

**Wessex Culture: 'Revolution' or Late Beaker 'Evolution':
Defining changes in the early 2nd millennium BC
Abstracts**

Keynote Introduction: ***Why Wessex?***

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The 'Why Wessex?' question is double-edged. It asks not only why such a strong and striking funerary tradition sprang up in this region in the Early Bronze Age, but also whether we are justified in our fascination with it. One cannot deny that something special was going on here in the early half of the second millennium, but was it any more special than in many other parts of Britain, Ireland and the near-Continent? Do we elevate the region and the phenomenon disproportionately because we are blinded by the spectacular survival of burial monuments into modern times and the riches a few of them have yielded? Do we fall too readily into a complacent model of economic powerhouse and encircling derivative sub-cultures?

The central questions posed by this conference are how did the Wessex phenomenon emerge from preceding traditions and to what extent were external influences a factor? As prelude to these questions it is vital to reconsider what the 'Wessex Culture' actually constitutes in terms of economic, technological, spiritual and funerary practice and to ask how coherent it is at either a regional or broader scale. Through such re-evaluations we can hope to draw a clearer picture of where Wessex stands in relation to other regions and preceding culture.

This paper will review a wide array of evidence at a variety of geographical scales in the hope of gaining a fresh perspective on our absorption with the Wessex Early Bronze Age.