

# Archaeologists discover diseased Anglo-Saxons that received monastic care

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Credit: University of Reading

An additional 20 intact human burials and the disturbed remains of many more have been discovered by archaeologists excavating a monastery in Cookham.

The [burials](#) are in addition to the [human remains](#) of 50 individuals found in 2023, supporting the theory that the ill and dying received care at the monastery.

Archaeologists from the University of Reading have excavated the site since the start of August, with the dig revealing yet more secrets from more than a millennium ago.

Professor Gabor Thomas, Professor of Early Medieval Archaeology at the University of Reading, led the dig. He said, "There appears to be a high prevalence of disease and healed injuries present in disturbed bone redeposited in later graves as well as intact burials. Parts of the cemetery were heavily used.

"Burials here intercut each other resulting in the disturbance of skeletal material placed back in the fill of subsequent graves. This demonstrates that individuals were receiving medical attention and care at the monastery over successive generations.

"Our discoveries highlight the importance of Anglo-Saxon monasteries as centers of healing and medical care. We can gain an impression of this role from contemporary historical sources, but Cookham is one of the first archaeological sites to provide detailed physical evidence for the range of diseases involved and medical care dispensed by contemporary monastic communities."

As well as the discovery of more burials, University staff, students and local volunteers also helped to complete the [excavation](#) of a 9th-century well first discovered in 2023. Several preserved wooden objects were recovered from the bottom of the well, including a very rare lathe turned wooden bowl.

They also completed further excavation of a deep ditch near to the River

Thames. Digging here revealed a preserved timber lining at the base, confirming that it is a leat for a watermill. The team unearthed more timber buildings located within the domestic quarters of the monastery.

The University of Reading's Department of Archaeology will continue excavations at Cookham in 2025.

Provided by University of Reading

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