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Oak Island's secret: It may hold the treasure of one of

CUTTHROAT PIR

File: Greene
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HALIFAX, N. S.



**Texas oilman
George Greene
seeks pirate loot
in Nova Scotia.**

By Cyril Robinson
WEEKEND Staff Writer

LAST FALL a Texas engineer, George J. Greene, started drilling on Oak Island, N.S., in the hope of solving one of this continent's greatest mysteries.

Did Captain Kidd bury treasure on this island on the Atlantic coast, some 45 miles south of Halifax? That has long been a popular theory. Another is that there is pirate booty cached on the island, but booty buried by some other sea marauder. Greene intends to keep drilling until he comes up with an answer.

His current quest for treasure believed buried more

than two centuries ago rings like an echo of a fantastic era when swashbuckling pirates roved the Atlantic. Some of history's most villainous rascals, whose hearts were as black as the flags they flew, sailed the sea in that grim, colorful age, plundering defenceless ships and capturing or slaying the crews.

Among this throat-slitting tribe of sea rovers was the infamous Capt. Edward Teach, alias Blackbeard, a Bristol-born blackguard who had 14 wives and who for many years was Public Enemy No. 1 of the sea lanes. One of Blackbeard's nastier habits was to shoot one of his shipmates at the dinner table just to prove who was boss.

One of Blackbeard's contemporaries was another Englishman named Capt. Edward Low, a cruel, sadistic ruffian who forced some of his victims to turn cannibal before he ran them through with his cutlass. Toward dusk on the black Friday of June 15, 1722, this audacious pirate sailed boldly into the harbor of Shelburne, N.S., and seized a fleet of 12 vessels from the astonished fishermen in one swift coup. Under threat of death, he forced many of the fishermen to turn pirate.

Low was such a bully that even his own crew eventually had enough of him. In 1724, they set him adrift in the Atlantic in a small boat with three shipmates. A few days later, a French ship found this

villainous quartet, took them to Martinique and hanged them.

During his piratical career, Low amassed great wealth from the ships he plundered. Some believe he may have cached it at Oak Island.

One of the most remarkable of all pirates of this day was a tall, handsome Welshman, Capt. Bartholomew Roberts. A strict disciplinarian who never drank anything stronger than tea, this fastidiously-dressed buccaneer would unhesitatingly shoot down a crew member who attacked a woman. But he had no scruples about sinking the ships of unarmed fishermen, killing the crew members or looting their homes.

ONE day in 1720, peace-loving fishermen in Trepassey Harbor, at the southern tip of Newfoundland, saw a black schooner enter port with the hated flag flying at its mast. From aboard the pirate craft came the sound of beating drums and blaring trumpets. As Roberts had planned, the sight of his vessel and the great noise frightened the fishermen. They took to the woods, leaving behind a fleet of 22 vessels. The pirates stormed ashore, tore down the fish stages, looted and set fire to the homes. Then, after helping themselves to valuables in the ships, they turned their guns on the fishing craft, which they sank or burned.

Two years later, fate caught up with this inhuman buccaneer who had scuttled over 400 vessels in his remarkable career. In February, 1722, a British man-o-war attacked Roberts' fleet in the North Atlantic. A chance shot caught him in the throat and, in compliance with his wish, his crew tossed their dying leader into the sea.

But Newfoundland had been plagued by pirates long before the era of Low and Roberts. During the Elizabethan and early Stuart period, men of all stations took to piracy for the sheer love of adventure. In 1611, a notorious pirate named Peter Easton sailed into Harbor Grace in command of 10 well-fitted ships of war. Easton looted the port and took 500 Englishmen with him to join in piracy. After plundering shipping off the Newfoundland coast, Easton fled to France, built a palace and lived the rest of his days under the title of Marquis of Savoy.

SIR HENRY MAINWARING, an English-born lawyer, soldier and sailor, was an equally celebrated rogue of this period. Mainwaring plundered many a vessel in Newfoundland, but his career of piracy came to an end when he accepted the offer of King James I of England of a free pardon if he would give up piracy. In gratitude, Mainwaring became a turncoat and returned to the sea in search of pirates. He once rescued a Newfoundland fleet which Turkish pirates had captured near Gibraltar.

A vast amount of the wealth gathered by pirates has never been found. It is believed buried in coves and on islands along the Atlantic coast, and a great many treasure hunts have been staged to find these hideouts. These caches are said to be guarded by pirate ghosts. It was reportedly the habit of pirates, whenever they dug a hole for their loot, to make it big enough to hold the body of one of their crew. Digging was always carried out at night. After the treasure was buried, the crew would draw lots to see whose body would be deposited with it. Then the luckless one would be slain by his mates and the corpse placed atop the valuables. His spirit was intended to act as a perpetual guardian to frighten off searchers. There's a legend that the eerie sounds coming over the water from Hannah Screecher's Island are the cries of a girl named Hannah, who was murdered by Captain Kidd. It's said that Kidd chose Hannah to guard the treasure because he did not wish to waste a valuable member of his crew.

Kidd

Most historians believe that if anyone slew Hannah it was not Kidd. Although he has often been pictured as a symbol of the blood-and-thunder age of piracy, William Kidd, son of a Scottish clergyman, was a comparatively mild-mannered man and a devoted husband. Prior to his capture and trial in London, where he was hanged for piracy, he is believed to have hidden vast treasures along the Atlantic coast.

Did Kidd bury a huge fortune on Oak Island? This question has been asked ever since the discovery, in 1795, of the Nova Scotian island's famed "Money Pit." A succession of treasure-

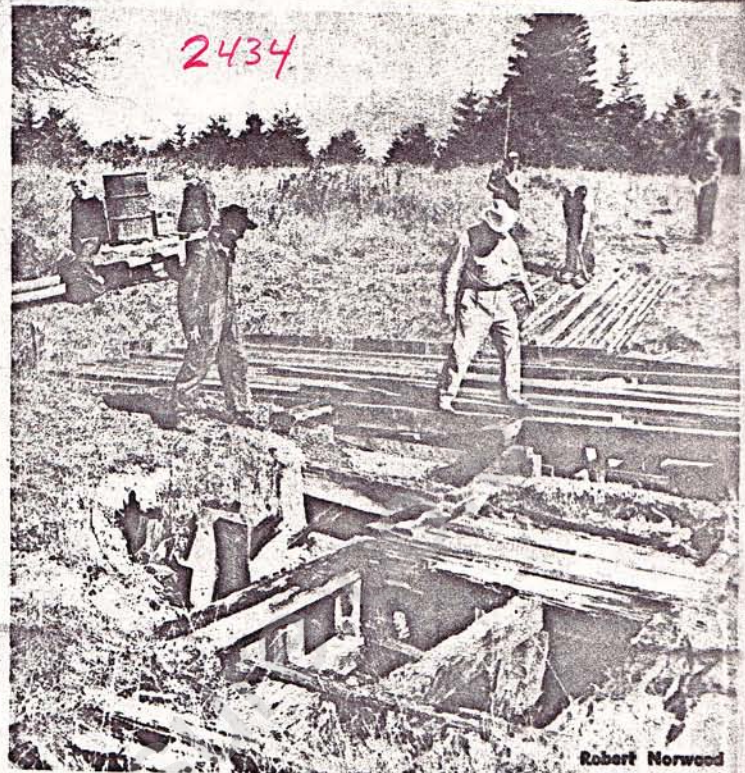
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seekers have spent a fortune trying to find the answer, and the gold. Excavations have revealed a series of oak platforms in the pit at every 10-foot level to a depth of 100 feet. How did the platforms get there? Removal of a three-foot layer of ship's putty at the 95-foot level resulted in the flooding of the pit and the discovery of an ingenious system of underground tunnels which linked the Money Pit to tidewater. Had those who buried the treasure enlisted the aid of the ocean to guard it? Borings into the Money Pit have yielded evidence of stout oak chests and casks and—at the 153-foot level—searchers came to a 20-inch layer of man-made cement. Who put it there? And why?

Petroleum engineer George J. Greene, of Corpus Christi, Tex., who represents five Texas oil companies, began drilling at Oak Island in the hope of solving the Money Pit mystery. "If there's anything down there, we'll find it," confidently declared the cigar-smoking Texan.

Greene holds exclusive rights from the Nova Scotian government to seek treasure trove in this mile-long, half-mile-wide island. He has an agreement with the owner of the property, Mel Chappell, of Sydney, who will get 45 per cent of whatever is found. He also has a personal interest in the project. His uncle, John W. Shields, of Oklahoma City, Okla., was associated with the late Franklin D. Roosevelt in an unsuccessful venture at Oak Island in 1909.

The popular theory is that if there's anything buried in Oak Island it is the treasure put there by Kidd. Others say the Money Pit may hold a fabulous hoard buried by Sir Henry Morgan and his fellow buccaneers after they sacked Panama. Still others say the island may have been used as the hiding place for the lost treasures of the Incas, stolen



Robert Norwood

Oak Island's mysterious Money Pit is the scene of Texan's search. It may hold pirate gold or the French crown jewels.

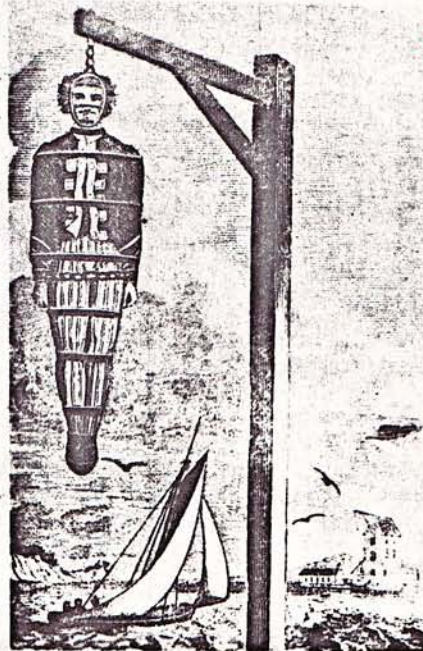
of Spain or Spainards who died before they could reclaim their spoils.

Greene doesn't agree with the theory that Oak Island holds pirate loot. "It's a lot of bunk," he says. "Pirates usually buried their gold five or six feet underground so they could dig it up and make a quick getaway. They never buried anything deeper than 30 feet. If there's anything in the Money Pit, it's probably the very valuable crown jewels of France and gold from the French treasury. These were taken by King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette when they fled Paris during the revolution. They have never been recovered.

A great French engineer who was a lover of Marie Antoinette came to this country and built the fort at Louisburg. He may have brought the jewels and gold with him and buried them in Oak Island."

The Texan spent several weeks core-drilling the area, reaching a depth of 181 feet without discovering any trace of the gold. However, his drill struck the buried oak platforms at every 10 feet down to the 100-foot level. For over 50 feet below this level his drill passed through a hollow shaft. Then it bored through soil and limestone. "There must be some explanation for those timbers," said Greene. With the approach of winter, he called a halt to drilling operations and announced he would return next spring with metal-detecting equipment for another crack at Oak Island's secret.

Should Greene's quest unearth a pirate treasure, it may throw new light on a period when the Atlantic was infested by some of history's most celebrated rogues. Were they alive today, the rascally Blackbeard, the infamous Ned Low, or maybe Roberts or Kidd could solve the Oak Island mystery. But dead men tell no tales.



Mariners beware! Kidd's body stayed aloft long after execution.