of the coast, Portreath in Cornwall kept a special morgue for bodies thrown up by the sea, called Dead Man's Hut.[16] But with this interpretation we have moved away from Dead Man as a designator for a place where bodies were found, and towards its use to denote the place to which they were taken. Dead Man's Island at Queenborough, near the confluence of the Swale and Medway, was used for the burial of Napoleonic prisoners of war who had died in captivity (Arnold 2013, 179). In the same conflict, barracks were built on Drybridge Hill at Woodbridge for the Duke of York's Regiment; between 1804 and 1814, 669 soldiers died and were buried in a mass grave by Dead Man's Lane. The name was also applied to the road which ran along the length of Royal Hospital Haslar in Gosport, where naval personnel were treated, and from which they were carried to Clayhall Cemetery if treatment had proved unsuccessful. The cemetery did not open until 1859, making this a comparatively late instance of the name.[17]

Elsewhere, roads called Dead Man's Lane have been identified with other, much earlier routes. These are the corpse ways which led from dependent chapelries to the parish church, and along which all those who died in the minor settlement had to be carried, since the mother church retained rights of burial. Unfortunately there is seldom enough evidence to identify a Dead Man name with one of these trackways. The best example is probably Sawley in Derbyshire, where Deadman's Stile lies on a route from the chapel to its mother church at Wilne (Cameron 1959,

15.   Mike Chislett, *pers. comm.* 2013; <http://www.bowlofchalk.net/1/post/2013/02/dead-mans-hole-tower-bridge.html> (accessed 6 January 2014); and <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2674754> (accessed 6 January 2014).

16.   <http://www.recordist.org.uk/2011/09/dead-mans-hut-portreath/> (accessed 6 January 2014).

17.   <http://www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk/assets/Documents/District/Planning-policy/CA-SPD/WoodbridgeConAreaAppraisalSPDJuly2011.pdf> (accessed 6 January 2014); and <http://www.haslarheritagegroup.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49&Itemid=109> (accessed 6 January 2014).

II, 520). In urban settings, the name may simply have been given by neighbours watching the frequent passage of funeral processions to the church. Already in the nineteenth century this was being offered as an explanation for Dead Mans Lane in Bradford (James 1866, II, 253). *Dedmanlane c*.1400 in Bishops Stortford and Dead Man's Lane in Oakham would both fit this pattern.[18]

Of course if all cemeteries and churches were marked by a Dead Man name, the toponym would lose much of its force. Instead, popular memory confined it to burial places marked by especially tragic circumstances, such as those used in time of plague. At Wandsworth, tradition had it that Deadman's Field 'derived its name from the fact of its containing one of the pits in which the bodies of persons who died during the great plague were deposited'. Unfortunately, when the field was developed for housing, 'no human bones were found'.[19] This is what might be expected of plague pit traditions, which spring up almost spontaneously around any waste piece of ground in an urban setting (Roud 2008, 118–19).

Any explanation of a local curiosity which involves plague, murder, duels, ghosts, gibbets or ancient battles will induce a shudder in the more sensitive kind of local historian. Unfortunately Dead Man names have been interpreted in connection with all these things, and even the plague story, which seems the weakest of them all, turns out to be supported by the strongest evidence: in fact by the only evidence to come from a medieval source. The arrival of the Black Death in London placed great strain on existing churchyards, and the bishop bought a croft of some three acres as a burial ground. The field had previously been empty, called *Nomanneslond* and used for executions; but now it was walled round, provided with a chapel, and known as Pardon churchyard. By the early fifteenth century, however, it had acquired the alternative name of *Deademannescroft* (Sloane 2011, 41).

In this case, a plague burial ground had acquired a Dead Man name within a century of its being consecrated for use, so evidently the plague explanation cannot be dismissed out of hand. Indeed, of all the other reasons offered for Dead Man names—sites of ancient cemeteries, places where concealed bodies were dug up, burial pits for the victims of battle, locations famous for road-side murders, sites of gallows, suicide graves, shores where dead sailors had washed up, landmarks where dead

18. Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1938, 202; and <http://www.discover-rutland.co.uk/xsdbimgs/PDF's/OakhamHeritageTrail.pdf> (accessed 6 January 2014).

19. *Wandsworth Notes & Queries* 1 (1898), 15, 51.

travellers were found, and roads to cemeteries or churchyards—none can be completely dismissed as general explanations, however much individual examples of the name may have been dovetailed into local mythology.

There is one other explanation for these names which, if it were generally true, would bring an end to all speculation about their origin. Deadman's Lane in Woodbridge is, in the view of Arnott (1946, 26), 'probably so named from a former occupier', such as the Dedman who appears in the parish accounts for 1641. This is not an isolated reference; there are other instances of Deadman as a surname, of the sort that might easily give rise to possessive place-names. Formally, these would be indistinguishable from the kinds of names that we have been discussing so far. Can it be that all our murders, suicides and cemeteries are simply fantasies conjured up by storytellers out of some wood or field which once belonged to John Deadman?

Probably not. Dead Man place-names appear frequently throughout England from the thirteenth century onwards, whereas the surname Deadman is local and (understandably) rare. In Reaney's judgement (Reaney and Wilson 1991, 129) it appeared in the late Middle Ages as a reduced form of the locative name Debenham, taken from the Suffolk village only ten miles from Woodbridge. And even in Suffolk place-names we find that Dead Man is compounded with Lane (five times) and Grave (twice)—not at all the pattern one would expect if the qualifier were an owner's name. It is possible that some Dead Man names derive from the surname Deadman, just as others—such as Dead Man's Green at Checkley (Horovitz 2005, 225) and Deadmanstone at Almondbury (Smith 1961–63, II, 259)—are from the personal name Dudeman. But these are not common enough to distort statistical patterns derived from a corpus of hundreds of names.

Two conclusions seem inescapable. Firstly, Dead Man names are polysemous; the literal meaning of the name was one which could be developed into various senses, according to local circumstances. And secondly, an onomastic history of the name-type should deal, not just with the sense which particular examples had when they were coined, but with the life that they continue to lead in popular narrative. All names have a denotative function, but there are other functions as well, and the one that Dead Man names possess in abundance is the power to elicit story-telling.

However diverse the narratives associated with them, it seems that Dead Man names have branched out into their present range of senses from an original, core meaning. The common thread in all the interpre-

tations is not just that the Dead Man is dead, but that he ought *not* to have been dead. It was war, murder, execution or plague that wrongly cut short his life—or else his body turned up under the soil of a field, by the roadside, on the beach, or somewhere else that a body has no place to be. In the case of the suicides, both factors apply: the self-murderer had no business making himself into a corpse, and therefore his corpse is buried on the outskirts of the village, away from where good bodies lie. That is why a place-name such as Dead Man's Grave is not tautologous. All dead men have graves, but the toponym is reminding us that this particular grave holds a man who was not expected to be dead, at least not here, and not in this way.

The Dead Man, in short, is someone who has suffered what the anthropologists call a bad death (Jupp and Gittings 1999, 97–98). This suggests that, in most cases, the associated place-name would have referred to someone who had just died, and not to a pile of disturbed ancient bones. This is borne out by the variation in qualifiers to be found among Dead Man names, as far as can be established from a corpus of examples.[20] Although the first element is usually *dede-man* or its modern reflex, we meet with many other words which could only apply to the body of somebody known, or at least identifiable: *dede-cherl*, *-grome*, *-knave*, *-ladde*, *-boie* and *-child*, and also *dede-womman*, *-wif*, *-quene* and *-maid*.

Two things stand out in this lexicon. The first is that *cherl* and *quene* are more commonly substituted for *man* and *wif* in Dead Man names than they are in other kinds of field-name. This may be linked to the fact that, at least in late Middle English, these words had acquired a mildly defamatory sense; to call someone a *cherl* would have been a bit of a put-down, and describing his wife as a *quene* could get you a punch in the mouth. It is hard to pin down semantic nuances of this kind, but it does look as if some view of the dead people's status is being expressed here, and it is certainly not one which could be deduced from bare bones.

The second anomaly is that both sexes are involved. Although the women's bodies are in a minority, it is a substantial one, making up 14% of the total as against 86% for the men. On first thoughts, this may seem compatible with the discovery of ancient bodies; after all, we are used to reading about male graves and female graves in the literature of excavations. But in fact there is no way that an ordinary person, digging into an ancient cemetery, could know whether they had disinterred a man

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20.   In the preparation of this article, a corpus was compiled of 270 Dead Man names (excluding twentieth-century and contemporary forms). All statistical analyses are based on this corpus, which will be placed online.

or a woman. Without flesh, without clothing (which decays as easily as flesh) and without the meticulous archaeological recovery of grave-goods, there is nothing that can distinguish dead men from women apart from a few features of skeletal anatomy which are only known to experts. The distinction of sex in Dead Man names argues against the general applicability of Crawford's archaeological explanation for them. They are more likely to commemorate the recent, identifiable dead.

But when did they die? If we divide up the first recorded appearance of Dead Man names into centuries, we get the following result:

C13—10%
C14—8%
C15—8%
C16—12%
C17—15%
C18—7%
C19—40%

The high proportion of forms from the nineteenth century reflects the arrival of tithe apportionments and the Ordnance Survey, and it is possible that biases in the creation or survival of documents might also account for the earlier variations. Normally, though, you would expect that the number of first recorded forms would increase as the centuries go by and the documentary record becomes more extensive, and it is noticeable that this does not happen: instead, it tails off after the seventeenth century. And there is a very high number of forms from the thirteenth century, even though there are none at all from the twelfth or any earlier period. It may be possible to fix the point of origin a little more accurately than this, given that the earliest clearly dated form is *Dedemanne* 1239/40 at Kintbury in Berkshire. There are a further 14 forms dated to the later part of the century, but none to its earlier years.[21] This suggests that Dead Man names first became current from the 1240s onwards.

The landscape of Dead Man names varies very little over time. The same compounds are repeated again and again; just under half of them rely on only five generics, as follows:

Lane—17%
Grave—16%
Field—9%
Hill—4%
Bush—3%

21.   Gelling 1973–76, II, 321. It is possible, however, that the early thirteenth-century *Deadknabohyge* at Kirtlington in Oxfordshire (Gelling 1953, I, 228) may be corrupt for a name in *dede knave*.

If we exclude those generics which appear once only, the rest can be conveniently classed under four headings. The first, and most obvious, is the place of burial—*grave* (occasionally *burial*). Next come the generics indicating some kind of roadway—*lane*, and then *way* and *street*, together with *cross* (which seems always to have its modern English sense of 'crossroads', not 'standing cross'). After that, there are generics indicating arable land of some kind—*field*, with *acre*, *batch*, *close*, *croft*, *furlong* and *piece*; together with those for woodland, such as *coppice*, *covert*, *grove*, *plantation* and *riding*. Most of the woodland generics are modern English, with the exception of *grove* (*grāf*), which may however be an analogical substitution for *grave* (*græf*).[22] Then there are the generics which identify landmarks—*hill*, with *bank*, *bottom*, *clough*, *dale*, *hole* and *moor*; trees are named in *bush*, *oak* and *thorn*; and water features in *brook*, *holme*, *sike* and *well*.

This gives an idea of the kind of places with which a Dead Man might be associated, but the situation is more fluid than might first appear, since different generics are frequently substituted in successive forms of the name. We have already seen *Dedcherlway c.*1274 succeeded by *le Dedcherlfeld* 1337 at Little Wilbraham, and other medieval examples include the replacement of *le Dedequenerode* 1297 by *Dedequencloht* 1434 at Sowerby in the West Riding, and *Dedmanslond* 1380 by *Dedmanesgrave* 1404 at Peterborough, while *Dedemannesmore* and *Dedmanneslowe* are contemporary forms in 1401 at Castle Church in Staffordshire (Smith 1961–63, III, 146; Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1933, 289; Horovitz 2005, 58). More recently, we find a number of additive names where a second generic has been tacked on in the later history of the name. Thus we have two eighteenth-century examples of Deadman's Grave Furlong at South Croxton in Leicestershire and Elton in Huntingdonshire, while tithe apportionments provide a Deadmans Bush Furlong at Benson in Oxfordshire, a Dead Man's Acre Copse at Bibury, and a Dead Woman Lane Close at Shapwick in Dorset (Cox 1998–2011, III, 74; Whistler 1892, 14; Gelling 1953, I, 118; Smith 1964–65, I, 7; Kerr 1968, 234).

It is noticeable that these additive generics are the same as those used in primary Dead Man compounds. It may be that other names have passed through a process of development beginning with a simplex *Dedeman* which was later elaborated by the addition of other elements. We can see this happening quite often in the medieval forms; at

22.   This appears twice in medieval forms—Cameron 1959, II, 608 and Dodgson 1970–97, IV, 256. As far as can be gathered from the landscape context, other medieval names containing something like *grave* refer to woods, not inhumations.

Granchester *Dedeman* C13 develops to *Dedmanneslond* C14, while at Ickleton in the same county *le Dedeman* and *Dedmanhyll* both appear in the same document of 1455; somewhere in Essex, a *locum vocatum the Deedwoman* 1433 had become *le Deade Womans Booshe* by 1547 (Reaney 1935, 598; 1943, 22, 354). There are other examples where a medieval simplex name has become a modern compound, confirming a drift towards more elaborate structure. Of the names first recorded in modern times, 11% are simplexes, while amongst those first recorded in the Middle Ages, the proportion is a much higher 30%. This suggests that the naming tradition had begun with simplex forms.

What exactly did our ancestors mean when they called somewhere the Dead Man? There are occasional clues, such as the location *super montem de Dedecherl* C13 in Warwickshire, and reference to a 'heap of stones called Deade Mann' 1651 in Wiltshire (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1936, 338; 1939, 455). This suggests that the original landmark was a gravemound or cairn, probably one created not too long before the name was given; at Pickwell in Leicestershire the appellative 'at the grave' of 1606 had ten years later become a place-name, *Deadmans Graue* (Cox 1998–2011, II, 242).

Support for this comes in a map of 1599, reproduced by Nicola Whyte in her study of place and memory in Norfolk; drafted to settle disputed grazing rights, this records Deadman's Grave at the parish junction of Cawston, Heveringham and Haveringland, and it is shown as a little round of concentric dots like a mound or cairn.[23] Like the turf crosses marked on the same map, this landmark was evidently substantial enough to be cited as a boundary marker. In the same way, we find that the seventeenth-century manorial procession around Gillingham in Dorset paused at 'a bush called dead man's bush, where is a bound-stone that parteth Gillingham, Meere and Milton', while the perambulation of Gilbert White's Selborne, as set down in the parish register for 1703, ends the afternoon of the first day by coming 'down to dead man's Thorn where is also a large stone, near to a road, and here a Gospel is to be read, a Psalm to be sung, and a Cross made X' (Freame 1921, 97; Mabey 1986, 23).

Though we lack a complete topographical survey of Dead Man sites, it is possible to examine those which appear on current Ordnance Survey maps, and the results are as follows:

23.   Whyte 2009, 159. At TG 170 227, this is some distance from Deadman's Hill on the Cawston/Marsham boundary; either there were two Dead Men, or the name has drifted.

County	Parish	Name	Grid ref.	Boundary?
Beds	Clophill	Deadman's Hill	TL 075 390	Yes
Beds	Haynes	Deadman's Cross	TL 112 419	Yes
Beds	Ickwell	Deadman's Oak	TL 129 466	Yes
Berkshire	Theale	Deadman's Lane	SU 635 713	No
Cumberland	Kirkoswald	Dead Man's Slack	NY 562 403	No
Derbs	Hazlebadge	Deadmans Clough	SK 180 798	Yes
Devon	Dartmouth	Deadman's Cross	SX 866 508	No
Dorset	Cranborne	Dead Man	SU 054 129	No
Essex	Galleywood	Deadman's Lane	TL 714 039	Yes
Glos	Bibury	Dead Man's Acre Copse	SP 102 088	No
Hants	Godshill	Deadman Hill	SU 199 164	No
Hants	Longparish	Deadman's Plack	SU 402 450	No
Herefs	Eastnor	Dead Woman's Thorn	SO 722 377	No
Herts	Hitchin	Dead Woman's Lane	TL 171 250	Yes
Herts	Sandon	Deadman's Lane	TL 291 370	Yes
Kent	Queenborough	Deadmans Island	TQ 892 726	No
Lancashire	Bowland Forest	High Dead Man's Stake	SD 589 508	No
Norfolk	Beechamwell	Deadman's Plantation	TF 778 050	Yes
Norfolk	Cawston	Deadman's Hill	TG 175 244	Yes
Norfolk	Paston	Dead Man's Grave	TG 305 324	Yes
Norfolk	Sheringham	Dead Man's Hill	TG 129 433	Yes
Oxon	Rotherfield Greys	Deadman's Lane	SU 699 857	Yes
Oxon	Spelsbury	Deadman's Riding	SP 386 224	Yes
Somerset	Charlton Horethorne	Deadman's Hill	ST 659 224	Yes
Somerset	Over Stowey	Dead Woman's Ditch	ST 162 381	No
Somerset	Whatley	Dead Woman's Bottom	ST 717 461	Yes
Suffolk	Battisford	Deadman's Lane	TM 040 545	Yes
Suffolk	Benhall	Deadman's Lane	TM 367 631	Yes
Suffolk	Walberswick	Deadman's Covert	TM 465 747	Yes
Suffolk	Wetheringsett	Deadman's Lane	TM 124 693	Yes
Westmorland	Stainmore	Deadman Gill	NY 824 190	No
Wilts	Kilmington	Dead Woman's Corner	ST 775 375	Yes
Yorks WR	Stainforth	Dead Man's Cave	SD 802 670	Yes
Yorks WR	Stonebeck Up	Dead Man's Hill	SE 051 783	Yes

From this it appears that out of 34 names, 22 (65%) are located on a parish boundary: a very high proportion. Whatever the nuances of interpretation in particular cases—and given that Dead Man names are polysemous, there will be a variety of these—our primary interpretation must explain why so many are found at liminal places. Many of the explanations traditionally offered for Dead Man names are unable to account for their presence at boundaries. Murderers do not make a point of killing their victims at the very edge of the parish, or, one imagines, of burying them there—although one source claims, rather incredibly, that after the three pedlars were killed near Stonebeck Up 'the dead bodies [were] conveyed on a sledge to this place and buried at midnight, on the boundary line…the actors…deeming that by so doing they would baffle the ends of justice' (Grainge 1863, 144).

Of the locations that lie away from boundaries, there are some—Godshill, Bowland Forest High, Over Stowey and Stainmore—that look like the kind of place in which a benighted traveller might succumb to malnutrition or hypothermia. The evidence of the landscape does not offer much support for other interpretations of the name; significantly, none of the Dead Man's Lanes on the OS follow a corpse way. Ancient cemeteries are another matter, since burials of the pagan Anglo-Saxon period do certainly cluster around the divisions which survive as parish boundaries, as do early execution sites. Barrie Cox, observing the strong correlation of Dead Man sites with boundaries in Leicestershire, saw this as the consequence of people discovering ancient burials there. But the same correlation of Dead Man names with boundaries is found in Dorset, where pagan Saxon burials of individuals are rare and large cemeteries are unknown (Harte 1986, 12–13). The link with boundaries is equally common in areas such as Norfolk, where the dead were cremated, not inhumed; a cremation urn would not have been recognised by medieval husbandmen as a dead body.

Out of all the categories traditionally identified as a source of Dead Man names, the only one compatible with a nationwide distribution of these sites on parish borders is that of outcast burial. The parish purged itself of the unwanted dead by dismissing them to the boundaries: here lay the heretic, the criminal, the sorcerer and, most often, the suicide. A second map of Cawston, made while the dispute over grazing rights was still rumbling on, features Deadman's Grave as before, but this time he has a neighbour: Jone Metton's Grave lies on the same boundary, a few hundred yards away (Whyte 2009, 161). This is an early instance of the name-type which would characterise suicide graves down to the abolition

of crossroads burial in 1823, as popular and theological attitudes to self-murder became harder and less charitable (Halliday 2010).

It seems as if the suicide—always a village neighbour, memorialised even after death by their own name—was taking over some of the cultural work which had formerly been carried out by those anonymous strangers, the Dead Men. Like all communities, the village defined itself by pointing the finger at those who had been excluded. That would explain why early forms of the qualifier, *dede cherl* and *dede quene*, made deliberate use of such derogatory words. It would also explain why these names make their appearance in the onomastic record during the 1240s, and why they become suddenly more common during the sixteenth century; these were the two periods of rising population and strained local resources, when the countryside confronted a Malthusian crisis, and villagers reacted by affirming the boundaries between those who belonged and those who did not. English xenophobia has a long pedigree.

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