

November 5th

Today we remember a dreadful terrorist plot to kill the King and Parliament assembled. A small group of men hired a cellar under the Lords chamber where the King would speak to his Parliament and packed it with barrels of gunpowder. The aim was the mass murder of the government and Parliament of James 1.

The plot was foiled thanks to excellent intelligence work alerted by a note sent by a conspirator to a relative to avoid going to the opening of Parliament. It was decided after the event to remember the near disaster annually by lighting bonfires, a tradition that has continued.

In 1983 I was asked to leave the Grand Hotel where I was staying for the Conservative conference at 3 in the morning after a bomb had been set off and a central part of the hotel had collapsed, killing and maiming some guests. The aim was the same as the Gunpowder plot, to kill leading figures of the government led by Margaret Thatcher.

The Jacobean gunpowder increased tensions with Catholics in England and delayed the necessary passage to religious toleration. The Brighton bomb delayed a peace process in Northern Ireland .

These terrorist events have been put behind us, though they leave deep scars particularly for those who lost loved ones or who were injured in the bombing. The country did move on to reconciliation and to live with differences of faith and outlook. As we witness terrorist attacks and the military responses they evoke elsewhere we should remember that it is possible to find peaceful ways of living with differences.