

Some Nottinghamshire dead men

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Jeremy Harte's recent article 'Down among the dead men' (2013) examines the phenomenon of place-names deriving from Middle English *dede-man* 'one who has died; a corpse; a ghost' (*MED* s.v. *dēd*, adj.) and reaches several conclusions about the likely significance of these names. He rejects the previously-supposed association between these names and the discovery of human remains, and debunks some of the folk-myths which arose from Dead Man names and which were prevalent in the nineteenth century. He examines the possible explanations for the names, from association with Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, through ancient battle-sites, the locations of famous murders or suicides, to execution spots, and the burial plots of these unfortunate individuals. Harte suggests that the names tend to reflect unexpected or exceptional circumstances, arguing that it 'is not just that the Dead Man is dead, but that he ought *not* to have been dead' (2013, 43–4).

Harte's discussion of this name-type (if, indeed, there is a single 'type' at work here) is naturally limited by the availability of minor names in the English Place-Name Society's survey volumes. It seems pertinent, then, to add to the discussion two clusters of Dead Man names which have become apparent in my doctoral research on Nottinghamshire minor names.¹ The first of these clusters is in the parish of Norwell, and the second in Sutton-on-Trent and the neighbouring Carlton-on-Trent:

¹ I compiled a survey of minor names in around twenty-five parishes of the Thurgarton Wapentake of Nottinghamshire, the exact number being dependent on changes to parish boundaries at various points in time.

Norwell

Dedmans wong ' 1406 White Book²

Dedmangrave 1433 *ibid.*

Deadmans grave close 1653 Deed

Sutton-on-Trent

Deadmans Furlong 1604 Deed³

Deadman Close 1808 EnclA⁴

Deadman Drain 1808 *ibid.*

Deadman Lane 1808 *ibid.*

Deadman Lane Drain 1808 *ibid.*

Deadman's Farm 1884 OS 6"

Deadman's Cottage 1884 *ibid.*

Carlton-on-Trent

Deadman's Grave 1828 Sale⁵

These minor names neatly follow the pattern of recurring generics established by Harte (2013, 45): *Lane* is the most popular element in his corpus, of which *Deadman Lane* is a Nottinghamshire example; *Grave* is almost as common, and each Nottinghamshire cluster has an instance. *Dedman's wong* contains a generic not in Harte's list, Old Norse *vangr* 'enclosure', but this element occurs very frequently locally, and is

² White Book forms are taken from Barrow *et al.* (forthcoming), a modern edition of the principal medieval cartulary of deeds relating to Southwell Minster and its estates. The cartulary was mainly compiled between 1335 and the mid-fifteenth century. See the Thoroton Society's website for more information on the project: <thorotonsociety.org.uk/news/thornews_autumn2010.htm>, accessed 21.10.16.

³ De A 39 from the Denison collection held at the University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections department.

⁴ Enclosure Award for Sutton-on-Trent with Wadnall Field, held at Nottinghamshire Archives: EA 92/2/1 and C/QDI 12.

⁵ 'Sale plan and particulars for Carlton on Trent mansion, manor and estate, including Bell Inn, with some lands in neighbouring Willoughby and Sutton on Trent', dated 29 February 1828. Held at Nottinghamshire Archives: DD 1408/1.

perhaps semantically similar to some of Harte's *Field* examples.⁶ It falls without difficulty into his category of 'generics indicating arable land of some kind' (2013, 46).

To my knowledge no stories of battles, murder or other folk-historical tales have survived to explain the Sutton-on-Trent and Norwell names. Neither parish contains or adjoins a known Anglo-Saxon cemetery, and in fact the closest such cemeteries are in Newark and North Collingham, on the opposite bank of the Trent (Meaney 1964, 200–2). These traditional explanations, then, can safely be passed over.

There is, however, another pattern which emerges from the Nottinghamshire names: the two parishes which contain the clusters of Dead Man compounds also contain minor names referring to gallows (Old English *galga-trēow*). There are no additional gallows names in the remainder of my study area, which means that (in this part of Nottinghamshire, at least) the *galga-trēow* and *dede-man* names only occur in combination with one another. The gallows names are as follows:

Norwell

Galowtrewong 1406 White Book

Sutton-on-Trent

Galley Tree Syke 1808 EnclA

Galley Tree Syke Lane 1808 *ibid.*

Galley Tree Sike Drain 1808 *ibid.*

The coincidence of these two name-types is striking at first glance, although they could represent chance survival of names, or else one name inspiring or influencing another in popular imagination; it is easy to imagine that the occurrence of gallows names might inspire folklore stories of ghosts and corpses in the surrounding landscape, resulting in coinage of names referring to a Dead Man or men. However, a closer

⁶ The parishes I have surveyed contain thirty-five separate names derived from *vangr* before 1500, and it seems likely that 'enclosure of arable from the common field' is the usual meaning of the element locally, although the precise sense is unimportant for the current purposes.

examination of the names renders it less likely that both *galga-trēow* and *dede-man* names are present in the same parishes by chance.

The Norwell gallows-name appears in the same document as *Dedmans wong*, and belongs to the same great arable field (the North Field). While neither can be precisely located, it is nevertheless clear that they were in the same general area of the parish, and that both names were in use contemporaneously. The Sutton-on-Trent names – appearing as they do in the parish Enclosure Award – can be mapped, as shown in Figure 1 opposite. Each map-marker is located as closely as possible to the central point of the feature, and although distances can only be approximate, especially considering that the features to which the names refer may have taken their names from other, nearby referents, it seems that the two clusters of names are only a few hundred metres apart from one another.

It cannot, of course, be proved that the Sutton-on-Trent and Carlton-on-Trent names predate the nineteenth century, but the centralization of judicial systems and the removal of structures such as purpose-built gallows and gibbets would be expected to have taken place before the enclosure process was complete (Whyte 2003, 37), so the gallows names at least must be older than this. The Dead Man names, scattered as they are over this small area, might reasonably be derived from one or two much older names; the naming of a farm and a cottage adds weight to this suggestion. There is no direct evidence to connect the nineteenth-century Dead Man names with the 1604 attestation of *Deadmans Furlong*, primarily because there is no information available regarding the location of the earlier name, but it is possible that this is an example of partial name survival in a nearby location. Such partial survival, of what might be thought of as the ‘core’ name with a change in generic, occurs frequently in minor names in this area and elsewhere. The Norwell names are very early by contrast, and do not appear to have survived beyond the late medieval or early modern period; as in Sutton-on-Trent, the seventeenth-century attestation cannot be confidently connected to the fifteenth-century field-names, but it is suggestive of continuity of naming in that locality. The compound *gallows-tree* is attested from *Beowulf* to the late nineteenth century (OE *galga-trēow*, Middle English *galwe-tre*),

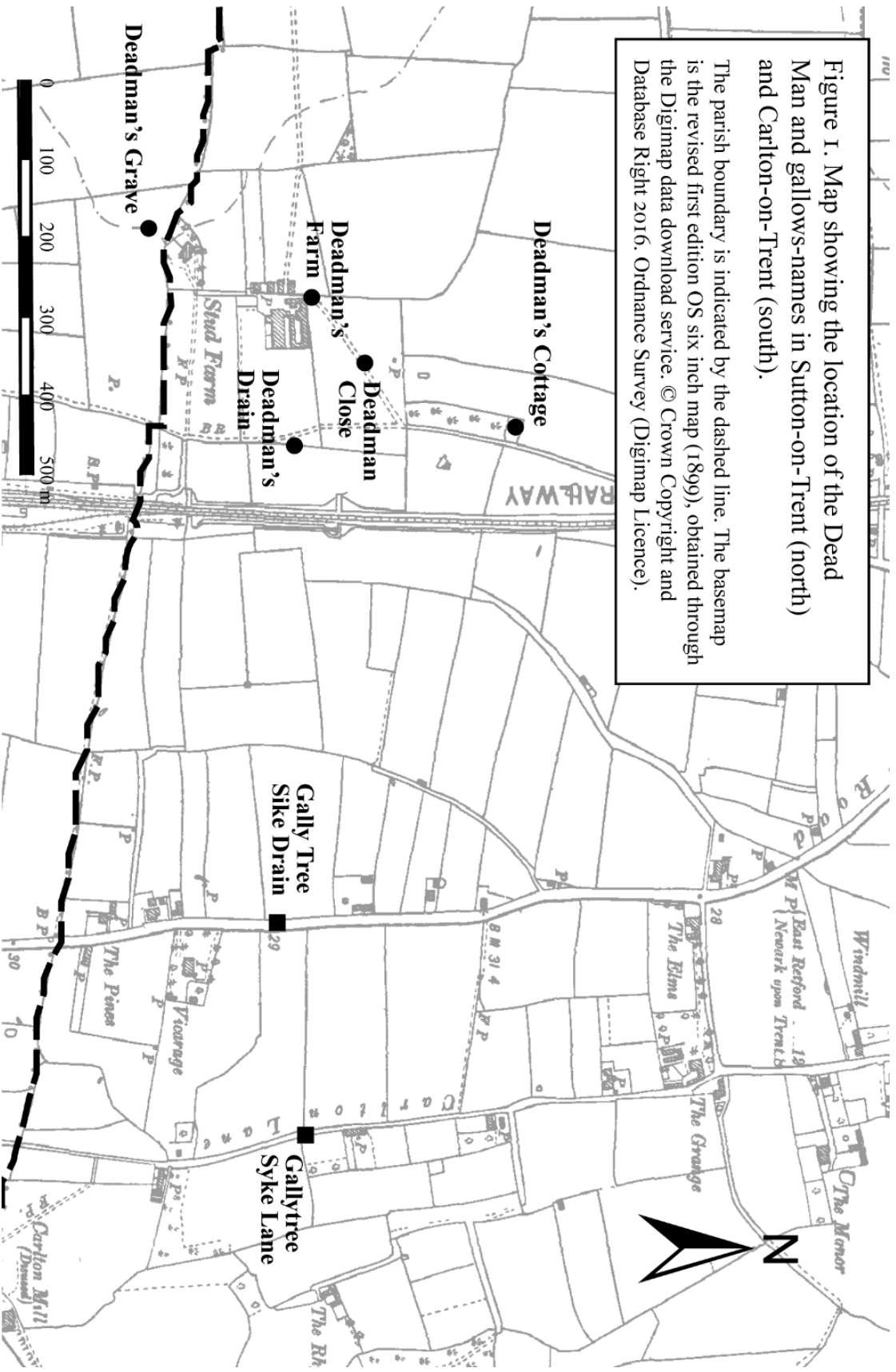


Figure 1. Map showing the location of the Dead Man and gallows-names in Sutton-on-Trent (north) and Carlton-on-Trent (south).

The parish boundary is indicated by the dashed line. The basemap is the revised first edition OS six inch map (1899), obtained through the Digimap data download service. © Crown Copyright and Database Right 2016. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence).

so names derived from it could have been coined at any time from the Anglo-Saxon period to the present day (*MED*, s.v. *galwe*, n.; *OED*, s.v. *gallows-tree*, n.).

In these Nottinghamshire minor names, there is a clear correlation not only between Dead Man names and parish boundaries, but also between the dead men and possible gallows sites.⁷ It would be tempting to suggest that the *Dedmangrave* in Norwell was the burial ground for executed criminals; and that the *Deadman's Grave* on the parish boundary in Carlton-on-Trent might be similarly connected to the gallows indicated by Sutton-on-Trent's *Galley Tree* names. Whyte's study of deviant burials in Norfolk gives an example of a named man's burial plot at the end of Gallowhill Lane (Pigg's Grave, Swanton Novers; 2003, 36), and it may be that there are similar correlations elsewhere in the country.⁸ The location of Dead Man names has been convincingly linked with boundaries by Harte and others (e.g. Harte 2013, 47–50; *EPNS Leicestershire*, II, 243, 278; VII, 44), and in Norfolk the same association has been made between gallows names and parish boundaries, especially at the convergence of multiple boundaries or routeways, including the aforementioned street-name (Whyte 2003, 30).⁹ It seems that a useful exercise would be to examine the place of gallows in the landscape in relation to Harte's study of Dead Man names, for although Reynolds' (2009) study of Anglo-Saxon deviant burials refers to the continuation of boundary burials for outcasts, recent work on executions and the place of criminals in the landscape has focused on the eighteenth century (Tarlow and Dyndor 2015; see also Halliday 1995). Tarlow and Dyndor's article 'The landscape of the gibbet' depicts physical boundaries in the landscape as representations of the distinction between body and soul in

⁷ This correlation is also discussed by Harte (2013, 38–9).

⁸ Named burials surviving as place-names are also evidenced by Harte, e.g. Jone Metton's Grave in Cawston, Norfolk (2013, 49).

⁹ It is relevant to note here that Deadman's Grave, shown in Figure 1, is very close to the point where a modern bridleway crosses the parish boundary, which may also have been an intersection at the time the names were coined.

a Christian society (2015, 71–2); the interrelation that they describe between places of corporeal punishment, social power, and religious lessons, seems as relevant a framework for the medieval period as for their later study. The manifestation of the physicality of crime and punishment is anchored in space and reflected in place-names; these names may at first reinforce the visual aspect of execution while the gallows still stands, but they subsequently preserve societal memories long beyond the point of the grave site becoming overgrown or the gallows being dismantled and removed.

While the *dede-man* names and the *galga-trēow* names certainly denote different perceptions of space and its use – the former fulfilling a number of semantic functions, and the latter referring specifically to a place or means of execution – it is possible that they refer to features which are, as Reynolds suggests, ‘separate entities but complementary in function’ (2009, 223). This is the explanation he gives for an Anglo-Saxon execution site and nearby burial ground in Staffordshire, both described in contemporary charter bounds. Although later, the Nottinghamshire examples seem equally to suggest a relationship between execution and burial sites, and there are a handful of similar examples from other counties in England which support the idea of a more widespread connection between the *dede-man* and the *galga-trēow* (Harte 1986, 13; Whyte 2003, 30).¹⁰ A wider survey of gallows in English minor names would allow further comparisons to be made, and might reveal additional connections and patterns between the elements discussed here and other, as yet unacknowledged, place-name types connected to execution and burial customs in the medieval period and beyond it.

¹⁰ Some less certain examples include Dead Woman’s Ditch in Holford, Somerset (ST1615), which is only a short distance from Walford’s Gibbet (ST1722), and Dead Woman’s Stone in Dorset (*EPNS Dorset*, 1, 290). The latter was probably on heathland around SY8219, see <pastscape.org/hob.aspx?hob_id=456341> (accessed 21.10.16); this is not far from Gallows Hill, now a wood- and street-name (SY8436).

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