

# Guy Fawkes: Britain's Most Famous Traitor [B2]

Il grande traditore d'Inghilterra, l'uomo che ha quasi fatto esplodere il Parlamento e ucciso il re, è diventato un simbolo delle proteste contro le ingiustizie sociali in tutto il mondo.

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Guy Fawkes was the most notorious participant in the Gunpowder [Plot](#) of 1605, the most famous, treasonous plot in British history. Fawkes was one of thirteen Catholic conspirators planning [to blow up](#) Parliament on 5 November during the ceremonial state opening. The conspiracy aimed at killing King James I, his close family, his chief ministers and all the [MPs](#). It came after increasing oppression of Catholics, and hoped to inspire a revolt against Protestantism and force a violent change of monarch and government. Fawkes was born into a prominent Protestant family in York in April 1570. After converting to Catholicism, he left England in 1593 to fight for Catholic Spain against Protestants in the Netherlands. Guido Fawkes, as he was known in Spain, earned a reputation for courage and determination. Fawkes became involved in the plot in April 1604. Robert Catesby, the plot leader, needed a military man. He sent for Fawkes, who immediately returned to England.

## BARRELS OF GUNPOWDER

In early 1604, the plotters discovered that an empty [cellar](#) was available under the House of Lords. Over several months, Fawkes [smuggled in](#) thirty-six barrels — approximately 2,500kg — of gunpowder, which he hid under [coal](#) and [firewood](#). However, some conspirators started [to have second thoughts](#). Then Lord Monteagle received an anonymous letter warning him not to attend the opening of Parliament. Monteagle told government ministers, who ordered a search of the House of Lords, but nothing was found. The plotters continued with their plans.

## CAUGHT RED-HANDED

During a second search, however, on the night of 4 to 5 November, Fawkes was caught with a [fuse](#) in his hand ready to light the gunpowder. The other plotters then [fled](#) London to Wales and the Midlands, expecting support. None came. Finally trapped in a house in Staffordshire, Catesby and two co-conspirators were killed and five more arrested.

## TORTURED ON THE RACK

Imprisoned in the Tower of London, Fawkes was tortured to reveal the names of his co-conspirators. Only after terrible suffering on the [rack](#), a machine which pulled [limbs apart](#), did Fawkes reveal their names. Even the king admired his [reluctance](#) to do so. The conspirators were tried, found guilty and sentenced to be [hanged](#), [drawn](#) and [quartered](#). On 27 January 1606, Fawkes and his [fellow](#) conspirators were transferred by [barge](#) from the Tower to Westminster Hall, to a [purpose-built scaffold](#). Fawkes watched as his colleagues were [hanged](#) until nearly dead, then taken down to have their genitals cut off and burnt. The executioners then removed the plotters' [bowels](#) and hearts, before decapitating them and cutting off their [limbs](#). However, as Fawkes approached the [scaffold](#), he fell — or jumped — dying instantly of a broken neck. As a warning to other potential traitors, the plotters' body parts went on tour and put on show in "the four corners of the kingdom."

## TWIST OF FATE

As a result of the plot, laws against Catholics became more severe, and the period's gradual advances towards religious toleration were put back centuries. Parliament established 5 November as a day of public [thanksgiving](#) to commemorate the failure of the plot — which itself quickly became part of England's national story. Over time, the 5 November celebrations became known as Fireworks Night, [Bonfire](#) Night or Guy Fawkes Night. Guy Fawkes himself has metamorphosed in popular culture. The 1980s graphic novel V for Vendetta featured an anarchist revolutionary who

wore a Guy Fawkes mask to remain anonymous. These comics inspired an American movie, released in 2005. The Guy Fawkes mask then began to be worn by real-life protesters during the international Occupy movement. Once [reviled](#) as a traitor in Britain, Fawkes became, for a few years at least, a symbol of resistance against social and political injustice.

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# Glossary

- **drawn** = estrarre
- **quartered** = squartare
- **scaffold** = patibolo
- **Plot** = congiura delle polveri
- **firewood** = legna
- **fuse** = miccia
- **limbs** = arti
- **reluctance** = riluttanza
- **bowels** = viscere
- **thanksgiving** = ringraziamento
- **reviled** = vituperare
- **MPs** = deputato, parlamentare (Member of Parliament)
- **fled** = fuggire
- **rack** = cavalletto (tortura)
- **barge** = chiatta, barcone
- **cellar** = cantina
- **smuggled in** = introdurre di nascosto, illegalmente
- **to have second thoughts** = ripensare
- **apart** = separare
- **fellow** = compagni
- **to blow up** = fare saltare in aria
- **coal** = carbone
- **hanged** = appendere
- **purpose-built** = costruito appositamente
- **Bonfire** = falò