

About Guy Fawkes

Guy Fawkes is one of the longest living icons in English history. His story is unique and one of the most interesting incidents to happen in the United Kingdom, which is why the story of November the 5th is still told to this day.

The story of Guy Fawkes fascinates many people and this article will walk you through this amazing tale and how the famous gunpowder plot unfolded.

The story began when Guy Fawkes left to go to battle in the Eighty years war on the side of the Spanish Catholics against the Protestant Dutch reformers. This eventually led him to meet Thomas Wintour with whom he returned to England.

Wintour introduced Fawkes to a man called Robert Catesby, who was planning to assassinate King James I to restore the Catholic monarch to the throne. The plotters secured the lease to a small part of the basement beneath the House of Lords, and Fawkes was placed in charge of the gunpowder they were planning to use. However, the authorities were tipped off and searched Westminster Palace during the early hours of the 5th of November and found Fawkes in the basement alone guarding the explosives. He was questioned and tortured over the course of the next few days and eventually broke down. According to Fawkes, 20 barrels of gunpowder were brought at first, followed by another 16 on the 20th of July. On the 28th of July however, the ever-present threat of the plague delayed the opening of Parliament until Tuesday, the 5th of November. As he was about to be executed on the 31st January, Fawkes jumped from the scaffold where he was about to be hanged and broke his neck.

Guy Fawkes is firmly associated with the Gunpowder Plot and on the 5th of November 1605, Londoners were encouraged to celebrate the King's escape from assassination by lighting bonfires. Parliament designated November 5th as a day of thanksgiving known as 'the joyful day of deliverance' and remained in force until 1859. Although he was only one of 13 conspirators, Fawkes is today the individual most recognised name associated with the failed Plot.

In Britain, November 5th has often been referred to as 'Guy Fawkes Night', 'Guy Fawkes Day' and 'Bonfire Night'. The latter relates directly back to the original celebration of the 5th of November 1605 when a bonfire was lit along with a fireworks display. Bonfires were accompanied by fireworks and from the 1650s onwards and it became customary to burn 'Guy Fawkes'. The 'Guy' is normally created by children from old clothes, newspapers and a mask. Some Children still carry out the tradition of carrying the guy through the streets asking passersby's for 'a penny for the Guy'. The money is used to buy fireworks to accompany the bonfire in which they will throw 'Guy' into.

Fireworks for Guy Fawkes Night

This is the one night where everyone joins together to make a lot of noise, so get hold of a nice mixture of colour, noises and effects and put together a display for everyone to enjoy.

Some firework tips for you:

- Sparklers are a major crowd pleaser and they make a nice icebreaker before your display. Consider glow sticks too, as they are a safer alternative to Sparklers
- Include traditional items such as Catherine Wheels, Roman Candles and Fountains
- Keep a nice mix of fireworks to cater for everyone. Ground Level fireworks such as fountains, medium level effects including Shot Cakes and Barrages and of course the high effects such as Rockets
- A combined Halloween and Guy Fawkes party creates a great atmosphere with both fancy dress and fireworks too! But make sure you inform your neighbours so they are aware and expect the fireworks that evening
- Have a nice, colourful opening and finish by pairing up some bigger fireworks for added impact. Larger cakes called Single Ignition Display Units can provide a hassle free way of making a mini professional fireworks display. Lighting one fuse, ideal for less experienced firers and for those that don't have time to set a full display up, is a perfect way to end a fireworks display

Bonfire advice

Letting off loads of fireworks is great fun but there's nothing like a good bonfire too! But make sure you consider all safety aspects before starting a bonfire! Ultimately you need to decide whether you really need to have a bonfire? Don't be pressurised by the occasion to provide one if it is unsafe to do so. Unfortunately, fire and explosives do not mix, so you have to be extremely careful when burning a bonfire along with a fireworks display. Here are some tips to help you prepare:

- The safest option is to start your bonfire after the firework display has finished
- If you intend to have a display while the fire is going, do not have the audience viewing point between the fire and the firework area. To be safe you should aim to have the fire at least 30-50m from the audience zone
- In short, it is not practical or safe to try and have a bonfire and fireworks going at the same time in the back garden
- Never use flammable materials to light the bonfire
- Always turn the fire over before lighting it to make sure there are no sheltering animals
- Your local fire brigade will be very happy to give you more advice. Look for your local office and contact them for further information. Tell the fire brigade if you're planning a large or public bonfire so they are aware and take a mobile phone you in case of any problems