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Body Discovered in Ancient Essex Cave Prompts Police Investigation

July 31, 2025

— Categories: Breaking News



Police have recovered a body from a medieval-era cave system in Hangman's Woods, Essex after a member of the public made the discovery earlier this week. The identity of the deceased and the circumstances surrounding their presence in the underground chamber are still under investigation.

Essex Police were alerted on Tuesday afternoon after a passerby reported a body in a chalk cave known as a "dene hole" located within Hangman's Woods, near the town of Grays.

These vertical shafts, originally used for chalk extraction in the Middle Ages, are now closed to the public and serve as a protected hibernation site for bats.

Detective Inspector Lydia George, who is leading the inquiry, confirmed that specialist teams, with assistance from partner agencies, conducted the recovery operation. “Utilising specialist equipment and skills and working with our partners, we recovered a body yesterday,” she stated. “Work is underway to establish who they are and the circumstances around how they came to be in the deneholes and how they died. I want to thank the community around this area for their support, particularly local businesses who kindly provided refreshments.”

The deneholes in Hangman’s Woods are officially designated as a Scheduled Monument and are regarded as some of the best-preserved examples of their kind. The shafts, typically more than 20 metres deep, feature branching chambers carved into the chalk and are recognised as a biological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the bat colonies they support.

While most of the shafts have been infilled for safety, a number remain open but are securely fenced off. Public access is generally restricted; however, access can be formally requested through the local council under specific conditions.

At this stage, no further details have been released regarding the cause of death or any potential links to foul play. Authorities have confirmed that a full post-mortem will be conducted and the investigation will continue in due course.

Police are appealing for anyone with relevant information to come forward.