

# Factsheet

## Prisoners Tortured at the Tower of London

### Guy Fawkes and The Gunpowder Plotters

- Perhaps the most famous prisoner who was known to have been tortured at the Tower of London, Guy Fawkes met his fate through the discovery of the Catholic Gunpowder Plot, which aimed to blow up Parliament and kill the Protestant King James I in 1605.
- When Guido 'Guy' Fawkes and his fellow-conspirators were arrested, James I did not hesitate to insist upon torture: '*the gentler Tortures are to be first used upon him et sic per gradus ad ima tenditur* [and then make them worse and worse in stages] *and so God speede your good work*' (6<sup>th</sup> November 1605)
- Fawkes was allegedly shown the rack, but he may have confessed without it. Other accounts suggest that he was tortured by being hung from the manacles.
- The scrawl of his signature on one of his confessions shows that his interrogation had certainly not been 'gentle.' By 8 November Fawkes was beginning to talk, revealing details of the plot and giving names and so all the other conspirators, who had left away from London, were rounded up. Fawkes was interrogated for three days, and signed a confession each night.
- In the end, Fawkes was hung, drawn and quartered at Westminster in 1607 and the rest is history...
- Fawkes' co-conspirator, Ambrose Rochewood, has left his inscription on the walls of the Martin Tower in the Tower of London.

### Anne Askew

- Anne Askew was born in Lincolnshire in 1521. She was a supporter of Martin Luther, giving sermons and distributing Protestant books, which had been banned. She was arrested in 1546 and the Lieutenant of the Tower of London was ordered to torture Anne in an attempt to force her to name other Protestants.
- It is the only reported instance of a woman being tortured in the Tower. In her own words, when she refused to name others who shared her beliefs.... "*Then*

*they did put me on the rack because I confessed no ladies or gentlewomen to be of my opinion, and thereon they kept me a long time. And because I lay still and did not cry, my Lord Chancellor and Master Rich took pains to rack me with their own hands till I was nigh dead...Then the Lieutenant caused me to be loosed from the rack: incontinently I swooned, and then they recovered me again..."*

- After a long period Anne still refused to give names or to recant. Her body was so badly damaged that she had to be carried to her trial. Found guilty of being a Protestant, she was condemned to death and burnt at the stake at Smithfield in 1546.

### **Father John Gerard**

- John Gerard is one of many Catholic priests who were imprisoned and tortured in Elizabeth I's Protestant England, and he has left the most detailed account of being tortured in the Tower. On two occasions in April 1597, Gerard was suspended by the manacles to make him disclose the routes by which letters were being brought to England from Jesuits in the Low Countries and Spain.
- Gerard was held in the Salt Tower at the Tower of London and tortured on three separate occasions by William Waad, later Lieutenant of the Tower.
- Gerard revealed nothing and his confession is signed, so he could still write, though he later said he had lost the use of his fingers. A surviving transcript of his examination contains almost no useful information and he later escaped from the Tower of London.