

## Write a letter

A letter played a very important role in helping the King's chief minister and spymaster, Robert Cecil, uncover the Gunpowder Plot. It is known today as the **Monteagle letter** after the name of the Catholic lord it was sent to. The letter, which historians believe was written by one of the plotters, warned Lord Monteagle to stay away from the opening of parliament on 5 November 1605 and warned of a 'terrible blow' set to strike those who attended. Cecil knew from his spies that a plot against King James I was brewing; but he didn't know what form it would take. The letter gave him both the place and the method. It was on this evidence that he ordered a search of the cellar beneath the House of Lords around midnight on 4 November and found a tall, red-haired stranger with a lantern lurking near 36 barrels of gunpowder and a stack of wood.

Letters play an important role in **Black Powder** too.

After Tom and the Falcon journey to London, Tom makes his own quill pen from a crow's feather he finds in the yard and mixes some soot and water to make ink. He then writes a message on a page torn from his mother's prayer book to tell her he is safe. But as readers of the book will know, the letter does not reach its final destination, and when Tom discovers what has happened to it, it causes him to doubt the motives of the Falcon, who promised to send it for him.

Later in the story, Tom and his cousin, Cressida are desperate to get hold of a letter which they fear will lead to the arrest of Cressida's father, Lord Montague, if Robert Cecil and his spy service get their hands on it.

And finally, near the end of the story, Tom receives a letter from the spy Solomon Wiseman which sets out to teach him what a bad man his friend the Falcon was, but which actually demonstrates that, whatever else he was, he was a man who kept his word.



### Activity

Imagine you are one of the following characters and write a short letter of 100-200 words on the topics suggested below:

- **Tom Garnett** – writing a letter to his mother to tell her he is safe in London with the Falcon and how he is planning to try and rescue his father.
- **Solomon Wiseman** – writing a letter to Robert Cecil to explain how he managed to capture Guy Fawkes.
- **Cressida Montague** – writing a letter to Tom in France to tell him what has been happening to her since he left England.
- Or think of your own idea for a letter between two of the characters in the story.

**Think:** There was no postal service in those days. How might each of the letter writers arrange to get their letter to its final destination?

**Find out more:** You can find a copy of the original Monteagle letter and read what it says here:  
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/gunpowder-plot/source-1/>