# Cause of The Gunpowder Plot – 1605

The Gunpowder Plot was the attempt by a group of men, including someone called Guy Fawkes, to blow up the Houses of Parliament and murder James I, King of England.

What made him want to do it? It was about religion, politics and who was in charge at the time.

A religious ticking time bomb – thanks Henry

When Henry VIII started the Church of England (known as the reformation) in the 16th century (1500s), Protestants in England and across Europe questioned the teachings, organization and authority of the Pope, head of the Catholic religion. But England, and its people, had been Catholic for hundreds of years.

When Henry VIII died, Protestants became even stronger under his son, King Edward VI (1547-53)

When Edward VI died, his sister, Queen Mary I (1553-58), tried to put the old Catholic faith back in. But she died and her sister Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) took over. She became the greatest Protestant power in Europe. Childless, Queen Elizabeth handed the throne over to her cousin James.

“Oh no, I’m on the wrong side…again.”

With the changing Kings and Queens, in the 16th century many people ended up on the wrong side by being protestant or catholic at the wrong time. If this happened they were called 'heretics' and were often hunted down by people in charge.

Queen Elizabeth I's government became very nervous about what people who were catholic were doing (remember she was a protestant like her dad, Henry VIII) She killed 100 Catholic priests when she was Queen to make her feel more secure. Some were hurt to get them to talk.

A crisis happens

The fight between Queen Elizabeth I Catholic rulers in Europe started to worsen. In 1570 the Pope said she was 'excommunicated'.

Now anyone who wanted to stop her being Queen (even killing her) had the support of the Pope. Many attempts were made on her life and in 1585 England and Catholic Spain were at war, the Spanish Armada.

A new King. A new hope?

Queen Elizabeth died in 1603. James I was a Protestant like Elizabeth but he thought he would bring peace.

As the son of the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, he was also expected to treat Catholics better than Queen Elizabeth I. Some even thought he might let them worship in the open.

Plots uncovered puts the King under pressure…

Many people in the House of Commons were strongly against Catholics putting pressure on the King. The King was rattled by plots such as the Bye Plot, kidnapping the King and forcing him to change the laws to suit Catholics and the Main Plot, killing him and making his cousin, Arabella Stuart the Queen.

King James' wife becomes a Catholic but it doesn’t get better.

James's wife, Anne of Denmark, changed (converted) her religion to become a Catholic. Catholics in England saw this as a new hope their lives would get better. But, in 1604, when King James failed to agree better terms for Catholics when 19 years of war was finally ended with Spain they realised things would not get better.

So, who was Guy Fawkes?

Guy Fawkes was English and very serious about his religion. Fawkes was a catholic who had fought in Spain against the Netherlands where he called himself Guido Fawkes.

He was born in York and was one in a group of Catholics who came up with the plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament and King James I. He wanted to see a Catholic as King or Queen and not James. This is what became The Gunpowder Plot.

Quick summary

Everything you have just read shows there were real problems in England at this time.

Starting with Henry VIII's decision to start a new church, many Catholics after decades of trouble under Queen Elizabeth I felt badly let down by King James I.

Those men who set out to blow up the Houses of Parliament and the King, felt that they were being stopped from practicing their true religion, they may have had friends and family killed, and they felt that the people in charge were doing things wrong and need to go. They were willing to die for their cause.

You can find out more in our [Gunpowder Plot pages](https://www.britpolitics.co.uk/gunpowder-plot-about-guy-fawkes-plan).

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