

48

On Her Majesty's Service

WASC 348



348

WASC 348

Did Guy Fawkes buy his gunpowder from
a Royal Ordnance Factory?
E. Lindsay Blee. 1947(?)

Subject

~~Dr. Pate~~ This may be of interest to you. It is written by Lindray. See who was at this program in both wars as I.D.A. It has not been published (but if it would not appeal to the security people.)

31/2/57.

~~Dr. Hodge~~

will you please open a file for document in the History of William Clegg
Form 5.8.84 put this in it.

afterwards pl. circulate to senior staff.

H.D.P.
19.11.48

Mr Rogers

AHw

article on history of W.A. written by Sunday. See

Suggested it is kept with other historical papers of the same nature

D.L.H.

16/12/48

Did Guy Fawkes buy his gunpowder from a Royal Ordnance Factory?

The question may sound absurd, but it seems most probable that he did.

In his time it was of course a private factory, and not a Government concern, for it was not taken over by the Board of Ordnance till 1787, nearly 200 years later, but it has the proud record of being the oldest explosives factory still in existence, and has been manufacturing continuously for nearly 400 years.

It still clings to its old name, the Royal Gunpowder Factory, for it built up its reputation on Gunpowder, the only explosives known for the first 300 years of its existence; but it is chiefly

(1)

(2)

Did Guy Fawkes buy his gunpowder from a
Royal Ordnance Factory?

The question may sound absurd, but it seems most probable that he did.

In his time it was of course a private factory, and not a Government concern, for it was not taken over by the Board of Ordnance till 1787, nearly 200 years later, but it has the proud record of being the oldest explosives factory still in existence, and has been manufacturing continuously for nearly 400 years.

It still clings to its old name, the Royal Gunpowder Factory, for it built up its reputation on Gunpowder, the only explosives known for the first 300 years of its existence; but it is chiefly other forms which it has been required to produce since then, and, during the present century, it has built up a new reputation on Cordite, making it even more famous than in the Gunpowder days.

The "Gunpowder" atmosphere still lingers however, and one cannot help feeling how it persists even today. It is rather the same as with such institutions as Lloyds, Trinity House, Oxford or Cambridge, - however up to date the present methods may be, the flavour of the past remains. The atmosphere still suggests quill pens and post-chaises rather than typewriters and telephones.

Today at Waltham Abbey, where the Royal Gunpowder Factory is situated, the appearance of many parts of the place presents nothing which would seem incongruous as a background for such characters as Mr. Fawkes, Mr. Catesby, Mr. Percy, or Mr. Meaze, as they must have appeared when visiting the place in those early days of the 17th. Century.

Mr. Meaze may strike you as an unfamiliar character in this group. You will recognise him better under his real name, Father Garnet, - but more of him later.

The question is, was the powder bought there?

You may not care, but should you be curious about the matter, here is the argument.

It is hardly surprising that no record exists as to where the conspirators obtained their gunpowder. Considerable care must have been taken to ensure that the purchases, (there seem to have been at least three separate transactions), were kept as secret as possible, and the precautions were probably sufficient to ensure that nothing could be proved against the mills which had been induced to supply the stuff.

After the discovery of the plot, there would be little object in taking the trouble to incriminate the sellers, who might have made their sales, particularly if in the form of several small supplies, in perfectly good faith. In those days, when it was quite usual for ordinary citizens to carry firearms for protection, and when, apart from its homicidal uses, gunpowder was the only form of propellant for sporting guns etc., such sales would be nothing out of the ordinary unless there were something remarkable about the quantity. Firearms, and the necessary powder and shot for them, were not controlled by license as they are today.

Another possibility is, that if Father Gerard's theory is correct, and that the Government knew all about the plot long before they "discovered" it, ("What was the Gunpowder Plot" - 1987), the powder might have been supplied without difficulty in quite large quantities with the tacit consent of the authorities. Matters could be so arranged that no obstacle should be put in the way, and certainly so that nothing should transpire afterwards to show the source from which supplies had been obtained.

Suggestions have been made that the gunpowder may have been brought over from the Low Countries, but there would be serious difficulties about this. In the first place it would have to be smuggled, and Gunpowder would not be an ideal or popular cargo for such a venture. It was still at that time something of a novelty, and much feared by the average person. There would also be objections in that ordinary smuggling methods, which often involved "sinking" the cargo or landing it on exposed beaches, could not be used, for the powder must at all costs be protected from damp.

It seems unlikely therefore that all the gunpowder they needed must have been purchased from mills somewhere in this country, and, with the state of the roads as we know them to have been in the early 17th. Century, it would be necessary that it should not have to be carried from too great a distance. The secrecy of the whole business would also make it very undesirable that it should have to travel over the public highway at all if it could possibly be avoided.

Where could a better source be found than the Powder Mills at Waltham Abbey? They were then quite a small concern in private hands, but nevertheless mills which were well established, for we know from a reference to them in the Callendar of State Papers (1561), that they had been in existence for at least 40 years.

There were several other mills in the country of course, but it is very doubtful if there were any showing advantages which could compare with those at Waltham.

In the first place, the conspirators could hardly have gone to a place where they were quite unknown, or where they had no excuse at all for making their purchases. At Waltham they had such an excuse ready made, for at White Webbs, only about two miles away, in the well known sporting district of Enfield Chase, there lived at that time, under the assumed name of Mr. Meaze, One of the principal conspirators, Father Garnet, Provincial of the English Jesuits. He seems to have been rather given to the use of assumed names, of which Mr. Meaze was only one of several, but as Mr. Meaze he seems to have been accepted locally as a highly respected citizen, and he certainly lived in what must have been a very imposing country residence.

White Webbs had been built in Queen Elizabeth's time, and was in fact granted by her to her Physician, Robert Huicke. Although it was pulled down in 1790 its site may be found today in the grounds of the present Middleton House.

Anyone living in such a place would have a legitimate reason for purchasing powder for sporting guns etc., or, there is another possibility, that "Mr. Meaze" might have disclosed his real identity to some ardent Roman Catholic in the employ of the Gunpowder Mills who would very likely be prepared to oblige Holy Church and ask no

questions, even if the circumstances seemed a bit unusual.

Such a transaction need not necessarily have been in the form of a purchase at all. The Mills at Waltham Abbey were then, as they are today, a perfect maze of waterways, used primarily as power for working the powder mills themselves by means of water wheels, but apart from this, their principal use, the intricate system of streams and canals formed a convenient means of transport for the gunpowder, both during the process of manufacture and subsequently.

Even today, the various waterways inside the factory communicate with the main River Lee outside it at several points, and in such a way as to make it almost impossible to prevent unauthorised entry or exit by boat. It is unlikely that it was any easier to control the traffic on these waterways 300 years ago, and it can be taken as a fact that the powder could have been removed, either with or without cooperation from someone inside the factory, without any serious difficulty. On the other hand, the stuff may have been bought quite honestly.

Now it is known that Father Garnet, alias Mr. Meaze, was living at White Webbs at the time of the conspiracy, and so was only about two miles from the Waltham Abbey Mills. It is also known that Fawkes, Percy, Catesby, and various other conspirators were frequent visitors at the place, and were actually there up to a few days previous to the 5th. November 1605.

Apart from the convenience of buying the powder without much difficulty or suspicion, from a reliable concern almost on their doorstep, there were other advantages which would weigh very heavily.

As mentioned before, there is, naturally enough, no record at all as to the actual source from which the powder was secured, and the first we hear of it in the official records is when it was stored at a house in Lambeth. This house was one which Percy had rented and in which he had installed Keyes as caretaker to look after it and its contents. The idea was to use the place as a temporary store where the powder could be gradually accumulated until it was time to transfer it across the river to the second house which Percy had taken, next to the Parliament House itself.

How easy it would be to bring the powder secretly and safely from Waltham to Lambeth. A smooth and fairly secluded waterway for the entire distance, first, down the Lee, and then up the Thames from Blackwall. It seems that nothing could be more ideal.

According to the confessions of Fawkes and Winter, which roughly agree, and which form the principal evidence from which we can ascertain the facts, the first consignment of powder was acquired a little before Christmas 1604, for, according to Fawkes' confession:-

"It was about Christmas when we brought our mine unto the wall, and about Candlemass we had wrought the wall half through. We had before this provided and brought into the house 20 barrells of powder."

This is confirmed in Winter's confession, where he states:-
"This hindered our beginning until a fortnight before
"Christmas, by which time both Mr. Percy and Mr. Wright
"were come to London, and we against their coming had
"provided a good part of the powder."

A second lot seems to have been bought between then and
September, for Fawkes states later on in his confession that:-
"about Easter, the Parliament being prorogued till
"October next, we dispersed ourselves.... In the
"meantime, Percy, having the key of the cellar, laid
"in more powder and wood into it."

A third lot is mentioned as being bought by Fawkes and Winter
jointly about the beginning of September, when Fawkes returned from
the Low Countries, for he states, after the forgoing that:-
"I returned about the beginning of September next, and
"then, receoving the key again of Percy, we brought in
"more powder and billets to cover the ~~same~~ again, and
"so I went into the country till 30th. October."
This again is confirmed by Winter's confession, in which he
says:-

"Mr. Fawkes departed about Easter for Flanders, and
"returned the latter end of August. About this
"time did Mr. Percy and Mr. Catesby meet at the Bath.
"Meanwhile Mr. Fawkes and myself alone bought some new
"powder as suspecting the first to be dank, and conveyed
"it to the cellar."

Their fears about the previous lots being "dank" were probably
only too well founded if no special precautions had been taken.

Catesby seems to have financed the business all through, an
unenviable job seeing that he had to buy right at the "top of the
market", for, according to investigations which have been made, the
price of gunpowder has never been higher in this country before or
since that time!

Whoever may have carried out the actual purchases, and whoever
arranged the transport and finance, the real truth and all the
details of the transaction must have been kept very secret. We can
only consider "probabilities", but it seems that on circumstantial
evidence alone there is a strong case for supposing that the Royal
Gunpowder Factory, now a highly respectable Government institution,
may have an interesting stain on its past.

It is a strange place in a strange district, and should you
visit the Lee Valley below Waltham Abbey you need hardly be surprised
if on a dark winters evening, when the mists are rising off the
marshes and the river, you should see a barge of an old fashioned type,
attended by men in peculiar old fashioned clothes, moving slowly down
the stream. The ghosts of the conspirators and their guilty cargo
may well haunt the neighbourhood, and perhaps they still occasionally
re-enact their dreadful journey down the Lee and up the Thames.
If you should see such a sight in the distance do not be
surprised. Many barges and their crews on the Lee would answer to
this description. But perhaps you had better not go too close.
It may be just an ordinary barge - or of course it may not.

WASC 348

DID GUY FAWKES BUY HIS GUNPOWDER
FROM A ROYAL ORDNANCE FACTORY?

E Lindsay Blee 1947(?)

Did Guy Fawkes buy his gunpowder from a
Royal Ordnance Factory?

The question may sound absurd, but it seems most probable that he did.

In his time it was of course a private factory, and not a Government concern, for it was not taken over by the Board of Ordnance till 1787, nearly 200 years later, but it has the proud record of being the oldest explosives factory still in existence, and has been manufacturing continuously for nearly 400 years.

It still clings to its old name, the Royal Gunpowder Factory, for it built up its reputation on Gunpowder, the only explosives known for the first 300 years of its existence; but it is chiefly other forms which it has been required to produce since then, and, during the present century, it has built up a new reputation on Cordite, making it even more famous than in the Gunpowder days.

The "Gunpowder" atmosphere still lingers, however, and one cannot help feeling how it persists even to-day. It is rather the same as with such institutions as Lloyds, Trinity House, Oxford or Cambridge, - however up-to-date the present methods may be, the flavour of the past remains. The atmosphere still suggests quill pens and post-chaises rather than typewriters and telephones.

To-day at Waltham Abbey, where the Royal Gunpowder Factory is situated, the appearance of many parts of the place presents nothing which would seem incongruous as a background for such characters as Mr Fawkes, Mr Catesby, Mr Percy, or Mr Meaze, as they must have appeared when visiting it in those early days of the 17th Century.

Mr Meaze may strike you as an unfamiliar character in this group. You will recognise him better under his real name, Father Garnet, - but more of him later.

The question is, was the powder bought there?

You may not care, but should you be curious about the matter, here is the argument.

It is hardly surprising that no record exists as to where the conspirators obtained their gunpowder. Considerable care must have been taken to ensure that the purchases, (there seem to have been at least three separate transactions), were kept as secret as possible, and the precautions were probably sufficient to ensure that nothing could be proved against the mills which had been induced to supply the stuff.

After the discovery of the plot, there would be little object in taking the trouble to incriminate the sellers, who might have made their sales, particularly if in the form of several small supplies, in perfectly good faith. In those days, when it was quite usual for ordinary citizens to carry firearms for protection, and when, apart from its homicidal uses, gunpowder was the only form of propellant for sporting guns etc, such sales would be nothing out of the ordinary unless there were something remarkable about the quantity. Firearms, and the necessary powder and shot for them, were not controlled by license as they are to-day.

Anyone living in such a place would have a legitimate reason for purchasing powder for sporting guns etc, or, there is another possibility, that "Mr Meaze" might have disclosed his real identity to some ardent Roman Catholic in the employ of the Gunpowder Mills who would very likely be prepared to oblige Holy Church and ask no questions, even if the circumstances seemed a bit unusual.

Such a transaction need not necessarily have been in the form of a purchase at all. The Mills at Waltham Abbey were then, as they are to-day, a perfect maze of waterways, used primarily as power for working the powder mills themselves by means of water wheels, but apart from this, their principal use, the intricate system of streams and canals formed a convenient means of transport for the gunpowder, both during the process of manufacture and subsequently.

Even to-day, the various waterways inside the factory communicate with the main River Lee outside it at several points, and in such a way as to make it almost impossible to prevent unauthorised entry or exit by boats. It is unlikely that it was any easier to control the traffic on these waterways 300 years ago, and it can be taken as a fact that the powder could have been removed, either with or without co-operation from someone inside the factory, without any serious difficulty. On the other hand, the stuff may have been bought quite honestly.

Now it is known that Father Garnet, alias Mr Meaze, was living at White Webbs at the time of the conspiracy, and so was only about two miles from the Waltham Abbey Mills. It is also known that Fawkes, Percy, Catesby, and various other conspirators were frequent visitors at the place, and were actually there up to a few days previous to the 5th November 1605.

Apart from the convenience of buying the powder without much difficulty or suspicion, from a reliable concern almost on their doorstep, there were other advantages which would weigh very heavily.

As mentioned before, there is, naturally enough, no record at all as to the actual source from which the powder was secured, and the first we hear of it in the official records is when it was stored at a house in Lambeth. This house was one which Percy had rented and in which he had installed Keyes as caretaker to look after it and its contents. The idea was to use the place as a temporary store where the powder could be gradually accumulated until it was time to transfer it across the river to the second house which Percy had taken, next to the Parliament House itself.

How easy it would be to bring the powder secretly and safely from Waltham to Lambeth. A smooth and fairly secluded waterway for the entire distance, first, down the Lea, and then up the Thames from Blackwall. It seems that nothing could be more ideal.

According to the confessions of Fawkes and Winter, which roughly agree, and which forms the principal evidence from which we can ascertain the facts, the first consignment of powder was acquired a little before Christmas 1604, for, according to Fawkes' confession:-

"It was about Christmas when we brought our mine unto the wall, and about Candlemass we had wrought the wall half through We had before this provided and brought into the house 20 barrels of powder."

This is confirmed in Winter's confession, where he stated:-

"This hindered our beginning until a fortnight before Christmas, by which time both Mr Percy and Mr Wright were come to London, and we against their coming had provided a good part of the powder."

A second lot seems to have been bought between then and September, for Fawkes states later on in his confession that:-

"About Easter, the Parliament being prorogued till October next, we dispersed ourselves In the meantime, Percy, having the key of the cellar, laid in more powder and wood into it."

A third lot is mentioned as being bought by Fawkes and Winter jointly about the beginning of September, when Fawkes returned from the Low Countries, for he states, after the foregoing that:-

"I returned about the beginning of September next, and then, recovering the key again of Percy, we brought in more powder and billets to cover the same again, and so I went into the country till 30th October."

This again is confirmed by Winter's confession, in which he says:-

"Mr Fawkes departed about Easter for Flanders, and returned the latter end of August.About this time did Mr Percy and Mr Catesby meet at the Bath. Meanwhile Mr Fawkes and myself along bought some new powder as suspecting the first to be dank, and conveyed it to the cellar."

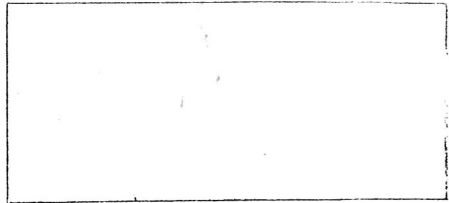
Their fears about the previous lots being "dank" were probably only too well founded if no special precautions had been taken.

Catesby seems to have financed the business all through, an unenviable job seeing that he had to buy right at the "top of the market", for, according to investigations which have been made, the price of gunpowder has never been higher in this country before or since that time!

Whoever may have carried out the actual purchases, and whoever arranged the transport and finance, the real truth and all the details of the transaction must have been kept very secret. We can only consider "probabilities", but it seems that on circumstantial evidence alone there is a strong case for supposing that the Royal Gunpowder Factory, now a highly respectable Government institution, may have an interesting stain on its past.

It is a strange place in a strange district, and should you visit the Lea Valley below Waltham Abbey you need hardly be surprised if on a dark winter's evening, when the mists are rising off the marshes and the river, you should see a barge of an old fashioned type, attended by men in peculiar old fashioned clothes, moving slowly down the stream. The ghosts of the conspirators and their guilty cargo may well haunt the neighbourhood, and perhaps they still occasionally re-enact their dreadful journey down the Lea and up the Thames.

If you should see such a sight in the distance do not be surprised. Many barges and their crews on the Lea would answer to this description. But perhaps you had better not go too close. It may be just an ordinary barge - or of course it may not.



Subject

~~Dr. Post~~ This may be of interest to you. It is written by Lindsay Blee who was at this factory in both wars as I.G.A. It has not been published (part of it would not appeal to the security people.)

31/5/48

~~Dr. Hodge~~

Will you please open a file for documents on the History of ^{R.S.P.} Wallham Abbey and put this in it.

afterwards pl. circulate to senior staff.

H.S.P.
19.1.48

~~Mr Baynes~~

A/W

article on history of W.A written by Lindsay Blee

Suggest it is kept with other historical papers of the same nature

D.L.H.

16/12/48

(1) WASC 348

Did Guy Fawkes buy his gunpowder from a
Royal Ordnance Factory?

The question may sound absurd, but it seems most probable that he did.

In his time it was of course a private factory, and not a Government concern, for it was not taken over by the Board of Ordnance till 1787, nearly 200 years later, but it has the proud record of being the oldest explosives factory still in existence, and has been manufacturing continuously for nearly 400 years.

It still clings to its old name, the Royal Gunpowder Factory, for it built up its reputation on Gunpowder, the only explosives known for the first 300 years of its existence; but it is chiefly other forms which it has been required to produce since then, and, during the present century, it has built up a new reputation on Cordite, making it even more famous than in the Gunpowder days.

The "Gunpowder" atmosphere still lingers however, and one cannot help feeling how it persists even today. It is rather the same as with such institutions as Lloyds, Trinity House, Oxford or Cambridge, - however up to date the present methods may be, the flavour of the past remains. The atmosphere still suggests quill pens and post-chaises rather than typewriters and telephones.

Today at Waltham Abbey, where the Royal Gunpowder Factory is situated, the appearance of many parts of the place presents nothing which would seem incongruous as a background for such characters as Mr. Fawkes, Mr. Catesby, Mr. Percy, or Mr. Meaze, as they must have appeared when visiting ~~the place~~ in those early days of the 17th. Century.

Mr. Meaze may strike you as an unfamiliar character in this group. You will recognise him better under his real name, Father Garnet, - but more of him later.

The question is, was the powder bought there?

You may not care, but should you be curious about the matter, here is the argument.

It is hardly surprising that no record exists as to where the conspirators obtained their gunpowder. Considerable care must have been taken to ensure that the purchases, (there seem to have been at least three separate transactions), were kept as secret as possible, and the precautions were probably sufficient to ensure that nothing could be proved against the mills which had been induced to supply the stuff.

After the discovery of the plot, there would be little object in taking the trouble to incriminate the sellers, who might have made their sales, particularly if in the form of several small supplies, in perfectly good faith. In those days, when it was quite usual for ordinary citizens to carry firearms for protection, and when, apart from its homicidal uses, gunpowder was the only form of propellant for sporting guns etc., such sales would be nothing out of the ordinary unless there were something remarkable about the quantity. Firearms, and the necessary powder and shot for them, were not controlled by license as they are today.

Another possibility is, that if Father Gerard's theory is correct, and that the Government knew all about the plot long before they "discovered" it, ("What was the Gunpowder Plot" - 1987), the powder might have been supplied without difficulty in quite large quantities with the tacit consent of the authorities. Matters could be so arranged that no obstacle should be put in the way, and certainly so that nothing should transpire afterwards to show the source from which supplies had been obtained.

Suggestions have been made that the gunpowder may have been brought over from the Low Countries, but there would be serious difficulties about this. In the first place it would have to be smuggled, and Gunpowder would not be an ideal or popular cargo for such a venture. It was still at that time something of a novelty, and much feared by the average person. There would also be objections in that ordinary smuggling methods, which often involved "sinking" the cargo or landing it on exposed beaches, could not be used, for the powder must at all costs be protected from damp.

It seems likely therefore that all the gunpowder they needed must have been purchased from mills somewhere in this country, and, with the state of the roads as we know them to have been in the early 17th. Century, it would be necessary that it should not have to be carried from too great a distance. The secrecy of the whole business would also make it very undesirable that it should have to travel over the public highway at all if it could possibly be avoided.

Where could a better source be found than the Powder Mills at Waltham Abbey? They were then quite a small concern in private hands, but nevertheless mills which were well established, for we know from a reference to them in the Callendar of State Papers (1581), that they had been in existence for at least 40 years.

There were several other mills in the country of course, but it is very doubtful if there were any showing advantages which could compare with those at Waltham.

In the first place, the conspirators could hardly have gone to a place where they were quite unknown, or where they had no excuse at all for making their purchases. At Waltham they had such an excuse ready made, for at White Webbs, only about two miles away, in the well known sporting district of Enfield Chase, there lived at that time, under the assumed name of Mr. Meaze, one of the principal conspirators, Father Garnet, Provincial of the English Jesuits. He seems to have been rather given to the use of assumed names, of which Mr. Meaze was only one of several, but as Mr. Meaze he seems to have been accepted locally as a highly respected citizen, and he certainly lived in what must have been a very imposing country residence.

White Webbs had been built in Queen Elizabeth's time, and was in fact granted by her to her Physician, Robert Huicke. Although it was pulled down in 1790 its site may be found today in the grounds of the present Middleton House.

Anyone living in such a place would have a legitimate reason for purchasing powder for sporting guns etc., or, there is another possibility, that "Mr. Meaze" might have disclosed his real identity to some ardent Roman Catholic in the employ of the Gunpowder Mills who would very likely be prepared to oblige Holy Church and ask no

questions, even if the circumstances seemed a bit unusual.

Such a transaction need not necessarily have been in the form of a purchase at all. The Mills at Waltham Abbey were then, as they are today, a perfect maze of waterways, used primarily as power for working the powder mills themselves by means of water wheels, but apart from this, their principal use, the intricate system of streams and canals formed a convenient means of transport for the gunpowder, both during the process of manufacture and subsequently.

Even today, the various waterways inside the factory communicate with the main River Lee outside it at several points, and in such a way as to make it almost impossible to prevent unauthorised entry or exit by boat. It is unlikely that it was any easier to control the traffic on these waterways 300 years ago, and it can be taken as a fact that the powder could have been removed, either with or without cooperation from someone inside the factory, without any serious difficulty. On the other hand, the stuff may have been bought quite honestly.

Now it is known that Father Garnet, alias Mr. Meaze, was living at White Webbs at the time of the conspiracy, and so was only about two miles from the Waltham Abbey Mills. It is also known that Fawkes, Percy, Catesby, and various other conspirators were frequent visitors at the place, and were actually there up to a few days previous to the 5th. November 1605.

Apart from the convenience of buying the powder without much difficulty or suspicion, from a reliable concern almost on their doorstep, there were other advantages which would weigh very heavily.

As mentioned before, there is, naturally enough, no record at all as to the actual source from which the powder was secured, and the first we hear of it in the official records is when it was stored at a house in Lambeth. This house was one which Percy had rented and in which he had installed Keyes as caretaker to look after it and its contents. The idea was to use the place as a temporary store where the powder could be gradually accumulated until it was time to transfer it across the river to the second house which Percy had taken, next to the Parliament House itself.

How easy it would be to bring the powder secretly and safely from Waltham to Lambeth. A smooth and fairly secluded waterway for the entire distance, first, down the Lee, and then up the Thames from Blackwall. It seems that nothing could be more ideal.

According to the confessions of Fawkes and Winter, which roughly agree, and which form the principal evidence from which we can ascertain the facts, the first consignment of powder was acquired a little before Christmas 1604, for, according to Fawkes' confession:-

"It was about Christmas when we brought our mine unto the wall, and about Candlemass we had wrought the wall half through. We had before this provided and brought into the house 20 barrells of powder."

This is confirmed in Winter's confession, where he states:-
"This hindered our beginning until a fortnight before
"Christmas, by which time both Mr. Percy and Mr. Wright
"were come to London, and we against their coming had
"provided a good part of the powder."

A second lot seems to have been bought between then and
September, for Hawkes states later on in his confession that:-
"about Easter, the Parliament being prorogued till
"October next, we dispersed ourselves.... . In the
"meantime, Percy, having the key of the cellar, laid
"in more powder and wood into it."

A third lot is mentioned as being bought by Hawkes and Winter
jointly about the beginning of September, when Hawkes returned from
the Low Countries, for he states, after the forgoing that:-

"I returned about the beginning of September next, and
"then, receiving the key again of Percy, we brought in
"more powder and billets to cover the same again, and
"so I went into the country till 30th. October."

This again is confirmed by Winter's confession, in which he
says:-

"Mr. Hawkes departed about Easter for Flanders, and
"returned the latter end of August. About this
"time did Mr. Percy and Mr. Catesby meet at the Bath.
"Meanwhile Mr. Hawkes and myself alone bought some new
"powder as suspecting the first to be dank, and conveyed
"it to the cellar."

Their fears about the previous lots being "dank" were probably
only too well founded if no special precautions had been taken.

Catesby seems to have financed the business all through, an
unenviable job seeing that he had to buy right at the "top of the
market", for, according to investigations which have been made, the
price of gunpowder has never been higher in this country before or
since that time!

Whoever may have carried out the actual purchases, and whoever
arranged the transport and finance, the real truth and all the
details of the transaction must have been kept very secret. We can
only consider "probabilities", but it seems that on circumstantial
evidence alone there is a strong case for supposing that the Royal
Gunpowder Factory, now a highly respectable Government institution,
may have an interesting stain on its past.

It is a strange place in a strange district, and should you
visit the Lee Valley below Waltham Abbey you need hardly be surprised
if on a dark winters evening, when the mists are rising off the
marshes and the river, you should see a barge of an old fashioned type,
attended by men in peculiar old fashioned clothes, moving slowly down
the stream. The ghosts of the conspirators and their guilty cargo
may well haunt the neighbourhood, and perhaps they still occasionally
re-enact their dreadful journey down the Lee and up the Thames.

If you should see such a sight in the distance do not be
surprised. Many barges and their crews on the Lee would answer to
this description. But perhaps you had better not go too close.
It may be just an ordinary barge - or of course it may not.