

Lithics

Julie Gardiner*

[Adapted from seminar notes by **Jake Weekes**, *Kent County Council*]

**As the planned speaker on lithics in the South East was not able to attend due to illness, Julie Gardiner kindly provided this contribution to the seminar on the day.*

It is extremely difficult to define general early Neolithic assemblages, because material tends to come from long barrows and causewayed enclosures in the South East. Given that the material is derived from such contexts, can it be considered 'normal'? The region cannot boast large Neolithic pit sites such as those in East Anglia, for example, and researchers simply do not have the general assemblage they need in order to make definitive classifications of material that exists outside earthwork monuments, even after the recent extensive Channel Tunnel Rail Link and Westhampnett excavations.

There is a vast amount of polished axes from whole region, but it is perhaps particularly interesting that there are a lot (both pristine and damaged) from the Weald (which is relatively little understood for the Neolithic as for other periods) providing evidence for early, middle and late Neolithic activity of some sort on the sands, and also on the clays. In relation to this, but also more generally, researchers need to expend a lot more time and energy on surface material than they have in the past.

For example, there are concentrations of early and late Neolithic flints on tertiary deposits overlying the chalk. How does this relate to the ways in which Neolithic people were using the landscape? There are also localised variations in the such evidence to consider in more detail. Even between Brighton and Beachy Head in Sussex for instance (only 5km), there is a very marked difference in the types of objects deposited, and evidently some interaction going on between two local areas. This sort of detail is starting to be apparent from the lithic material, with different areas representing specialised, different uses of the landscape (for example agricultural vs. animal hide processing). Not a lot can yet be done to obtain more detailed chronology for such material, however. Environmental evidence also needs to be more widely sought in order to allow further comparison between different areas, and lithic material can be used to target more holistic studies.

Overall then, there is a need to look at lithic material at a broader scale, but also in terms of more particular localised situations. Certainly research must go beyond looking at 'objects for objects sake', towards a reconstruction of Neolithic settlement, society and culture.