

HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

POST-GRADUATE CONFERENCE

Dawn Cansfield – PhD student at University of Winchester

Email: D.Cansfield.10@winchester.ac.uk

Supervisors: Dr Nick Thorpe & Dr Keith Wilkinson

ABSTRACT

Early Neolithic mortuary practice in Hampshire and beyond

In the study of past societies, differential ritual treatment of the dead can be indicative of individuals' identities in life. The archaeological record for burials in the Early Neolithic period (4000–3300 BC) comprises a disparate body of evidence collected over hundreds of years from the antiquarian investigations of the 18th century until the present day. As such, it poses particular challenges arising from both the variety of archaeological methods deployed and the resultant data, and also the different interpretative frameworks used over time as the discipline has developed and practices have gone in and out of fashion, and indeed as modern society itself has changed. Furthermore, the period has received relatively little attention in the south-east compared to the western side of the region.

To elucidate the demographic elements of Early Neolithic mortuary practice, the starting point of my research is a synthesis of existing data with the addition of new data from recent fieldwork and archive reassessments. This is set within radiocarbon dating frameworks which have recently transformed the study of this period. From here the evidence and its previous interpretations is scrutinised and subjected to statistical and palaeodemographic analyses to build a demographic profile of the Early Neolithic population in south-east England.

In this paper I will describe my research to date with a focus on the findings from Hampshire and how these sit within the picture for the study as a whole.