

# The Gunpowder Plot

For over four hundred years, adults and children have celebrated Guy Fawkes Night on the 5th November, by singing songs and burning a 'Guy' on a bonfire. Everyone knows how Guy Fawkes and his Catholic friends tried to blow up the Protestant King James I and Parliament in revenge for the way in which Catholics were being treated. Source A is taken from a school text book written in 1835 and tells the traditional story of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.

**Source A: An engraving of Guy Fawkes being executed, 1605**



**Source B: History of England by Lady Callcott, 1835.**

King James I dealt severely with the Catholics, from whom he took a lot of money. The Catholics grew tired of this. Some of them thought that if they could kill him they might have a Catholic king or queen.

They found that there were some cellars under the Houses of Parliament, and they filled these cellars with gunpowder; and as they expected the Parliament and King to meet there on 5 November they hired a man called Guy Fawkes to set fire to the gunpowder, and so to blow up and kill everybody there.

Now, it happened that one of the lords, whose name was Mounteagle, had a friend among the Catholics and that friend wrote him a letter, without signing it, to beg him not to go to Parliament that day because a sudden blow would be struck which would destroy them all.

Lord Mounteagle took this letter to the king's council. Some of the councillors laughed at it. But the King thought about it and said the sudden blow must mean gunpowder. He set people to watch the cellars under Parliament, until at last they caught Guy Fawkes with his lantern, waiting for the time to set fire to the gunpowder.

The story continues that after Guy Fawkes was captured he was tortured and signed a confession. Nearly everyone involved in the gunpowder plot were killed when the King's soldiers tried to arrest them. A few weeks later Guy Fawkes was executed as a traitor by being hung, drawn and quartered. What was left of his body was burnt

**Source C: A Guy Fawkes with his fellow plotters, 1605**



|                           |                    |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Guy Fawkes</i>         | Guy Fawkes         |
| <i>Robert Catesby</i>     | Robert Catesby     |
| <i>Thomas Percy</i>       | Thomas Percy       |
| <i>John Wright</i>        | John Wright        |
| <i>Christopher Wright</i> | Christopher Wright |

## Activity 1: The Gunpowder Plot, 1605

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1. Look at Source B. Copy out the statements below that correctly tell the traditional story of the Gunpowder Plot:

James I liked the Catholics living in England.

The Catholics living in England in 1605 did not like James I.

James I forced Catholics to pay extra taxes.

A small group of Catholics thought that they would stab the King.

A small group of Catholics thought they would blow up the King.

Guy Fawkes hid the gunpowder in a cellar under Parliament.

One of the Catholic plotters sent a letter to James I to warn him.

One of the Catholic plotters sent a letter to Lord Mounteagle to warn him.

Guy Fawkes was caught in the local pub having a pint of beer.

Guy Fawkes was caught in the cellar waiting to set fire to the gunpowder.

2. Look at Source A. How was Guy Fawkes executed?
3. Look at Source C. What were the names of the other men involved in the Plot and how did they die?

There are many modern historians who do not believe the traditional story of what happened. They believe that Guy Fawkes and his friends were framed by James I's chief minister Sir Robert Cecil - a Protestant - who wanted to not only discredit the Catholics, but make James I more popular with his new English subjects.

Although James was popular when he first became King, he had one or two bad habits which made him very unpopular. An attempt on his life would help to make him popular by uniting the people behind him against the Catholics.

So which version is correct, the traditional view or the more modern?  
The purpose of the rest of this worksheet is to help you make up your own mind.

**Source D: An extract from the letter sent to Lord Mounteagle, 1605.**

My lord, I have a care for your safety. Therefore I would advise you to devise some excuse to miss your attendance at Parliament. For God and man have come together to punish the wickedness of this time. Go into the country, for they shall receive a terrible blow this Parliament - and yet they shall not see who hurts them.

**Source E: Robert Cecil, 1602**

The King's excessive kindness has ended in this, that Catholic priests go openly about the country saying Mass. This gives great offence to others. We cannot hope for good government while we have a large number of people who obey foreign rulers as the Catholics do. The priests preach that Catholics must kill the King to help their religion.

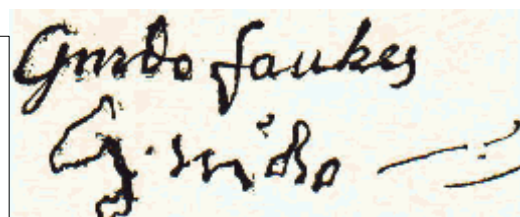
**Source F: Mr Huggins, Suspicious Circumstances, 1998**

Lord Mounteagle told the King about the plot on 27th October and yet the government took no action until 4 November. At that time all gunpowder was carefully controlled by the government and had to be kept in the Tower of London. The records for 1605 have mysteriously disappeared.

**Source G: King James I's orders about Guy Fawkes interrogation, 1605.**

If he will not confess, the gentler tortures are to be first used, and then the ones which cause the uttermost pain.

**Source H: Guy Fawkes normal signature, above his signature taken from his confession, 1605.**



**Source I: An extract taken from a letter by Sir Robert Cecil, 1605.**

On Tuesday night at midnight, as he was busy to prepare his things for explosion, he (Guy Fawkes) was caught in the place itself. There was found some fine powder, to make a fuse. He would have saved himself from the blow by some **half an hour**.

**Source J: Extract taken from Guy Fawkes' confession, 1605.**

He said he did not intend to set fire to the fuse until the King came into the Houses of Parliament, and then he intended to do it so that the powder might blow up a **quarter of an hour late**

**Source K: Key facts put forward by modern historians, 1996**

1. The 36 barrels of gunpowder were placed in a cellar next to Parliament. This cellar was owned by John Whynniard, a royal official and close friend to Sir Robert Cecil.
2. The government seemed to know where all the plotters were. On the 7 November they were surrounded in Holbeach House. They offered no resistance and yet some of them were shot dead.
3. All the plotters were killed and or captured quickly, except one Francis Tesham. Once the trial was over he was taken prisoner and died of a mysterious illness in the Tower of London on 23 December 1605.

## Activity 2: Assessing the Evidence on Guy Fawkes

1. Copy and complete the table below to help you decide whether or not Guy Fawkes and the Catholics were framed:

| Source | Guy Fawkes planned to blow up James I and Parliament. | Fawkes was framed to help make James I more popular. |
|--------|---|--|
| D      |   |  |
| E      |   |  |
| F      |   |  |
| G      |   |  |
| H      |   |  |
| I      |   |  |
| J      |   |  |
| K      |   |  |

Use the evidence from your table to do the following activities.

2. Write a long paragraph explaining whether or not you think Guy Fawkes was framed.
3. Design a pamphlet by either James I or the English Catholics, describing your version or story of the Gunpowder Plot:

## PLOTS AND TRAITORS, 1605.

**Evil Protestant King frames  
innocent Catholics.**

*Today, poor innocent Guy Fawkes  
was murdered by the evil Protestant  
executioners. He was falsely  
accused of treason for ...*

**Evil Catholics try to murder  
James I and Parliament.**

*Today the evil Guy Fawkes and his  
murderous Catholic friends were  
executed as traitors for ...*

Use the pictures in this booklet to help illustrate your work