

Remember, Remember... [B2]

Guy Fawkes: da criminale a simbolo della resistenza nella Guy Fawkes Night.

The reigns of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and James I (1603-1625) were dangerous times for English Catholics. The country had [moved away](#) from Catholicism under Henry VIII (1509-1547), and Protestantism was now the established religion. Many Catholics, however, hoped to return the country to their faith, perhaps with the help of Spain. [Plots](#) and rebellions against Elizabeth I were followed by severe [reprisals](#)— priests found holding [masses](#) in secret, for example, were tortured and executed. Guy Fawkes' plot of 1605 to kill King James I had enough [gunpowder](#) to destroy both the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey, and to seriously damage buildings up to five hundred metres away. Historian Antonia Fraser has described Fawkes as "a tall, [powerfully-built](#) man, with thick reddish-brown hair, a [flowing moustache](#) in the tradition of the time, and a [bushy](#) reddish-brown beard." He was "a man of action", "capable of intelligent argument as well as physical [endurance](#)"

GUY FAWKES NIGHT

In January 1606, Parliament established 5 November as a day of public thanksgiving to commemorate the failure of the Gunpowder Plot. Guy Fawkes Night is one of the most popular celebrations of the English calendar, which is surprising given that it is named after a man who tried to destroy the English Parliament and, indeed, the Establishment itself. [Bonfires](#) and fireworks became common elements from the 1650s onwards. But after more than two centuries of being seen as one of England's worst villains, Fawkes' image began to change in the 19th century, as the country became more tolerant religiously. Over the years it became the custom to burn an effigy of the Pope or Guy Fawkes. In recent times, effigies have often been political figures, such as Margaret Thatcher or Putin. The anti-Catholic element disappeared, and the day is now a friendly family event. These days as many as twenty million people attend private or public [firework displays](#),

and people spend around £150m on fireworks. The opening lines of John Milton's 1626 poem *On the Fifth of November* are part of British culture: "Remember, remember, the 5th of November. Gunpowder, treason and plot."

FROM VILLAIN TO HERO

Over the years, Fawkes started to appear as essentially an action hero in children's comics and books. England's most famous traitor then dropped out of public view until the arrival of 20th century Britain's most radical Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. In 1982, a comic book series, *V for Vendetta*, made its first appearance. A vigilante tries to destroy an authoritarian government in a dystopian future Britain. Writer Alan Moore and illustrator David Lloyd decided to portray him as a resurrected Guy Fawkes, complete with a papier-mâché mask. Lloyd wanted to "celebrate [Fawkes'] attempt to blow up Parliament!"

ANONYMOUS

Two decades later, in 2005, a film version of the graphic novel's anarchistic revolutionary appeared, complete with Guy Fawkes mask. In just a few years, the Fawkes mask disguise was adopted by Anonymous hacktivists and protestors in the global Occupy movement of 2011-2013. The name was also used by the libertarian right. In recent years, the mask has frequently been used by groups protesting against governments and financial institutions: India in 2012, Bahrain in 2013, Venezuela in 2014, Hong Kong in 2019, and the storming of the US Capitol in 2021. The masks conceal identities and show commitment to a shared cause.

Glossary

- **reprisals** = rappresaglie
- **gunpowder** = polvere da sparo
- **disguise** = travestimento
- **Plots** = complotti
- **dropped out of public view** = scomparire
- **vigilante** = giustiziere
- **storming** = assalto
- **moved away** = allontanarsi
- **flowing moustache** = baffi inglesi
- **Bonfires** = falò
- **to blow up** = fare saltare in aria
- **masses** = messe
- **powerfully-built** = di corporatura robusta
- **bushy** = folta
- **endurance** = resistenza
- **firework displays** = spettacolo di fuochi d'artificio
- **conceal** = nascondere
- **commitment** = impegno