

The gunpowder is smuggled to Westminster

[Richard Lintern]

To blow up the House of Lords the plotters would need gunpowder...in vast quantities .

In theory the Government controlled how the explosive was produced and distributed, but it could also be obtained by 'unofficial means'.

Luckily for the plotters, a recent peace treaty between England and Spain had left a glut of it in the hands of several private merchants.

Ringleader Robert Catesby decided to first store the gunpowder at his lodgings in Lambeth. In the autumn of 1604, he enlisted his trusted acquaintance Robert Keyes to guard the explosives.

Catesby's Lambeth house was just on the other side of the river from Parliament and barrels could easily be ferried across under the cover of darkness.

Then in March 1605, the plotters had a lucky breakthrough. Thomas Percy, who was a royal bodyguard, managed to rent a vault that was directly beneath the House of Lords.

Guy Fawkes, posing as Percy's servant, stowed away 36 barrels in the vault over the next four months.

Fawkes was an expert in explosives. In August he realised the damp in the cellar had damaged some of the gunpowder and replaced it with a fresh batch.

By the 4th of November, the day before the state opening of Parliament, everything was ready. That evening Guy Fawkes loitered near the vault. He had matches and fuses in his pockets and was ready to set off the massive explosion.

But it was not to be. Just after midnight a search party found Guy Fawkes and the carefully hidden barrels of gunpowder and arrested him on the spot.

The gunpowder was then taken to the Royal Armouries at the Tower of London. would be used by the state it had meant to destroy.