

James I and The Gunpowder Plot 1605

What led up to the plot?

James I was the son of Mary, Queen of Scots and Lord Henry Darnley.

- His mother and father were both Catholics and therefore the English Catholics thought that he would favour them and give them help to restore Catholicism in England.
- At first James appeared to be tolerant of the Catholics and many who had previously under Elizabeth I, kept their faith a secret, suddenly came out into the open. James' advisors were very shocked at the large number of Catholics that were now worshipping openly.

At the **Hampton Court Conference** in 1604, James decided to support the Church of England and spoke out strongly against the Catholics and Puritans. Many Catholic priests were banished from the country and severe fines were issued for non attendance at Protestant churches. James believed "there was no need for the papist." Naturally many Catholics felt let down by James.

Who organised the plot and what were their intentions?

Thomas Percy and **Robert Catesby** were the brains behind the plot. These two men devised an elaborate plan:

1. To **blow up Parliament**, the King and Prince Henry, the heir to the throne, at the State Opening of Parliament.
 2. With the King and his advisors dead, an **armed rising** would follow supported by a foreign **invasion** and England would be restored to the Catholic faith.
 3. James' Catholic daughter, Elizabeth would then be crowned **Elizabeth II**.
- In May 1604, 3 others including **Guy Fawkes** were brought in on the plan. Guy Fawkes was an expert on explosives.
 - On 11th December, 1604, Thomas Percy rented a house near Parliament and the plotters began to tunnel towards Parliament. This was to prove hard work and time was running out when they struck a foundation wall that further delayed their tunneling.
 - In March, 1605, they still had a long way to go. As luck would have it the house next door had a cellar to let. This cellar ran under the House of Lords. Thirty-six barrels of gunpowder were placed in the cellar and covered with coal and faggots (bundles of firewood). All the plotters had to do now, was wait.
 - The list of plotters had now grown to 14 men.

Thomas + Robert Winter, Robert Keyes, Thomas Catesby, Ambrose Rookwood
Matthew Bates, Everard Digby, Thomas Percy, Guy Fawkes
John and Christopher Wright, John Grant, Robert Catesby and Francis Tresham



Why did the plot fail?

However, by now some of the conspirators were having second thoughts, particularly, since there would be many Catholics in Parliament at the time of the explosion. It was not right that they should die. **Francis Tresham** wrote an anonymous letter to his cousin **Lord Monteagle** warning him not to attend the State opening of Parliament. It was stated in the letter " They shall receive a terrible blow, this Parliament, and they shall not see who hurts them". Monteagle thought it was a hoax but nevertheless took it to the King's Council.

Two days before the State Opening King James was shown the letter. James was always concerned about his safety. His mother had been executed and his father brutally murdered after his house had been blown up with gunpowder. James ordered a search of the cellars, and at 11pm, on 4th November, Lord Chamberlain and Lord Monteagle discovered the gunpowder with **Guy Fawkes** guarding it. In his pockets were found a tinder box and a match.



Fawkes was tortured and eventually confessed all. The other conspirators fled north to Holmbeach House in Staffordshire. Here, they were traced by the King's men. Robert Catesby and Thomas Percy were killed with the same bullet and the others were killed or captured.

The surviving conspirators were tried in London for high treason and all were hanged, drawn and quartered. Fawkes was so maimed by his torture that he was unable to walk to the scaffold.



The execution of Father Garnet

What were the results of the failure of the Gunpowder plot?

1. The plotters were killed or executed.
2. The Catholics became even more unpopular and were viewed as untrustworthy, traitorous and even murderers.
3. Very strict laws were brought in against the Catholics. However they were not carried out all over the country and James made sure that the Catholics were not treated too badly. After all he wanted his son to marry a Catholic. For the next 100 years, the Catholics were to be persecuted by a Protestant Parliament.
4. Catholics were barred from holding any government office.
5. Catholics were not allowed to become doctors.
6. Catholics were not allowed within 10 miles of London.
7. Practising Catholics were often fined £20 a month, equivalent to £6000 today.
8. Father Garnet the head of the English Jesuits was implicated and executed.
9. Overall the failure of the plot had ruined the Catholic cause in England.

In recent years, some historians have put forward the suggestion that this was a "set up job" by James' advisors (Robert Cecil) and that the conspirators were innocent and used as pawns in a game to discredit the Catholic faith in England.

Other reasons why plot failed - too many people involved to keep it a secret. - Cecil's spies had infiltrated the conspirators and were always one step ahead of the plotters.