Reading Practice

Read the text. Are the sentences true (*T*) or false (*F*)?

a) Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators wanted to take over the government. ___

b) Someone sent a letter to Lord Monteagle, warning him of the danger. ___

c) Thomas and Robert Winter tried to organize a rebellion. ___

d) The conspirators had a lot of support from the public. ___

e) The trial was not a fair one. ___

The Gunpowder Conspiracy was a failed assassination attempt by a group of Catholics against King James I of England. They planned to kill not only the king, but most of the aristocracy, by blowing up the British Houses of Parliament on November 5, 1605.

The five conspirators used part of a house underneath the parliament building to drive a tunnel under the thick foundation walls of the House of Lords, where there was a coal cellar. They spent many months planning how they would transport the gunpowder up the River Thames by boat at night. Guy Fawkes was to light the fuses, then leave by boat and flee to Europe.

However, the plot was discovered when an anonymous letter was sent to Lord Monteagle, warning him not to attend Parliament that day. It is not clear whether the letter was genuine, or a forgery sent from within government circles. In any event, on November 4, Lord Monteagle searched the cellars and discovered Guy Fawkes, with the wood and coal ready, along with thirty-six barrels of gunpowder. Fawkes was arrested, but on hearing of the failure of the plot, the others fled to the home of fellow conspirators Thomas and Robert Winter in Worcestershire. Heavy rain hampered their escape, and they were caught before they got there and taken back to London. Some of the other conspirators attempted to organize a rebellion, but were rounded up, too. There was great rejoicing in London that the plot had been uncovered, and Sunday, November 10 became a day of thanksgiving.

The conspirators were interrogated for three months in the Tower of London. One of them, Francis Tresham, died while in the Tower, but the surviving eight were accused of high treason. The trial took place in Westminster Hall on January 27, 1606. It was a national spectacle, with reports of spectators spending up to ten shillings for entry to the courtroom. The trial lasted only one day. All but one of the prisoners pleaded “not guilty,” but the verdict was a foregone conclusion. The plotters were, without exception, convicted and sentenced to death. They were publicly executed in 1606.

Today, in the UK, November 5 is still a day on which people commemorate the discovery of the plot. Many towns and villages hold firework displays, and it is the custom to attend bonfire parties, where effigies of Guy Fawkes, made of old clothes stuffed with straw or newspaper, are burned.

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