**He who has the biggest pyre? Male identity in early Anglo-Saxon society**

*Dr Kirsty E Squires (Staffordshire University)*

[Kirsty.Squires@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:Kirsty.Squires@staffs.ac.uk)

One of the most defining characteristics of early Anglo-Saxon inhumation burials is the gendered grave assemblages buried with the dead. Males were often interred with military accoutrements, such as swords, spears and shields, while females were more commonly buried with jewellery, for example glass beads and brooches. However, an examination of grave provisions from contemporary cremation burials provides a very different picture. Females from cremation practicing groups are also associated with dress accessories and functional objects, such as spindle whorls, however male burials show a dearth of weapons and male-oriented grave provisions. Males and females from such groups were cremated with faunal offerings and interred in urns of a similar height. Therefore, this leads to the question: how did males from cremation practicing groups display their masculinity in life and death? This paper will explore how daily activities and the cremation rite allowed males to convey their masculinity and will also consider why male identity appears to be archaeologically invisible in cremation cemeteries. An exploration of the lifecycle and construction of identity among these groups will be conducted through an assessment of the grave provisions (cinerary urns, animal offerings and grave- and pyre-goods) afforded to the dead and the spatial distribution of burials within cremation cemeteries. The differential amounts of labour and economic investment in male and female burials will also be considered through an examination of cremated bone from early Anglo-Saxon England. This paper will highlight that males belonging to groups that practiced the cremation rite displayed their masculinity in a more discrete manner than their contemporaries that employed inhumation due to the differential social structure of these two groups.