

Changing focus and identity in Early Bronze Age Dorset

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The round barrows of Wessex are still primarily viewed as collections of sepulchral monuments with some interesting spatial articulations that form the foundation for our knowledge base of Early Bronze Age society. Although in more recent years investigation has broadened to look at a wider contextualisation of the functionality of these monuments we are still, one might argue collectively limited in our understanding of them.

The completion of the fieldwork stage of an integrated programme of excavation and survey at the barrow cemetery located at High Lea Farm near the village of Witchampton in east Dorset has revealed some fascinating new evidence for continuity in the choice of place spanning the period c. 2200BC – c. AD850. In particular the placement, articulation and subsequent erection of what on the face of it was an otherwise very ordinary round barrow, raises some important issues about how we might view the origins of such monuments in the future.

A secondary but not entirely unrelated programme of largely geophysical investigation at the site of the famous 'Clandon' barrow to the south –west of Dorchester is also beginning to shed new light on how individual barrows became reworked and adapted by successive generations, and allows us to re-examine the work of its initial excavator Edward Cunnington in 1882.