

ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE

WASC 1489

Mr. Maharen

RO(WA) claim to fame

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Westminster Comment

By Sir John Biggs-Davison,
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WHO killed President Kennedy? At least one book has posed and attempted to answer this question differently from official versions of that calamity. I remember as a small boy watching an exciting movie which implicated one of Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet officers (or at least one) in the assassination of that even more famous President of the United States.

Coming nearer home, there are scholarly historians who allege that the Gunpowder Plot was a plot in the other sense of a frame-up of those who were condemned for trying to blow up Monarch, Lords and Commons on the occasion when these, the three elements in every Parliament, are met together — at the State Opening in the House of Peers which many of you have seen, if only on television, in form not so very different from that of 1605.

In King Charles II's reign "knocking and digging" were heard in cellars adjoining the Houses of Parliament. There were uneasy thoughts of November 5th 1605; so the Surveyor of the King's Works was

ordered to inspect the cellars beneath the Chambers of the Lords and the Commons. The official's name was Sir Christopher Wren. As a result of his enquiries, the search of the cellars by Yeomen of the Guard before every State Opening has been performed since those Stuart times.

But why, some readers may be asking, does the Member of Parliament for Epping Forest run on about this old history. Precisely, he replies, because he is MP for Epping Forest. Some time ago I visited the Royal Ordnance Factory at Waltham Abbey. There I heard of the legend that Guy Fawkes obtained his gunpowder in the Abbey.

Which is one fascinating piece of our local history in which more and more of my constituents are taking an interest. Witness the local history societies covering Chigwell, Loughton, Buckhurst Hill and Waltham Abbey itself. Witness the success of the museum set up in Sun Street by Epping Forest District Council.

The Abbey appeal and the preparations, in which I am taking a small part, for the Essex celebration of the

Domesday Book, are further signs that Essex and English people treasure more than ever a glorious heritage.

But talking of Guy Fawkes, I was in the Chamber of the Commons the other night for a debate on terrorism when the Home Secretary's speech was interrupted by screaming demonstrators who threw leaflets upon us. A hard object also landed on the Opposition side.

Some years back, I was one of those who imbibed a choking ration of CS gas when canisters were thrown from the Strangers' Gallery. One of the two landed at my feet. The Chamber emptied. I went back with the Sergeant at Arms who had to remove the Mace, the House being suspended. That's how I swallowed more of the gas than did most.

The possibilities are disturbing — and there can be no absolute security. In the Dublin parliament they have put glass in front of the visitors' galleries. We decided not to. MPs are determined to be accessible to constituents and to other visitors from all over the world.

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