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The fifth of November

Bonfire Night is 5 November because official commemoration was written into law. The fire, the Guy, and the fireworks came after.

UK Parliament says the Gunpowder Plot "is commemorated to this day on Bonfire Night – 5 November." The Thanksgiving Act of 1606 "made services and sermons commemorating the Plot on the 5 November an annual event." English Heritage, for the same year, says it became mandatory for all English churches to host a service on that day. Other celebrations followed: bonfires, puppet shows, and official artillery salutes.

In 1673, English Heritage says, crowds began parading an effigy and stringing it up above a bonfire — "initially in the form of the Pope." "It was during the 1800s that the figure burnt above a bonfire became the familiar Guy Fawkes of today." And then a later, careful sentence: "These days, Bonfire Night celebrations are stripped of their anti-Catholic sentiment." Fireworks, a bonfire, and revelry take centre stage.

A date worth remembering

Parliament's aftermath page also points to the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, under a heading about the growth of toleration. The official story of the fifth is not only a cellar in 1605. It is also what the commemorations became.

A short quiz

1. What did the Thanksgiving Act of 1606 do?
2. What was the 1673 effigy, according to English Heritage?
3. When did the familiar Guy Fawkes figure arrive?

Answers. 1. It made services and sermons on 5 November an annual event. 2. Initially, the Pope. 3. In the 1800s.

Wording from UK Parliament, aftermath, and English Heritage, "The Real Story of Bonfire Night," checked 17 November 2026.
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