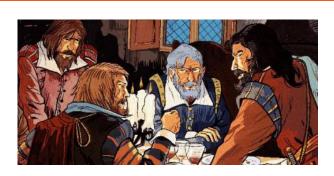
## THE GUNPOWDER PLOT



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Plotters discussing their plan to blow-up the Houses of Parliament when the King and his family gathered in the chambers on the 5th of November, 1605. Image online, courtesy U.K. Parliament.

After Elizabeth I died of cancer in 1603, <u>James VI</u> of Scotland also became James I of England. In one of his greatest political achievements, James was the first to refer to the now United Kingdom as "<u>Great Britain</u>."

<u>Used to</u> the Scottish form of government, however, James was soon at odds with the English Parliament. He was also at odds with English Catholics against whom strict laws had been passed. A group of those Catholics decided to strike against both the King and Parliament.

Using the mercenary Guy Fawkes as their "trigger man," Robert Catesby and his like-minded friends concocted a plan to kill King James and members of Parliament. The conspiracy - known as "The Gunpowder Plot" - was aimed at the King because of the oppressive anti-Catholic laws he was introducing.

<u>The plot</u> was engineered for maximum effect: <u>Blow up</u> the Houses of Parliament on opening day, November 5, 1605. (At that time, Westminster did not yet have "<u>Big Ben</u>," its famous clock. That <u>ticking landmark</u> became a London feature in 1859.)

Renting a vault under the House of Lords, the conspirators stored thirty-six barrels of gunpowder. Guy Fawkes was hired to set it off when His Majesty, King James I, was opening Parliament.



Since the Queen and the heir to the throne would also be present, the entire male line to the throne would be killed. The conspirators would then "install" one of the king's daughters, Princess Elizabeth, as the new sovereign. The opposition, of course, would heavily influence her.

The plot went awry when one of the conspirators (likely Francis Tresham) <u>warned a relative</u> (William Parker, also known as <u>Lord Monteagle</u> and brother-in-law of Tresham) <u>not</u> to attend opening day ceremonies. With such a tip in hand, security was tightened and Guy Fawkes was <u>caught</u> with incriminating evidence on his person.

The king was saved, but the <u>conspirators</u> were in for quick retribution.

After investigators found all the gunpowder hidden near Fawkes, the trigger man would face serious and tortuous questioning. Before that happened, though, the Privy Council (as the story goes) met in the King's bedchamber. (Remember ... Guy was arrested during the very early morning of November 5th while the King was home in bed).



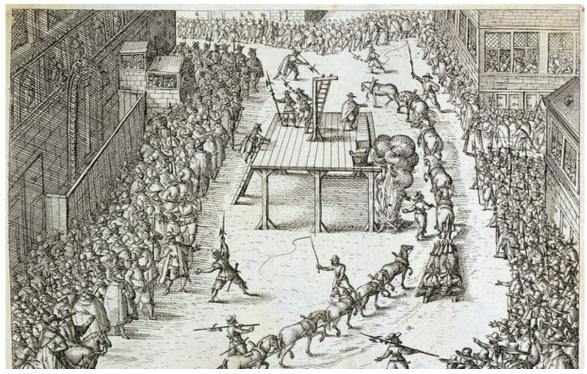
Hauled before His Majesty, Fawkes was asked why he wanted to blow-up Parliament, thereby killing the King (who was from Scotland), with so *many* barrels of gunpowder. He reportedly said:

To blow you Scotch beggars back to your own native mountains!

Fawkes, who claimed to be Jhon Jhonson, confessed the details of his plan after he was tortured. (Follow this link to a page of <a href="mailto:the confession">the confession</a>, signed by "Jhon Jhonson.") He also gave up the names of his conspirators.

King James issued <u>proclamations</u> urging all citizens to track down the offending plotters. He offered a reward of 1,000 pounds (a huge sum of money in those days) to anyone who turned-in a member of the group. The King even <u>offered</u> to pardon - and pay - any member of the conspiracy who turned-in a colleague.

While some of the ringleaders were killed before trial, others were brought to swift justice. By January, 1606, all remaining plotters had been <u>tried</u> and condemned.



The <u>local</u> London <u>newspaper</u> described the <u>gruesome verdicts</u> and public <u>executions</u>. Guy Fawkes himself, however, escaped the horrific execution plans (which included gross mutilation of the defendants' bodies).

Instead - just before he was to be executed on January 31, 1606 - Fawkes jumped from the hanging scaffold. Although he still died from a broken neck, he avoided the agony of the government's plan to mutilate him (while he was still alive).

Greatly relieved the Gunpowder Plot went awry, thereby saving the King and the heir, authorities encouraged Londoners to celebrate with bonfires.



That tradition continues every November 5th on "Guy Fawkes Day." Sometimes festivities even take place at the Monarch's residence (as depicted in this 1776 etching of Windsor Castle).



Now that you know something about this famous event in British history, do you think you could foil the plot? The BBC has launched a game to test your skills ... <a href="mailto:check it out">check it out</a>!

### Credits:

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A Guy Fawkes effigy, made of wax, burns in a 2010 bonfire at the Billericay Fireworks Spectacular in Lake Meadows Park, Billericay, Essex, UK. Photo by William Warby, online via Wikimedia Commons with Creative Commons License CC BY 2.0.

In September of 1776, Paul Sandby (1730 or 1731-1809) published his image of a Guy-Fawkes bonfire. Measuring 36  $\times$  50 cm, the original (maintained at the British Library) is an aquatint with etching of the festivities in Windsor Castle during a "Guy Fawkes Night." Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

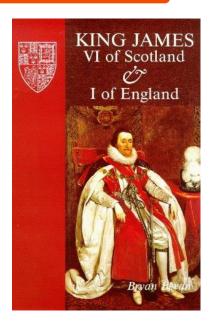
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# Media Stream



King James VI of Scotland and I of England

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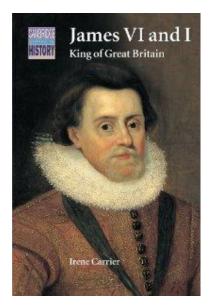
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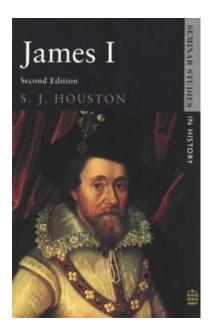
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James I: King of Great Britain
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#### James I - by S.J. Houston

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