

GUY FAWKES, WAS HE A TWITCHER?

By Tony Boardman

MY RAMBLINGS are conveyed to you as we celebrate Guy Fawkes or Bonfire Night. A night when considerable money literally goes up in smoke. Don't get me wrong, kids have eagerly awaited the 5th of November, or thereabouts, for quite some time now. I know I did before a certain small Austrian with a ridiculous moustache put a stop on proceedings for a while in the 40s. The curtailment however only whetted one's appetite and gave more excuses to have bonfires and fireworks once the war was won. The image of children grasping parents' hands around a blazing fire anticipating the launch of some spectacular pyrotechnic starburst is the pleasant aspect of a well organised safety first evening.

Fortunately these days, as fireworks have become so expensive, the organised event attracts more parents who would rather pay a few pounds and leave it to the experts to put on the show. Thus everyone goes home satisfied and in one piece.

There will always be the idiot fringe of course, and sad statistics of some appalling injuries are sustained each year, mainly to the youngsters. Indeed the hospitals and fire services up and down the country must dread this time of year.

How does the verse go? "Remember, remember, the 5th of November, of gunpowder, treason and plot. I see no reason why gunpowder, treason and plot should be forgot." Was it a rhyme written by a child or was it the brain child of the advertising depart-

ment of a leading firework manufacturer?

Apart from burning his effigy on top of the bonfire, what consideration, if any, is given to the late Mr. Fawkes? We know that he was born in York and was a soldier of distinction, but he was a devout Catholic at a time when the faith was not in favour in this country. History records that as an avenging angel and instrument of destruction of Parliament and its Protestant King, he was as successful as dear old 'Eddie the Eagle' was at ski-jumping!!

In actual fact he was the original "Fall Guy", for he drew the short straw, or he may have volunteered, for what was the most dangerous job of all, the instigator of the dreadful catastrophe. Unfortunately, unbeknown to him, one of the plot sympathisers who had a friend due to attend parliament got cold feet and suggested that it might not be a good idea to put in an appearance. The so-called friend, (actually Fawkes brother-in-law), put two and two together and reported his suspicions to the authorities who gave immediate priority to searching the cellars beneath the parliament building.

The rest, as they say, is history, and the judges of the day were swift to mete out the most painful and humiliating punishment on the plotters when they were tracked down. One could almost say that the Gunpowder Plot ended up a bit of a damp squib!

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A new word has crept into the English language, I refer to the verb "to twitch". My old school dictionary, which is never far from my side, particularly when writing these articles, defines it best as a spasmodic contraction of the muscles. A nervous tic, in fact. Nowadays a "twitcher" it seems has to be eccentric, affluent and prepared to travel at short notice. No, he or she is not another form of James Bond, for they are merely bird watchers, but with a distinct difference to the norm. They are privy to information of sightings of rare, often bemused birds, that find themselves completely off-course and presumably grateful to find dry land, up and down the breadth of the British Isles.

Recently a small red flanked blue-tail migrating from chilly Finland on its way to Asia found itself in a field near Swanage in Dorset. What the poor bird must have thought as it hopped about considering its navigational malfunction, to find over 4,000 massed "Twitchers" armed with spy-glasses, binoculars and cameras gawping over a hastily erected fence. The farmer, a shrewd man with an eye to business had opened up his field and was charging car owners £1.50 a time, and raised hundreds of pounds, happily, for a charity for the disabled.

Apparently another red flanked bluetail alighted in the Shetland Islands some time ago, and a "Birder", as these professionals prefer to be called, chartered a helicopter at a cost of £1,000, only to discover that the bird had flown before he had. Me, I think I'll settle for what I can see

visiting our garden and around the fields and lanes. I wonder if we shall have a blackcap over-winter with us this year?

By the way, whilst realising that it is an added burden on the expense account, please try and remember the birds in your garden, and they will provide you with literally hours of pleasure watching their feeding antics.

Some folk believe that feeding the birds is a question of chucking out a few dry stale bread crusts, which, if left, will in fact attract vermin. Bread or toast by all means, but break it up and soak it in warm water and place it on a table, preferably cat proof, and you should soon attract some winged action. Scraps of meat on the bone such as cooked chicken, in a wire cage like a nut holder are good; rotting apples — don't just throw them away — they are great favourites with thrushes and blackbirds. Porridge, grated cheese are acceptable, as is unwanted fat from the roast mixed with wild bird seed when cool.

Always provide birds with access to water which they need not only for drinking, but for bathing too. Believe me, they will reward you for your trouble and you will more than likely be saving their lives, particularly if we are in for an Arctic winter, as some predict.

Finally, as we cruise rapidly and inevitably towards another Christmas, may I wish you all a very happy Christmas, and may it be spent in good company with family and friends in warmth. And like those birds I've just mentioned outside, may there be enough food and drink for you too.

Speak to you again in '94.