INVESTIGATIVE FILES

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The Secrets of Oak Island

It has been the focus of "the world's longest and most expensive treasure hunt" and "one of the world's deepest and most costly archaeological digs" (O'Connor 1988, 1, 4), as well as being "Canada's best-known mystery" (Colombo 1988, 33) and indeed one of "the great mysteries of the world." It may even "represent an ancient artifact created by a past civilization of advanced capability" (Crooker 1978, 7, 190). The subject of these superlatives is a mysterious shaft on Oak Island in Nova Scotia's Mahone Bay. For some two centuries, greed, folly, and even death have attended the supposed "Money Pit" enigma.

The Saga

Briefly, the story is that in 1795 a young man named Daniel McInnis (or McGinnis) was roaming Oak Island when he came upon a shallow depression in the ground. Above it, hanging from the limb of a large oak was an old tackle block. McInnis returned the next day with two friends who—steeped in the local lore of pirates and treasure troves—set to work to excavate the site. They soon uncovered a layer of flagstones and, ten feet further, a tier of rotten oak logs. They proceeded another fifteen feet into what they were sure was a man-made shaft but, tired from their efforts, they decided to cease work until they could obtain assistance. However, between the skepticism and superstition of the people who lived on the mainland, they were unsuccessful.

The imagined cache continued to lie dormant until early in the next century, when the trio joined with a businessman named Simeon Lynds from the town of Onslow to form a treasure-hunting consortium called the Onslow Company. Beginning work about 1803 or 1804 (one source says 1810), they found oak platforms "at exact intervals of ten feet" (O'Connor 1978, 10), along with layers of clay, charcoal, and a fibrous material identified as coconut husks. Then, at ninety feet (or eighty feet, according to one alleged participant) they supposedly found a flat stone bearing an indecipherable inscription (see figure 1). Soon after, probing with a crowbar, they struck something hard—possibly a wooden chest!—but discontinued for the evening. Alas, the next morning the shaft was found flooded with sixty feet of water. Attempting to bail out the pit with buckets, they found the water level remained the same, and they were forced to discontinue the search. The following year, the men attempted to bypass the water by means of a parallel shaft from which they hoped to tunnel to the supposed treasure. But this shaft suffered the same fate, and the Onslow Company's expedition ended (O'Connor 1978, 9–16; Crooker 1993, 14; Harris 1958, 12–22).

Again the supposed cache lay dormant until in 1849 another group, the Truro Company, reexcavated the original shaft. Encountering water, the workers then set up a platform in the pit and used a hand-operated auger to drill and remove cores of material. They found clay, bits of wood, and three links of gold chain—supposed evidence of buried treasure. The Truro Company sank additional nearby shafts, but these, too, were inundated with water, and work ceased in the fall of 1850. Other operations continued from 1858 to 1862, during which time a workman was scalded to death by a ruptured boiler (O'Connor 1988, 17–31).

The Oak Island Association followed and attempted to intersect the "tunnel" that presumably fed water to the pit. When that 120-foot shaft missed, another was sunk and, reportedly, a three-by-four-foot tunnel was extended about eighteen feet to the "Money Pit" (as it was then known). However, water began coming in again. A massive bailing operation was then set up when suddenly there was a loud crash as the Money Pit collapsed. It was later theorized that the imagined chests had fallen into a deep void and that the pit may have been booby-trapped to protect the treasure (O'Connor 1988, 29). The Association's work was followed in 1866 by the Oak Island Eldorado Company but without

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significant results (Harris 1958, 203).

Decades elapsed and in 1897 the Oak Island Treasure Company (incorporated four years earlier) apparently located the long-sought "pirate tunnel" that led from Smith's Cove to the Money Pit. They drilled and dynamited to close off the tunnel. Subsequent borings were highlighted by the discovery of a fragment of parchment upon which was penned portions of two letters (possibly "ri"). They also found traces of a chalk-like stone or "cement" (Harris 1958, 91–98). In this same year Oak Island's second tragedy struck when a worker was being hoisted from one of the pits and the rope slipped from its pulley, plunging him to his death.

After that company ran out of funds, most of the moveable assets were sold at a sheriff's sale in 1900. The new century brought continued searches, with the digging of innumerable drill holes, shafts, and tunnels—so many that "The entire Money Pit area has been topographically demolished, changing completely its original appearance and rendering old maps and charts useless" (Crooker 1978, 190). In 1965 there came yet another tragedy when four men died in a shaft after being overcome either by swamp gas or engine fumes (O'Connor 1988, 143–145).

In 1966 a Florida building contractor named Dan Blankenship teamed up with Montréal businessman David Tobias to continue the quest. The partners began an extensive drilling operation, sinking some sixty boreholes the following year alone, and, in 1968, enlisted a number of investors in what they named Triton Alliance. Unfortunately, mechanical problems, land disputes, the Stock Market crash of 1987, and other troubles, including the eventual falling out of the two partners, stopped their projected $10 million "big dig" (Randle 1995). Once open to tourists, the site sank into neglect.

Over the years the fabled treasure has been the target of dowsers, automatic writers, clairvoyants, channelers, tarot-card readers, dream interpreters, psychic archaeologists, and assorted other visionaries and soothsayers, as well as crank inventors of devices like a "Mineral Wave Ray" and an airplane-borne "treasure smelling" machine—not one having been successful (Preston 1988, 62; O'Connor 1988, 121–136; Finnan 1997, 166–170).

An Investigative Approach

The more elusive the treasure has proved, the more speculation it has engendered. Given the "immense amount of labor" presumably required to construct the pit and the accompanying "flooding tunnel" that served as a "booby trap," presumption of a pirates' hoard has begun to be supplanted by such imagined prizes as the French crown jewels, Shakespeare's manuscripts, the "lost treasure" of the Knights Templar, even the Holy Grail and the imagined secrets of the "lost continent" of Atlantis (Sora 1999, 7–38, 101; Crooker 1978, 153).

But is there a treasure at the bottom of the "Money Pit"? My research into the mystery of Oak Island dates back many years, and I opened a file on the case in 1982. However, except for periodic updates, I put it on hold, largely because the solution seemed to lie in the same direction as those of some other mysteries (Nickell 1980; 1982a; 1982b). However, when asked to address a forensic conference in nearby New Brunswick, I resolved to place Oak Island on my itinerary (Nickell 2000).

In planning my trip I attempted to contact Triton's David Tobias, who did not, however, return my call, but I did reach Jim Harvey at the Oak Island Inn and Marina on the nearby mainland. Harvey, a retired Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer and licensed private investigator, is in charge of security for Oak Island, and he was adamant that it is no longer open to visitors. Making not-so-veiled references to the legendary temper of Dan Blankenship, the other Triton partner who still lives on the island, Harvey suggested it would not be safe for me to trespass on the island, although he offered for hire his cabin cruiser for a guided circumnavigation.

Harvey may have had in mind an incident of many years ago, involving an altercation between Blankenship and another island resident, Frederick Nolan. According to one source: "One day Blankenship had approached with a rifle in hand and an ugly situation had begun to develop. Eventually the police were called in to calm everybody down and confiscate the gun" (Finnan 1997, 93).

So it was with some trepidation

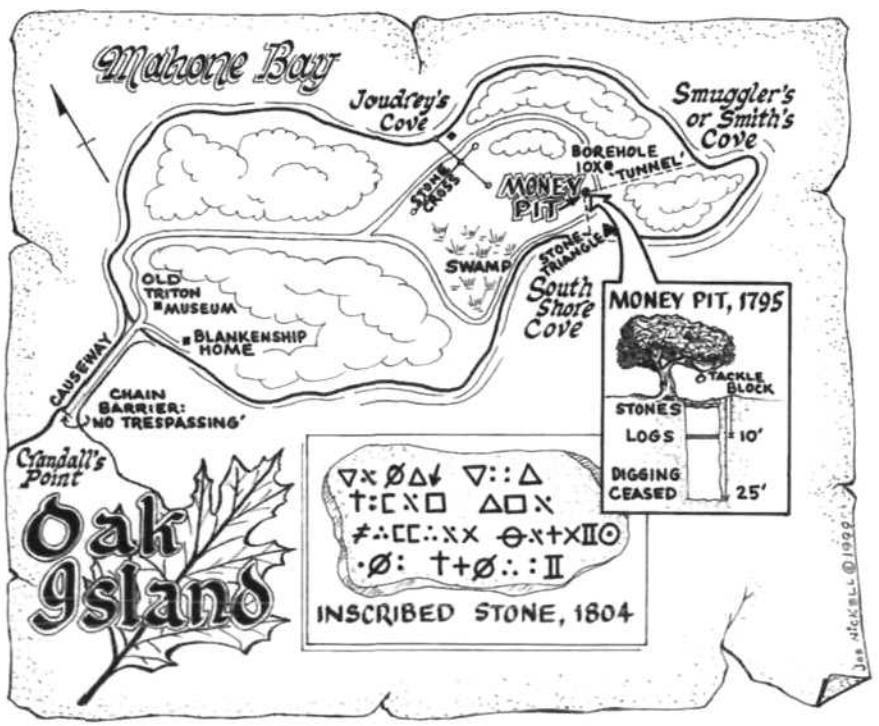

Figure 1. Oak Island "treasure map" (illustration by author).

that—on the afternoon of July 1, 1991, after arriving at the village of Western Shore and checking in at the Oak Island Inn—I drove to the causeway leading to Oak Island. This land bridge connecting the island to the mainland was constructed in 1965 so that a great excavating machine could be transported to the "treasure" area. Today it is chained off and marked "Private/No Hunting or Trespassing/Danger."

A local fisherman responded to my proposal to walk over and talk to Mr. Blankenship, "He won't shoot you, but he will probably turn you back." In fact, although Blankenship was at first standoffish, having read a Canadian Press article about the "professional skeptic" who was heading to Oak Island (see Nickell 2000), I soon mollified him, and he graciously invited me to his home. I was there until nearly 11 P.M., being shown artifacts, photos, papers, and a video made by a camera lowered into a borehole—the fruits of almost thirty-five years of treasure hunting that had earned Blankenship the title of "Oak Island's most obsessive searcher" (O'Connor 1988, 145). The video reveals the interior of a "tunnel," graced with an apparent upright timber and what some imagine to be "chests," a "scoop," and other supposed artifacts. Blankenship (1999) told me he had located the site of the borehole by dowsing. The next day Jim Harvey took me on our prearranged boat trip, permitting me to view the remainder of the island (see figure 2).

The more I investigated the Oak Island enigma, the more skeptical I became. Others had preceded me in supplying what I came to regard as the two main pieces of the puzzle, although apparently no one had successfully fitted the pieces together. One concerned the nature of the "money pit" itself, the other the source of certain elements in the treasure saga, such as the reputed cryptogram-bearing stone.

Man-made or Natural?

Doubts begin with the reported discovery in 1795 of the treasure shaft itself. While some accounts say that the trio of youths spied an old ship's pulley hanging from a branch over a depression in the ground (Harris 1958, 6–8), that is "likely an apocryphal detail added to the story later" and based on the assumption that some sort of lowering device would have been necessary in depositing the treasure (O'Connor 1988, 4). Nevertheless some authors are remarkably specific about the features, one noting that the "old tackle block" was attached to "a large forked branch" of an oak "by means of a treenail connecting the fork in a small triangle" (Crooker 1978, 17). Another account (cited in Finnan 1997, 28) further claims there were "strange markings" carved on the tree. On the other hand, perhaps realizing that pirates or other treasure hoarders would have been unlikely to betray their secret work by leaving such an obvious indicator in place, some versions of the tale agree that the limb "had been sawed off" but that "the stump showed evidence of ropes and tackle" (Randle 1995, 75).

Similarly, the notion that there was a log platform at each ten-foot interval of the pit for a total of nine or eleven platforms, is only supported by *later* accounts, and those appear to have been derived by picking and choosing from earlier ones so as to create a composite version of the layers. For example the account in the *Colonist* (1864) mentions that the original treasure hunters found only flagstones at two feet ("evidently not formed there by nature") and "a tier of oak logs" located "ten feet lower down" (i.e., at twelve feet). They continued some "fifteen feet farther down," whereupon—with no mention of anything further of note—they decided to stop until they could obtain assistance. James McNutt, who was a member of a group of treasure hunters working on Oak Island in 1863, described a different arrangement of layers (Crooker 1978, 24).

In 1911 an engineer, Captain Henry L. Bowdoin, who had done extensive borings on the island, concluded that the treasure was imaginary. He questioned the authenticity of various alleged findings (such as the cipher stone and piece of gold chain), and attributed the rest to natural phenomena (Bowdoin 1911). Subsequent skeptics have proposed that the legendary Money Pit was nothing more than a sinkhole caused by the ground settling over a void in the underlying rock (*Atlantic* 1965). The strata beneath Oak Island are basically limestone and anhydrite (Crooker 1978, 85; Blankenship 1999), which are associated with the formation of solution caverns and salt domes (Cavern 1960; Salt Dome 1960). The surface above caverns, as well as over faults and fissures, may be characterized by sinkholes.

Indeed, a sinkhole actually appeared on Oak Island in 1878. A woman named Sophia Sellers was plowing when the earth suddenly sank beneath her oxen. Ever afterward known as the "Cave-in Pit," it was located just over a hundred yards east of the Money Pit and directly above the "flood tunnel" (O'Connor 1988, 51).

Geologist E. Rudolph Faribault found "numerous" sinkholes on the mainland opposite Oak Island, and in a geological report of 1911 concluded there was "strong evidence" to indicate that the purported artificial structures on the island were "really but natural sink holes and cavities." Further evidence of caverns in the area came in 1975 when a sewage-disposal system was being established on the mainland. Approximately 3,000 feet north of the island, workmen excavating with heavy machinery broke through a rock layer and discovered a 52-foot-deep cavern below (Crooker 1993, 144). Fred Nolan insists that, earlier, in 1969, while drilling on Oak Island, Triton broke into a cavern near the fabled treasure shaft at a depth of 165 feet. "Blankenship and Tobias figured that the cavern was man-made," said Nolan, "but it isn't, as far as I'm concerned" (Crooker 1993, 165). And Mark Finnan (1997, 111), writing of "the unique geological nature of Oak Island," states as a fact that "naturally formed underground caverns are present in the island's bedrock." These would account for the flood "booby-traps" that were supposedly placed to guard the "treasure" (Preston 1988, 63).

Today, of course, after two centuries of excavation, the island's east end is "honey combed with shafts, tunnels and drill holes running in every imaginable direction" (Crooker 1978, 190), complicating the subterranean picture and making it difficult to determine the nature of the original pit. In suggesting that it was a sinkhole, caused by the slumping of debris in a fault, one writer noted that "this filling would be softer than the surrounding ground, and give the impression that it had been dug up before" (*Atlantic* 1965). Fallen trees could have sunk into the pit with its collapse, or "blowdowns" could periodically have washed into the depression (Preston 1988, 63), later giving the appearance of "platforms" of rotten logs.

Just such a pit was in fact discovered in 1949 on the shore of Mahone Bay, about five miles to the south of Oak Island, when workmen were digging a well. The particular site was chosen because the earth was rather soft there. Reports O'Connor (1988, 172–173): "At about two feet down a layer of fieldstone was struck. Then logs of spruce and oak were unearthed at irregular intervals, and some of the wood was charred. The immediate suspicion was that another Money Pit had been found."

The treasure seekers and mystery mongers are quick, however, to dismiss any thoughts that the "shaft" and "tunnels" could be nothing more than a sinkhole and natural channels. Why, the early accounts would then have to be "either gross exaggerations or outright lies," says one writer (O'Connor 1988, 173). For example, what about the reported "pick marks found in the walls of the pit" (O'Connor 1988, 173)? We have already seen—with the oak-limb-and-pulley detail—just how undependable are such story elements. Then what about the artifacts (such as the fragment of parchment) or the coconut fiber (often carried on ships as dunnage, used to protect cargo) found at various depths? Again, the sinkhole theory would explain how such items "worked their way into deep caverns under the island" (Preston 1988, 63).

Secrets Revealed

Assuming the "shaft" is a natural phenomenon, there still remains the other major piece of the Oak Island puzzle: How do we explain the presence of such cryptic elements as the cipher stone allegedly discovered in the pit in 1803, a large equilateral triangle (made of beach stones and measuring ten feet on each side) found in 1897, or a megalithic cross which Fred Nolan discovered on the south shore in 1981? (See figure 1; Finnan 1997, 36, 68–69, 79–82.)

By the early 1980s I had become aware of parallels between Oak Island's Money Pit and the arcana of the Freemasons. Theirs is not, they insist, a "secret society" but a "society with secrets." Carried to North America in the eighteenth century, Masonry has been defined as "a peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols" (*Masonic Bible* 1964, 26). One of the essential elements of any true Masonic group is "a legend or allegory relating to the building of King Solomon's Temple" ("Freemasonry" 1978). And an allegory of the Secret Vault, based on Solomon's fabled depository of certain great secrets, is elaborated in the seventh or Royal Arch degree. Among the ruins of the temple, three sojourners discover the subterranean chamber wherein are found three trying-squares and a chest, identified as the Ark of the Covenant (*Masonic* 1964, 12, 37, 63; Lester 1977, 150; Duncan 1972).

No doubt many readers have encountered Secret Vault symbolism—which pertains to lost secrets, buried treasure, and the grave (Macoy 1908, 445; *Revised* 1975, 64 n.22)—without recognizing it as such. For example, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a Freemason, not only employed Masonic allusions in several of his Sherlock Holmes stories (Bunson 1994, 84) but penned three that evoke Masonry's hidden vault itself. For instance, Holmes uncovers dark secrets in "The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place." Beneath an old chapel on the Shoscombe property, accessed by stumbling through "loose masonry" (an obvious pun) and proceeding down a steep stairway, Holmes finds himself in a crypt with an "arched . . . roof" (evoking the Royal Arch degree of Masonry). Accompanied by his client—a "Mr. Mason"!—Holmes finds the key to a series of strange mysteries. Similarly allusive Holmes stories are "The Red-Headed League" (featuring a client who sports a Masonic breastpin), and the suggestively titled "The Musgrave Ritual."

In addition to the Sherlockian Secret Vault allegories there are several examples of the genre that many people have taken at face value, believing them true accounts. One, for example, is the tale of Swift's Lost Silver Mine of eastern Kentucky. In his alleged journal, one "Jonathan Swift" explored the region prior to Daniel Boone, marking a tree with "the symbols of a compasses, trowel and square"—Masonic emblems—and discovering and mining silver (which geologists doubt exists in the region). Leaving to seek backers, Swift says he stored the treasure in a cave and "walled it up with masonry form." Later he became blind and unable to find his fabled treasure (although still capable of writing in his journal!). This evokes Masonic ritual wherein a candidate must enter the lodge in *complete blindness* (i.e. blindfolded) to begin his quest for enlightenment (Nickell 1980).

Another such lost-treasure story is found in the purported Beale Papers which tell a tale of adventure, unsolved ciphers, and fabulous treasure. This was "deposited" in a stone-lined "vault" (using language from the Select Masters' degree) in Virginia. The papers were published by a Freemason (Nickell 1982b).

Then there is the "restless coffins" enigma of the Chase Vault of Barbados. According to proliferating but historically dubious accounts, each time the vault was opened, between 1812 and 1820, the coffins were discovered in a state of confusion. After they were reordered the vault was closed by "masons." Yet the coffins would again be found in disarray. At least two of the men involved were high-ranking Freemasons. In 1943 another restless-coffins case occurred on the island, this time specifically involving *a party of Freemasons* and the vault being that of *the founder of Freemasonry in Barbados* (Nickell 1982a)

It now appears that another such tale is the legend of Oak Island, where again we find unmistakable evidence of Masonic involvement. There are, of course, the parallels between the Money Pit story and the Masonic Secret Vault allegory. The "strange markings" reportedly carved on the oak adjacent to the Pit suggest *Masons' Marks*, inscribed signs by which Masons are distinguished (Waite 1970, xx; Hunter 1996, 58). The three alleged discoverers of the Pit would seem to represent the *Three Worthy Sojourners* (with Daniel McInnis representing the *Principal Sojourner*), who discover the Secret Vault in the Royal Arch degree (Duncan 1972, 261). In that ritual the candidate is lowered on a rope through a succession of trap doors, not unlike the workmen who were on occasion hauled up and down the (allegedly platform-intersected) Oak Island shaft. The tools used by the latter—notably spades, pickaxes, and crowbar (O'Connor 1988, 2; Harris 1958, 15)—represent the three *Working Tools* of the Royal Arch Mason (Duncan 1972, 241). Indeed, when in 1803 workers probed the bottom of the Pit with a crowbar and struck what they thought was a treasure chest, their actions recall the Royal Arch degree in which the Secret Vault is located by a sounding blow from a crowbar (Duncan 1972, 263). The parallels go on and on. For example, the soft stone, charcoal, and clay found in the Pit (Crooker 1978, 24, 49) are consistent with the *Chalk, Charcoal and Clay* cited in the Masonic degree of Entered Apprentice as symbolizing the virtues of "freedom, fervency and zeal" (Lester 1977, 60; Hunter 1996, 37).

Then there are the artifacts. Of course many of these—like the old branding iron found in the swamp (Crooker 1993, 175, 176)—are probably nothing more than relics of the early settlers. Some are actually suspicious, like the links of gold chain found in the Pit in 1849. One account holds that they were planted by workers to inspire continued operations (O'Connor 1988, 177–178).

Other artifacts are more suggestive, like the cipher stone (again see figure 1) which disappeared about 1919. Its text has allegedly been preserved, albeit in various forms and decipherments (Rosenbaum 1973, 83). For instance zoologist-turned-epigrapher Barry Fell thought the inscription was ancient Coptic, its message urging people to remember God lest they perish (Finnan 1997, 148–149). In fact, the text as we have it has been correctly deciphered (and redeciphered by several investigators, me included). Written in what is known as a simple-substitution cipher, it reads, "Forty Feet Below Two Million Pounds Are Buried" (Crooker 1993, 23). Most Oak Island researchers consider the text a hoax (O'Connor 1988, 14), but as Crooker (1993, 24) observes, an inscribed stone *did* exist, "having been mentioned in all the early accounts of the Onslow company's expedition." Significantly, a cipher message (with key), found in the Secret Vault, is a central aspect of Freemasonry's Royal Arch degree (Duncan 1972, 248–249).

Figure 2. Offshore view of Oak Island showing site of Borehole 10X. The "Money Pit" lies just beyond.

Other artifacts (Finnan 1997, 67, 80, 83) that appear to have ritualistic significance are the stone triangle and great "Christian Cross" as well as "a hand-worked heart-shaped stone"—Masonic symbols all. Crooker (1993, 179) notes that "a large amount of time and labor" were spent in laying out the cross, but to what end? Could it have been part of a Masonic ritual?

An "old metal set-square" found at Smith's Cove may simply be an innocent artifact, but we recall that three small squares were among the items found in the Secret Vault (Duncan 1972, 243). Indeed, the square is one of the major symbols of Freemasonry which, united with a pair of compasses, comprises the universal Masonic emblem.

Explicitly Masonic, I believe, are certain inscribed stones on the island. These include one discovered at Joudrey's Cove by Gilbert Hedden in 1936. It features a *cross* flanked by the letter H, said to be a modification of the Hebraic letter for Jehovah, and a prime Masonic symbol known as a *Point Within a Circle*, representing mankind within the compass of God's creation (Morris n.d., 47; Finnan 1997, 66, 151). Another clearly Masonic stone is a granite boulder found near the Cave-in Pit in 1967. Overturned by a bulldozer it bore on its underside the letter "G" in a rectangle (what Masons term an *oblong square*). *G* denotes the Grand Geometer of the Universe—God, the central focus of Masonic teachings—and is "the most public and familiar of all symbols in Freemasonry," observes Mark Finnan (1997, 152). He continues: "The presence of this symbol on Oak Island and its location in the east, seen as the source of light in Masonic teachings, is further indication that individuals with a fundamental knowledge of Freemasonry were likely involved."

Indeed, the search for the Oak Island treasure "vault" has been carried out largely by prominent Nova Scotia Freemasons. I had an intimation of this years ago, but it fell to others, especially Finnan who gained access to Masonic records, to provide the evidence. Freemasonry had come to Nova Scotia in 1738 and, concludes Finnan (1997, 145), "it is almost a certainty that organizers of the first coordinated dig . . . were Masonicly associated." Moreover, he states: "Successive treasure hunts throughout the past two hundred years

often involved men who were prominent members of Masonic lodges. Some had passed through the higher levels of initiation, and a few even held the highest office possible within the Fraternity."

They include A. O. Creighton, the Oak Island Association treasurer who helped remove the cipher-inscribed stone from the island about 1865, and Frederick Blair, whose family was involved in the quest as far back as 1863. Blair, who formed the Oak Island Treasure Company in 1893, was a "prominent member" of the lodge in Amherst, Nova Scotia. Treasure hunter William Chappell was another active Mason, and his son Mel served as Provincial Grand Master for Nova Scotia from 1944 to 1946 (Finnan 1997, 145–146). Furthermore, discovered Finnan (1997, 146):

> The independently wealthy Gilbert Hedden of Chatham, New Jersey, who carried out the treasure search from 1934 to 1938, and Professor Edwin Hamilton, who succeeded him and operated on the island for the next six years, were also Freemasons. Hamilton had at one time held the office of Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. Hedden even made it his business to inform Mason King George VI of England about developments on Oak Island in 1939, and Hamilton corresponded with President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, another famous Freemason directly associated with the mystery.

(Roosevelt actually participated in the work on Oak Island during the summer and fall of 1909.) Other Masonic notables involved in Oak Island were polar explorer Richard E. Byrd and actor John Wayne (Sora 1999, 12; Hamill and Gilbert 1998).

Significantly, Reginald Harris, who wrote the first comprehensive book on Oak Island at the behest of Frederick Blair, was an attorney for Blair and Hedden. Himself a thirty-third-degree Mason, Harris was provincial Grand Master from 1932 to 1935. Among his extensive papers were notes on Oak Island, scribbled on the backs of Masonic documents and sheets of Masonic letterhead. The papers show that at least one Oak Island business meeting was held in the Masonic Hall in Halifax, where Harris had an office as secretary of the Grand Lodge (O'Connor 1988, 93; Harris 1958, vii; Finnan 1997, 143; Rosenbaum 1973; 154).

One investigator, Ron Rosenbaum (1973, 154), discovered that among Harris's papers were "fragments of a Masonic pageant" that were apparently "designed to accompany the rite of initiation into the thirty-second degree of the Masonic Craft." The allegory is set in 1535 at the Abbey of Glastonsbury, where the Prime Minister is attempting to confiscate the order's fabulous treasures. But one item, the chalice used at the Last Supper—the Holy Grail itself—is missing, and secret Masons are suspected of having hidden it for safekeeping. The allegory breaks off with them being led to the Tower for torture.

Given this draft allegory by Harris, it may not be a coincidence that some recent writers attempt to link the Holy Grail to Oak Island. They speculate that the fabled chalice is among the lost treasures of the Knights Templar, precursors of the Freemasons (Sora 1999, 180, 247–251).

In any event, the evidence indicates a strong Masonic connection to the Oak Island enigma. Others have noted this link but unfortunately also believed in an actual treasure of some sort concealed in a man-made shaft or tunnel (Crooker 1993; Finnan 1997; Sora 1999; Rosenbaum 1973). Only by understanding both pieces of the puzzle and fitting them together correctly can the Oak Island mystery finally be solved.

In summary, therefore, I suggest first that the "Money Pit" and "pirate tunnels" are nothing of the sort but are instead natural formations. Secondly, I suggest that much of the Oak Island saga—certain reported actions and alleged discoveries—can best be understood in light of Freemasonry's Secret Vault allegory. Although it is difficult to know at this juncture whether the Masonic elements were opportunistically added to an existing treasure quest or whether the entire affair was a Masonic creation from the outset, I believe the mystery has been solved. The solution is perhaps an unusual one but no more so than the saga of Oak Island itself.

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