TRANSCRIPT OF REPORT OF JOHN BROWN TO THE DIRECTORS OF THE OAK ISLAND COMPANY [ALSO KNOWN AS THE HALIFAX COMPANY] OF 1867

Note: This transcript was initially made by Dennis King and minor modifications were made by Les MacPhie November 11, 2010.

Walton
Jan. 17th 1867

To
Messrs McElreith, J D Nash, John Selnes and others
Directors of the Oak Island Company

Gentlemen,

In making a report of the recent boring operations conducted under my superintendence at Oak Island, it would be superfluous on my part to enter into any of the past history of that remarkable locality, as doubtless most of the shareholders are better acquainted with it than myself. Before however entering into a description of the borings, the results obtained, and the conclusions I have arrived at, I must tender my thanks to Mr. Hill, as well as to Mr. Ross the engineer for their valuable advice (derived from the interest and experience they have in the undertaking) as without it, it would have been impossible for me to have completed in so short a time the work entrusted to me.

The position of affairs previous to the works of the last two months (if I understand rightly was as follows) the treasure was supposed to have been originally deposited upon a platform built across the Money Pit at a depth from the surface of some ninety odd feet, and that a tunnel from Mitchell's Shaft had undermined it, the whole platform and treasure falling to the bottom of the pit, where it was thought it would be found; therefore it was required by means of boring to find the bottom of the unsettled and disturbed ground, and if possible strike the remains of the platform.

From what I could learn it appears that the present Money Pit is not exactly in the position of the original one, the bottom of the existing pit containing within its base only about 2 ft of the old round Money Pit, the latter being to the eastward and in order to arrive in the centre of it, it became necessary to bore at a slight angle; we had therefore to keep the engine at work and commenced our operation from a platform erected ten feet from the bottom of the pit. In this hole (No. I on the plan) we passed through –

1 ft water
5 ft soft mud
½ ft soft wood
4 ft gravel and clay
½ ft mud
10 ft gravel clay and mud with fibres
6 ft clay and gravel
1 ft oak borings
4 ft clay gravel and sand
1 ft vacant space
25 ft hard settled ground, making in all 58 ft or 166 ft from the original surface.

The water being kept by the engine some 75 ft below the tide level, we were subject to an immense pressure of water, rising through the boring tubes and it was only by driving the pipes ahead of the borings that at times we were enabled to save any portions of the ground passed through. The water appeared to augment until we passed the spot marked on the plan as vacant space, the augur dropping suddenly one foot, caused no doubt by the great rush of water clearing away that extent of ground from before the pipe. After passing this place the ground soon became much harder and the water gradually ceased until about 163 ft it completely stopped, at 166 ft the ground was very hard and unfortunately at this depth we lost an augur, and being unable to recover it, abandoned the hole. Having met with the undisturbed ground at 141 feet from the surface and having been boring at an inclination to the eastward it was thought possible we had passed through the old round pit and had reached its opposite side, it was therefore deemed advisable to put down another hole more perpendicular than the first, so that we might be able to sink further in the pit without danger of coming in contact with the side.

Being able to accomplish the desired end from the tide level, the engine was stopped and after planting the end of the pipe in the right direction inclining only one part in twenty to the eastward, we commenced to bore meeting with nearly the same results as in the previous borings, passing through –

18 ft soft clay and gravel
8.8 ft clay, gravel, softwood chips, with fibres
4 ft gravel
1 ft augur dropped into a fine sediment
8 ft fine sediment (sandy)
9 ft settled ground
12 ft hard ground, bringing us to a depth of 169 ft

In the last borings which were nearly vertical it will be noticed that we struck the settled ground at almost the same depth as on the first occasion when boring at a greater angle; it is therefore beyond doubt that it was not the side of the pit struck in the first instance, but that both of the holes must have reached the bottom.

The layer of gravel which forms the bottom of the unsettled ground is also (no matter whether natural or artificial) the channel by which the seawater is brought into the pit; on the first occasion the rush of water (as before mentioned) greatly increased and also became clearer and cleaner, but immediately it was passed the water lessened foot by foot (and it would naturally follow the pipe for some distance) but we found in both holes that after going a few feet it entirely ceased.

The boring marked III on the plan was commenced 78 ft from the mouth of the pit and was inclined 1 ft in 4 to the east in order to arrive at the spot where Mr. Graham & Co met with wood, etc in 1851. Mr. Graham was himself present at the starting of this hole, but from the altered appearance of the ground was unable to give any exact information as to the bearings it would be necessary to give in order to explore the ground he passed through. This hole was sunk 25 ft meeting with hard clay which evidently had never been interfered with and having arrived in the immediate vicinity of Mr. Hill's tunnel it was useless to continue in that direction.

I should be doing Mr. Graham great injustice did I not believe that he personally is convinced, that the borings of 1851 actually penetrated the treasure; but it is the easiest thing in the world for the most honest man to be deceived, especially in connection with borings having for their

purpose the discovery of immense amounts of treasure; one's imagination is so readily excited by the supposed proximity of wealth, that we are not in a position to discuss and examine evidence which under other circumstances would not be for a moment entertained.

Many times I have allowed myself to be carried away with the idea that we were about to strike something. Doubtless Messrs Graham & Co passed through wood, but when the wood was brought up in the augur, why did the coin not also come up, from mere curiosity, I often at a depth of 150 ft threw money into the hole, of course it came up in the augur and I for one should not be in the least afraid to throw any amount in, and to bring up every piece. If the treasure existed in layers as was supposed, confined in a chest or even in bags, it is my opinion that provided the augur once entered it would be impossible for some of the contents not to have been brought to the surface.

I might also mention that during my operations I frequently passed small layers of gravel, at which times the grit of the augur so greatly resembled the sound I should fancy would emanate from gold or silver coin, that it was difficult to undeceive myself until the augur was withdrawn.

Having given you a description of the borings which will be better understood by reference to the accompanying plan, I will briefly draw your attention to a few of the conclusions I have arrived at viz: the water course is a natural one, and this being the case it is quite possible to account for the original sinkage at the surface, the existence of the so-called round Money Pit, the presence of wood in the disturbed ground as well as the peculiarity of the salt water being found only in one pit.

As regard the water course, it is not at all likely that any man would excavate a drain so great a depth below tide level when the same result of flooding the pit could have been accomplished by bringing a drift in at a much less incline, and consequently at a far less expenditure of time and labour. If it were an artificial channel it must have been at least 5 feet x 3 or 4 feet in size, and as the engine could not possibly keep the quantity of water such a tunnel would bring in, it has been surmised that the drain had become choked, but it could only have been choked by the surrounding clay, and as it still brings in the seawater with the tremendous pressure acquired by reason of being some 100 feet below low water, it is impossible to believe that it would not soon clear itself; on the contrary however, I understand from those who have watched it for years passed, that the supply of water neither lessens or increases.

Again, the tunnels with which Mr. Hill fully explored the supposed course of the drain, although timbered and secured in a manner reflecting great credit on those who executed the work, having been in existence only a few years, had already in various cases caved in from the surface, and I cannot but think that a tunnel in existence for 200 years would surely have distinctly marked its course upon the surface. It has been said that in driving a tunnel from the shore pit the water burst through from the drain, such being the case the shore pit would be the first to fill after stopping the pumps, on the other hand it is the last. Were the water brought in by layers of gravel beneath, of course the deepest pits would be the first to fill leaving the shore pit until the last.

The original depression on the surface, as well as the old round pit, must be attributed to a natural caving having taken place from the layer of gravel upwards; such things are by no means uncommon, it is only a few years since on the Windsor Road that a most curious instance of this sort occurred. A very tall tree suddenly sank, so that its top most branches were level with the ground. This was caused by a cavity excavated by a subterraneous watercourse. At Oak Island at the present time, there is to be seen a depression on the surface, similar to the mouth of the old pit and probably caused by the same means. The cavings to Mr. Hill's tunnels

show that it required but an excavation of 7 ft in height to cause a slip of 100 feet and what is still more curious, is, that these are round or nearly so, in shape.

The old diggers assert, and subsequent investigation has proved that the so-called old Money Pit was not only round, but that it seemed to incline to the east. Now it would be impossible without very secure timbering, to sink through the clay that is found there, in any, but a perpendicular direction; the overhanging part not been able to support itself; no mention has I believe ever been made of any timber having been found.

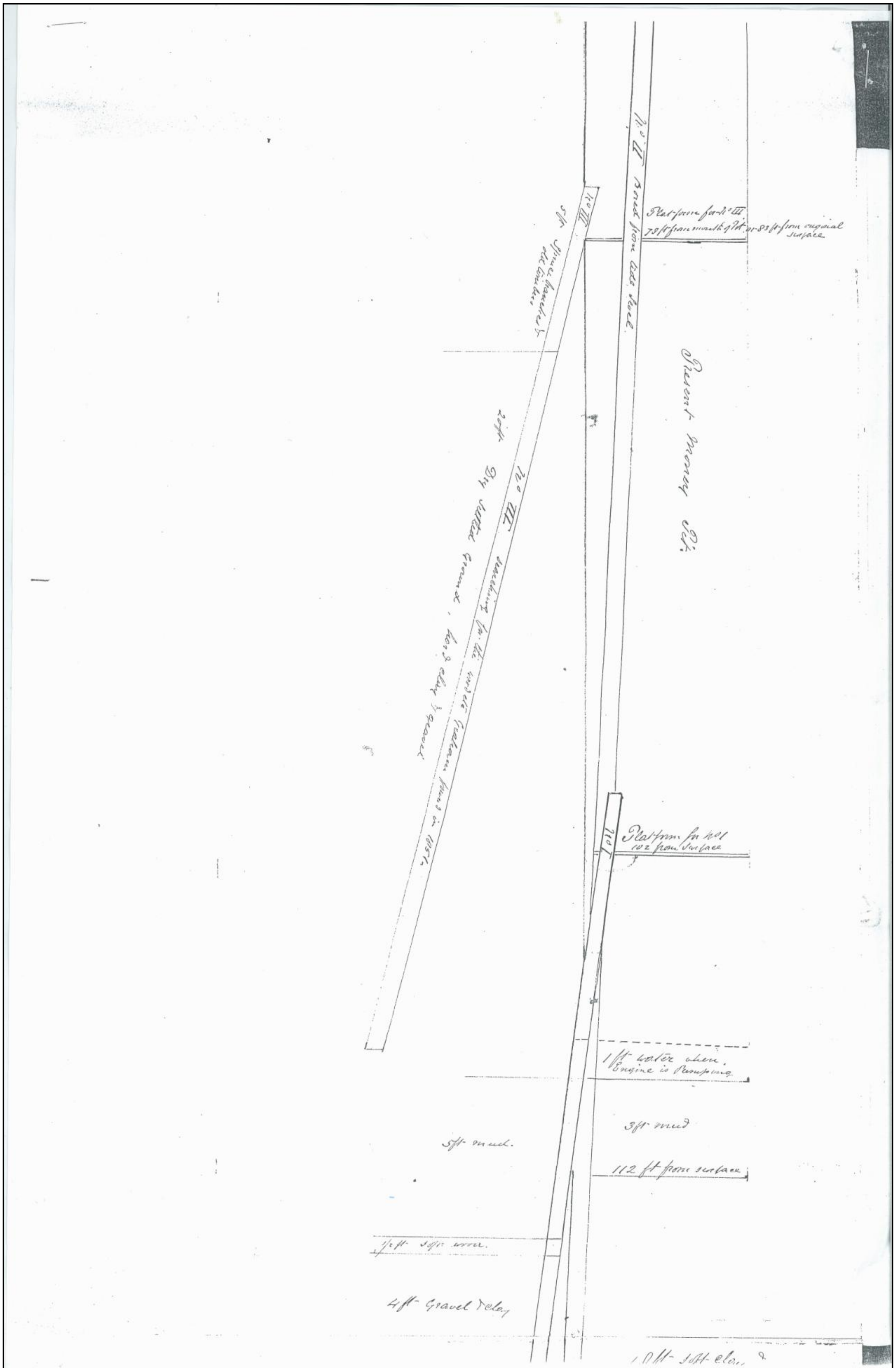
It seems also absolutely impossible that providing there had been a platform across the pit, that the two holes we put to the bottom should not have struck some portion of it; if we were to believe that it is there it would also be necessary to believe that it has by some miraculous means, all been stowed away in a small corner so as to escape the borings.

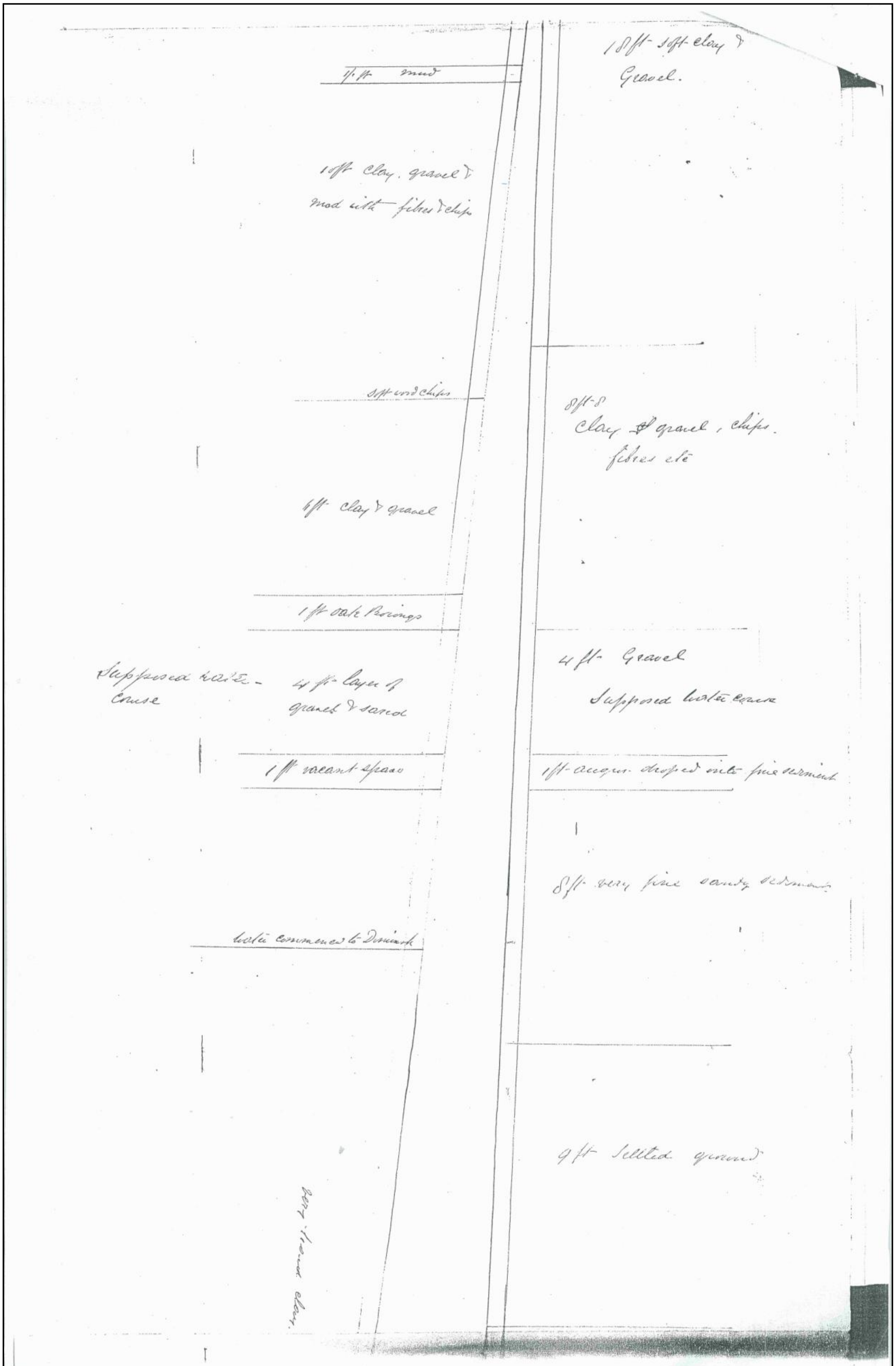
Should the ground have caved in (as I suppose) it would be broken up and very easy to remove. At a depth of 90 feet it may have become sufficiently consolidated to resist for a time the rising of the water, or until the diggers should have removed enough weight to allow the pressure of water to burst through and rise to tide level. The water having once raised through the clay, at every baling, the whole of the chips, wood and chain, or anything else left by previous workers would naturally sink and get mixed up, penetrating the soft clay until hard bottom was reached. The above has been exactly verified by the borings, scarcely an augur could be brought up without containing some particles of wood, but after passing the layer of gravel and getting into the settled ground, not a trace of any foreign substance could be discovered. In believing that the whole mystery can be attributed to the hand of nature, it becomes necessary to disbelieve some of the old traditions and although I do not wish to insist upon all the details of my theory being correct, yet if it succeeds in proving the possibility of its being a freak of nature, it must in a great measure banish the probability of its being the work of man.

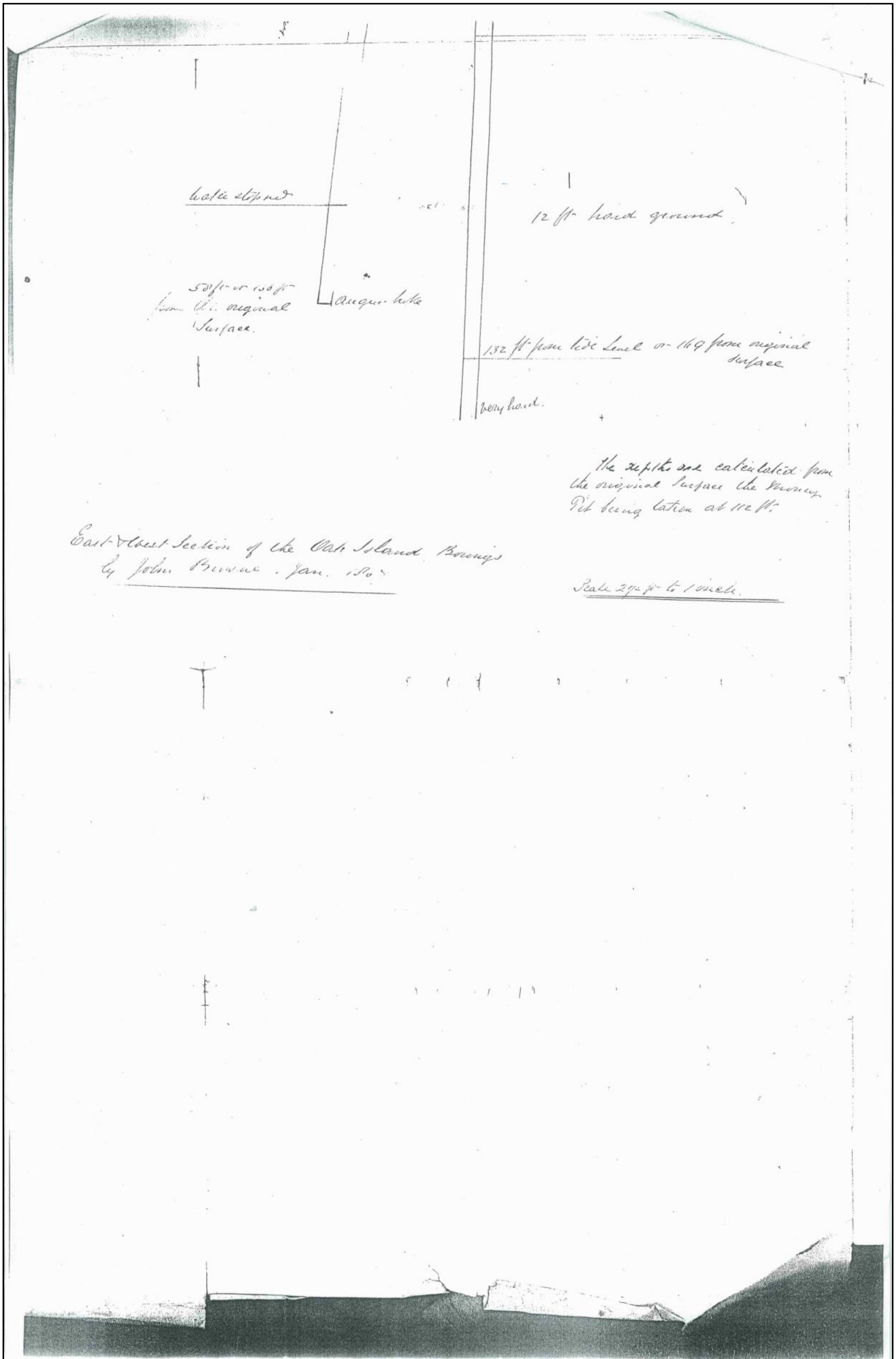
It may appear strange that the conclusion I have arrived at (if correct) were not come to long ago, persons might naturally think that the vast sums of money expended on the island, would never have been spent, had there not been sufficient proof to convince even the most sceptical that the treasure lay buried there. Tradition, hearsay evidence, and lastly the indomitable pluck and energy of those concerned have done more towards influencing the outflow of capital by succeeding companies than any actual evidence.

The tremendous amount of work which has been accomplished, more especially under Mr. Hill's direction has, so far as I am able to judge, been carried on under the firm conviction that the treasure was there, the object was to get at it, and I believe that had it been there Mr. Hill's works would have succeeded in reaching it. The whole difficulty has arisen from the fact that it has been taken for granted, that the disturbed condition of the ground, the watercourse etc, were only to be attributed to artificial means whereas had one hundredth part of the capital been devoted towards testing the possibility of its being the work of nature, I think the Oak Island problem would have been solved years ago.

I am Gentlemen
Yours v truly
John Brown


No. II Bored from Side Level
No. III
Platform for No. III
78 ft from mouth of Pit, or 83 ft from original surface
Present Money Pit
No. I
Platform for No. I
102 from Surface
1 ft water when Engine is Pumping
3 ft mud
5 ft mud.
112 ft from surface
4 ft Gravel & clay


18 ft soft clay & Gravel.
4 ft mud
10 ft Clay, gravel & mud with fibres & chips
soft wood chips
8 ft 8
Clay & gravel, chips, fibres etc
6 ft clay & gravel
1 ft oak Borings
Supposed water course
4 ft layer of gravel & sand
4 ft Gravel
Supposed water course
1 ft vacant space
1 ft auger dropped into fine sediment
8 ft very fine sandy sediment
water commenced to diminish
9 ft Settled ground


water stopped
12 ft hard ground
from the original surface
auger hole
132 ft from tide level or 169 from original surface
very hard
The depths are calculated from the original surface the Money Pit being taken at 112 ft.
East & West Section of the Oak Island Borings by John Browne. Jan.
to 1 inch