

= Thomas Percy (Gunpowder Plot) =

Thomas Percy (c . 1560 ? 8 November 1605) was a member of the group of provincial English Catholics who planned the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605 . A tall , physically impressive man , little is known of his early life beyond his matriculation in 1579 at the University of Cambridge , and his marriage in 1591 to Martha Wright . In 1596 his second cousin once removed , Henry Percy , 9th Earl of Northumberland , appointed him constable of Alnwick Castle and made him responsible for the Percy family 's northern estates . He served the earl in the Low Countries in about 1600 ? 1601 , and in the years before 1603 was his intermediary in a series of confidential communications with King James VI of Scotland .

Following James 's accession to the English throne in 1603 , Percy became disenchanted with the new king , who he supposed had reneged on his promises of toleration for English Catholics . His meeting in June 1603 with Robert Catesby , a religious zealot similarly unimpressed with the new royal dynasty , led the following year to his joining Catesby 's conspiracy to kill the king and his ministers by blowing up the House of Lords with gunpowder . Percy helped fund the group and secured the leases to certain properties in London , one of which was the undercroft directly beneath the House of Lords , in which the gunpowder was finally placed . The conspirators also planned to instigate an uprising in the Midlands and to simultaneously kidnap James 's daughter , Princess Elizabeth . Percy was to remain in London and secure the capture of her brother , Prince Henry .

When the plot was exposed early on 5 November 1605 , Percy immediately fled to the Midlands , catching up with some of the other conspirators en route to Dunchurch in Warwickshire . Their flight ended on the border of Staffordshire , at Holbeche House , where they were besieged early on 8 November by the pursuing Sheriff of Worcester and his men . Percy was reportedly killed by the same musketball as Catesby , and was buried nearby . His body was later exhumed , and his head exhibited outside Parliament .

In his youth Percy was reportedly " very wild more than ordinary , and much given to fighting " , although his excesses were tempered somewhat by his conversion to Catholicism . He may have abandoned his first wife for another woman , and was for a time imprisoned for killing a man during a border skirmish . His membership of the plot proved extremely damaging to his patron , the Earl of Northumberland , who although uninvolved was imprisoned in the Tower of London until 1621 .

= = Life before 1604 = =

Thomas Percy was the younger of two sons born to Edward Percy of Beverley and his wife Elizabeth (née Waterton) . His father was a son of Jocelyn / Josceline Percy (died 1532) , whose father was Henry Percy , 4th Earl of Northumberland . He was born around 1560 and matriculated at the University of Cambridge as a member of Peterhouse in 1579 . Little is known of his early life . He may have been a papist before he was at some point received into the Catholic Church , and he may have sailed with George Clifford , 3rd Earl of Cumberland , in 1589 . In 1591 he married Martha Wright , daughter of Ursula Wright (a convicted recusant) and sister to Christopher and John Wright (both later involved in the Gunpowder Plot) . Claims by several authors that Percy may have left Martha " mean and poor " for an unidentified woman in Warwickshire are disputed , but the two were at least estranged . In 1605 Martha and her daughter were living on an annuity funded by the Catholic William Parker , 4th Baron Monteagle . Thomas and Martha 's son , Robert , married Emma Mead at Wiveliscombe in Somerset on 22 October 1615 .

Percy was a tall , physically impressive man , " of serious expression but with an attractive manner " , although by his forties he was prematurely greying . He appears to have had some complaint with his clothing ; author Alan Haynes describes this as a skin disorder so acute that " he could not endure any shirt but of the finest holland or cambric " , although author and historian Antonia Fraser has written of his propensity to sweat so much that he changed his shirt twice a day .

Thomas was the great @-@ grandson of Henry Percy , 4th Earl of Northumberland , and the second cousin once removed of the 4th Earl 's descendent , Henry Percy , 9th Earl of

Northumberland . Despite not being a close relative , in 1595 the 9th earl made him responsible for collecting rents from his northern estates , and the following year appointed him constable of Alnwick Castle . Thomas exercised his authority in a manner which gave some cause for complaint , not least from an officer he replaced , and contemporary reports of his dealings with the earl 's tenants include claims of mismanagement and bribery . During a border skirmish he killed James Burne , a Scot , for which he was imprisoned at a London gaol , but his release was secured by the intervention of Robert Devereux , 2nd Earl of Essex . Thomas subsequently aided Essex in a conspiracy against the Scottish warden of the middle marches , although unlike several others who later joined the Gunpowder Plot , he was not a member of the earl 's failed rebellion of 1601 .

Percy has been variously described as a belligerent and eccentric man , with " surges of wild energy subsiding into sloth " . The Jesuit priest Father John Gerard wrote that in his youth Percy had " been very wild more than ordinary , and much given to fighting " , while the Jesuit Oswald Tesimond thought he had been " rather wild and given to the gay life , a man who relied much on his sword and personal courage . " According to both men , Percy 's conversion to Catholicism was a calming influence , but biographer Mark Nicholls , who calls Percy " a pugnacious character " , says that this was only true to a point . His excesses did not prevent him from joining Northumberland during his command in the Low Countries , held from 1600 ? 1601 , for which he was rewarded with £ 200 . The earl also appointed Percy his receiver of rents in Cumberland and Northumberland , in 1603 . Henry Percy was considered a supporter of the Catholic cause , and on several occasions before 1603 , suspecting that Queen Elizabeth I did not have long to live , he entrusted Thomas with the delivery of secret correspondence to and from her probable successor , King James VI of Scotland . Northumberland 's uncle had been executed for his involvement in the Rising of the North , a plot to replace Elizabeth with James 's mother , Mary , Queen of Scots . He planned to make up for his family 's disgrace by building a strong relationship with James , but also wished to counter the influence of Robert Cecil , 1st Earl of Salisbury , whose father (it was rumoured) James believed had been responsible for Mary 's death .

Exactly what assurances James gave Percy are unknown . Tesimond wrote that he made " very generous promises to favour Catholics actively " , and " he would admit them to every kind of honour and office " , but the consensus among historians is that what promises James did make were oral , rather than written . Fraser posits that the Scottish king probably intended to allow Catholics to worship privately , which if true was a much more reserved view than that subsequently announced by Percy , who told his fellow Catholics that the king had promised to protect their religion . Considering the " quaintness " of James 's spoken English there may have been some misunderstanding on both sides . In his surviving correspondence with Northumberland , the king writes only that neither would " quiet " Catholics be disturbed , nor would those that deserved recognition " through their good service " be overlooked . This mixing of signals was to have lasting consequences .

= = Plot = =

Percy became the fifth member of the Gunpowder plot on Sunday 20 May 1604 . Almost a year earlier , he had called at Robert Catesby 's home at Ashby St Ledgers , and complained bitterly about James , who since succeeding Elizabeth had done little to fulfil his expectations . He had threatened to kill the new king with his own hands , but was asked by Catesby to restrain himself , and told " I am thinking of a most sure way and I will soon let thee know what it is . " Thus Percy found himself at the Duck and Drake inn near the Strand in London , along with Catesby and his cousin Thomas Wintour , John Wright and Guy Fawkes . His first words at the meeting were " Shall we always , gentlemen , talk and never do anything ? " All five later swore an oath of secrecy on a prayer book , and then celebrated Mass in another room with Father Gerard , who was ignorant of their pact .

While the plotters did not then have a detailed plan , Percy 's appointment on 9 June as a Gentleman Pensioner gave him a reason to establish a London base . Through Northumberland 's agents , Dudley Carleton and John Hippesley , he subleased a house in Westminster from Henry

Ferrers , a tenant of John Whynniard , and installed Fawkes there as his servant , " John Johnson " . On 25 March 1605 Percy also obtained the lease for the undercroft directly underneath the first @-@ floor House of Lords . It was into this room that the plotters moved 36 barrels of gunpowder from Catesby 's lodgings on the opposite side of the River Thames . The plan was that during the State Opening of Parliament , at which the king and his ministers would be present , the plotters would blow up the House of Lords , killing all those within it . James 's daughter , Princess Elizabeth , would be captured during a Midlands uprising , and installed as a titular queen .

Percy spent that Autumn collecting Northumberland 's rents , while Catesby continued to enlist support . By October 1605 , he had 12 Catholic men assigned to his cause and was at work on the remaining details . Several conspirators expressed disquiet over the safety of fellow Catholics who might be caught in the planned explosion . Percy 's concern was for his patron , Northumberland , who it seems might have been made Lord Protector if the plot had succeeded . Lord Monteagle 's name was also mentioned , by a worried Francis Tresham . The fate of Elizabeth 's brother , Prince Henry , was uncertain ; although the plotters presumed that he would die with his father , they decided that if he did not attend Parliament , Percy should kidnap him .

= = Monteagle letter = =

On Saturday 26 October , at his house in Hoxton , Monteagle received an anonymous letter that warned him to stay away from Parliament . Uncertain of its meaning , he delivered it to Robert Cecil , 1st Earl of Salisbury . Cecil was already aware of certain stirrings , although he did not then know the exact nature of the plot or who exactly was involved . Instead of informing the king immediately , he decided to wait and watch what happened . Catesby 's reaction to news of the letter 's existence was somewhat different ; he and Wintour suspected Francis Tresham was its author and the two went to confront him . Tresham managed to convince them of his innocence , all the while urging them to abandon the plot . Percy reacted to the news by declaring that he was ready to " abide the uttermost trial " . He may have visited the infant Prince Charles on 1 November , indicating perhaps that some rearrangement of the plan was being considered . The deposition of a servant claimed that Percy visited the prince 's lodgings and " made many enquiries as to the way into his chamber " , although the statement came too late for Percy to comment on it .

Percy visited Northumberland at Syon House , west of London , on 4 November . Fraser suggests that his visit was a " fishing expedition " , to find out what , if anything , Northumberland had heard about the letter . This " expedition " later proved disastrous for the earl , who claimed that there was nothing treasonable about their conversation , and that Percy had merely asked him " whether he would command any service " before leaving . Percy then went to another of Northumberland 's properties , Essex House in London , and spoke with his nephew , Josceline . Later that evening he met with Wintour , John Wright and Robert Keyes , and assured them that all was well . He then travelled to his lodgings along Gray 's Inn Road , where he left orders for his horses to be made ready for an early departure the next morning .

= = Failure and death = =

By then , the king knew about the letter . James felt that it hinted at " some strategem of fire and powder " , perhaps an explosion exceeding in violence the one that killed his father , Lord Darnley , in 1567 . The following day , the Privy Council told him that they had decided to undertake a search of Parliament , " both above and below " . The first , headed by Thomas Howard , 1st Earl of Suffolk , was made on 4 November . In the undercroft beneath the House of Lords he noticed a tall man who appeared to be a servant , and a large pile of faggots ? far too large to serve the small house Percy had subleased from Henry Ferrers . The house 's owner , John Whynniard , told the search party that its tenancy was held by Percy . Monteagle , present during the search , immediately told Suffolk that he suspected Percy was the letter 's author . The king ordered a second , more thorough search to be made , and at about midnight , Fawkes was discovered guarding the gunpowder , and was immediately arrested .

As Fawkes identified himself as John Johnson , servant to Thomas Percy , it was Percy 's name which appeared on the government 's first arrest warrant . It described him as a " tall , florid man , with a broad beard ? ' the head more white then the beard ' ? and stooping shoulders , being also ' long footed , small legged ' " . The celebrated astrologer Simon Forman was employed to divine his whereabouts , a rider was sent to look for him in northern England , and a search was made of Essex House . All of this was in vain , however , as Percy had been warned of Fawkes 's capture and had fled for the Midlands with Christopher Wright , telling a servant as he went , " I am undone . " The two men met Catesby and the others (who had left for the Midlands uprising) and continued on to Dunchurch , at one point throwing their cloaks off to increase their speed . A relative of Lieutenant of the Tower of London William Waad encountered Percy leaving London , which led to Waad writing the following letter to Salisbury on 5 November :

It may please your good lordship my cousin Sir Edward York , being lately come out of the north and coming this afternoon to me , upon speech of the happy discovery of this most monstrous plot , he telleth me he met Thomas Percy , the party sought for , going down to the north disguised ... From the Tower in haste .

Accompanied by some of his fellow conspirators , Percy 's flight ended at about 10 : 00 pm on 7 November , at Holbeche House on the border of Staffordshire . He was unharmed by a gunpowder accident that injured Catesby and a few of the others , but those who remained resolved to wait for the arrival of government forces , who were only hours behind . Thus at 11 : 00 am the following morning the house was besieged by the Sheriff of Worcester , Richard Walsh , and his company of 200 men . In the ensuing firefight , Percy and Catesby were reportedly killed by the same musket ball , fired by a John Streete of Worcester . News of the battle soon reached London , rendering superfluous a government proclamation made on the same day and which offered a rich reward for his capture . The survivors were taken into custody and the dead buried near Holbeche , but on the orders of the Earl of Northampton , the bodies of Percy and Catesby were exhumed and their heads displayed on spikes at " the side of the Parliament House " .

With Thomas dead , there was nobody who could either implicate or clear Henry Percy of any involvement in the plot . His failure to ensure that Thomas took the Oath of Supremacy upon his appointment as a Gentleman Pensioner , and their meeting on 4 November , constituted damning evidence , and the Privy Council also suspected that had the plot succeeded , he would have been Princess Elizabeth 's protector . With insufficient evidence to convict him he was charged with contempt , fined £ 30 @ , @ 000 and stripped of all public offices . He remained in the Tower until 1621 .