

The significance of the gunpowder plot for catholics during 1605 – 1620 essay



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This essay will discuss the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 when a group of catholic noblemen plotted to blow up the English House of Parliament; the target of the plot was King James VI of Scotland and I of England. This essay will focus on how the event impacted Catholics and their treatment in society and law after the event. Primary sources including letters, Parliamentary documents and their insight into how the event impacted Catholics in the years after the event will be used to provide evidence and Secondary sources to provide different historians views on the treatment of Catholics.

The gunpowder plot had a significant effect on the catholic community due to the new laws and oaths put in place by the strongly protestant parliament and House of Lords. An example of this would be the Oath of Obedience, a law put in place by James I on June 22nd 1606, this meant all Catholics had to swear their allegiance to the king as head of church instead of the pope; this followed the Popish recusant's act of 1605 which increased the watch on Catholics by government and the education of their children in the true religion, this being Protestantism.

The impact on Catholics because of this oath was great as they had to swear against their faith causing them in God's eyes to be heretics. An effect of the plot was that previous laws against their religion where brought back into parliament and strengthened due to James protestant upbringing and the reaction of society after the plot, To keep Protestants satisfied parliament where under pressure to victimise all Catholics and not just those who were connected to the plot; the protestants where scared that Catholicism could retain its hold in Britain.

Catholic priests were under scrutiny for the writings, beliefs and connections (to the plotters) they had in the years before and after the Gunpowder plot. These were classed as "heretical, treasonable and damnable" to use the quote in Father Henry Garnet's trial, a Catholic priest who was trialled in connection to the plotter Robert Catesby. The trial of Father Henry Garnet, conducted by the Privy Council, was preceded by his connections to Robert Catesby but also his writings after the gunpowder plot; this was conducted on 13th February 1606. This trial was of significance for Catholics as it showed the Catholic population the opinions in parliament and more importantly the king's opinion on Catholicism.

Catholics were continually under persecution by the government after the gunpowder plot, opinionated actions in society like the vote were withheld from the Catholic community until 1829, this can be seen as a major impact on Catholic opinion due to the gunpowder plot causing mistrust and fear of the Catholics. Until 1797 no Catholic male could vote in elections, and until after 1829 they could not vote in elections to parliament" Alan Haynes wrote in argument that "the gunpowder that did not explode, despite the earnest tending of Guy Fawkes, nevertheless managed to cause a severe, albeit invisible, national wound." This suggests that even after the plot Catholics were withdrawn from society, their opinions invalid and their faith ridiculed for centuries after, giving reason for the harsh reputation of Protestants' treatment of Catholics.

There were few social aspects of the impact of the gunpowder plot for Catholics but in 1697 the country was obsessed with the fear of Catholic conspiracy once more. Cartoons and portraits were made after the plot to <https://assignbuster.com/the-significance-of-the-gunpowder-plot-for-catholics-during-1605-1620-essay/>

celebrate the fail of the plot but also to put fear onto the protestant population, the new printing press made publication of leaflets and cartoons easier and quicker than in Elizabeth's reign.

Puritans, the most extreme group of Protestants, printed cartoons to establish fear amongst the Protestant community and implicate catholic conspiracies. See figure 1]The cartoon was originally printed in 1612; this reprint in 1697 shows fear off another catholic conspiracy. The cartoon depicts, as the title suggests, the papist powder treason which is what the gunpowder plot was latter known as. From 1678 to 1681 the idea of ' The Popish Plot' took over conversation and became an obsession in the country. The Plot, which this time was entirely fictional, was created to scare the country into believing that Catholics where conspiring to dethrone Charles II like they had done in 1605 with the gunpowder plot.

The cartoon shows parliament under one archway in session and Guy Fawkes in the other with the gunpowder to blow up parliament. This false plot was designed to create fear amongst the protestant community, it replicates the gunpowder plot of 1605, this print and the idea of a second plot increased the division in society for Catholics, a significant impact on the treatment of Catholics after the plot as even 80 years later the puritans still printed propaganda, the cartoon also implies the shunning off know Catholics in society.

This occurrence was one of many replications of the plot, causing severe repercussions for Catholics. Social division after the plot included Catholics going against each other; those connected with the plot where at times out

casted by other Catholics, this increasing divide in community and at times affected the sentencing of other Catholics who were included in the plot or in few cases only knowing the conspirators.

Social figures such as Anne Vaux who supported conspirators like the Jesuit priest Father Henry Garnet, Jesuits being an order of roman catholic priests, where called into prosecution due to their involvement socially with the plotters, in the case of Anne Vaux she set up houses to help hide the conspirators after the plot: In 1625 she was arrested and convicted of Recusancy.

Some Catholics like the Fortescues, another highly social and political family; refused to help the conspirators especially Father John Gerard who looked for lodgings after the plot was turned away by the Fortescues. The different actions of socialites like the Fortescues and the Vaux family subjected Catholics to social separation, in court Catholics were shunned this also occurred with the lower class Catholics, brawls between Protestants and Catholics kicked off in streets.

Social division and political divisions in the 1600's worsened after the gunpowder plot. Historians such as Francis Herring have agreed on this in articles written about the treatment of Catholics after the plot. The plot enforced fears that where already pointed out by protestants before the plot and even in 1620 15 years after the plot fears where still lurking around with puritans. Frances herring states that " Hostility to Catholicism formed an important part of the political crises of the seventeenth century. this suggests that Catholicism affected every day politics and the running of

parliament during this era it can even suggest that the divisions between parliament and Catholics was strengthened by the plot and parliament would go out of its way to affect the Catholics day to day life.

The Anti-Catholic legislation, brought back into place in the summer of 1606, can also agree as this act followed the previous popish recusants act in 1605 (straight after the plot) this act forced Catholics to stop worshipping their faith and a statement from the king proclaiming That many honest men blinded peradventure with some opinions of Popery, as if they be not found in the questions of the Real presence, or in the number of the Sacraments, or some such School-question: yet do they either not know, or at least, not believe all the true grounds of Popery, which is indeed, The mystery of iniquity” the king suggests following the pope as a religious leader is considered treasonable against the King being supreme head of church and that the plotters are blinded by popery.

This affected the treatment of Catholics and signifies where it affected decisions politically and worsened the crisis and threat of religious war in the 1620's. In opposition to this take on James being for the persecution of Catholics Murphy, Carrier and Spary all disagree stating “ subsidies being voted to encourage James to take an anti-Catholic stand”; this statement is backed up by the second session of the first parliament in 1606 where James I is effectively bribed, with the subsidies he needed to solve the crowns finances, in these historians views to enforce and support the Anti-Catholic movement within parliament.

Also Murphy goes on to state that “ the gunpowder plot forced the abandonment of James’s tolerant attitude towards Catholics” this quote tells me that Murphy believes that James had no choice and was ‘ forced’ into giving support for the anti-Catholic movements in parliament giving the alternate opinion of the impact of the plot on James being personal rather than political but changing the Kings views gave it a political nature causing more of an impact than it would have, Parliament being a key factor in making the impact last longer and more severe for the catholic communities.

The significance and impact of the gunpowder plot affected Catholics for decades after. The evidence shows that in the 15 years after the plot, the common link, Parliament affectively aggravated the treatment of Catholics in community and law. The persecution and victimisation of the Catholics had been harsh in Elizabeth’s reign and before the plot was created in the rule of James I, but after this event in history the catholic community was shunned and continually out casted until the 1800’s.

The gunpowder plot affected the lives of Catholics and their role in parliament allowing it to be a significant event in the catholic timeline. The gunpowder plot caused Catholics problems for years after the plot was discovered and between the years 1605 and 1620 Catholics where persecuted, faced public discrimination, forced to be victim of propaganda by the Protestants and the more extreme Puritans they faced harsh laws introduced by the king and parliament and even charges of treason for their faith.

Evidence shows that after the plot James was forced by Parliament into Anti-Catholic movement, Parliament was the key issue for Catholics up until the change of law in the 15 year period after the plot, even until the 1800's parliament still acted as a threat for Catholics, the introduction of new laws and Oaths, Acts and proclamations made being a catholic in the years after the treasonous plot difficult and those who chose to follow the catholic faith where considered to be untrustworthy.

Opinions from Herring, Haynes and Murphy all give different sided views on how the gunpowder plot impacted the lives of individuals but they all have a common link that parliament was to blame for the excessive persecution of Catholics. To say that the Gunpowder plot was the major impact on Catholics would be considered wrong and the real problem after the plot was parliament itself causing disruption and conflict between religion, politics and the country.