

What festival is this?



Are you sitting comfortably?

And so our story begins...



November 5th 1605 was set to be a special and happy day...



King James I was going to Parliament for the yearly Royal State Opening of Parliament ceremony and the building would be packed with people.

He did not know that everyone going to the ceremony would be in grave danger. For more than a year a gang of men had been secretly plotting a huge explosion to blow up Parliament and the King. The gang were Catholics and were angry that the Protestant King and Parliament would not let Catholics practise their religion.

Robert Catesby was the brains behind the deadly plan. He couldn't work alone, so he gathered a group of like-minded men, including the famous Guy Fawkes, to help him. The gang's plan came to be called the Gunpowder Plot.



The plotters

Guy Fawkes

Robert Catesby



The plot began in May 1604 when Guy Fawkes and Thomas Percy rented a house very close to Parliament. Fawkes called himself John Johnson and pretended he was Percy's servant. They then began to dig a tunnel...

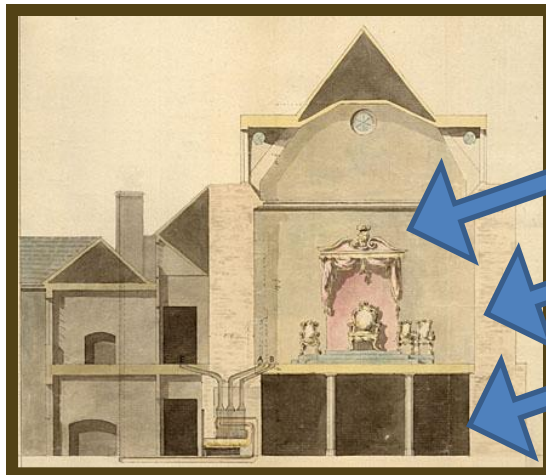


Why a tunnel? Well, imagine you had a huge heap of gunpowder and you wanted to get it into the most important building in the country without anyone noticing. Not an easy thing to do.

The tunnel was meant to run from the cellar of their house and under the street, ending up underneath the Houses of Parliament - perfect for smuggling that gunpowder.



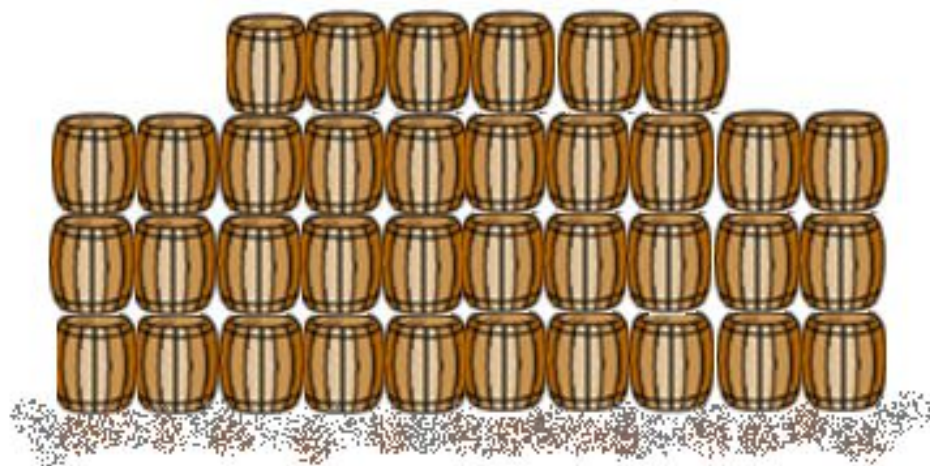
Time ticked on and the plotters kept digging... until in March 1605 they had a stroke of luck. A cellar underneath the House of Lords came up for rent.



Throne
House of Lords
Cellar

Cross-section of the House of Lords, by Sir John Soane, 1794. Parliamentary Archives

The plotters abandoned their tunnel and packed the cellar with 36 barrels of gunpowder. They covered the huge heap of barrels with bundles of firewood, just in case anyone looked inside.

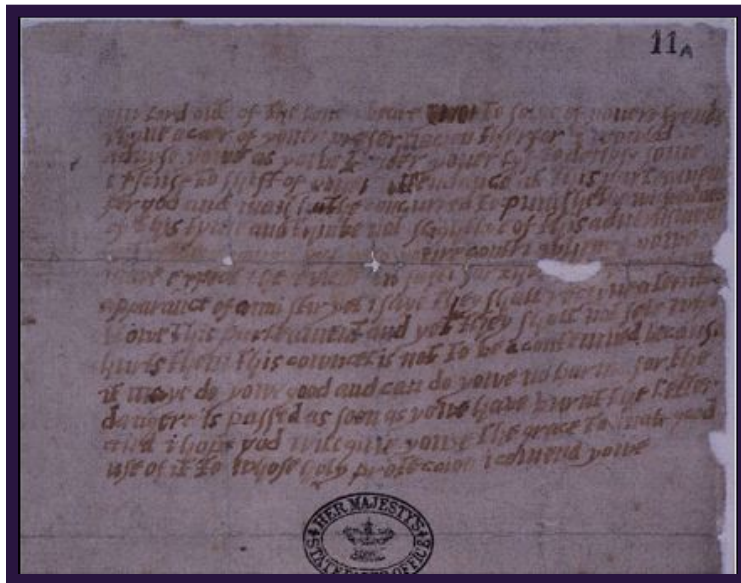


The most deadly and dangerous part of the Gunpowder Plot was in place.

What next...?



Ten days to go. The gunpowder was ready. The plotters were ready. What could possibly go wrong? Well, all it took to upset those careful plans was a very mysterious letter.



Letter sent to Lord Monteagle, National Archives (UK)

Lord Monteagle, a very important man and friend of King James I, was given a letter at dinner on October 26th 1605. A tall, mysterious stranger had handed it to his servant in the street earlier in the evening. The letter warned him not to go to the ceremony on November 5th as something terrible was going to happen.

Monteagle didn't know what to make of the letter and he had no way of knowing who had written it. Was it a nasty joke or was it a serious warning?



Lord Monteagle took his mystery letter to show to friends in the government, but they were slow to act. King James was away hunting and many ministers were suspicious it might be a fake.

For a few days all was quiet.

Meanwhile, the plotters quickly found out about the letter. Catesby wasn't going to give up though. He sent Guy Fawkes down to the cellar to check that the gunpowder stores were still safe. All the gang could do now was wait.



The afternoon before Parliament was due to open, Guy Fawkes took up his position in the gunpowder cellar. He settled down with his watch and some matches, all ready to put the murderous plan into action.



In the middle of the afternoon, he heard voices approaching the cellar. Soldiers had come to search the storerooms, just in case the warning letter had been true. They found Fawkes, and even questioned him, but didn't find the gunpowder.

Fawkes bravely stayed in the cellar to carry out his task, probably thinking he'd got away with it, but no. Later that evening the soldiers came back, and this time they found the deadly gunpowder!





Guy Fawkes was
arrested.

The Gunpowder
Plot had failed.



After his arrest in the cellar, Fawkes was taken to see King James and his court. He refused to answer most of their questions and made it very clear that he didn't have any regrets at all.

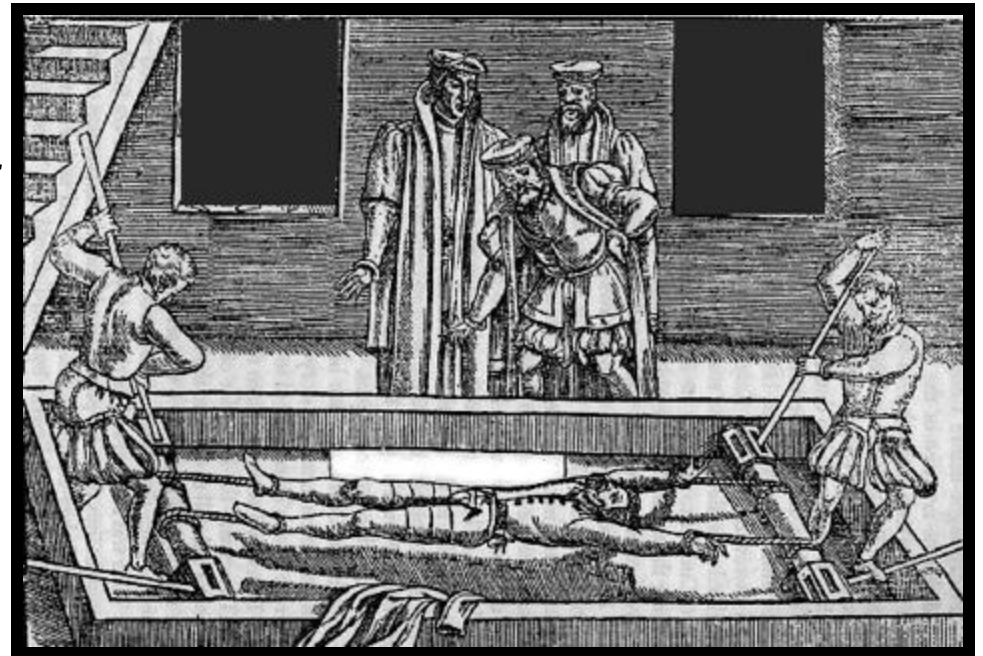


Perhaps most annoyingly for the King, Fawkes wouldn't reveal who the other plotters were. Reports written at the time quote him as saying, "You would have me discover my friends."



After his audience with the King, Guy Fawkes was taken to the Tower of London in the hope that the guards there could get him to talk. Fawkes was tough and determined not to give away any secrets.

Guy Fawkes was then tortured on the rack to get him to reveal the names of the others. Eventually he revealed the names of the others under torture. Their trial was at Westminster Hall in Parliament in January 1606.



All seven were sentenced to be...
hung drawn and quartered!



By permission of the British Library.



Their heads were placed on spikes for everyone to see.



So, Catesby, Fawkes and the other plotters had very nearly managed to kill the King and blow up the Houses of Parliament.

Their daring plan had been discovered in the nick of time.



Warning! The **gruesome** bit!

hung

The prisoner was hung but cut loose just before they lost consciousness.

drawn

Their stomach was then sliced open and their guts pulled out.

The heart would be pulled out last, and shown to the dying person.

quartered

Finally, the head would be cut off and the body cut into four quarters.



Remember, remember the fifth of November
The gunpowder treason and plot.
I see no reason why gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot.

Guy Fawkes, 'twas his intent
To blow up king and parliament.
Three score barrels were laid below
To prove old England's overthrow.

By God's mercy he was caught
With a dark lantern and lighted match.
Holler boys, holler boys, let the bells ring
Holler boys, holler boys, God save the King.



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