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**An archaeological watching brief on  
drainage works at The Vyne,  
Sherborne St. John, Hampshire**

**NGR: SU 6360 5678**

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**Report to National Trust (Southern Region)**

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### **Summary statement**

Work was required to install a drainage pipe outside the Stone Gallery on the SW side of the Vyne, Sherborne St. John, Hampshire (SU 6360 5678). This required a pipe to be laid at a depth of about 1.5m leading out to a soakaway in the park, a total length of about 30m. The Vyne is a Listed Building Grade I, dating from the early Tudor period. It is in the ownership of the National Trust. Previous archaeological work has revealed the Vyne to be a complex site, with considerable buried remains in the vicinity. The client, the National Trust (Southern Region) asked C K Currie of CKC Archaeology to carry out a watching brief on the works.

A narrow trench cut between the Stone Gallery and the edge of the garden revealed a substantial cut feature. Although the excavated trench uncovered neither the full width nor depth of this feature, it was observed to be at least 7m wide and over 1.6m deep. Provisional interpretation suggests that it might be the cut of a moat believed to surround the medieval manor formerly on the site. Occasional pieces of ceramic in the fill suggest it was backfilled in the mid or late 17<sup>th</sup> century. This would seem to indicate that, if it does represent a moat, this survived as part of the Tudor complex, and was not filled in until, or after, Chaloner Chute substantially reduced and modernised the mansion in the 1650s.

A possible brick structure was found in a further cut, possibly beyond the edge of the conjectured moat. This was very crudely made with reused materials, and did not seem to be parallel with the existing Stone Gallery. It is not known what this feature represented as only a small proportion was exposed. It appeared to have a built end at the point that it was exposed, but it was so badly made that this can not be said with any certainty. This feature also appears to have been destroyed at the same time as the large cut described above.

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**An archaeological watching brief on drainage installation at The Vyne, Sherborne St.  
John, Hampshire  
NGR: SU 6360 5678**

This report has been written based on the format suggested by the Institute of Field Archaeologists' (hereafter IFA) *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*. (Birmingham, 1994). The ordering of information follows the guidelines given in this document, although alterations may have been made to fit in with the particular requirements of the work.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Work was required to install a drainage pipe outside the Stone Gallery on the SW side of the Vyne, Sherborne St. John, Hampshire. This required a pipe to be laid at a depth of about 1.5m leading out to a soakaway in the park, a total length of about 30m. The Vyne is a Listed Building Grade I, dating from the early Tudor period. It is in the ownership of the National Trust. Previous archaeological work has revealed the Vyne to be a complex site, with considerable buried remains in the vicinity. The client, the National Trust (Southern Region) asked C K Currie of CKC Archaeology to carry out a watching brief on the works.

## **2.0 Historical background**

The Vyne is a site of some antiquity. It has been studied in depth by Currie (1994), who showed that there had been a stone manor house with adjacent hamlet called Vyne Green on the site in the medieval period. The hamlet gradually disappeared over the later medieval period. From 1496 William Sandys, later Lord Chamberlain to Henry VIII, converted the medieval manor into one of the most magnificent early Tudor mansions in England. This building was of considerably greater size than the existing building. It is described in an inventory of 1540-41 as surrounding a courtyard. Remains of the extended building have been revealed by archaeological work in 1995 on the north lawn, together with garden walls and a substantial brick bridge (Currie 1995). After William Sandy's death in 1540 it seems that the upkeep of this large house became a burden to the family, and the site was gradually superseded as their main Hampshire residence by Mottisfont Abbey, near Romsey.

Financial difficulties following the English Civil Wars (1642-51) caused the Sandys family to sell the estate to Chaloner Chute, notable as a speaker to the House of Commons. He had the house reduced in size and modernised, commissioning John Webb as his architect. The classical portico on the north front dates from this period, and was the first of its kind in England. The house was further modified by John Chute (1754-76), a talented architect and friend of Horace Walpole. After his death without issue, the estate descended twice in the female line. Each of these inheritors adopted the name Chute. Sir Charles Chute (1879-1956) bequeathed the house and the remains of its estate to the National Trust in 1956. It is currently one of their more popular properties with the visiting public, and has recently undergone considerable refurbishment. Archaeological work has been undertaken at each stage of the alterations beginning with the estate survey by Currie (1994). Readers are referred to the property archives for further details of this work.

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### **3.0 Strategy**

The strategy followed that undertaken for previous watching briefs undertaken for the National Trust by CKC Archaeology. This was based on the IFA's *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*. (Birmingham, 1994). This is summarised as follows:

1. An archaeological presence was maintained during on all relevant groundworks on site.
2. The groundworks were carried out under the supervision of the author. The contractor was required to adopt groundwork methods that maximised the recognition and recovery of archaeological material.
3. The groundworkers were required to give the author proper access to excavate and record features according to the standards laid down by IFA *Guidelines*. The groundworks were required to co-operate with this to ensure the minimum of delay.
4. It was required that the author was given reasonable time to complete the recording of each discovery. Delays were unlikely to exceed two working days per discovery unless in agreement with the client. Archaeological recording was undertaken in such a way that the groundworkers could continue with other tasks while the recording was in progress.
5. The works were supervised by a full Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (MIFA) with the appropriate council-validated Area of Competence (Excavation).
6. When significant archaeological features were encountered, they were hand-excavated. The work was personally supervised on site by C K Currie MIFA.
7. The trenches were recorded in plan and by sections at a scale of 1:20 unless special circumstances required planning at 1:10. The trenches were recorded stratigraphically, according each context with a separate number. Single-feature planning was undertaken when suitable remains were encountered. All features were recorded by monochrome and colour slide photography, using appropriate scales.
8. All pre-modern finds were retained, including bone, with the exception of post-medieval brick and tile and oyster. The latter was discarded on site after having been suitably sampled, unless there was good reason to do otherwise. Any early post-medieval brick and tile was examined on site before discarding, with suitable samples being taken for the archive where considered appropriate.

### **4.0 Results**

#### **4.1 Conditions**

The excavated trench was numbered according to the sequence of trenches excavated at The Vyne by CKC Archaeology. The trench number in this instance was trench 28. The same

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applied to the context numbering, it following on from the sequence of previous work. Contexts numbers for this piece of work began with the number 572, extending to number 585.

The recording was inhibited by a series of difficulties. The excavator's bucket was a mere 0.3m wide. The trench was generally 1.6m or more deep, making access both difficult and dangerous as the sides could not be supported. The narrow width of the trench made meaningful photography very difficult, and the sections had to be drawn from on top of the trench with only a moderate amount of cleaning. Furthermore, the presence of a hedge midway along the proposed trench meant that the machine had to turn around, and track back over the top of the previously excavated trench. This resulted in the trench sides collapsing, and the machine partly falling into the trench. This caused some damage to the archaeological remains that made subsequent interpretation difficult. The archaeologist tried to cope with these difficulties to the best of his abilities, but the reader should be aware of the possible limitations of this recording.

#### **4.2 Results of trench 28**

This trench extended 17.4m from the west range of the house to a hedge marking the boundary of the garden with the parkland. It was only 0.3m wide. The highest layer was a dark grey brown clay loam topsoil (context 572; 10YR 3/3). It was seldom much more than 0.1m deep, and overlay a brown clay (context 573; 10YR 4/3). This layer was only 0.15m deep at the east end of the trench, but became deeper nearer the hedge, where it was over 0.65m thick. This layer overlay deep layers of mainly rubble dumping in the eastern part of the trench.

It was not certain if these rubble layers represented the fills of a single very large cut, or the fills of two large cuts. This was partly the result of the problems outlined in section 4.1. On balance, it was decided to record them as two separate cuts.

The most easterly of these cuts was context 579. This extended to a depth of at least 1.6m. The bottom of the cut was not seen, being deeper than the excavated depth. It was overlain by a layer of clay containing mortar flecks (context 574; 10YR 4/3), averaging 0.2m thick. This overlay the main fill levels in cut 579. All these fills extended beyond the depth of the trench (1.6m), making the cut a very substantial feature. Its length to the east end of the trench was over 7m. Four fill layers were recorded. They all dipped sharply to the east. In stratigraphic terms, the latest layer was context 575. This was a fairly clean clay dump, with only very small quantities of brick rubble within it. It had substantial volume, extending 3m from the east end of the trench. It overlay a relatively thin layer of brick rubble in clay (context 576). This was about 0.1m thick, and overlay another relatively thin (0.15m) layer of cleanish clay (context 577) similar in composition to context 575. These layers overlay a substantial dump of brick and mortar rubble, over 2m thick (context 578). This contained concentrated deposits of brick, mortar and clay roof tiles. This dumping spread over the line of the cut, continuing as an ever thinning layer of rubble that extended over the conjectured second cut (context 581).

Cut 581 was on average 3.5m wide. Rubble from cut 579 seemed to extend over it. This layer of rubble ended approximately over the west end of cut 581. This feature and its contents was ready to be cleaned and recorded when the manoeuvring excavating machine caused the sides of the trench to collapse, taking the machine into the trench with it. This, and the subsequent

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digging out of the machine, caused some damage to the archaeology, and the following description records damaged and contaminated deposits.

The fill of cut 581 was made up of the same clay found naturally as subsoil in this area. It contained occasional brick rubble (context 582), but this was not as dense as in the layer extending from cut 579 over it. Although the bottom of the cut was not found for certain, a structure was found that was probably built on, or near, that bottom. This was a very strange structure, and it is unfortunate that it was damaged by the above-mentioned accident.

Before the collapse, the author thought that he witnessed this structure with a built end on it. As the structure (context 583) was only seen in the south facing section of the trench, and did not appear to extend to the north facing side, it would seem this observation was valid. It was badly made, and had to be examined carefully to decide if it really was a structure or merely large chunks of bonded demolition rubble. Although badly made, it did seem to have been an *in situ* structure. It was at an angle to the excavated trench, thereby being not parallel to the Stone Gallery. On the west side of the structure was a concentrated dump of mainly mortar with some brick (context 584). This may represent the backfilling of a construction cut. The structure itself was notable for containing large coping bricks within it. These seem to have been reused.

Between cuts 579 and 581 was an area of cleanish clay with only occasional rubble flecks within it. It was unsure whether this was an extension of 585. The brick within it could be contamination from the excavation. However, the clay dump 575 in cut 579 was relatively clean, and so it is unsure whether this layer represented a relatively undisturbed subsoil cut into by both 579 and 581, or a clean clay dump within a larger overall cut.

Cut 581 cut into a cleanish clay (context 585) which appeared to be undisturbed soils. There was very little evidence for further archaeological activity in the last 3m of the trench before the hedge was reached. The excavation began again on the other side of the hedge. After a few metres of digging, it seemed that there was nothing here beyond the sequence of topsoil (572), disturbed subsoil (573), and undisturbed clay (585). With only about 8m to go before the soakaway was reached (the area around which could be seen to be much disturbed), it was decided that no further archaeological recording was required.

The archaeological levels on the east (house) side of the hedge contained little in the way of finds, compared with the masses of brick and tile debris. Fortunately a few pieces of ceramic were recovered. These were generally of reasonable size and good condition, suggesting that they had not been constantly redeposited. All the sherds found represented ceramics common in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and were similar to finds made in the mid-17<sup>th</sup>-century demolition layers from the 1995 excavations. The sherds included three of 'Tudor Green' Borderwares, a slipware plate (or dish?) rim and a plain white tin-glazed earthenware rim. They were recovered from cuts 579 and 581, suggesting a mid-to-late 17<sup>th</sup> century date for the infilling of these features

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## 5.0 Discussion

This was an important excavation, and it is unfortunate that the accident with the digger damaged the stratigraphy because there is now some uncertainty about what exactly the discoveries mean. However, it must be recognised that, even without the accident, the narrow width of the trench would have made recording and interpretation difficult and a safety problem. It is possible that cleanish clay in layer 580 would have been difficult to interpret even under better circumstances. It is suspected that the interpretation given here would have been much the same even without the accident. Nevertheless, the author feels that the circumstances of the recording must be fully integrated into the interpretation in the event that future work seems to be at variance to these results.

It is thought that the medieval manor on this site was surrounded by a moat. This is mentioned by Leland, who says that Lord Sandys had found the Vyne 'no very great or sumptuous place, only contained within the moat' (Chute 1888, 34). The inventory of 1540-41 hints that this may have partly survived as it mentions a bridge related to the buildings complex (HRO 31M57/643). The old tradition that the moat was on the other side of Vyne Road would seem to be disproven by more recent work (Currie 1994, *passim*; Howard 1998, 44). If there seems to have been a moat on the site at one time, finding where it was would be of the greatest interest, and would help considerably in the interpretation of the development of the Vyne.

It had always been this author's opinion that remains of a moat would be found in the area of trench 28. However, it was expected that it would be nearer the line of the hedge, even outside it. The archaeological evidence recovered here seems to suggest a very substantial cut (579), a minimum of over 7m wide, and over 1.6m deep existed very close to the line of the Stone Gallery. This cut clearly extended beyond the east end of the trench, which was barely 2m from the outside of the Gallery. Unless the cut rose sharply, it would seem that it might extend under the building itself. The most obvious interpretation of such a massive cut is that it represents part of the moat.

There is a problem with this interpretation. Why were no silty soils found within the cut? This might be explained by the fact that the excavated trench, even at 1.6m deep, had not reached the bottom of the cut. Another problem of interpretation is that the feature appears to have been backfilled in the mid-to-later 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Stone Gallery seems to have been completed before 1526 (Howard 1998, 44). This would suggest that, if the feature is a moat, it was still open when the Gallery was built. It also suggests that the cut must have risen sharply between the end of the excavated trench and the Gallery.

There are other problems with the perceived evidence. The structure found in cut 581 is not parallel with the Gallery. The constituents of this structure contain coping bricks, suggesting it reused old materials. The odd angle of the wall and these reused bricks suggest that it is not in the first phase of brick structures on the site. Therefore, it would seem to post-date the Gallery. The use of coping bricks suggests that a garden wall was demolished to build the structure. Its crude construction causes problems. Is it really a structure, or a large block of masonry put back in a demolition cut? The circumstances of the excavation do not allow us to answer this. It is even possible that the cut it is within, is part of a larger overall cut encompassing both cut 579

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and 581. Could this make it part of a brick revetment to the outer edge of the moat? The way cut 579 seems to need to rise sharply on the other side suggests that a revetment would have been needed there to prevent a conjectured moat from eroding the Gallery's foundations.

If this structure is a revetment, why is it at an irregular angle to the Gallery? This might suggest that it is not a revetment, and that the cut it is within does stand alone. However, it can not be said for certain that this is not a lump of dumped masonry rather than a real structure. Even if the machine had not fallen into the trench here, the width of the trench was such that insufficient of the structure would have been exposed to answer this question satisfactorily.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

A narrow trench cut between the Stone Gallery and the edge of the garden revealed a substantial cut feature. Although the excavated trench uncovered neither the full width nor depth of this feature, it was observed to be at least 7m wide and over 1.6m deep. Provisional interpretation suggests that it might be the cut of a moat believed to surround the medieval manor formerly on the site. Occasional pieces of ceramic in the fill suggest it was backfilled in the mid or late 17<sup>th</sup> century. This would seem to indicate that, if it does represent a moat, this survived as part of the Tudor complex, and was not filled in until, or after, Chaloner Chute substantially reduced and modernised the mansion in the 1650s.

A possible brick structure was found in a further cut, possibly beyond the edge of the conjectured moat. This was very crudely made with reused materials, and did not seem to be parallel with the existing Stone Gallery. It is not known what this feature represented as only a small proportion was exposed. It appeared to have a built end at the point that it was exposed, but it was so badly made that this can not be said with any certainty. This feature also appears to have been destroyed at the same time as the large cut described above.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

The discoveries made in this narrow trench are of major significance to an interpretation of the Vyne's development. Although it is not possible to make any definitive statements here, it has been possible to record that there is a significant archaeological feature of relatively early date just outside the Stone Gallery. Should any future work be done in this vicinity, it is strongly urged that an archaeological evaluation should be undertaken in advance. A watching brief would be an insufficient response to future work in this area. The accident with the machine that occurred in this instance should be taken as an exemplary warning of the pitfalls involved in watching briefs. Now that we have the benefit of hindsight, this area should be given the highest archaeological priority in future.

## **8.0 Archive**

The archive for this work has been deposited in the archive room at The Vyne, along with the results of other recent archaeological investigations. Copies of the report were lodged with the client, the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), and the National Monuments Record in Swindon, Wiltshire.

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## **9.0 Acknowledgements**

Sincere thanks are given to all those involved with this project. In particular, Judith Congdon, Buildings Manager at the Regional Office, organised the watching brief and liaised with the parties involved. Jonathan Ingram, Property Manager and his staff allow the author access, and, as always, gave assistance where required. The groundworkers (from Tudor Gardens Ltd) are thanked for their co-operation.

## **10.0 References**

### **10.1 Original sources in the Hampshire Record Office (HRO)**

HRO 31M57/643, inventory of the The Vyne, 1540-41

### **10.2 Secondary sources**

C W Chute, *A history of the Vyne in Hampshire*, Winchester 1888

C K Currie, *The Vyne estate, Sherborne St. John, Hampshire: an archaeological survey*, report to the National Trust, 1994

C K Currie, *Trial excavations at The Vyne, Sherborne St. John, Hampshire*, report to the National Trust, 1995

M Howard, *The Vyne, Hampshire*, National Trust Guidebook, 1998

Institute of Field Archaeologists, *Standard and guidance for archaeological*, Birmingham, 1994

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### Appendix 1: Key to excavated contexts

Context number	Description
572	clay loam layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 3/3)
573	clay layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 4/3)
574	clay layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 4/3)
575	clay fill of cut 579 (Munsell Colour 10YR 4/4)
576	clay and rubble fill of cut 579 (Munsell Colour 10YR 4/4)
577	clay fill of cut 579 (Munsell Colour 10YR 4/4)
578	clay and rubble fill of cut 579 (Munsell Colour 10YR 5/4)
579	large cut
580	clay layer? (Munsell Colour 10YR 4/3)
581	cut
582	clay fill of cut 581 (Munsell Colour 10YR 4/4)
583	crudely made brick structure?
584	rubble fill of 581 in sandy clay matrix (Munsell Colour 10YR 5/6)
585	clay layer (Munsell Colour 10YR 4/3)

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## **Appendix 2: glossary of archaeological terms**

**Archaeology:** the study of man's past by means of the material relics he has left behind him. By material relics, this means both materials buried within the soil (artefacts and remains of structures), and those surviving above the surface such as buildings, structures (e.g. stone circles) and earthworks (e.g. hillforts, old field boundaries etc.). Even the study of old tree or shrub alignments, where they have been artificially planted in the past, can give vital information on past activity.

**Artefacts:** any object made by man that finds itself discarded (usually as a broken object) or lost in the soil. The most common finds are usually pottery sherds, or waste flint flakes from prehistoric stone tool making. Metal finds are generally rare except in specialist areas such as the site of an old forge. The absence of finds from the activity of metal detectorists is not usually given much credibility by archaeologists as a means of defining if archaeology is present

**Baulk:** an area of unexcavated soil on an archaeological site. It usually refers to the sides of the archaeological trench.

**Burnt flint:** in prehistoric times, before metal containers were available, water was often boiled in pottery or wooden containers by dropping stones/flints heated in a fire into the container. The process of suddenly cooling hot stone, particularly flint, causes the stone to crack, and form distinctive crazed markings all over its surface. Finds of large quantities of such stone are usually taken as a preliminary indication of past human presence nearby.

**Context:** a number given to a unit of archaeological recording. This can include a layer, a cut, a fill of a cut, a surface or a structure.

**Cut:** usually used to mean an excavation made in the past. The 'hole' or cut existed in time as a void, before later being backfilled with soil. Archaeologists give a context number to the empty hole, as well as the backfilled feature (called the 'fill').

**Desk-based assessment:** an assessment of a known or potential archaeological resource within a specific land unit or area, consisting of a collation of existing written or graphic information, to identify the likely character, extent and relative quality of the actual or potential resource.

**Earthwork:** bank of earth, hollow, or other earthen feature created by human activity.

**Environmental evidence:** evidence of the potential effect of environmental considerations on man's past activity. This can range from the remains of wood giving an insight into the type of trees available for building materials etc, through to evidence of crops grown, and food eaten, locally.

**Evaluation:** a limited programme of intrusive fieldwork (mainly test-trenching) which determines the presence or absence of archaeological features, structures, deposits, artefacts or ecofacts within a specified land unit or area. If they are present, this will define their character,

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extent, and relative quality, and allow an assessment of their worth in local, regional and national terms.

**Hedgebanks:** banks of earth, usually with a ditch, that have been set up in the past on which is planted a stock-proof line of shrubs. There is written evidence that they were made from at least Roman times, but they are suspected as existing in prehistoric times.

**Lynchets:** bank of earth that accumulates on the downhill side of an ancient ploughed field as the disturbed soil moves down the slope under the action of gravity.

**Munsell colour:** an objective method of defining soil colour using a specially designed colour chart for soils. The reading defines hue (an objective description of colour; eg YR means yellow-red), value (darkness or lightness of the colour) and chroma (the greyness or purity of the colour). For example 10YR 3/2 is a dark grey-brown.

**Natural [layer]:** in archaeological reports, this is a layer that has been formed by natural process, usually underlying man-made disturbance.

**Period:** time periods within British chronology are usually defined as Prehistoric (comprising the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age), Roman, Saxon, Medieval and Post-medieval. Although exact definitions are often challenged, the general date ranges are as given below.

**Prehistoric** c. 100,000 BC - AD 43. This is usually defined as the time before man began making written records of his activities.

Palaeolithic or Old Stone Age 100,000 - 8300 BC

Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age 8300 - 4000 BC

Neolithic or New Stone Age 4000 - 2500 BC

Bronze Age 2500 - 700 BC

Iron Age 700 BC - AD 43

**Roman** AD 43-410

**Saxon** AD 410-1066

**Medieval** AD 1066-1540

**Post-medieval** AD 1540-present

**Pottery sherds:** small pieces of broken baked clay vessels that find their way into ancient soils. These can be common in all periods from the Neolithic onwards. They often find their way into the soil by being dumped on the settlement rubbish tip, when broken, and subsequently taken out and scattered in fields with farmyard manure.

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**Project Design:** a written statement on the project's objectives, methods, timetable and resources set out in sufficient detail to be quantifiable, implemented and monitored.

**Settlement:** usually defined as a site where human habitation in the form of permanent or temporary buildings or shelters in wood, stone, brick or any other building material has existed in the past.

**Site:** usually defined as an area where human activity has taken place in the past. It does not require the remains of buildings to be present. A scatter of prehistoric flint-working debris can be defined as a 'site', with or without evidence for permanent or temporary habitation.

**Sondage:** an arbitrary hole dug during archaeological excavation. Often dug after the main excavation is complete to quickly test for information that may be required to clarify points of the main excavation.

**Stratigraphy:** sequence of man-made soils overlying undisturbed soils; the lowest layers generally represent the oldest periods of man's past, with successive layers reaching forwards to the present. It is within these soils that archaeological information is obtained.

**Worked flint or stone:** usually taken to mean pieces of chipped stone or flint used to make prehistoric stone tools. A worked flint can comprise the tools themselves (arrowheads, blades etc.), or the waste material produced in their making (often called flint flakes, cores etc.).

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