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Thirty-six barrels

Guy Fawkes is the name everyone remembers. Official pages put Robert Catesby at the centre of the plot, and Fawkes in the cellar with the gunpowder.

English Heritage calls Catesby “the charismatic mastermind behind it all.” UK Parliament’s people page uses the same word. Fawkes, Parliament says, was “recruited as the gunpowder expert.” His role, English Heritage says, was to light the fuse, detonating 36 barrels of gunpowder. The Commons Journal page records the same number: “36 barrels of gunpowder in the vault under the House.”

In March 1605, English Heritage says, an undercroft below the House of Lords became available. Fawkes assumed the identity of John Johnson, and later signed his confession as Guido, the Italianised form of his name, adopted while fighting for Spain. The plotters numbered thirteen, including Catesby’s servant, Thomas Bates.

A letter, carefully worded

A few days before, Lord Monteagle received a letter citing “they shall receive a terrible blow,” and took it to the King. Parliament says “it may have been Tresham who sent the Monteagle letter.” That “may” is part of the official sentence.

A short quiz

1. Who do official pages name as the mastermind?
2. How many barrels do English Heritage and the Journal page both name?
3. What alias does English Heritage say Fawkes assumed?

Answers. 1. Robert Catesby. 2. 36. 3. John Johnson.

Wording from UK Parliament (people; House of Commons Journal) and English Heritage, checked 17 November 2026.
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