

The Gunpowder Plot

When James I came to the throne in 1604 religion was still a big problem. James was a Protestant but because his mother Mary, Queen of Scots had been a Catholic many Catholics hoped that James would support them.

James didn't support the Catholics and made all Roman Catholic priests leave England in 1604. A small group of Catholics decided that James should pay for this betrayal with his life and planned to kill James when he came to the houses of Parliament. The plan was to blow up Parliament with gunpowder and then James daughter Elizabeth would be made Queen and be brought up a Catholic.

There were many plotters involved in the plot but perhaps the most famous is a man called Guy Fawkes, who was given the dangerous job of lighting the gunpowder.

The plot began to go wrong when an important man called Lord Mounteagle received a letter a couple of days before the King was due to go to parliament:

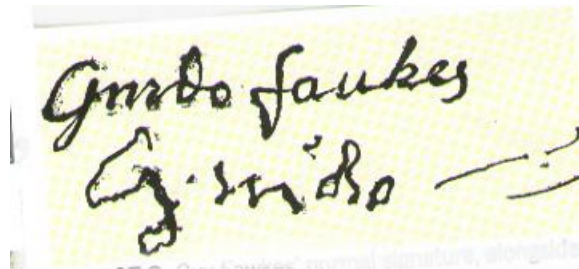
"My lord I have a care for your safety. I would advise you to devise some excuse to miss your attendance at this Parliament... For they shall receive a terrible blow this Parliament and yet they shall not see who hurts them."

Lord Mounteagle was concerned and showed the letter to a man called Robert Cecil who showed

the letter to the King. The King ordered a search of the commons to be made and at midnight on the November 5th Guy Fawkes was found in the cellars beneath parliament with 36 barrels of gunpowder.

King James was very angry and demanded the names of the other people that were involved in the plot. Guy Fawkes was a brave man and refused to give their names. Eventually the king ordered:

"If he will not otherwise confess, the gentler tortures are to be first used, and then the utmost pain."



Guy Fawkes signature before and after torture.

Eventually Guy Fawkes gave the King the information he wanted and the other plotters were all killed or executed.

The plot had failed. Catholics were now even more unpopular and the people who had saved the King especially Lord Mounteagle and Robert Cecil were heroes. Every year since on November 5th the failed plot has been celebrated with bonfires and fireworks. In some parts of the country figures of Guy are burnt to remind us of the story.

Tasks.

By Mr Day

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1. Why were Catholics angry with James at the start of his reign?
2. Explain which parts of the letter you think made the King suspicious.
3. How can we tell from Guy Fawkes signature that he had been badly tortured? What do you think the King meant by the words "*the utmost pain*"?
4. Some historians claim that the Catholics were framed and the whole plot was set up to make them unpopular. How likely do you think this is? Who benefited from the plot being foiled?