

= Robert Catesby =

Robert Catesby ( b. in or after 1572 ? 8 November 1605 ) was the leader of a group of provincial English Catholics who planned the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605 .

Most probably born in Warwickshire , Catesby was educated in nearby Oxford . His family were prominent recusant Catholics , therefore presumably to avoid swearing the Oath of Supremacy he left college before taking his degree . He married a Protestant in 1593 and fathered two children , one of whom survived and was baptised in a Protestant church , but in 1598 , following the deaths of his father and wife , he may have reverted to Catholicism . In 1601 he took part in the Essex Rebellion but was captured and fined , after which he sold his estate at Chastleton .

The Protestant James I , who became King of England in 1603 , was less tolerant of Catholicism than its followers had hoped . Catesby therefore planned to kill him by blowing up the House of Lords with gunpowder , the prelude to a popular revolt during which a Catholic monarch would be restored to the English throne . Early in 1604 he began to recruit other Catholics to his cause , including Thomas Wintour , John Wright , Thomas Percy , and Guy Fawkes . Described latterly as a charismatic and influential man , as well as a religious zealot , over the following months he helped bring a further eight conspirators into the plot , whose naissance was planned for 5 November 1605 . A letter sent anonymously to William Parker , 4th Baron Monteagle , alerted the authorities , and on the eve of the planned explosion , during a search of Parliament , Fawkes was found guarding the barrels of gunpowder . News of his arrest caused the other plotters to flee London , warning Catesby along their way .

With a much @-@ diminished group of followers , Catesby made a stand at Holbeche House in Staffordshire , against a 200 @-@ strong company of armed men . He was shot and later found dead , clutching a picture of the Virgin Mary . As a warning to others , his body was exhumed and his head exhibited outside Parliament .

= = Early life = =

= = = Childhood = = =

Robert Catesby was the third and only surviving son of Sir William and Anne ( née Throckmorton ) Catesby , and was probably born in or after 1572 at his father 's main residence in Lapworth . Robert was a lineal descendant of Sir William Catesby ( 1450 ? 1485 ) , the influential councillor of Richard III captured at the Battle of Bosworth and executed . On his mother 's side he was descended from Sir Robert Throckmorton of Coughton , and his second wife , Elizabeth Hussey . His parents were prominent recusant Catholics ; his father had suffered years of imprisonment for his faith , and in 1581 had been tried in Star Chamber alongside William Vaux , 3rd Baron Vaux of Harrowden , and his brother @-@ in @-@ law Sir Thomas Tresham , for harbouring the Jesuit Edmund Campion . The head of the Throckmortons , Sir Thomas Throckmorton , was also fined for his recusancy , and spent years in prison . Another relation , Sir Francis Throckmorton , had been executed in 1584 for his involvement in a plot to free Mary , Queen of Scots .

In 1586 Robert was educated at Gloucester Hall in Oxford , a college noted for its Catholic intake . Those either studying at university or wishing to take public office could not do so without first swearing the Oath of Supremacy , an act which would have compromised Catesby 's Catholic faith . Presumably to avoid this consequence , he left without taking his degree , and may then have attended the seminary college of Douai .

= = = Adulthood = = =

In 1593 he married Catherine Leigh , daughter of Sir Thomas Leigh of Stoneleigh in Warwickshire . Catherine came from a wealthy Protestant family and brought with her a dowry of £ 2 @ , @ 000 , but also a religious association that offered Robert some respite from the recusancy laws then in effect .

From the death of his grandmother the following year he inherited a property at Chastleton , in Oxfordshire . The couple 's first son William died in infancy , but their second son Robert survived , and was baptised at Chastleton 's Protestant church on 11 November 1595 . When Catesby 's father died in 1598 , his estates at Ashby St Ledgers were left to his wife , while Catesby and his family remained at Chastleton . Catesby had seemed happy to remain a Church Papist but after his wife 's death later that year he became radicalised , and reverted to a more fanatical Catholicism .

In 1601 Catesby was involved in the Essex Rebellion . The Earl of Essex 's purpose might have lain in furthering his own interests rather than those of the Catholic Church , but Catesby hoped that if Essex succeeded , there might once more be a Catholic monarch . The rebellion was a failure however , and the wounded Catesby was captured , imprisoned at the Wood Street Counter , and fined 4 @, @ 000 marks ( equivalent to over £ 6 million as of 2008 ) by Elizabeth I. Sir Thomas Tresham helped pay some of Catesby 's fine , following which Catesby sold his estate at Chastleton . Several authors speculate about Catesby 's movements as Elizabeth 's health grew worse ; he was probably among those " principal papists " imprisoned by a government fearing open rebellion , and in March 1603 he may have sent Christopher Wright to Spain to see if Philip III would continue to support English Catholics after Elizabeth 's death . Catesby funded the activities of some Jesuit priests , and while visiting them made occasional use of the alias Mr Roberts .

= = Gunpowder Plot = =

= = = Background = = =

Catholics had hoped that the persecution they suffered during Elizabeth 's reign would end when she was succeeded in 1603 by James I. His mother , Mary , Queen of Scots ( executed in 1587 for treason ) had been a devout Catholic , and James 's attitude appeared moderate , even tolerant towards Catholics . Protestant rulers across Europe had , however , been the target of several assassination attempts during the late 16th century , and until the 1620s some English Catholics believed that regicide was justifiable to remove tyrants from power . Much of James 's political writing was concerned with such matters , and the " refutation of the [ Catholic ] argument that ' faith did not need to be kept with heretics ' " . Shortly after he discovered that his wife had been sent a rosary from the pope , James exiled all Jesuits and other Catholic priests , and reimposed the collection of fines for recusancy . Catesby soon began to lose patience with the new dynasty .

British author and historian Antonia Fraser describes Catesby 's mentality as " that of the crusader who does not hesitate to employ the sword in the cause of values which he considers are spiritual " . Writing after the events of 1604 ? 1606 , the Jesuit priest Father Tesimond 's description of his friend was favourable : " his countenance was exceedingly noble and expressive ... his conversation and manners were peculiarly attractive and imposing , and that by the dignity of his character he exercised an irresistible influence over the minds of those who associated with him . " Fellow conspirator Ambrose Rookwood , shortly before his own death , said that he " loved and respected him [ Catesby ] as his own life " , while Catesby 's friend , Father John Gerard , claimed he was " respected in all companies of such as are counted there swordsmen or men of action " , and that " few were in the opinions of most men preferred before him and he increased much his acquaintance and friends . " Author Mark Nicholls suggests that " bitterness at the failure of Essex 's design nevertheless seems to have sharpened an already well @-@ honed neurosis . "

= = = Early stages = = =

Despite the ease with which Catesby seems to have inspired his fellow conspirators , that it was he and not Fawkes ( today most often associated with 5 November ) who devised what became known as the Gunpowder Plot , has largely been forgotten . The precise date on which he set events in motion is unknown , but it is likely that he first had the idea early in 1604 . Sometime around June the previous year he was visited by his friend Thomas Percy . A great @-@ grandson of the 4th Earl

of Northumberland , Percy was reported to have had a " wild youth " before he became a Catholic , and during Elizabeth 's final years had been entrusted by the 9th Earl with a secret mission to James 's court in Scotland , to plead with the king on behalf of England 's Catholics . He now complained bitterly about what he considered to be James 's treachery , and threatened to kill him . Catesby replied " No , no , Tom , thou shalt not venture to small purpose , but if thou wilt be a traitor thou shalt be to some great advantage . " Percy listened while Catesby added " I am thinking of a most sure way and I will soon let thee know what it is . " During Allhallowtide on 31 October he sent for his cousin Thomas Wintour , who was at Huddington Court in Worcestershire with his brother Robert . Thomas was educated as a lawyer and had fought for England in the Low Countries , but in 1600 had converted to Catholicism . Following the Earl of Essex 's failed rebellion , he had travelled to Spain to raise support for English Catholics , a mission which the authorities would later describe as comprising part of a ' Spanish Treason ' . Although Thomas declined his invitation , Catesby again invited him in February the next year .

When Wintour responded to the summons he found his cousin with the swordsman John Wright . Catesby told him of his plan to kill the king and his government by blowing up " the Parliament howse with Gunpowder ... in that place have they done us all the mischief , and perchance God hath designed that place for their punishment " . Wintour at first objected to his cousin 's scheme , but Catesby , who said that " the nature of the disease required so sharp a remedy " , won him over . Despite Catholic Spain 's moves toward diplomacy with England , Catesby still harboured hopes of foreign support and a peaceful solution . Wintour therefore returned to the continent , where he tried unsuccessfully to persuade the affable Constable of Castile to press for good terms for English Catholics in forthcoming peace negotiations . He then turned to Sir William Stanley , an English Catholic and veteran commander who had switched sides from England to Spain , and the exiled Welsh spy Hugh Owen ; both cast doubt on the plotters ' chances of receiving Spanish support . Owen did , however , introduce Wintour to Guy Fawkes , whose name Catesby had already supplied as " a confidant gentleman " who might enter their ranks . Fawkes was a devout English Catholic who had travelled to the continent to fight for Spain in the Dutch War of Independence . Wintour told him of their plan to " doe some whatt in Ingland if the pece with Spaine healped us nott " , and thus in April 1604 the two men returned home . Wintour told Catesby that despite positive noises from the Spanish , he feared that " the deeds would nott answere " . This was a response that in Nicholls 's opinion came as no surprise to Catesby , who wanted and expected nothing less .

On Sunday 20 May in the well @-@ to @-@ do Strand district of London , Catesby met with Thomas Wintour , John Wright , Thomas Percy and Guy Fawkes , at an inn called the Duck and Drake . Percy had been introduced to the plot several weeks after Wintour and Fawkes 's return to England . Alone in a private room , all swore an oath of secrecy on a prayer book , and then in another room celebrated Mass with the Jesuit priest ( and friend to Catesby ) John Gerard . Robert Keyes was admitted to the group in October 1604 , and charged with looking after Catesby 's Lambeth house , where the gunpowder and other supplies were to be stored . Two months later Catesby recruited his servant , Thomas Bates , into the plot , after the latter accidentally became aware of it , and by March 1605 three more were admitted : Thomas Wintour 's brother Robert , John Grant and John Wright 's brother Christopher .

= = = Further recruitment = = =

Although the state opening of Parliament was planned for February 1605 , concern over the plague meant that it would instead occur on 3 October . A contemporaneous government account has the plotters engaged in digging a tunnel beneath Parliament by December 1604 , but no other evidence exists to prove this , and no trace of a tunnel has since been found . If the story is true , the plotters ceased their efforts when the tenancy to the undercroft beneath the House of Lords became available . Several months later , early in June 1605 , Catesby met the principal Jesuit in England , Father Henry Garnet , on Thames Street in London . While discussing the war in Flanders , Catesby asked about the morality of " killing innocents " . Garnet said that such actions could often be excused , but according to his own account during a second meeting in July he showed Catesby a

letter from the pope which forbade rebellion . Catesby replied , " Whatever I mean to do , if the Pope knew , he would not hinder for the general good of our country . " Father Garnet 's protestations prompted Catesby 's next reply , " I am not bound to take knowledge by you of the Pope 's will . " Soon after , the Jesuit priest Father Tesimond told Father Garnet that while taking Catesby 's confession he had learned of the plot . Father Garnet met with Catesby a third time on 24 July at White Webbs in Enfield Chase , the home of Catesby 's wealthy relative Anne Vaux , and a house long suspected by the government of harbouring Jesuit priests . Without acknowledging that he was aware of the precise nature of the plot , the priest tried in vain to dissuade Catesby from his course .

By 20 July 1605 , 36 barrels of gunpowder had been stored in the undercroft , but the ever @-@ present threat of the plague yet again prorogued the opening of Parliament , this time until 5 November 1605 . Catesby had borne much of the scheme 's financial cost thus far , and was running out of money . As their plans moved closer to fruition , during a secret meeting at Bath in August , at which he , Percy and Thomas Wintour were present , the plotters decided that " the company being yet but few " he was to be allowed to " call in whom he thought best " . Catesby soon added Ambrose Rookwood , a staunch Catholic who was both young and wealthy , but who most importantly owned a stable of fine horses at Coldham . For the plan to work Rookwood and his horses needed to be close to the other conspirators , and so Catesby persuaded him to rent Clopton House at Stratford @-@ upon @-@ Avon . Francis Tresham was brought into the plot on 14 October . Also descended from William Catesby , Tresham was Robert 's cousin , and as young children the two had often visited White Webbs . Although his account of the meeting is weighted with hindsight ( when captured he sought to distance himself from the affair ) , he asked Catesby what support for the Catholics would be forthcoming once the king had been killed . Catesby 's answer , " The necessity of the Catholics [ was such that ] it must needs be done " , in Fraser 's opinion demonstrates his unwavering view on the matter , held at least since his first meeting with Thomas Wintour early in 1604 . The final conspirator to be brought in was Everard Digby , on 21 October , at Harrowden . Catesby confided in Digby during a delayed Feast of Saint Luke . Like Rookwood , Digby was young , wealthy , and possessed a stable of horses . Catesby told him to rent Coughton Court near Alcester , so that he would " the better to be able to do good to the cause [ kidnap Princess Elizabeth ] " .

The day after Tresham 's recruitment , Catesby exchanged greetings in London with Fawkes 's former employer , Lord Montague , and asked him " The Parliament , I think , brings your lordship up now ? " Montague told him that he was visiting a relative , and that he would be at Parliament in a few weeks time . Catesby replied " I think your Lordship takes no pleasure to be there " . Montague , who had already been imprisoned for speaking out in the House of Lords against anti @-@ Papist legislation , and who had no inclination to be present while more laws were introduced , agreed . Following the plot 's failure he became a suspect and was arrested , but after intense lobbying was released some months later .

The recruitment of Rookwood , Tresham and Digby coincided with a series of meetings in various taverns across London , during which the last remaining details were worked out . Fawkes would light the fuse , and escape by boat across the Thames . An uprising would start in the Midlands , during which Princess Elizabeth was to be captured . Fawkes would escape to the continent and explain to the Catholic powers what had happened in England .

= = = Monteagle letter = = =

Several of the conspirators expressed worries about fellow Catholics who would be caught up in the planned explosion ; Percy was concerned for his patron , Northumberland , and when the young Earl of Arundel 's name was mentioned Catesby suggested that a minor wound might keep him from the chamber on that day . Keyes 's suggestion to warn the Earl of Peterborough was , however , derided . On 26 October William Parker , 4th Baron Monteagle ( Tresham 's brother @-@ in @-@ law ) received an anonymous letter while at his house in Hoxton , warning him not to attend Parliament , and forecasting that " they shall receive a terrible blow this Parliament ; and yet they

shall not see who hurts them " . Uncertain of its meaning he delivered it to Secretary of State Robert Cecil , 1st Earl of Salisbury . In an extraordinary act of bravado Catesby had planned to go hunting with James , but was warned of the betrayal by Monteagle 's servant . He immediately suspected that Tresham was responsible for the letter , a view which was shared by Thomas Wintour . Together the two confronted the recently recruited conspirator , and threatened to " hang him " , but Tresham managed to convince the pair that he had not written the letter , and the next day urged them to abandon the plot .

Catesby waited for Percy 's return from the north , before making his decision . He thought the letter too vague to constitute any meaningful threat to the plan , and decided to forge ahead . As Fawkes made a final check on the gunpowder , other conspirators took up their positions in the Midlands . Salisbury , already aware of certain stirrings before he received the letter , did not yet know the exact nature of the plot or who exactly was involved . He elected to wait , to see how events unfolded . On 3 November , Catesby met with Wintour and Percy in London . Although the nature of their discussion is unknown , Fraser theorises that some adjustment of their plan to abduct Princess Elizabeth may have occurred , as later accounts told how Percy had been seen at the Duke of York 's lodgings , enquiring as to the movements of the king 's daughter . Nicholls mentions that a week earlier ? on the same day that Monteagle received his letter ? Catesby was at White Webbs with Fawkes , to discuss kidnapping Prince Henry rather than Princess Elizabeth .

= = = Failure and death = = =

Late on Monday 4 November , Catesby , John Wright and Bates left for the Midlands , ready for the planned uprising . That night however , Fawkes was discovered guarding the gunpowder in the undercroft beneath the House of Lords . As news of his arrest spread , the next day most of the conspirators still in London fled . Catesby 's party , ignorant of what was happening in London , paused at Dunstable when his horse lost a shoe . When Rookwood caught them up and broke to them the news of Fawkes 's arrest , the group , which now included Rookwood , Catesby , Bates , the Wright brothers and Percy , rode toward Dunchurch . At about 6 : 00 pm that evening they reached Catesby 's family home at Ashby St Ledgers , where his mother and Robert Wintour were staying . To keep his mother ignorant of their situation , Catesby sent a message asking Wintour to meet him at the edge of the town . The group continued on to Dunchurch , where they met Digby and his hunting party and informed them that the king and Salisbury were dead , thus persuading them to continue with the plan .

On 6 November they raided Warwick Castle for supplies , before continuing to Norbrook to collect stored weapons . From there they continued their journey to Huddington . Catesby gave Bates a letter to deliver to Father Garnet and the other priests at Coughton Court , informing them of what had transpired , and asking for their help in raising an army in Wales , where Catholic support was believed to be strong . The priest begged Catesby and his followers to stop their " wicked actions " , and to listen to the pope 's preachings . Father Garnet fled , and managed to evade capture for several weeks . Catesby and the others arrived at Huddington at about 2 : 00 pm , and were met by Thomas Wintour . Terrified of being associated with the fugitives , family members and former friends showed them no sympathy .

Back in London , under pain of torture Fawkes had started to reveal what he knew , and on 7 November the government named Catesby as a wanted man . Early that morning , at Huddington the remaining outlaws went to confession , before taking the sacrament ? in Fraser 's opinion , a sign that none of them thought they had long to live . The party of fugitives , which included those at the centre of the plot , their supporters and Digby 's hunting party , by now had dwindled to only thirty @-@ six in number . They continued on through pouring rain to Hewell Grange , home of the young Lord Windsor . He was absent however , so they helped themselves to further arms , ammunition , and money . The locals were unsupportive ; on hearing that Catesby 's party stood for " God and Country " , they replied that they were for " King James as well as God and Country " . The party reached Holbeche House , on the border of Staffordshire , at about 10 : 00 pm . Tired and desperate , they spread in front of the fire some of the now @-@ soaked gunpowder taken from

Hewell Grange , to dry out . Although gunpowder does not explode ( unless physically contained ) , a spark from the fire landed on the powder and the resultant flames engulfed Catesby , Rookwood , Grant , and another man .

Catesby survived , albeit scorched . Digby left , ostensibly to give himself up , as did John Wintour . Thomas Bates fled , along with Robert Wintour . Remaining were Catesby ( described as " reasonably well " ) , Rookwood , the Wright brothers , Percy and John Grant , who had been so badly injured that his eyes were " burnt out " . They resolved to stay in the house and wait for the arrival of the king 's men . Catesby , believing his death to be near , kissed the gold crucifix he wore around his neck and said he had given everything for " the honour of the Cross " . He refused to be taken prisoner , " against that only he would defend himself with his sword " .

Richard Walsh , Sheriff of Worcester , and his company of 200 men besieged Holbeche House at about 11 : 00 am on 8 November . While crossing the courtyard Thomas Wintour was hit in the shoulder . John Wright was shot , followed by his brother , and then Rookwood . Catesby and Percy were reportedly both dropped by a single lucky shot , while standing near the door . Catesby managed to crawl inside the house , where his body was later found , clutching a picture of the Virgin Mary . This and his gold crucifix were sent to London , to demonstrate what " superstitious and Popish idols " had inspired the plotters . The survivors were taken into custody and the dead buried near Holbeche . On the orders of the Earl of Northampton however , the bodies of Catesby and Percy were exhumed and decapitated . John Harington , 2nd Baron Harington of Exton , made an opportune study of the heads while en route to London , and later reflected : " more terrible countenances were never looked upon " . Placed on " the side of the Parliament House " , Catesby 's head became one of the " sightless spectators of their own failure . "