

The Gunpowder Plot

***Remember, remember the 5th of November,
Gunpowder, Treason and Plot.***

***I see no reason why Gunpowder Treason
Should ever be forgot***

The rhyme reminds people why on the 5th of November each year, bonfires are lit around the land - very often with a Guy made of cloth sitting on top.

Explain why the Gunpowder plot took place in 1605, who was involved and why, and why there's some doubt as to what the real events were.

1. *"The Gunpowder plot took place in..."*
2. *"Several men plotted against the King because..."*
3. *"There is doubt over the real events of the plot because..."*

1. The Gunpowder Plot took place in 1605. Its roots lay in the politics of the time and the way that religious belief divided different sections of the community. The background to it lay in the unhappiness felt by Catholics about the way they were being treated in England.

When the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558 she persecuted Catholics, fearing they may side with an invader from the European continent. When Elizabeth died in 1603, King James VI of Scotland became James I of England.

2. English Catholic leaders hoped James would be more tolerant. These hopes were quickly dashed however, and the persecution continued. Most Catholics accepted the situation, but a small number were determined to do something about it and try to force change.

The five central figures of the Gunpowder Plot were Robert Catesby, Thomas Percy, Thomas Wintour, John Wright and - best known of all - Guy Fawkes. Fawkes, who had been born in York in 1570, was a mercenary, or soldier of fortune, who had spent more than 10 years fighting for Spain in Flanders as part of a regiment of English exiles. He was recruited because of knowledge about the use of gunpowder.

The five swore to blow up James and the Houses of Parliament at the official opening of Parliament, killing the King and all his leading advisers. They first rented a house near to Parliament and began digging a tunnel, but this plan was abandoned when they came up against the foundations of the Palace of Westminster. Instead Thomas Percy managed to acquire a cellar within the Parliament buildings directly under the House of Lords. Fawkes - posing as Percy's manservant and using the name John Johnson - was installed as caretaker. Here the plotters eventually stacked 36 barrels of gunpowder. They ferried the barrels across the River Thames at night, and hid them under firewood.

Delays in the opening of Parliament and the rising costs incurred by the plotters, who were storing arms at various points around the country for use in the revolt they were planning to

lead following the death of the King, led to more people being brought into the conspiracy. All these were close to the original conspirators, most of them being related. It is believed that it was one of these people - Francis Tresham - who wrote a letter which was delivered to his brother-in-law Lord Monteagle on October 26th, 1605. The letter warned Monteagle not to attend the opening of Parliament. Monteagle immediately took the letter to King James' Secretary of State Robert Cecil. Despite becoming aware of the existence of the letter, the plotters continued with their plans, sure the authorities remained unaware of the details of the scheme. Guy Fawkes spent the day before the opening of Parliament - scheduled for November 5th - in the cellar containing the gunpowder. A slow burning fuse was in position. Fawkes was to light it and then escape to the continent. On the night of November 4th, however, searches were made of the cellars beneath the Houses of Parliament. During the first search of the cellar in which Fawkes was holed up it was noticed it contained a suspiciously large amount of firewood. At around midnight a magistrate accompanied by soldiers returned and overpowered Fawkes. The gunpowder was discovered and Fawkes was arrested and taken before the King for questioning.

Despite being tortured he kept up the pretence that he was John Johnson, the servant of Thomas Percy. Government spies had, however, already linked him to Catesby and the other conspirators. Catesby and most of the others had fled London for the Midlands. They and sympathisers - around 60 in total - finally arrived at Holbeche House on the Staffordshire/Warwickshire border on November 7th. The following day the house was surrounded by a force led by the Sheriff of Worcester. In the fighting that followed Catesby, Wright and Percy were killed and the other plotters arrested. They were tried and convicted as traitors at the end of January 1606 and were summarily executed. Guy Fawkes and Thomas Wintour, along with two others conspirators, were put to death in the Old Palace Yard at Westminster. Francis Tresham, believed to have been the author of the letter which alerted the authorities to the Gunpowder Plot, had been taken to the Tower of London following his arrest. It is recorded that he died there in December 1605, possibly as a result of poisoning, though some historians believe he was allowed to escape.

3. (Use the evidence from Page 4 of the summary sheets headed: Other Evidence. 1 - 7.)

Conclusion: State the 3 comments from the heading, "What might have happened" in your conclusion. (There is no way of knowing absolutely which one of these is correct.)

On November 5th 1606 people in London lit bonfires to mark the anniversary of the foiling of the plot to kill the King, beginning a tradition which has survived right through to the present day. Another tradition also survives. As part of the ritual at the State Opening of Parliament each year, the Yeoman of the Guards, complete with their Tudor uniforms and armed with pikes, carry out a search of the buildings.