

Bonfire Night

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Bonfire Night is a reminder of the failed attempt to kill the King of England and the important people of England on, 5th November, 1605.

Bonfires were lit that first night to celebrate the King being saved, but as the years went by, the burning of straw dummies began as a reminder that traitors cannot get away with plotting to kill the king.

The Plot Itself

The English Catholics hoped that the new king, James I, would be more accepting of people being Catholic even though he himself was not Catholic. However, he was no more accepted by Catholics than the previous ruler.

A group of angry Catholics began to meet and discuss what could be done. The leader of the group, Robert Catesby, was very keen to take violent action. Their plan was to blow up the Houses of Parliament and kill many important people who they did not agree with. This was an act of terrorism.



Some of the plotters began to think the plot wasn't such a good idea after all, because some innocent people would be killed too. And they all knew they would be put to death for being a traitor, if they were caught.

The Letter

Lord Monteagle was handed a letter warning him not to go to the Houses of Parliament on the 5th November. Not knowing who had sent the letter, he showed it to the king, who immediately ordered his soldiers to search the building.

Act of Terrorism:
Deliberate attempt to kill or injure many innocent people, for religious or political reasons.

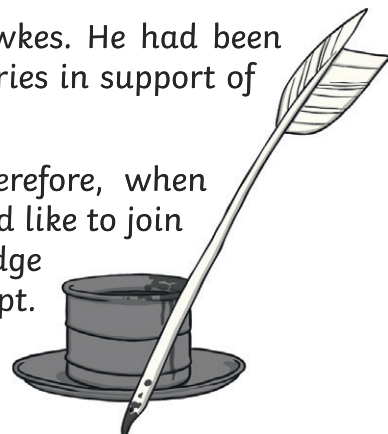
In the cellars, they found a man beside 36 barrels of gunpowder. They arrested him and took him away for questioning. So who was he?

Who was Guy Fawkes?

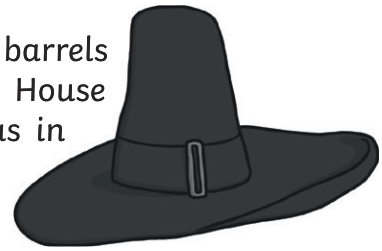
The soldiers had found the Catholic soldier, Guy Fawkes. He had been born in York and moved to Spain to fight other countries in support of Spain.

Fawkes hated the Protestant King of England. Therefore, when Thomas Wintour (one of the plotters) asked if he would like to join them, because he was impressed with Fawkes' knowledge of war and skill with gunpowder, he was keen to accept.

For 18 months, Guy Fawkes met with the gang and



they plotted what to do and when to do it. They got 36 barrels of gunpowder and stored them in the cellars of the House of Lords. Each man had a job to do. Guy Fawkes was in charge of the gunpowder and to light the fuse!



Caught in the Act!

When Guy Fawkes was arrested and questioned, the rest of the gang went into hiding. Fawkes refused to say who he was, or give the names of anyone else involved. Soldiers were given permission by the king to torture Guy Fawkes to make him tell them everything they wanted to know.

Guy Fawkes was a strong man and although he suffered agony being stretched on the rack, it took two days to get him to confess. Fawkes finally told them the names of everyone involved. He was found guilty of high treason and sentenced to a traitor's death.

High treason:

The crime of betraying your country, by attempting to kill or overthrow the country's king, queen or government.

The eight surviving plotters were also sentenced to a traitor's death, which meant they would be hanged, drawn and quartered. However, despite his weak and pained body, Guy Fawkes jumped from the scaffold where he was to be hanged, and broke his own neck as he fell.

The Plotter's Legacy

The foiled Gunpowder Plot is remembered each year through the lighting of bonfires and fireworks. Every year before the State Opening of the Houses of Parliament, the tradition of checking the cellars of the building continues, just in case another plot should be discovered!



Bonfire Night Questions

1. Why do people light bonfires each year on 5th November?

2. What did the English Catholics hope for when James I became King of England?

3. Why did the plotters want to kill the King of England?

4. Explain why some plotters began to think the plan wasn't such a good idea.

5. How was the King made aware of the plot?

6. Why was Fawkes a good choice to join the group of plotters?

7. Who asked Guy Fawkes if he wanted to join the gang?

8. How did the soldiers make Fawkes confess everything?

9. Explain in your own words, what you understand 'high treason' means.

10. Why are the cellars checked before the State Opening of the Houses of Parliament every year?

Bonfire Night Answers

1. Why do people light bonfires each year on 5th November?

People light bonfire each year on 5th November, as a reminder of the failed attempt to kill the King of England and the important people of England

2. Why did the plotters want to kill the King of England?

The plotters wanted to kill the King of England because he was a Protestant and not a Catholic.

3. What was their plan?

Their plan was to blow up the Houses of Parliament when the King was there with all the important people of England.

4. Explain why some plotters began to think the plan wasn't such a good idea.

Some plotters began to think the plan wasn't such a good idea because they realised that a lot of innocent people would be killed and they knew they would have a traitor's death if they were caught.

5. How was the King made aware of the plot?

The King was made aware of the plot when Lord Monteagle took a letter that he had been given, warning him not to go to the Houses of Parliament that day.

6. Why was Fawkes a good choice to join the group of plotters?

Fawkes was a good choice to join the group of plotters because he hated the King of England and had knowledge of war and skill with gunpowder.

7. Who asked Guy Fawkes if he wanted to join the gang?

Thomas Wintour asked Guy Fawkes if he wanted to join the gang.

8. How did the soldiers make Fawkes confess everything?

The soldiers made Fawkes confess everything by torturing him and stretching him on the rack until he told them everything.

9. Explain in your own words, what you understand 'high treason' means.

Pupil's own explanation based on the crime of betraying your country, by attempting to kill or overthrow the country's king, queen or government.

10. Why are the cellars checked before the State Opening of the Houses of Parliament every year?

The cellars are checked before the State Opening of the Houses of Parliament in case there should be another plot.