

52/04/2020



Time Travellers Club

Dear Club Members,

April 13th marks the 450th anniversary of the birth of Guy Fawkes, the most famous of the Gunpowder plotters. The plot was organised by a group of English Catholics who wished to assassinate James I in order to put a Catholic on the English throne.

James I was already the reigning Scottish King when he inherited the English throne. He was the son of Mary Queen of Scots, whose Grandmother was Margaret Tudor, a sister of Henry VIII. On the death of Elizabeth I he was her closest male relative, and more importantly was a Protestant. He was not popular with many English Catholics, and they wished to put his daughter Elizabeth Stuart on the throne. Aged just 10 she would have been little more than a puppet Queen, allowing Catholic nobility to make all the decisions about the ruling of the kingdom. Eventually Elizabeth's grandson inherited the throne on the death of Queen Anne in 1714.

James was more open to religious freedom than Elizabeth I, his wife was Catholic and he appointed "known" Catholics such as the Earl of Northumberland, Thomas Percy, to important government posts. This led to many Catholics being more open about their religion, which in turn led to religious friction with extreme Protestant groups like the Puritans. James was stuck between the 2 groups, and following the discovery of 2 Catholic plots to depose him reintroduced strict laws against Catholicism. Some Catholics returned to living their double lives, but others decided to take action. Over the course of 1604 and 1605 a group of men gathered together and concocted a plan to blow up the King, and many of the Protestant nobility during the state opening of Parliament on November 5th 1605.

The lead plotter was not the more well known, Guy Fawkes. Robert Catesby had already made sacrifices for his faith. His father had been arrested for sheltering a priest, and he had left university without completing his studies as he refused to swear the Protestant Oath of Supremacy. He put together a group of friends who all wished to take action, and they were joined by Guy Fawkes. He was an English Catholic who had fought for Catholic Spain against the Protestant Dutch Republic. The group later grew from 5 to 10, with most of the subsequent plotters being relatives of the original 5 by blood or marriage. Many of the men were known to Robert Cecil, "spymaster" of the British crown, but the plot would have remained undiscovered were it not for William Parker, 4th Baron Monteagle (and secret Catholic) showing Cecil an anonymous letter warning him to stay away from the opening of Parliament. That clue was enough to lead to a search of the cellars under Westminster. They found a large amount of firewood in one cellar, and in the other Guy Fawkes and some barrels of gunpowder. The remains of the plotters had already fled London, and the plan had been for Fawkes to light the fuse and to flee the city by boat to reach the safety of continental Europe. Meanwhile the other plotters were to lead an uprising in the Midlands to seize power. Eventually all the plotters were arrested, and either died in a fight whilst resisting arrest, or were captured and executed. The failed plot cause many further hardships for British Catholics, leading them to being scapegoats for events such as the Great Fire of London.

Placating the Puritans also had limited success, in turn many ended up fleeing Britain for America, to escape religious persecution.

The plot itself was uncovered on November 5th, and by Parliament decree became a day for celebration. In London bonfires were lit, and by the 1650's they were accompanied by fireworks. To this day 5th November is known as Bonfire Night, or Guy Fawkes Night. Effigies known as "guys" are burnt on the bonfire.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Further Reading-

The Gunpowder Plot-

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/civil_war_revolution/gunpowder_robinson_01.shtml

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2017/11-12/history-the-explosive-truth-about-guy-fawkes/>

The plotters-

<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/parliamentaryauthority/the-gunpowder-plot-of-1605/overview/people-behind-the-plot/>

Robert Cecil, Spymaster

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Cecil,_1st_Earl_of_Salisbury

Recent BBC dramatisation of the events of the plot-

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Gunpowder/dp/B076XB34LZ>

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