

British traditions: Bonfire Night

If you're ever in the UK on the evening of 5 November, you might wonder why you can hear fireworks. Bonfire Night is celebrated all over the country, but what is it about? Find out about the history of this well-loved event in this article.

Before reading:

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task:

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary	Definition
1. a bonfire	a. a plan to do something, usually something bad or wrong
2. fireworks	b. to make something explode
3. gunpowder	c. a large, round wooden container
4. a plot	d. coloured fire or explosions in the sky used in celebrations
5. to commit treason	e. to think someone is doing bad things
6. to blow up something	f. powder that explodes when lit
7. a barrel	g. a big fire people build with wood
8. to be suspicious	h. to be disloyal to your government

Bonfire Night can be a hard celebration to explain. It's also sometimes called Guy Fawkes Night – but who was Guy Fawkes and what's it all about? Well, Guy Fawkes tried to blow up London's Houses of Parliament in 1605 because he wanted to kill King James I. So British people celebrate that night, 5 November, with bonfire parties, including huge bonfires in public parks, and firework displays.

But isn't it strange to celebrate a plot to kill the king?

Well, yes, it would be. But if you know more about the history of Bonfire Night and the Gunpowder Plot, its traditions make more sense. You see, the first Bonfire Night, on 5 November 1606, wasn't exactly a celebration. It was a warning: 'This is what happens if you commit treason.'

But let's start from the beginning of the story.

Reading:

Part 1

A BOMB IN THE PARLIAMENT

Four hundred years ago a group of terrorists tried to bomb the British Parliament. Every year, on 5 November, British people remember "The Gunpowder plot".

There had been religious problems in England for a long time. In 1534, King Henry VIII created the Church of England, rejecting Catholicism. In 1570, the pope **excommunicated** Henry's daughter Elizabeth I. From that date on the Catholics **were persecuted** by the Queen and English Protestants.

When Elizabeth died in 1603, Catholics believed that her successor, James I, would respect them- his wife was a Catholic! But after two small Catholic plots against the Protestants James publicly declared his "**detestation**" of Catholicism.

THE PLOT

Robert Catesby came from a radical Catholic family. On 20th May 1604 he met four other Catholics at a London pub. Guy Fawkes was one of them. They discussed a plan to blow up Parliament. Soon, there were ten conspirators.

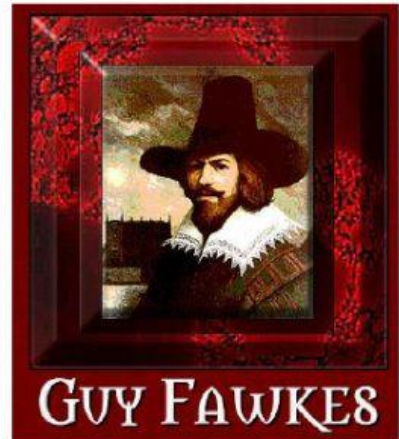


In March 1605, the group rented a cellar which was directly underneath the House of Lords. Their plan was to explode an enormous bomb with barrels of gunpowder on 5 November, when Parliament was going to open. They wanted to kill the king and many nobles. During the next few months, they slowly brought in 36 barrels of gunpowder they needed into the cellar.

A WARNING

But a week before the opening of Parliament, Lord Monteagle received an anonymous letter warning him not to be present at the opening. Monteagle was a Catholic and was related to one of the conspirators by marriage. Monteagle reported the letter to Westminster, soldiers were sent and a search of the cellars was ordered. They found the gunpowder and Guy Fawkes.

Some of the Conspirators were shot and killed when they tried to escape. Others were arrested and joined Guy Fawkes in the Tower of London, where they were horribly tortured. They were all publicly executed- some outside St Paul's Cathedral. But Guy Fawkes' execution took place in front of the Parliament.



Some Londoners organized fireworks and bonfires to celebrate the fact that the king was safe, others to celebrate the fact that some people had had the nerve to try something against the king!!!



Months later, the Observance of 5th November Act enforced an annual public day of thanksgiving for the plot's failure.

Within a few decades Gunpowder Treason Day, as it was known, became the predominant English state commemoration. As it carried strong Protestant religious overtones it also became a focus for anti-Catholic sentiment.

Excommunicate – to exclude or expel from membership or participation in any group

Persecute somebody (for something) - to treat somebody in a cruel and unfair way, especially because of their race, religion or political beliefs.

Detestation - extreme hatred or dislike

Task 1

Write numbers next to the sentences to put them in order from 1–9.

- ___ Lord Monteagle received a warning letter.
- ___ Celebrating the King had survived, some people lit bonfires around London.
- ___ There were small plots to kill King James I.
- ___ Parliament declared 5 November a public celebration.
- ___ Guy Fawkes, Robert Catesby and other men rented a room under Parliament.
- ___ Catholics were treated badly under Queen Elizabeth I.
- ___ Guy Fawkes organised the gunpowder in barrels.
- ___ Guy Fawkes was caught and put in prison.
- ___ Guy Fawkes was tortured and sentenced to be **hanged, drawn and quartered**.

<https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ha>

Task 2

Are the sentences true or false or they state something which is not mentioned (DS – doesn't say)?

Treason was not a crime in 1605. **T/F/DS**

Guy Fawkes was the main organiser of the plot. **T/F/DS**

Guy Fawkes was the only one who died for his part in the Gunpowder Plot. **T/F/DS**

King James was not popular with Catholics. **T/F/DS**

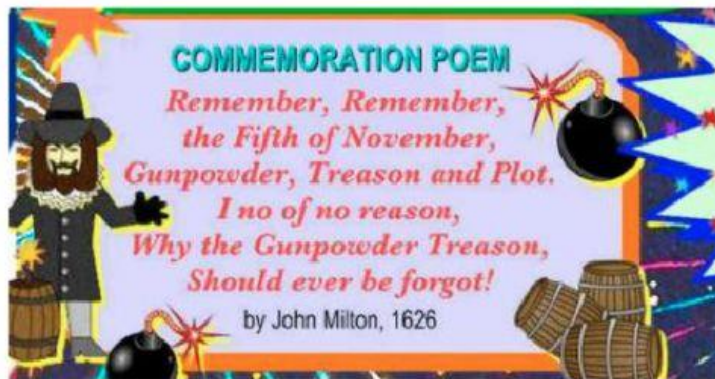
There were consequences for Catholics even after the 17th century. **T/F/DS**

Most British people don't know the history behind Bonfire Night. **T/F/DS**

Part 2

THE BONFIRE NIGHT/ THE GUY FAWKES NIGHT

Anyway November 5th has become a very important day in England and these words are chanted each year:



Ever since that day the British have celebrated Guy Fawkes' Night.

Today young people in Britain make a guy with old clothes and fill him with newspaper or straw. Then they go around the streets with the guy and ask "A penny for the guy?" With this money they buy fireworks.

Nowadays on the night of 5 November there are fireworks and big bonfires to burn the



Throughout England, towns and villages....

- light huge bonfires,
- let off magnificent fireworks,
- burn an effigy (a homemade model of a man, like a scarecrow) and
- celebrate the fact the Parliament and James I were not blown sky high by Guy Fawkes.

GUY. Some people have bonfires in their back gardens. Young people love the noise, excitement and colourful fireworks.

In Lewes, Sussex for example there is a big public festival on

Guy Fawkes' night. People dress in historic costumes. The guy is burned on top of a hill on an enormous bonfire. There are also brilliant fireworks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YtPHVYVb14>

The biggest firework display is the Edenbridge Display in Kent. Edenbridge also has the biggest Guy: a nine-metre 'celebrity' model is burned there every year. Last year the celebrity Guy was Wayne Rooney wearing Shrek-style ears and a football shirt.

In some places the use of fireworks is highly regulated to avoid violence or accidents.



Food

It's normally quite cold in November in Britain, so on Bonfire Night people wear hats, scarves and gloves to spend the evening outside. They need some warm food too. Traditional Bonfire Night food is hot baked potatoes. They are cooked on the bonfire and filled with butter and cheese. There are also toffee apples (apples on a stick, covered in sweet toffee) and in the north of England they eat a special type of cake called parkin. Toasting marshmallows on the bonfire is also popular. Yum!



Penny for the Guy

The Guy (effigy) is made out of old clothes stuffed with paper or straw. The Guy is a reminder of Guy Fawkes.



In Britain only adults can buy fireworks but in the past they were sold to children too. During the days before Bonfire Night,

children used to take their home-made Guys onto the streets and ask for 'A penny for the Guy' to collect money to buy fireworks. Now you have to be over 18 to buy fireworks, and safety on Bonfire Night is an important issue.



Task 1

Complete the text with the words below.

PENNY, GUY FAWKES, MONEY, NOVEMBER, CAKE, FIREWORKS, PARLIAMENT, BAKED, GUY, APPLES, BONFIRES, GUNPOWDER

The British have celebrated the Bonfire Night or the _____ Night on 5th November since 1605 to commemorate the failed attempt of Catholic conspirators to blow up the _____ and kill King James I. People light huge _____, and there are magnificent _____ everywhere. In some places, people wear traditional and other costumes to celebrate this event. Bonfires are lit to burn the _____. It is an effigy - a homemade model of a man. In the past children used to make the "Guys" out of old clothes, straw and newspaper and sell them on the street to earn _____ to

buy fireworks, shouting: "A _____ for the Guy." People eat special food: _____ potatoes, toffee _____, the parkin _____, etc. There is even a special rhyme chanted every year:

Remember, remember,

The 5th of _____

_____ treason and plot.

I see no reason

Why the Gunpowder Treason

Should ever be forgot!