

Mine the Mountain Nicholas Hedges

Deadman's Walk

The name 'Deadman's Walk' derives from the 13th century when Jews would carry their dead along this route from the mediaeval Jewish Quarter around modern-day St. Aldates, to their burial ground in what is now the Botanic Gardens.

Funerals are of course occasions when attention is turned towards the deceased individual and it's this focus upon the individual I wish to consider with this work, examining, as we walk the route of those mediaeval mourners, what we, as individuals are made of.

'Deadman's Walk' would appear to be a contradiction in terms, but being as we comprise a part of every one of our ancestors, we can say that the dead do indeed walk. As we think of the dead and our own mortality we are at once both mourners and mourned and in the contemplation our own non-existence (death), so life becomes more precious.

Furthermore, in considering our ancestors and the unlikelihood of our individual birth, this contrast is heightened further still and through this understanding of the miracle of the individual, we might begin to question our attitude towards others.



My Nan, Me and my Cousin
Deadman's Walk, 1973

"Through the square, across the High Street and down Grove Street they passed. The Duke looked up at the tower of Merton... Strange that tonight it would still be standing there, in all its sober and solid beauty - still be gazing over the roofs and chimneys, at the tower of Magdalen, its rightful bride. Through untold centuries of the future it would stand thus, gaze thus. He winced. Oxford walls have a way of belittling us; and the Duke was loth to regard his doom as trivial.

Aye by all the minerals we are mocked. Vegetables, yearly deciduous are far more sympathetic. The lilac and laburnum making lovely now the railed pathway to Christ Church Meadow were all a-swaying and a-nodding to the Duke as he passed by - 'Adieu, adieu your Grace,' they were whispering. 'We are very sorry for you - very sorry indeed. We never dared suppose you would predecease us. We think your death a very great tragedy. Adieu!'"

'Zuleika Dobson', Max Beerbohm

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