

Session 3: Why was it claimed that the fire was started by a Catholic conspiracy?

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Colin Haydon

In his prologue to his seminal work on religion and the decline of magic, Keith Thomas listed the most appalling hazard, next to bubonic plague in the 16th and 17th centuries in England, as fire. In towns largely built of wooden houses often cramped closely together, carelessness with cooking, drying laundry or even placing a candle in the wrong place could lead to devastating fires. Destruction of homes and property, loss of life and disastrous economic consequences there ensued. And of course the Great Fire of London is naturally the best-known fire of the early modern period because of its scale within London and also because of the scale of London itself. In 1700 London was 19 times larger than the next town in England (Norwich, at a mere 30,000 people). As we've heard, thousands of homes were destroyed, St Paul's and 87 parish churches, great damage to the port and huge numbers of people left homeless. But there were other famous urban fires as well; at Buckingham, at Dorchester, Marlborough, Stratford upon Avon, Tiverton burnt down three times in the early modern period, and Warwick.

And arson of course was a very worrying crime for those in authority both in the town and in the countryside. Arson leaves minimal evidence (very close to where I live we had an arson case recently which ultimately took four years to properly solve). And of course there was the sense that arson could be a very effective form of plebeian protest; and one thinks of the firing of hay ricks during the early 19th-century swing riots in southern England, a very effective sign of contempt for the wealthy, which of course could be seen for miles.

And given the difficulty in tracking down perpetrators it was of course natural to blame fires, and especially major fires, on incendiaries. In 1689, there was a devastating fire at Alresford in Hampshire which was blamed on James II's Catholic/Irish troops and indeed if you go to Alresford now the town guides still relate this. So the easy answer to my question, 'Why was it claimed that the fire was started by a catholic conspiracy?' might simply be this, 'That when disaster strikes out-groups can be satisfyingly blamed or satisfyingly punished.' And one thinks of the early Christians and the fire that devastated Rome in Nero's reign or the Communists and the Reichstag fire. And this is just one example of wider conspiracy theories; the Black Death and the idea that Jews had poisoned wells to spread it, the persecution of witches in the 16th and 17th centuries, blamed for a range of ills across European society as it became increasingly dislocated. Or political parallels with the belief that the French Revolution had been planned and orchestrated in all its stages by Freemasons or the Nazi mythology of the International Jewish Conspiracy.

Nevertheless, describing the general functions of out-groups is plainly not the whole answer to my question because for the accusation to gain widespread acceptance an out-group needs to be convincing. One thinks of the fires this summer in Greece: not only foreigners but developers with something very tangible to gain. So, the subsidiary question is clearly 'Why were Roman

Catholics, instead of say underground Republicans under Charles II, held to be responsible for the Great Fire?' And the first reason is that since Elizabethan times, a very potent anti-Catholic stereotype had been created. Roman Catholics, or Papists, and I shall use the terms for this talk effectively interchangeably, were seen as determined to return England to the Catholic fold by whatever means was necessary. They were accused of being utterly fanatical, convinced that theirs was the only true faith that they must extirpate Protestantism. Priests and especially Jesuits, in J.P. Kenyon's tasteless phrase, '*the Waffen SS of 17th century Catholicism*', priests were slaves to the Pope and the Catholic laity were slaves to their priests having no right, unlike Protestants, of private conscience.

And Catholicism was increasingly linked with England's national enemies, with Spain and with France. The memories of the Spanish Armada was kept alive, there was the infamous Spanish armoury in the Tower of London. English Catholics were seen as a potential Fifth Column, the word which is often applied to them is 'outlandish' (literally 'foreign' – 'out-land-ish'), and it was moreover believed that an authoritarian church favoured authoritarian political regimes like the absolute monarchies of France and Spain and hence popery and tyranny were linked together. Catholics, it was said, hoped to crush the traditional liberties of Englishmen.

And it was believed that Papists were utterly ruthless and cruel, and examples were pointed to of Spaniards in the New World, the massacre of St Bartholomew in Paris in 1572 or the Irish Rising in 1641. And it was said that English Papists would rise against the Protestants majority if they could, preferably with Catholic help from abroad, or that they would undermine the state with plots and clandestine subversion and there was a particular fear here of Papists in disguise, an identikit picture which some at court and of course perhaps Charles II himself appeared to match too uneasily.

Now of course anti-Catholic fantasies can appear absurd to us today, particularly the thesis that Catholics and Jesuits had infiltrated Cromwell's army and were responsible both for the Civil War and Charles I's execution. But, nonetheless there were two real events which were the foundations for a virulent popular anti-Catholicism. First there was the burning of the Protestants in the reign of Mary I, 1553-58, who'd returned England to the Roman Catholic Church after the deaths of Henry VIII and Edward VI. Three hundred Protestants burned alive and, particularly with Bishop Ridley and Archbishop Cramner, horrific deaths. According to the late Sir Geoffrey Elton who of course was not English, whose real name was Ehrenberg, and who always, I think, saw England from the outside, as an observer, the buildings quote '*ensured that after the reign an undying hatred of the Pope and Roman Catholicism was one of the most marked characteristics of the English*'. The persecution was commemorated in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* of 1563, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* with its various additions in many parish churches or libraries and with a text showing the horrors of the fires of Smithfield and, for the illiterate, the woodcuts again making the point. Queen Elizabeth's succession day putting an end to Mary's reign on the 17th of November was widely commemorated until the early 18th century. And

secondly, there was the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, the plot to kill James I, the immediate royal family and the Lords and the Commons, in other words England's ruling elite. If we were to apply this to 9/11 we are talking of the equivalent of killing the President of the United States, the Senate and the House of Representatives in one go. And after the failure of the Gunpowder Plot, seen as God's work, Parliament decided to hold a church service every November 5th in order to commemorate it. The liturgy was partly composed from sentences in the scriptures and linked to events in the Bible like the attempt to assassinate St Paul. The plot was denounced as unnatural, i.e. it was not merely a political act of terrorism but a crime against God and that Parliament, note the language, '*by popish treachery had been appointed a sheep to the slaughter, in a most barbarous and savage manner*'. And remember of course, the explosion would have been very likely to have set off a major fire in Westminster too.

The gunpowder service also made provision for a sermon and sermons as historians constantly emphasise were of tremendous importance in this period. The parson spoke with authority, the message could reach even the illiterate. Church on Sunday, supposedly the nation at prayer. Preachers at the November 5th service and at other times often describe the past and the expected cruelties of Roman Catholics in blood curdling terms and to some extent these things could be enjoyed, rather one suspects in the way of horror films, but with the difference that it could happen to you. The one eyewitness in the Restoration saw Gilbert Burnet, later a bishop, preach out the hour-glass on the subject of popery and when the sand had run out Burnet '*took up the hour-glass and held it aloft in his hand and then turned it over for another hour upon which the audience sent out almost a shout of joy*' (I've wanted to do this with my students occasionally but I fear it might not have the effect). '*Burnet was accustomed to set forth all the horrors of the Popish religion with such force of speech and action*', another witness stated, that he had '*never seen an audience anywhere so much affected as we all were who were present at that discourse*'.

And in the evening there was the ringing of bells and then bonfires and from Charles II's reign onwards burnings of effigies of the Pope and the Devil. Guy Fawkes doesn't take the centre stage until the 19th century. In London, in the late 1670s and 1680s, there were large processions with people dressed as cardinals, monks and so on up of course until the reign of James II and really largely in the early part of the 1680s. There were music and fireworks at the great 'Pope-burnings' of London in the late 1670s, early 1680s. Live cats were placed in effigies of the Pope in order to provide the screams. Village events, however, were much smaller and we've got an 18th-century picture of a rustic bonfire, which gives some indication of what they were like, the Pope, a few sticks with a paper tiara on top. But even at village celebrations there were the bells ringing, the bonfire, beer and songs. Clearly these were enjoyable events, but they also instilled in the populous the state's profoundly anti-popish ideological teaching.

So, by 1666 it was believed that papists aimed to extirpate Protestantism by fire and sword and that there was no act of terrorism seemingly beyond them.

The Jesuits above all were thought to be skilled fire-raisers. A 1667 pamphlet *Pyrotechnica Loyolana* (Saint Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit movement) – ‘*Ignation fireworks*’ is its subtitle or ‘*the fiery Jesuits temper and behaviour*’ and that work noted the fires for which the Jesuits were supposedly responsible in Europe and described in particular their use of incendiary devices, normally just referred to as fireballs.

And in 1666, London was jittery, there had long been dark prophecies for the year going back to Nostradamus and there were real dangers particularly if one views the international context. Protestantism was pushed to the periphery of Europe surviving largely in thinly-populated second-rate states. The counter-reformation was making steady advances in central and eastern Europe, the menace of Spain might be diminishing but it was being replaced by the threat from Louis XIV’s militantly Catholic France. And it was feared that the King, the court and the government were far too much influenced by Catholics or disguised Catholics, Papists in disguise, the crypto-Catholics who inspired great fear.

In 1665, a war with the Dutch had begun, but in January 1666, the French joined the conflict and they indeed inflicted heavy losses in the West Indies and in May it was thought that a French fleet was about to enter the Channel. So it is unsurprising that during and after the Great Fire rumours abounded that it was the Papists’ works and these rumours are usefully recorded in Samuel Pepys’ diary. On the 5th of September when the fire was still raging Pepys noted, ‘*discourses are now begun that there is a plot in it and that the French have done it*’. And also ‘*there has been a great alarm of the French and Dutch being risen*’, he thought they were actually going to land, though then he notes ‘*which prove nothing*’. The next day, the 6th, Pepys noted that there were, ‘*great grounds to people, and to me too, to think that there is some kind of plot in this*.’ There were attacks on strangers in the street, the arrests of foreigners and on the 7th again, Pepys says ‘*the talk is rife of the French having a hand in it*.’ Soon came November the 5th, Pepys thought ‘*never was there a time that the Papists were more feared than just at this time*.’ Preachers warned their congregations that the Papists were as dangerous as they had been in 1605 and Pepys returning home anticipated many bonfires in London (you would have thought they might have thought again about this, but he didn’t think that they would). And on the 10th of November he recorded ‘*this is the fatal day that everybody has long discoursed on as the time that the Papists have designed to commit a massacre on the populous*’ though other dates for that event were anticipated in the provinces. And he was still recording fears of Popish plots and Papists in disguise in June the following year, ‘*we are betrayed by the Papists, we are bought and sold and governed by Papists*.’ There’s an oscillation I think between direct attacks and then the fear of clandestine subversion thereafter.

And interestingly alarms about Popish incendiaries were not confined merely to the capital. At Warwick, and it did get burned down in 1694, it was potentially a very flammable place. In Warwick a panic erupted when a man was seen behaving suspiciously and a, ‘*blackish brown wall was found*.’ The

militia actually mounted guard on the town all night, so seriously were those rumours taken.

So clearly, those in authority needed to investigate the truth of these allegations. Either they needed to punish those who were responsible for so terrible a crime or to allay fears of a Catholic uprising and massacre. And initially it seemed that the blame could be pinned on the Catholics because one Robert Hubert, a Frenchman arrested in Kent/Essex confessed to starting the fires on the instigation of a puppet master, the 'van der Lubbe' figure for this, rather than the Reichstag Fire. What he did show was that he had a detailed knowledge of the area round Pudding Lane where the fire started and indeed he was hanged on the 29th of October. Nonetheless both the Privy Council and the King's Bench noted disturbing contradictions in his story and in the words of Gilbert Burnet he appeared '*melancholy mad*'.

And in fact both the Privy Council and the House of Commons had determined to investigate the fire's origins more thoroughly. The Privy Council discounted the allegation of arson. In a memorandum, its clerk noted, '*nothing has been found to argue the fire in London to have been caused by other than the hand of God, a great wind and a very dry season.*' And the role of providence, God's hand, was emphasised in a pamphlet, *Observations Both Historical and Moral upon the Burning of London*, which was published in 1667. '*Notwithstanding suspicions of arson, the manner of the burning makes us conclude the whole was an effect of an unhappy chance, or to speak better, the heavy hand of God upon our sins.*'

The Commons decided to set up a committee of 70 to investigate the fire on the 25th September. It wished to appear impartial, but on the 27th, Pepys noted that '*some 200-300 daggers had been found in the burnt ruins of a Catholic's house and reports of that, of the Catholics seeming pleasure at events and their boldness about their religion hath made the Commons mad.*' The Commons accordingly asked the King to banish priests and Jesuits and to order the enforcement of the anti-Catholic penal statutes, which he did. But then the Commons Committee proceeded in its examinations and produced the evidence early in 1667. It had heard stories about Catholics supposedly prophesying the fire and uttering sinister and alarming words. It had heard about the insolence of Popish priests and the increase of Popery. It had heard of a doggerel poem found in Leeds, *Beware the fire, Protestants!*, though since this was dated the 5th of November 1666, i.e. after the fire, this was plainly not genuine.

And there was other circumstantial evidence to suggest a plot. Burnet noted, '*some of the presumptions of the city being burned by design.*' But he went on, '*when these came to be led before the committee of the House of Commons, they were found of no weight*' and the many stories that were published at that time with great assurance were upon strict examination, '*void of all credibility*', as the committee reported. And in the next session which began in October 1667, the Commons decided not to revive the fire committee. The evidence which it heard however was printed as a pamphlet and as it were, 'got out', but the government thinking that it could only prove

troublesome, confiscated copies and ordered its burning, though it was later reprinted in 1679 as *London's Flames* and on that version's title page it was unequivocally stated that, '*it is plainly proved that the Papists were the contrivers and actors in the burning of the great and noble City of London*' and one thinks that it was probably foolish of the government to suppress this document thereby exposing itself to the inevitable charge of a sinister cover-up. The evidence given to the committee was also the basis for other pamphlets, one famous one claiming fires were made in several places to increase the fire and that both in city and country it was bragged by several Papists that '*upon such a day or in such a time we should find the hottest weather that ever there was in England*', all words of plainer sense. But by contrast, Thomas Osborne, who was actually on the committee stated in October 1666, '*I have been this afternoon employed in the committee of examining persons suspected of firing the City, but all the allegations are very frivolous and people are generally satisfied that the fire was accidental.*' So there was an official verdict, but despite the official verdict the popular belief that the Papists had begun the Great Fire persisted.

Conspiracy theories are after all very potent because they are self-confirming. If one cannot prove a conspiracy that merely shows how well planned and dangerous that conspiracy had been in order to secrete the evidence thereafter. The accusation's survival is shown best at the time of the so-called 'Popish Plot' and the Exclusion Struggle, because in 1678 Titus Oates declared that there was a popish plot to assassinate King Charles II, that the Catholics would rise against the Protestant majority and would put the heir presumptive, James Duke of York, the King's younger brother, on the throne and James was a Roman Catholic. And the Whig party in Parliament thereafter endeavoured to exclude James, the heir presumptive, the Roman Catholic heir, from the line of succession and Titus Oates' fabricated Popish Plot got great and deeply alarming vogue. This was an immensely serious political crisis for the Restoration monarchy, but given this lecture's subject, the real interest of that crisis lies in the recrudescence of alarms about popish incendiarism.

Oates claimed that the Catholics planned to burn London again and to murder many of the capital's Protestants. Prints were issued recalling the fact that Papists had been responsible for the Great Fire. A side-kick of Oates, William Bedloe, in his *Narrative and Impartial Discovery of the Horrid Popish Plot*, published in 1679, included a large part of it indeed is a narrative of the Pope's late fireworks in England, detailing fires started by Catholics supposedly. One print showed the Pope breathing fire, some playing cards show Jesuits offering bribes to burn houses and in March 1680, one Whig zealot, Robert West, spread the rumour that Holborn was to be fired. Captured fireworks purportedly for starting fires were displayed in coffee houses. And these claims' credibility was enhanced by a series of real fires at this time. In 1679, the Temple caught fire, the work supposedly of Popish arsonists. And then a maid suspected of igniting her master's house confessed saying that she did it at a Roman Catholic priest's suggestion. In May 1679, the Earl of Burlington wrote to a friend maintaining that '*there are almost every second night attempts to fire houses which very often succeed*

and infinitely enrage the people here against the Papists, whom they look upon as the promoters of this design, those that are taken, proving to be of that profession.' And in 1680, another maid was executed for firing a house in Southwark, another alleged Popish conspiracy. News even came from Boston in New England of recent Catholic incendiarism.

And it was in January 1681, that the House of Commons itself affirmed the belief that the Catholics had been responsible for the Great Fire and in the same year the Whig Lord Mayor of London, Sir Patience Ward, ordered an inscription to be placed upon the Monument where the fire had commenced and it read, *'This pillar was set up in perpetual remembrance of that most dreadful burning of this Protestant city begun, carried on by the treachery and malice of the Papists.'* So a conspiracy theory which had previously been investigated and discounted as unfounded was transmuted in a period of political crisis, into an established fact.

Of course, the Whigs attempts to exclude James Duke of York from the line of succession failed and when King Charles II died in 1685, he became James II. James ordered, as one would expect as a Catholic, the removal of the inscription on the Monument but when he fell at the end of 1688, was overturned and fled to France, the so-called 'Irish Night' panics reveal just how deeply the fear of Catholic incendiarism was, utterly ingrained in the popular mind. As James' regime collapsed, his army broke up and the Irish troops headed home and as they moved west wild rumours circulated regarding their intentions. It was claimed that they intended to fire London. It was said that already Bedford, Birmingham, Stafford and other towns were ablaze, and there is a brilliantly vivid account of this panic by Daniel Defoe who was at Windsor at the time and he subsequently gave an account of it in the vicinity around Windsor in his tour through the whole island of Great Britain which was published between 1724 and 1726. He noted that everywhere there were rumours rife that Irish troops would, *'burn all the towns wherever they came and cut the throats of all the people'* and rumours reached him that Maidenhead, Reading, Uxbridge and so on were already in flame, when in fact nothing of the kind ever occurred. And after 1688 the thesis that the Papists were responsible for the Great Fire was long perpetuated. The inscription blaming the Catholics for the fire was again affixed to the Monument and it was left there until 1830, the year after the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act. It was only in 1830 that it was finally removed. Apparently it was grossly inconvenient it caused traffic congestions – people looked at it and gawped. It is now in the Museum of London.

The accusation was perpetuated in almanacs. Almanacs are produced in very large numbers in the late 17th and 18th centuries. According to Bernard Cap, *'almanacs were sold annually in the late 17th century in England at the rate of 400,000 a year.'* You're talking of a population for England and Wales of 5 million so 400,000 is a very large figure. And at the beginning they often have chronologies, listing key events in England's history and particularly England's Protestant history. The accession of Queen Elizabeth I, the Armada, the Gunpowder Plot, the Irish Massacre of 1641, the Great fire and

then the overturning of James II by William of Orange, his son-in-law who becomes William III. In the post-revolution Protestant almanac, the burning of the City of London is there and it's one of only nine events which are listed in those chronologies, which I think shows its great importance in the psyche of the time and I might say as one of those things, it ranks alongside the Creation and the Incarnation, which seems pitching it a little high.

The 5th of November services continued in the 18th century, they were retained, in fact, until 1859, at least on paper; so did the Pope-burning celebrations. One writer in 1794 claimed that the lower class of people derived the greater part of their knowledge of the history of their own country from that and other national festivals.

And accusations of fire-raising against the Catholic minority recurred in the 18th century. In October 1745, when the Jacobite army headed by James II's grandson Prince Charles Edward Stuart marched towards London, the *Gentlemen's Magazine* declared that, '*his majesty's bake-house at Dover and stocks of farmers in diverse parts were burnt, not without suspicion of wicked Irish Papists*'. In 1770 there was a major fire in the dockyard at Portsmouth. It was claimed that it was a Popish plot, one of the conspirators being directed and later harboured by a Catholic nobleman, Lord Falconberg. And the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780 (appalling riots, London is out of control for a week), in which Catholic chapels, along with Newgate jail, Blackfriar's Bridge and much private property were fired, were claimed by some Protestant zealots to have been started by the Catholics themselves. Britain is engaged in the war of American Independence and is actually at war also with France and Spain and so again the old linking of internal subversion helping the foreign enemy was there.

So, to answer, as far as one can, the rather clumsy question which I set myself, not elegantly phrased but, why was it claimed that the fire was started by a Catholic conspiracy, there seem to me to be three main themes. First, there was the widespread popular belief that Roman Catholics were naturally incendiaries. It's the natural outcome of a century of sustained anti-Catholic propaganda. The identikit picture of the arsonists, fanatical, cruel, disloyal, subversive, is the same as the stereotype of the cruel, outlandish Papist, the stereotype so long fostered by the secular and religious authorities. And it was likely that the official exculpations of the Catholics would fall on deaf ears and the most modern parallel is quite clearly the Warren Commission's findings about President Kennedy's assassination and yet the enormous vogue which Oliver Stone's movie has in perpetuating a conspiracy theory about Kennedy's death.

Secondly, the accusation was revived with a vengeance by Whig politicians and their allies for political purposes at the time of the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Struggle. Pope-burning displays in London during that period of crisis emphasised the history of Popish atrocities. But, of course the Great Fire was a Popish atrocity within the living memory of Londoners and one which was appallingly traumatic for those who lived in a hugely politically excited capital during those years. It is of course ironic, given the very

prominent and valiant efforts of James, Duke of York, in fighting the fire himself in 1666, that this was turned in this way.

And thirdly, the accusation was kept alive through different forms of propaganda after the fall of James II in 1689. The ideology of anti-Popery provided the clinching justification for William III's usurpation and his monarchy and the later Hanoverian monarchy and the continued exile of James himself and his Jacobite heirs. The common linking of Papists and incendiarism is illustrated by the panics of 1688, as described by Defoe, and the various 18th-century accusations which I've just noted. The ideology of anti-Catholicism was only gradually diluted after the victory of Culloden and then the death of the Young Pretender himself.

And finally, note that this was a self-confirming circular argument. To go back to Keith Thomas, Thomas has always maintained the reason magical beliefs last so long is because they have a self-confirming character. You can always explain any problems, 'the magic doesn't work', 'ah well you've been to an incompetent magician', or whatever, in terms of the belief system itself and what we've seen here, I think too, has got that character as well. The Roman Catholics fired London; therefore arson was a Catholic weapon. Arson was a Catholic weapon, therefore the Papists fired London. It goes round in a hideous, vicious circle. And that is where I think I would like to end.

Question 1: In 1666 what percentage of London's population would be avowed Catholic? I have no idea if it would be one percent, five percent, ten percent, and were they seen to be in any particular category, you mentioned a maid who was encouraged by a priest? I know there were several distinguished well-known Catholic families that Titus Oates selected. But so it's the sheer numbers and who were they seen to be?

Answer: Colin Haydon: Well, one, overall in England you are certainly not talking about more than five percent of avowed Catholics, but of course they are being penalised and that I think is an important point. London has the greatest number of Catholics in it but, as you say, there are two factors here. One, it is assumed that there are more of them than are being fined for recusancy and that there are Catholics who are in secret and this applies particularly at court, after all remember the Queen is a Catholic, she has Catholic chaplains and so on (they are the only people incidentally who are not officially told to leave London by the Proclamation). Yes, there were Catholic nobles, there are people who seem to be well placed who may just be on the turn, and of course this is not unrealistic given the end of Charles II's life at all, I mean, one thinks that this is just nonsense – it isn't. And then of course there is the constant fear of Catholics in disguise which Pepys is very interesting on, and you know people who he works with have been accused of this. So I don't think it's just a case that one can say, 'ah, there were numbers.'

What fuels this is almost exactly what one would expect, you force something underground and you don't know how many there really are. But of course

they also work on the assumption that if these people are going to rise (and the image is always that of cutting throats, presumably, you know, you don't scream as your throat is cut), that ideally this is going to happen when you get a landing of the French and when it's in September when the fire is still just going on Pepys talks about this rumour going around. They apparently thought that they were going to land 50,000 experienced troops and then the Papists would rise and then those who were secret Papists, would throw off the mask and they would rise as well. And again the other point which I think is important there, is it is always worth remembering that this isn't just a Protestant fantasy that there are these crypto-Papists around. James II believes that there are lots of people who if only they were talked to seriously about the real nature of the Roman Catholic faith and weren't going to be persecuted anymore, would come out and it's partly the basis of his own religious policy, that to assume that, yes, these people are there. So, I think in terms of numbers, and I'm evading your question because I don't think we know the number, I'm not sure that matters in the sense of the fear which is built into this way of thinking. It is like 'Reds under the bed' and the more crafty your neighbour is, the better he disguises it, you only see the very tell-tale signs occasionally.

Question 2: Something that occurs to me, which links with this morning, if we didn't know why there weren't more deaths recorded, could it be that if they thought the Roman Catholics were responsible, they did not want to give them the satisfaction of knowing there might have been a bigger success than they were led to believe?

Answer: Colin Haydon: I doubt that because the parallels are the massacre of St. Bartholomew in France in 1572. There is an enormous amount on the sheer numbers who are killed, and equally when the native Irish rise in Ulster in 1641, I think the modern estimate nowadays, is about 20,000 people are killed. But, the propaganda at the time puts it at about 200,000, so I think if anything as regards people being killed, had more people been killed and they thought that it was the Catholics, they would have laid it on with a trowel.

Question 3: I just wondered if there was any other group, I was thinking particularly of the dissenting churches, who were also in the frame as possible fire-starters?

Answer: Colin Haydon: Yes there are and I didn't go into that because in fact this paper has grown so large that I didn't think I'd get through it in time, but yes, at times that is considered as a possibility, not least because the fire starts on the 2nd, but September 3rd was the day Cromwell died and was indeed his victories and Dunbar and Worcester and therefore was seen as a sinister day rather like November 5th as far as these people are concerned. But, had I gone on to deal with that, they also square this circle by saying that these people may indeed be Papists in disguise, which was an idea which had been widely put forward by William Prynne about the Civil War and the execution of Charles I. The Jesuits were held to justify regicide. In the good

of the Church you could kill kings. Killing kings is something which is made a lot of with the Jesuits, and therefore, again, the identikit picture worked really rather well.