

# THE GUNPOWDER PLOT: *17th-Century False Flag?*

TODAY, THE IMAGE OF GUIDO “GUY” FAUKES is as well known as any 17th-century figure, with masks of his likeness being worn by people across the globe who are even now gathering together to protest outside of symbols and edifices of financial and political power. But why has Faukes become possibly the most recognizable metaphor for resistance to tyranny? Were he and his Catholic mates really planning to blow up the British Parliament with tons of gunpowder—or is there a hidden side to this celebrated story? According to TBR assistant editor John Tiffany, the Gunpowder Plot may be a perfect example of an early false-flag operation, designed by the powers that were (and still are) to frame an enemy and stoke the fires of perpetual war.

By John Tiffany

For more than 400 years, the majority of people have accepted the official version of the events of (“remember, remember”) the 5th of November 1605. According to the British government and the court historians, a group of Roman Catholic conspirators, sparkplugged by the top Jesuit in England, if not the pope himself, sought to blow up Parliament, with most of its members, both lords and commons, various other celebrities (including Francis Bacon and Archbishop Bancroft) and the king himself, with one gigantic explosion of gunpowder (with iron bars for shrapnel).

The idea was to wipe out the top level of the British government at one fell swoop, and then hopefully to get a new, manipulable monarch and parliamentarians who would restore the rights of Catholics, which had been in

decline more or less since the time of Henry VIII (reigning from 1509 till his death in 1547). Henry, anxious to annul his marriage, had consulted the Venetian Jews, and, on their advice, had spun off the Church of England, formerly part of the Catholic Church. In 1605 the king was James I, famous for the King James Bible. He had started out as James VI of Scotland, and then added Eng-

**“Even at the time, many people did not buy the story that Faukes, Catesby and their followers really orchestrated the Gunpowder Plot.”**

land (and Wales) to his realm, creating the United Kingdom (1603-25).<sup>1</sup>

Catholicism had been proscribed during the “penal times” in England in the 16th and 17th centuries, and some 240 Catholics were even put to death, much as Protestants had suffered under Catholic rulers (more than 300 were burnt at the stake in Britain). From about



1570 onward, pressure on Catholics rapidly increased, as a result of the Northern Rising of 1569 and other events. The rising was a failed rebellion of Catholics in northern England seeking a restoration of Catholic rights in officially Protestant England. In 1570 Pope St. Pius V excommunicated Queen Elizabeth and released Catholic followers from allegiance to her, thus triggering an increase in the English government's hostility to the church and Catholics in general.

An act in 1585 made it treason to be a priest in England, and also treason to shelter or assist a priest. Many Catholics were to suffer death under such laws. The launching of the Spanish Armada in 1588 convinced many Englishmen that the Vatican was a hostile power and all Roman Catholics were agents of this foreign power—a fifth column.

The alleged Gunpowder Plot was supposedly a conspiracy by a number of Catholics, a madcap scheme. The best known of these was Guy, or Guido, Faukes (usually spelled "Fawkes" today), but Robert Catesby<sup>2</sup> was allegedly the ringleader or mastermind, second only to the Jesuit superior named Henry Garnet.<sup>3</sup>

The plot, we are supposed to believe, was rather

**Above, a copper engraving** from 1794, based on a contemporary depiction, shows eight of the 13 alleged Gunpowder Plot conspirators. They include, from left to right, Thomas Bates, Robert Winter, Christopher Wright, John Wright, Thomas Percy, Guido Fawkes (or Guy Faukes), Robert Catesby and Thomas Winter. Others not shown included Robert Keyes, John Grant, Ambrose Rockwood, Sir Everard Digby and Francis Tresham. Which were government agents and which were patsies is up for debate.

miraculously "discovered" just 10 days before the bombing was to be carried out. Up till then, the government insists, it knew nothing at all about the plot. but a convincing case can be made that 5-11 was England's 9-11 in more ways than one, although no building was actually destroyed and no one other than the supposed plotters was hurt. Substitute "Muslim fanatics" for "Catholic zealots," and 5-11 Day in England begins to look very much like 9-11 Day in America.

Just as the CIA and Mossad controlled any alleged al Qaeda patsies, it appears British intelligence either made 5-11 almost happen, or at least let it almost happen.

Robert Cecil, earl of Salisbury, emerges from the



Above, hundreds of average citizens have donned Guy Faukes masks and gathered together on the streets of London to anonymously protest the stranglehold the international bankers have over the common folk of the globe. Their desire for anonymity is well grounded. Just recently it was revealed in *American Free Press* newspaper that Bank of America employs 20 full-time personnel to spy on the activities of financial protesters via social media websites. Below, every year in England on the night of Nov. 5, effigies of Faukes are carried through the streets of British towns and burned on large bonfires in celebration of the foiling of the Gunpowder Plot. Originally a mandated state celebration instituted soon after the 1605 incident, the holiday had extremely anti-Catholic overtones, with effigies of the pope being burned. Today the celebration has become more of a demonstration of class-based struggle.



shadows as the real villain and mastermind, if not the instigator, of the whole affair. Cecil was effectively the prime minister of England, wearing more than one hat. Born in 1563, he was lord privy seal, 1598-1612, and secretary of state, 1590-1612 (when he died), as well as holding other important offices.

Different sources give totally different descriptions of Cecil. Some portrayals are favorable. Others say he was malevolently self-centered, exploiting the Gunpowder Plot to bolster his position in the face of his understandable unpopularity. He has been portrayed in movies and literature as hunchbacked, with a notable limp, but his portrait (c. 1602) by John de Critz the Elder does not show him as crippled.

An investigation of the standard version of the Gunpowder Plot by John Gerard turned up grave doubts and difficulties “at every turn,” he wrote.

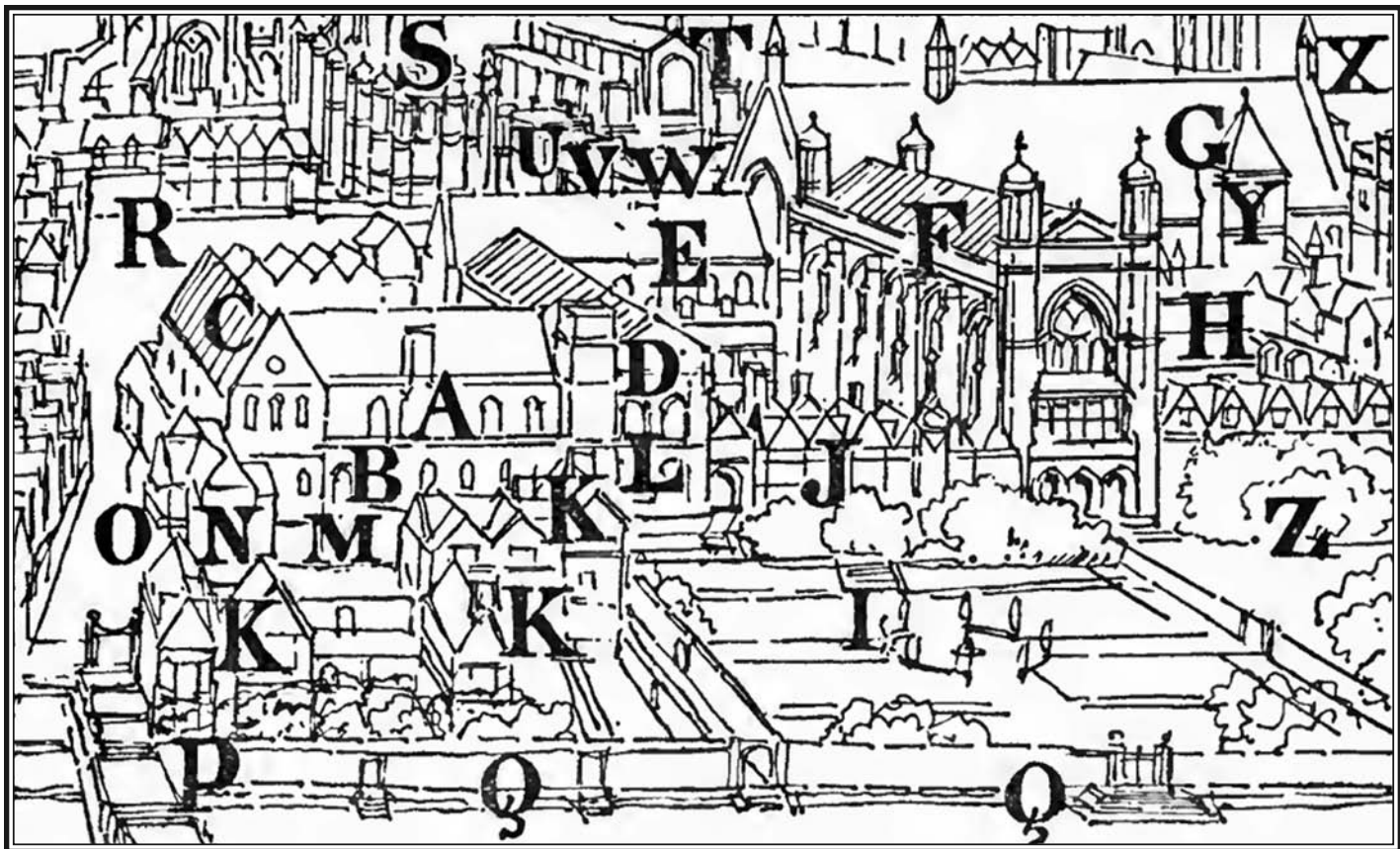
The real history of the plot we will, in all probability, never know for sure. But the balance of evidence lies heavily against Cecil and his minions, as having been the real plotters, “devising and working the scheme for their own ends,” as Gerard concluded.

## THE PLOT IS DISCOVERED

On the morning of Nov. 5, 1605, London was abuzz with the news that the previous night a plot had been “discovered.” In a room usually called a “cellar” but more properly described as an undercroft, under the room where the lords were to meet that very day, along with the king and the commons, a vast quantity of gunpowder in barrels had been found, and with it a desperado who admitted he intended to blow up the powder during the king’s speech opening the session of Parliament. The man, calling himself John Johnson, refused to give any evidence that might incriminate any possible accomplices.

However, it was found that the undercroft in which the 36 barrels of gunpowder was positioned had been rented to Thomas Percy, a Catholic gentleman, along with a nearby home. (Percy lived from 1560 to 1605.)

Little is known of Percy’s early life, but he was involved in a series of confidential communications with King James. It has been suggested he was a double agent, but, if so, it didn’t work out well for him. In the manhunt that followed the discovery of the powder,



**MAP OF PARLIAMENT AT THE TIME OF JAMES I:** A. The House of Lords. B. Chamber under the House of Lords, called “Guy Faukes’s Cellar.” C. The Prince’s Chamber. D. The Painted Chamber. E. The “White Hall” or Court of Requests. F. The House of Commons (formerly St. Stephen’s Chapel). G. Westminster Hall. H. St. Stephen’s Cloisters, converted into houses for the Tellers of the Exchequer. I. Garden of the Old Palace (afterwards called “Cotton Garden”). J. House built on the site of the Chapel of “Our Lady of the Pew” (called later “Cotton House”). K. Houses built upon ruins of the walls of the Old Palace. L. Vault under the Painted Chamber. M. Yard or court into which a doorway opened from Guy Faukes’s Cellar. N. Passage leading from the same yard or court into Parliament Place. O. Parliament Place. P. Parliament Stairs (formerly called “The Queen’s Bridge”). Q. The River Thames. R. Old Palace Yard. S. Westminster Abbey. T. St. Margaret’s Church. U, V, W. Buildings of the Old Palace, called “Heaven” (or “Paradise”), “Hell” and “Purgatory.” X. New Palace Yard. Y. Bell Tower of St. Stephen’s. Z. The Speaker’s Garden.

Percy was shot to death—they claim he was killed by the same musket ball that killed Catesby.

Officially, 13 men directly participated in the plot (not counting the priests), all of them Catholic, and all but one of them gentlemen, the other being a servant of one of the men.

Francis Tresham was unique in that he did not flee with his associates, other than Faukes (they headed for a safe house in the English midlands). Tresham stayed in London and even offered his services to the authorities. Was he a turncoat, or was he a double agent all along?

Catesby had married a Protestant woman—so we may wonder if he was as much a Catholic as he is made out to be. Tresham died possibly from bladder cancer

or “stangury” in the Tower of London, Dec. 23, 1605. Four of the 13 were rich.

The government’s conspiracy theory is that from about mid-December 1604, the perpetrators tried to dig a tunnel or “mine” from the nearby house they initially rented to a point under the Peers’ Chamber, to put the gunpowder in place. After tunneling as far as the foundations of the House of Lords, they happened to discover that there was already an undercroft under the meeting room of the lords—a claim that strains all credibility. Percy was able to rent this “cellar,” and they were able to move the powder in, in the dead of night, or nights, so the tunnel became obsolete.

The idea was to use a “train”—effectively a long



**ELIZABETH I**

Last of the Tudors.



**KING JAMES I**

One target of alleged plot.



**PRINCESS ELIZABETH**

Plotters' choice for queen?



**ROBERT CECIL**

False-flag mastermind?

fuse—to set the powder off. After lighting the train, Faukes, the demolition expert, would have about 15 minutes to escape to a spot far enough away so he would not need to become a suicide bomber.

The plotters allegedly intended, in a muddled sort of way, to seize one of the king's sons or daughters after the lethal blast, who they would then proclaim as the new sovereign, with themselves as the guardians of the new monarch (and in effect the regents).

A crucial point is that the government claimed it had no inkling of the plot until something lucky happened: 10 days before Parliament was to meet and be blown to bits, a Catholic peer, Lord Monteagle, William Parker by name,<sup>4</sup> got an anonymous letter delivered by an unknown man. The letter, couched in incoherent language, warned him it would be wise to be absent for the opening ceremony. Monteagle took it at once to Lord Cecil,

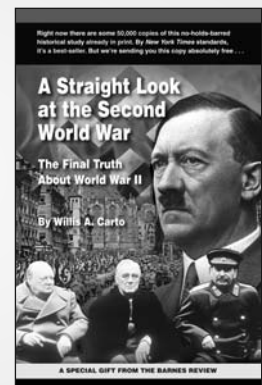
the king being out of town on a hunt, and Cecil figured out its meaning and gave it to the king five days later, pretending to be baffled by it. The king read it and divined its meaning. Four days later the cellar was raided, the powder was found under some firewood, and Faukes was arrested either there or in the vicinity, depending on which government version you want to buy.

Fantastically, the peers met as planned, despite the horrible danger, as the powder had not been removed and could have gone off accidentally. As far as this writer knows, the king was not there, and no business was transacted that day. Parliament did not get under way, with the commons, until about five days after the discovery.

There has been much speculation as to who wrote the letter, but the perpetrators got wind of it and headed for the countryside, other than Faukes, who allegedly tried to go ahead with the planned explosion, and Tresham.

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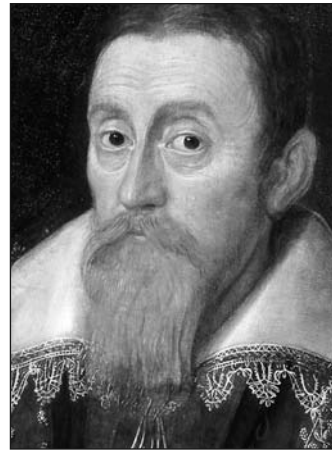




**FRANCIS TRESHAM**  
Possible double agent.



**THOMAS PERCY**  
Rented "tunnel" house.



**WILLIAM PARKER**  
Warned authorities of plot.



**ROBERT CATESBY**  
Shot during escape.

### 1598 ALL OVER AGAIN?

One Revisionist theory is that Cecil wrote the letter, as part of a cover story to explain how the plot was discovered in the nick of time. It would not be the first time the government has pulled off such a hoax. The case of Edward Squire, who was hanged, drawn and quartered in 1598, is one such case. Squire was killed for allegedly plotting to kill the queen by rubbing some poison on the pommel of her saddle, and the earl of Essex later by putting poison on his chair—these crimes being instigated by Richard Walpole, who supplied the poison, according to Squire's confession. But no one of any sense believed in this plot, and Walpole apparently got off scot free—although the operation was evidently designed to impeach the Jesuit order and Catholics in general, just as the Gunpowder Plot was.

The official story of the Gunpowder Plot is internally inconsistent, and much of what the perpetrators are alleged to have done is well-nigh incredible. If they had acted in the manner described, it is utterly impossible the state authorities would not have had full knowledge of the crazy proceedings.

For sure, Cecil is a shady character. While enjoying the confidence of Queen Elizabeth,<sup>5</sup> Cecil was engaged in secret correspondence with King James (then king only of Scotland), which would be regarded as treasonable. And later, under King James (of Scotland and England<sup>5</sup>), while effectively prime minister of the United

Kingdom, Cecil was secretly receiving a "pension" from the king of Spain—a monarch with whom any correspondence he treated as treason in others.

*Cui bono?* Who benefits? Certainly, whatever its origin, the Gunpowder Plot immensely increased Cecil's power, and even his popularity (for a while), assuring the success of his policies: persecute the Catholics at home in the British Isles, and make war on Catholic powers in mainland Europe.

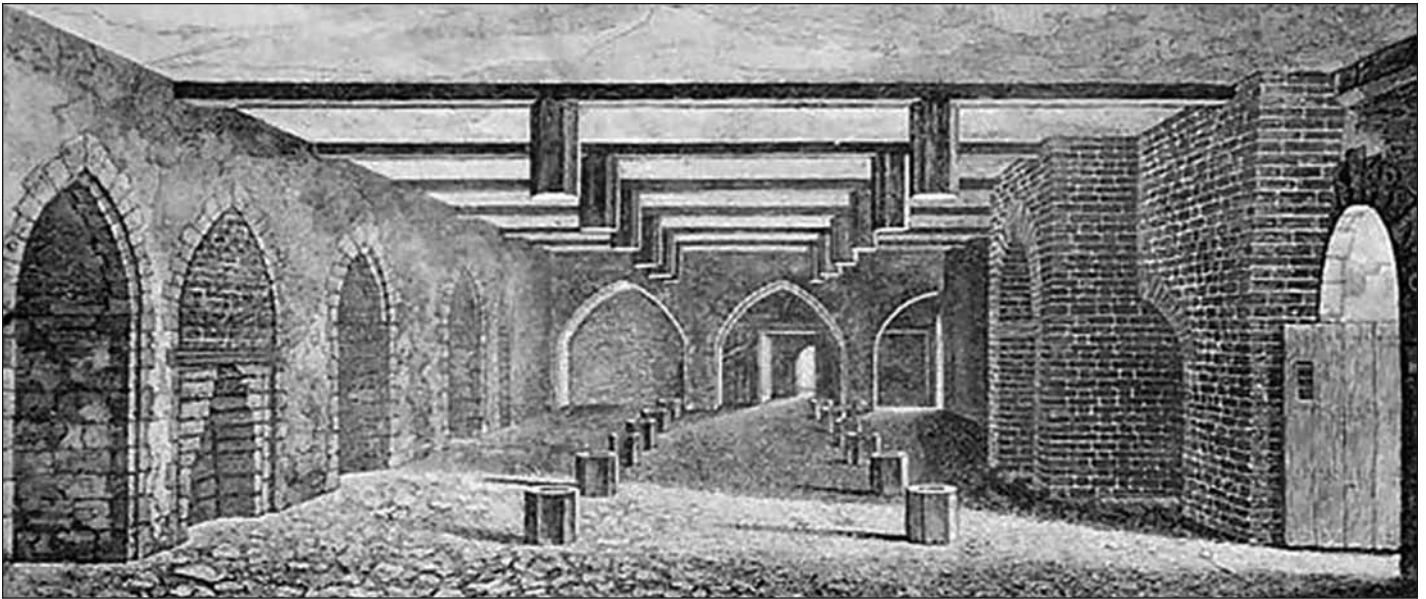
Were the "evil 13" really Catholics? One Catholic priest described them as "wicked and desperate wretches, whom many Protestants termed papists, although the

**"The *de facto* prime minister of England at the time, Lord Robert Cecil, maintained a secret correspondence with the king of Spain."**

priests and true Catholics knew them not to be such. . . . They were never frequenters of Catholic sacraments with any priest. . . . None was a convicted Catholic or recusant."

Note the parallels with the dubious "Muslim skyjackers" of 9-11 who drank alcoholic beverages and went to topless bars just before allegedly flying airliners into buildings. Sir Charles Cornwallis, the English ambassador to Spain, writing from Madrid, called the Gunpowder Plotters "atheists and devils."

As for the explosive mine, it is simply impossible. There were people, witnesses, all around, living and



coming and going. Innocent people lived in the very house that sheltered the plotters. Additional dwellings were clustered thickly around, inhabited by various officials. Tradespeople and workmen were constantly in the vicinity. How then did the plotters dispose of the large amounts of soil removed from the tunnel? The flimsy official explanation is that it was hidden beneath the turf in the little garden adjoining. This is patently ridiculous. And what about the great stones removed from the foundation(s)—an estimated 60 cubic feet of stones? No way could these be hidden under the garden turf. Also a forest of timber would have to be smuggled into the house to shore up the tunnel—all this without anyone noticing the subterfuge.

These men were aristocrats, not construction workers or engineers. What are the chances they could dig through the foundations of the house without causing it to collapse or at least crack severely?

What about the noise made by the constant tunneling—assaulting a wall described as “very hard to beat through”? The striking of the picks and shovels in the shallow tunnel would be audible for many yards around. Yet we are supposed to believe none of the people swarming around had any notion something unusual was going on. We are also supposed to believe that during all this strenuous work, the “bad guys” were ignorant of the existence of the undercroft. Wouldn’t they have “cased the joint” before even renting the nearby house, much less start swinging a pick? Wouldn’t anyone? Were they really that nutty or stupid?

Furthermore, John Gerard says there are reasons to

**How could five tons of gunpowder** remain undetected right under the House of Lords meeting room from May until November with literally dozens of people using the chamber every day as a passageway? How did the conspirators get the barrels (each about 400 pounds) in there without anyone noticing? And when the government removed the gunpowder, with no need for secrecy, why was there not a single witness? Reportedly the undercroft was used often as a shortcut between the buildings of Parliament, meaning numerous people should have seen the mountain of gunpowder—allegedly hidden under some firewood—stored there.

believe the undercroft “served habitually as a passage between the different parts of the palace.” With all this foot traffic through the ground-level “cellar,” how in the world could the conspirators store 36 barrels of gunpowder—an estimated 4.5 to 5 tons of powder—for half a year, without anyone noticing?

Says Gerard: “It must be remembered that the government thus credited with childlike and culpable simplicity was probably the most suspicious and inquisitive that [had] ever held power [in Britain], for its tenure whereof it trusted mainly to the elaborate efficiency of its intelligence department.”

Hard as it is to believe the vast amount of explosive materiel could be smuggled into the building, it is even more incredible the powder could have been removed without anyone witnessing this amazing operation, which would have been a public spectacle. There was no reason to hide such an operation, logically. Yet no one saw the powder being removed. Did anyone ever see the

powder in the undercroft? It is only reasonable to suppose the gunpowder never even existed.

The government had a monopoly on gunpowder. How could the culprits possibly get their hands on this quantity of powder—representing perhaps a quarter of the total annual production of the materiel in all of Britain? Why have the official records of gunpowder for 1605 mysteriously disappeared?

Torture, although illegal, was freely employed to extract “evidence” from the captive conspirators and others who were so unfortunate as to fall into the hands of the government, while others were shot to death, sealing their lips forever.

The earl of Salisbury admits, in a letter addressed to a Mr. Favat, dated Dec. 4, 1605: “[M]ost of the prisoners have willfully forsworn that the priests knew anything in particular, and obstinately refuse to be accusers of them, yea, what torture soever they be put to.”

Analysis of the confession forced out of Guy Faukes by torture shows there are two distinct handwritings in the document, showing more suspicious business.

King James, no innocent party to the proceedings, set down in his own handwriting the order to torture Guy Faukes: “If he will not otherwise confess, the gentlest tortures are to be first used unto him, and so on, step by step, to the most severe. And so God speed your good work.”

Thus, while we cannot deny the Jesuits have done their share of conspiring over the centuries, in this case the only Catholic plotting was by laymen, who were amateur plotters compared to the British Protestant gov-

ernment. And there is more than sufficient evidence to suggest that the Gunpowder Plot was a government psychological operation, like ones we have seen both in Britain (Dunblane) and Australia (Port Arthur), but also here in the United States, in the past several decades.

As Sir Edward Coke wrote: “Ages to come will be in doubt whether it were a fact or fiction.”

Indeed we do doubt, Sir Edward. Indeed we do. ♦

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#### ENDNOTES:

1 James was born in 1567 and reigned until he died.

2 Born in 1572 or after.

3 Born 1555.

4 Born 1575.

5 Born September 1533; reigned 1558 to March 24, 1603.

6 Reigned March 24, 1603-1625.

**JOHN TIFFANY** is an assistant editor of THE BARNES REVIEW. He has for decades been interested in diverse ethnic groups, ancient history, mathematics, science, real-life conspiracies and the problem of crime in our government. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from the University of Michigan and has studied comparative religions and mythologies. Currently he has written a study of the Old Testament, called *Fountain of Fairytales: A Scholarly Romp Through the Old Testament* (\$20 plus \$5 S&H in the U.S.). Outside U.S. email sales@barnesreview.org. 1-877-773-9077.

#### “The Apprehension of Guy

Faukes by Sir Thomas

Knevet and his attendants,”

engraved by F. Deeves after a picture by Hamilton, copper engraved print published in

*The History of England*, 1802.

Most accounts have it that Knevet and his men arrived just in time, as Faukes was placing his flame to the fuse. It made for a more hair-raising story, for sure.

