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**THE  
CRYSTAL  
SKULLS**

**MARK GREENWOOD  
HISTORY HUNTER**



**FREMANTLE PRESS**

# INTRODUCTION

*Is the truth out there?*

Sometimes, the information age can feel more like the age of misinformation. Daily, we are bombarded by exaggeration and fabrication. The internet stretches the truth. Social media breeds fake news. Advanced tools at society's disposal support our desire to check facts, yet deception is everywhere. Our lives have become a haven for hoaxes, schemes, scams and swindles.

It seems that nothing is immune. Even the ancient wonders of the world have sparked controversy. The origins of the Great Pyramids of Egypt and England's Stonehenge continue to polarise camps of believers and non-believers. Scientists and spiritualists can

produce evidence from credible sources to support opposing opinions.

There are many other examples that generate discussion: Were crop circles messages from intelligent extraterrestrial life? Did Noah's Ark come to rest on a mountain in Turkey? Is the Shroud of Turin the burial cloth that Jesus was wrapped in after the crucifixion over two thousand years ago or is it a medieval relic made in the fourteenth century? In the ongoing debate over the authenticity of historical items, should we rely on science? How else can we be confident any relic is ancient, modern or fake?

One extraordinary set of objects has long been the subject of speculation and debate. In the second half of the nineteenth century, lifelike skulls carved from crystal began appearing in museums on both sides of the Atlantic. Visitors admired the eerie works of art and the creative skill of the ancient artisans claimed to have made them. Archaeologists, anthropologists and spiritualists disagreed on their origins and the purpose of perfecting a human cranium made from

quartz, one of the hardest known substances on the planet.

One claim is that the skulls originated when the Mayans or Aztecs (1300s–1500s) inhabited Central America, before Europeans arrived. Others believe that they were created tens of thousands of years earlier by an unknown civilisation. Some have suggested the relics originated on the lost island of Atlantis. And those invested in the study of unexplained phenomena are confident extraterrestrials created the crystal skulls.

The blend of archaeological intrigue and supernatural mystique surrounding the skulls challenged beliefs and captivated imaginations worldwide. Over time, the crystal skulls have woven their way into popular culture, inspiring art, books and a Hollywood blockbuster. They feature in episodes of *The X-Files*, *Stargate*, cartoons, comics and computer games.

What are the true origins of these mysterious artefacts? Join me on a trek into the jungle of Central America to the ruins of an ancient civilisation. Step into

the backrooms of museums and research laboratories for some scientific sleuthing. An open-minded investigation is timely.



**MITCHELL-HEDGES SKULL**

In 1924, Anna Mitchell-Hedges, an adventurous teenager, was travelling with her father on an expedition into the jungles of Belize. For weeks, a team of explorers pushed through dense foliage into the jungle's dark heart. The air was steamy. In the tangle of creepers, monkeys chattered and howled. The shifting shadows played tricks on the mind. Branches crackled underfoot. Anna trod carefully over the knotted roots of strangler figs. Spiders and fire ants infested the vines. Flesh-eating botflies lurked in the mud.

Anna's father, British explorer Frederick Mitchell-Hedges, was searching for the ruins of a lost civilisation. Local workers recounted tales of 'star people', advanced beings who imparted knowledge to the ancients and then mysteriously vanished. Mitchell-Hedges believed these beings hailed from Atlantis.

Could the legend of Atlantis have its origins in the truth?

For Anna and everyone involved, the expedition had been gruelling. After months hacking through the jungle, they'd stumbled upon mossy mounds of stone suffocated by gnarled vines. Mitchell-Hedges and his team spent weeks clearing the site. Slowly, an ancient Mayan city was revealed, unlike anything ever encountered. The stones were perfectly cut. Buildings were constructed without mortar, a technique not typical in Mayan architecture. The ruins marked the site of a mighty citadel that encompassed homes, shrines, palaces, an amphitheatre and a grand pyramid with walls that reminded Mitchell-Hedges of the Great Pyramids in Egypt, located halfway across the world.

Local Mayans identified these ruins as Lubaantun, 'The City of Fallen Stones'. In the mists of antiquity, long before modern cities spanned the globe, a vibrant tapestry of life flourished in Central America. Monumental temples and grand

pyramids were constructed. Elaborate calendars honoured the cyclical nature of time. Renowned for a deep connection to the cosmos, the ancient people were innovators with an advanced understanding of astronomy and mathematics. Life was in tune with the rhythms of the natural world. Buildings were aligned with the sun, moon, planets and stars. Here, a civilisation thrived until suddenly, without explanation, the site was abandoned and reclaimed by the jungle.

Anna celebrated her seventeenth birthday at Lubaantun. After long days of excavating and clearing, the team was exhausted. The afternoon sun cast shadows of golden light. The ancient ruins were strangely quiet. In the drowsy heat, everyone made themselves comfortable in the shade — except Anna.

‘Father warned me not to climb to the top of the pyramids,’ she later confessed. ‘But the locals told me on a clear day, I might see the ocean.’ While others took a well-earned siesta, Anna clambered up the stone wall, clinging to vines. At the summit, a glint of light

between the rocks caught her eye. She hurried back to the base camp to rouse her father. ‘Come quickly,’ she insisted. ‘There’s a light inside the pyramid.’

‘It’s just the sun playing tricks on you.’

Anna protested. ‘I saw something shining in there.’

Her father pulled his hat back over his eyes. ‘We’ll check tomorrow.’

The following morning, Anna led her father up the side of the ruins. After clearing away some debris, he shone his torch through a gap in the stones. ‘There’s something down there for sure,’ he agreed. ‘I can see it glowing.’

The opening was too narrow for Anna’s father to squeeze through. The younger, thinner local guides refused to descend, insisting what was inside should remain undisturbed. Mitchell-Hedges dismissed their concerns as hocus-pocus. ‘Doesn’t anybody here have any courage?’

Silence followed, until a soft voice spoke up from the back. Anna stepped forward. ‘I’ll do it.’

With a light strapped to her head and ropes tied

around her body, Anna was lowered into the void. 'There are scorpions and snakes down here,' she called out. Near what appeared to be the remains of an altar, the source of the light flashed when caught in the beam of her headlamp.

Anna inched closer. The object was transparent, like glass. Instantly, she recognised the eerie, lifelike shape of a human skull. It was the most extraordinary object. Her headlight enhanced the glow of its hollow eye sockets. Anna's heart raced. She wiped the dust from its smooth surface and tugged on the rope. 'Bring me up,' she yelled.

By the time Anna emerged, a crowd had gathered. Her father held up a crystal skull, mesmerised by the way it reflected the sunlight. For a moment, there was silence among local Mayans before they erupted with joy, crying and hugging each other. An elder informed Mitchell-Hedges that the skull was thousands of years old and encoded with knowledge about the past and the future. 'A powerful force,' he said, 'has been released from its tomb.'



*The Mitchell-Hedges crystal skull, allegedly discovered in  
Mayan ruins at Lubaantun in 1924.*

That night, the crystal skull was blessed with drumming, chanting and singing. Later, according to Mitchell-Hedges, the ancient relic was gifted to him in gratitude for food, medicine and his care of the local Mayans. What Anna and her father didn't know at the time was that the crystal skull would prove to be one of the most mysterious objects ever found, and it would change their lives forever.

After his return to England, Mitchell-Hedges penned several newspaper articles and a book about his adventures, but he only briefly mentioned the crystal skull. 'How it came into my possession,' he wrote, 'I have reason for not revealing.'

In the following years, the crystal skull from 'The City of Fallen Stones' was occasionally displayed in a room lit by candles. Visitors marvelled at its craftsmanship, the perfection of its cheekbones, the prisms of light it reflected. In the presence of its distinctive aura, some people claimed to hear the soft chanting of human voices. Others, peering deep into its interior, alleged they'd seen visions of the

future. The penetrating stare of the skull was feared by some. 'Nonsense,' said Anna. 'It brings me joy and happiness.'



**THE LEGEND OF  
THE CRYSTAL SKULLS**

Many people have reported inexplicable experiences in the presence of the Mitchell-Hedges skull. It is said to have 'psychic' and 'healing' powers. But this skull is not the only crystal cranium to be found. There are others, and all are surrounded by claims of puzzling phenomena.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, crystal skulls were exhibited in prestigious museums on both sides of the Atlantic. Each one was admired for the creative precision that seemed remarkable given their reputed ancient origins.

Crystal skulls quickly gained a reputation as some of the most mysterious objects in the world. And according to enthusiasts, they are much more than impressive pieces of art. True believers claim

they contain important information for the benefit of humankind.

These beliefs can be traced back to an ancient legend that involves a prophecy about thirteen crystal skulls dispersed around the world. Mayan, Aztec and Native American spiritual leaders say the shared legend has been handed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. They believe, at a pivotal time in humanity's history, thirteen skulls will be revealed when the world is ready for the truth. The knowledge that will come is considered unimaginable to our current understanding.

The number of skulls is said to have cosmic significance. Thirteen correlates with the eight planets in our solar system, plus the five officially recognised dwarf planets — Ceres, Pluto, Haumea, Makemake and Eris. The thirteen skulls symbolise collective consciousness — the beliefs, ideas and moral attitudes shared within society. It is said some skulls are yet to be discovered, but that all contain information about the mysteries of life and the universe. Like living

libraries, they are purported to hold revelations about the past and intelligence about humankind's destiny.

According to the legend, at a time of need, the thirteen crystal skulls will come together. When reunited, their collective power will trigger an awakening, transforming the old world into the new world. The information revealed will be vital to the survival of humanity – although the nature of exactly what will happen differs, depending on who is telling the tale.

Sceptics claim that 'The Legend of the Crystal Skulls' is a fabricated story. They do not believe crystal skulls are the work of extraterrestrials or came from Atlantis or were created by ancient Mayans or Aztecs. The legend, they say, is an intricate yarn started by a real-life Indiana Jones. The crystal skulls are nothing more than a modern illusion created for profit by self-proclaimed 'experts' in antiquities from Mexico's past.

After the crystal skulls became famous, the world was flooded with modern skulls of every size, colour

and shape. Hundreds of thousands of skulls are produced every year to tap into the public's fascination with these objects. Some people who acquire a crystal skull, like to pretend that theirs is ancient. But modern crystal skulls are not rare or mysterious. And since the age of crystals cannot be dated, how can anyone determine which skulls are modern and which might be ancient?

While modern skulls are widely available, it is only the small handful of rare crystal skulls in private and public collections — those deemed to be 'authentically ancient' — that continue to fuel controversy among archaeologists, scientists and museum officials. For over a century, 'The Legend of the Crystal Skulls' has blended elements of mystery, history and mythology, blurring the lines between fact and fiction, science and spirituality. Is it their translucent allure and the way they refract light that fuels our fascination? Or is it their association with ancient civilisations and lost knowledge that taps into our desire to connect with the past?



*Anna Mitchell-Hedges, pictured in 2005, with the crystal skull allegedly discovered during her father's 1924 expedition in search of the lost city of Atlantis.*

Mathew McCarthy, Kitchener-Waterloo file photo.

Anna Mitchell-Hedges claimed her skull was found in the ruins of Lubaantun, where the Mayans built one of the most advanced civilisations the world has ever known. Some researchers have suggested that the Mayans received crystal skulls from the survivors of the mythical city of Atlantis, who also shared knowledge and technology with them. Mayan priests were thought to have used skulls in ceremonies to predict the future by making the skulls talk. Interestingly, Anna's crystal skull is anatomically perfect and it even has a separate detachable jaw.

From the moment the Mitchell-Hedges skull was recovered from the jungle, it was widely believed that there was something special about the object. Over the years, it has cast its spell over many people. Does the skull possess supernatural powers? While that theory may seem 'out there', investigators encourage us to keep an open mind.