

Factsheet

Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot Conspirators

- Guy - or Guido - Fawkes was a veteran soldier from York, who had spent a number of years fighting for Catholic Spain in the Low Countries. He changed his name to John Johnson when he arrived in England to remain inconspicuous. He was recruited by the early Gunpowder Plot conspirators, as he was known to be a Gunpowder expert.
- The idea for blowing up the Palace of Westminster on the day of the Opening of Parliament was formulated by Robert Catesby. He first recruited his cousin Thomas Wintour and his friend John Wright, and in May 1604 Guy Fawkes and Thomas Percy were told of the plan at a secret meeting at Catesby's lodgings in the Duck & Drake Inn in London.
- Robert Catesby had earlier been implicated in the Earl of Essex's rebellion against Elizabeth I in 1601 and therefore he and at least two other conspirators – John and Christopher Wright (who had also taken part in the Essex revolt) - were already under surveillance by government agents before the conspiracy began. The fear of catholic plots against the King meant that many recusant families were under observation by the government. Nonetheless, Catesby seems to have managed to keep the Gunpowder Plot secret until 10 days before the fateful day itself.
- Many of the men involved in the Gunpowder Plot were young country gentlemen of moderate means. They were negatively affected, both religiously and financially, by King James' re-establishment of the recusancy laws, whereby Catholics had to pay a fine if they did not attend an Anglican church.
- Dramatist Ben Jonson was a dinner guest at one of the meetings held by the plotters, however, he didn't – it seems - become involved in the plot.
- Initially the conspirators daringly leased a house next to the Houses of Parliament and began to dig a tunnel to the building. However, due to the difficulties in digging this mine the men were forced to rent a cellar (actually a ground-floor vault) under the House of Lords. They then transported the gunpowder to the vault via riverboat.

- According to later interrogations, during the summer of 1605 Fawkes went to Flanders in order to lay low, and to introduce the notorious spy Hugh Owen to the plot. It was thought that Owen would be able to co-ordinate continental reaction following the plot's success.
- Initially the opening of Parliament was planned for February 1605, but then postponed repeatedly until November 5th. While this gave the plotters more time to plan, it also gave the government more time to learn of the plot.
- The government found out about the plot when Lord Monteagle (a relative of one of the conspirators) brought an anonymous letter to the attention of Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, and King James's Secretary of State. The letter warned Monteagle – a catholic – not to attend Parliament, and warned of a 'terrible blow' that would be struck there. No-one knows who wrote the letter: it could have been written by one of the conspirators, or their wives, or indeed by Monteagle himself (if he had found out about the plot and needed a way of revealing it without declaring his source).
- Unluckily for Guy, it was he who was found by investigators as he was leaving the vault containing the gunpowder in the early hours of November 5th. His co-conspirators all fled while he was taken to be imprisoned at the Tower of London
- Most of the rest of the conspirators were hunted down at Holbeach House in Staffordshire, where Catesby, Percy and the Wright brothers were killed in a shoot-out on November 8th. They had failed to raise a rebellion as most catholics were appalled at Catesby's plan when he revealed it to them, and refused to join him in open revolt. Some of the conspirators joined Fawkes at the Tower in late November.
- Guy Fawkes was interrogated over many days at the Tower. Initially, the government was keen to know who his co-conspirators were, and what their detailed plans had been. Once the other conspirators had been killed or arrested at Holbeach, Fawkes cracked – almost certainly under torture – and signed a full statement naming his friends.
- Fawkes was further questioned about Catesby's wider plans for government after the plot, but had little more information to give. If there really had been a secret aristocratic sponsor of the plot, proof of their involvement died with Catesby at Holbeach. Nonetheless, many suspected the Earl of

Northumberland – cousin of Thomas Percy – and the Earl spent the next 16 years at the Tower, imprisoned for lesser crimes as no proof could be found linking him to knowledge of the plot.

- Fawkes and the other seven surviving chief conspirators were tried at Westminster in January 1606 and executed over two days in Westminster and St Paul's Churchyard at the end of the month. They were hanged drawn and quartered.