

In 1605, thirteen young men planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament. Among them was Guy Fawkes, Britain's most notorious traitor.

After Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603, English Catholics who had been persecuted under her rule had hoped that her successor, James I, would be more tolerant of their religion. James I had, after all, had a Catholic mother. Unfortunately, James did not turn out to be more tolerant than Elizabeth and a number of young men, 13 to be exact, decided that violent action was the answer.

A small group took shape, under the leadership of Robert Catesby. Catesby felt that violent action was warranted. Indeed, the thing to do was to blow up the Houses of Parliament. In doing so, they would kill the King, maybe even the Prince of Wales, and the Members of Parliament who were making life difficult for the Catholics. Today these conspirators would be known as extremists, or terrorists.

To carry out their plan, the conspirators got hold of 36 barrels of gunpowder - and stored them in a cellar, just under the House of Lords.



But as the group worked on the plot, it became clear that innocent people would be hurt or killed in the attack, including some people who even fought for more rights for Catholics. Some of the plotters started having second thoughts. One of the group members even sent an anonymous letter warning his friend, Lord Monteagle, to stay away from the Parliament on November 5th. Was the letter real?

The warning letter reached the King, and the King's forces made plans to stop the conspirators.

Guy Fawkes, who was in the cellar of the parliament with the 36 barrels of gunpowder when the authorities stormed it in the early hours of November 5th, was caught, tortured and executed.

It's unclear if the conspirators would ever have been able to pull off their plan to blow up the Parliament even if they had not been betrayed. Some have suggested that the gunpowder itself was so old as to be useless. Since Guy Fawkes and the other conspirators got caught before trying to ignite the powder, we'll never know for certain.

Even for the period which was notoriously unstable, the Gunpowder Plot struck a very profound chord for the people of England. In fact, even today, the reigning monarch only enters the Parliament once a year, on what is called "the State Opening of Parliament". Prior to the Opening, and according to custom, the Yeomen of the Guard search the cellars of the Palace of Westminster. Nowadays, the Queen and Parliament still observe this tradition.

On the very night that the Gunpowder Plot was foiled, on November 5th, 1605, bonfires were set alight to celebrate the safety of the King. Since then, November 5th

has become known as Bonfire Night. The event is commemorated every year with fireworks and burning effigies of Guy Fawkes on a bonfire.

Some of the English have been known to wonder, in a tongue in cheek kind of way, whether they are celebrating Fawkes' execution or honoring his attempt to do away with the government.



**“Remember, remember the Fifth of
November, The Gunpowder Treason
and Plot, I know of no reason Why the
gunpowder treason Should ever be
forgot. Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes,
t’was his intent To blow up the King
and Parli’ment. Three-score barrels of
powder below To prove old England’s
overthrow; By God’s providence he
was catch’d With a dark lantern and
burning match. Holloa boys, holloa
boys, let the bells ring. Holloa boys,
holloa boys, God save the King!”**

~ ALAN MOORE

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Guy Fawkes Day Poem

Remember, remember, the 5th of November
The Gunpowder Treason and plot;
I know of no reason why Gunpowder Treason
Should ever be forgot.

Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes,
'Twas his intent,
To blow up the King and the Parliament.
Three score barrels of powder below,
Poor old England to overthrow.
By God's providence he was catch'd,
With a dark lantern and burning match.

Holloo boys, Holloo boys, let the bells ring
Holloo boys, Holloo boys, God save the King!

Hip hip Hoorah!
Hip hip Hoorah!

A penny loaf to feed ol' Pope,
A farthing cheese to choke him,
A pint of beer to rinse it down,
A faggot of sticks to burn him,
Burn him in a tub of tar,
Burn him like a blazing star,
Burn his body from his head,
Then we'll say: ol' Pope is dead.

