

= Piers Gaveston , 1st Earl of Cornwall =

Piers Gaveston , 1st Earl of Cornwall (c . 1284 ? 19 June 1312) was an English nobleman of Gascon origin , and the favourite of King Edward II of England .

At a young age he made a good impression on King Edward I " Longshanks " , and was assigned to the household of the King 's son , Edward of Caernarfon . The prince 's partiality for Gaveston was so extravagant that Edward I sent the favourite into exile , but he was recalled a few months later , after the King 's death led to the prince 's accession as Edward II . Edward bestowed the Earldom of Cornwall on Gaveston , and arranged for him to marry his niece Margaret de Clare , sister of the powerful Earl of Gloucester .

Gaveston 's exclusive access to the King provoked several members of the nobility , and in 1307 the King was again forced to send him into exile . During this absence he served as the King 's Lord Lieutenant of Ireland . Edward managed to negotiate a deal with the opposition , however , and Gaveston returned the next year . Upon his return his behaviour became even more offensive , and by the Ordinances of 1311 it was decided that Gaveston should be exiled for a third time , to suffer outlawry if he returned . When he did return in 1312 , he was hunted down and executed by a group of magnates led by Thomas of Lancaster and Guy de Beauchamp , Earl of Warwick .

It was alleged by medieval chroniclers that Edward II and Piers Gaveston were lovers , a rumour that was reinforced by later portrayals in fiction , such as Christopher Marlowe 's late 16th @-@ century play Edward II . This assertion has received the support of some modern historians , while others have questioned it . According to Pierre Chaplais , the relationship between the two was that of an adoptive brotherhood , and Gaveston served as an unofficial deputy for a reluctant king . Other historians , like J. S. Hamilton , have pointed out that concern over the two men 's sexuality was not at the core of the nobility 's grievances , which rather centred on Gaveston 's exclusive access to royal patronage .

= = Family background and early life = =

Piers Gaveston 's father was Arnaud de Gabaston , a Gascon knight in the service of Gaston VII of Béarn . Gabaston had come into a substantial amount of land in Gascony through his marriage to Claramonde de Marsan , who was co @-@ heir with her brother of the great landowner Arnaud @-@ Guillaume de Marsan . Through the possessions of his wife , Gabaston also became a vassal of the King of England , in the King 's capacity of Duke of Aquitaine . His service to Edward I of England stretched over a long period of time , starting in the Welsh Wars of 1282 ? 83 , in which he participated with a substantial contingent . Sometime before 4 February 1287 , Claramonde died , and for the rest of his life Gabaston struggled to retain his wife 's inheritance from rival claims by relatives and neighbours . Because of this , he became financially dependent on the English king , and was continuously in his service . He was used as a hostage by Edward twice : first in 1288 to Aragon , secondly in 1294 to the French king , when he managed to escape and flee to England in 1297 . After returning home , he was back in England in 1300 , where he served with Edward I in the Scottish Wars . He died at some point before 18 May 1302 .

Little is known of Piers Gaveston 's early years ; even his year of birth is unknown . He and Prince Edward of Caernarfon (born 25 April 1284) were said to be contemporaries (coetanei) , so it can be assumed that he was born in or around 1284 . Though one chronicle claims he accompanied his father to England in 1297 , the first reliable reference to him is from Gascony later that year , when he served in the company of Edward I. In 1300 he sailed to England with his father and his older brother , Arnaud @-@ Guillaume de Marsan . It was at this time that he became a member of the household of the young Prince Edward ? the future Edward II . The King was apparently impressed by Gaveston 's conduct and martial skills , and wanted him to serve as a model for his son . In 1304 , the King awarded Gaveston the wardship of Roger Mortimer of Wigmore , after the death of Roger 's father , on the request of Edward , Prince of Wales . This put Gaveston in charge of Mortimer 's possessions during the latter 's minority , and served as proof of the King 's confidence in his son 's companion .

As part of the circle around the prince , however , Gaveston also became entangled in conflicts between the King and his son . These difficulties first materialised in a dispute between treasurer Walter Langton and Prince Edward . The case enraged King Edward to the point where he banned his son from court , and banished several men from the prince 's household . Though the two were reconciled at a later point , the King still prevented Gaveston from rejoining the prince . This matter was settled before 26 May 1306 , however , the date when Gaveston was knighted , four days after the prince . Later that year Gaveston was once more in trouble , when he and twenty @-@ one other knights deserted a Scottish campaign to attend a tournament . An arrest order was sent out for the deserters , but , at the insistence of Queen Margaret , they were all pardoned in January 1307 .

= = First exile and return = =

Gaveston 's return to grace was only temporary . On 26 February 1307 , Edward I announced that the prince 's favourite had to leave the realm shortly after 30 April that year . This time it seems the punishment was not intended for Gaveston , though , but for the Prince of Wales . According to Walter of Guisborough , the prince appeared before the King to request that his own county of Ponthieu be given to Gaveston . Edward I , enraged , tore out handfuls of his son 's hair and threw him out of the royal chambers . Though Guisborough cannot necessarily be trusted on the details of the events , the story reflects the general exasperation the King felt with the prince 's favouritism towards Gaveston , and the lavish gifts bestowed on the favourite . This extravagance was clearly seen on Gaveston 's departure , when Prince Edward equipped him with horses , luxurious clothes , and £ 260 of money .

Gaveston 's first exile was to be a short one . In early July 1307 , Edward I fell ill while once more campaigning in the north , and lay dying at Burgh by Sands near the Scottish border . According to one chronicle , he gathered some of his most trusted men around him , including Henry de Lacy , Earl of Lincoln ; Guy de Beauchamp , Earl of Warwick ; and Aymer de Valence , soon to be Earl of Pembroke . Edward entrusted the magnates with the care of his son , and instructed them particularly to prevent the return of Piers Gaveston from exile . Nevertheless , when the King died on 7 July , one of Edward II 's first acts as king was to recall his friend . Gaveston returned almost immediately , and the two were reunited by early August .

= = Earl of Cornwall = =

On 6 August 1307 , less than a month after succeeding , Edward II made Piers Gaveston Earl of Cornwall . According to contemporary narrative sources , this was a controversial decision . Gaveston came from relatively humble origins , and his rise to the highest level of the peerage was considered improper by the established nobility . Furthermore , the earldom of Cornwall had traditionally been reserved for members of the royal family , and Edward I had intended it for one of his two younger sons from his second marriage . The discontent reported by the chronicles may have been the result of hindsight , however ; there is no sign that the established nobility objected to the ennoblement of Gaveston at the time . The earldom gave Gaveston substantial landholdings over great parts of England , to the value of £ 4 @,@ 000 a year . These possessions consisted of most of Cornwall , as well as parts of Devonshire in the south @-@ west , land in Berkshire and Oxfordshire centred on the honour of Wallingford , most of the eastern part of Lincolnshire , and the honour of Knaresborough in Yorkshire , with the territories that belonged to it . In addition to this , Edward also secured a prestigious marriage between Gaveston and Margaret de Clare , sister of the powerful Earl of Gloucester . The possessions and family connection secured Gaveston a place among the highest levels of the English nobility .

Even though the new king was initially met with goodwill from his subjects , it was not long before certain members of the nobility became disaffected with Gaveston and the special relationship he enjoyed with Edward . On 2 December 1307 , exactly one month after Gaveston 's marriage , the King organised a tournament in Gaveston 's honour at Wallingford Castle . Here Gaveston and his companions in arms handed a humiliating defeat to the earls of Warenne , Hereford , and Arundel .

Gaveston won , according to various accounts of the events , either by bringing too many knights to the field , or simply by having a better contingent . From this point on Warenne ? and possibly also the other two earls ? became hostile to Gaveston .

When Edward II left the country early in 1308 to marry the French king 's daughter Isabella , he appointed Gaveston regent in his place . This was a responsibility that would normally be given to a close family member of the reigning king . There is no sign that Gaveston exploited the regency for personal gains , but the other nobles were still offended by his arrogant behaviour . This behaviour continued at the coronation feast after the King 's return , during which the King largely ignored his new wife in favour of Gaveston . The collective grievances first found expression in the so @-@ called ' Boulogne agreement ' of January 1308 , in which the earls of Warenne , Hereford , Lincoln and Pembroke expressed concern about oppression of the people and attacks on the honour of the crown . Though not mentioned by name , Gaveston was the implied target of this document . Later that year , in the April parliament , the so @-@ called Declaration of 1308 demanded the renewed exile of Gaveston , again without explicitly mentioning the favourite by name . The King initially resisted , but had to give in to the demand once it became clear that the barons had the support of King Philip IV of France , who was offended by Edward 's treatment of his daughter . On 18 May , Edward consented to sending Gaveston into exile .

= = Ireland and return = =

Gaveston was not exiled immediately ; he did not have to leave the realm until 25 June , but faced excommunication by the Archbishop of Canterbury , Robert Winchelsey , should he return . Edward used the intervening period to provide for his favourite 's continued prosperity and political importance . As a compensation for the loss of the earldom of Cornwall , which was another condition of the exile , Gaveston was granted land worth 3 @, @ 000 marks annually in Gascony , and land amounting to the same value in England . Further to this , he was appointed the King 's Lieutenant of Ireland , so that a certain amount of honour could be maintained despite the humiliation of the exile . The appointment came the day after Richard de Burgh , Earl of Ulster , had been given the same position , indicating that it was an improvised measure . Gaveston 's appointment came with wider authority than Ulster 's , however , for he had full regal powers to appoint and dismiss any royal officers .

Gaveston 's lieutenancy was primarily of a military nature ; by the early 14th century , Ireland had become a rebellious and unruly dominion for the English crown . In this capacity Gaveston had considerable success , killing or defeating several major insurgents . He fortified the town of Newcastle McKynegan and Castle Kevin , and rebuilt the road from Castle Kevin to Glendalough . This helped pacify the county at least as far as the Wicklow Mountains , west of Dublin . In the field of administration he made less of a mark . The most notable issue with which he was involved concerned a dispute over murage ? a toll on the town walls ? between the citizens of Dublin . As during the regency , though , there is no evidence that Gaveston exploited his position for his own advantage and he did nothing to alienate the local elite .

Edward II began working towards a recall before Gaveston had even left . Through distribution of patronage and concessions to political demands , he won over several of the earls who had previously been of a hostile disposition . Lincoln , who was the leader of the baronial opposition due to his age and great wealth , was reconciled with Edward by late summer 1308 . Even Warwick , who had been the most unyielding of the King 's enemies , was gradually mollified . Significantly , though , Thomas , Earl of Lancaster , who had not been involved in the campaign to exile Gaveston , seems to have become disaffected at this time . Nevertheless , by 25 April 1309 , Pope Clement V was satisfied that the difficulties between the King and his magnates had been settled , and agreed to lift the interdict against Gaveston . At the parliament that met at Stamford in July , Edward had to agree to a series of political concessions . The so @-@ called Statute of Stamford was based on a similar document Edward I had consented to in 1300 , called the articuli super carta , which was in turn based on Magna Carta . Before the Stamford Parliament , however , on 27 June , Gaveston had returned to England .

= = Ordinances and final exile = =

On 5 August 1309 , Gaveston was reinstated with the earldom of Cornwall . It did not take long , however , for him to alienate the earls once more . The chronicles tell of how Gaveston gave mocking nicknames to other earls , calling Lincoln ' burst @-@ belly ' , Pembroke ' Joseph the Jew ' , Lancaster ' the fiddler ' and Warwick ' the black dog of Arden ' (from the forest of Arden in Warwickshire) . Gaveston also began to exploit his relationship with the King more ostentatiously , obtaining favours and appointments for his friends and servants . The political climate became so hateful that in February 1310 , a number of the earls refused to attend parliament as long as Gaveston was present . Gaveston was dismissed , and , when parliament convened , the disaffected barons presented a list of grievances they wanted addressed . On 16 March , the King was forced to appoint a group of men to ordain reforms of the royal household . This group of so @-@ called Lords Ordainers consisted of eight earls , seven bishops and six barons . Among the earls were supporters of the King , like Gloucester and John of Brittany , Earl of Richmond , as well as strong opponents , like Lancaster and Warwick .

While the Ordainers were at work drafting their reform document , Edward decided to address one of the main causes behind the discontent : the Scottish situation . Edward II had , almost immediately after his accession , abandoned the relentless Scottish campaigns of his father . As a result , Robert the Bruce had been able to regain the initiative in the war , reconquer lost territory , and stage destructive raids into the north of England . To aggravate matters , Edward had continued to raise extortionate taxes , ostensibly for the war in Scotland , but without showing any result . If the King could produce victory against the Scots , this would go a long way towards undermining the work of the Ordainers . In June , the King summoned the magnates for a military campaign , but most of the Ordainers refused on the basis of the work they were performing . When the King departed for Scotland in September , only Gloucester , Warenne and Gaveston among the earls accompanied him . The campaign proved frustrating for Edward , when Bruce refused to engage in open battle , or even get involved in negotiations . In February , Gaveston was sent with an army north from Roxburgh to Perth , but he failed to track down the Scottish army .

While the royal army was in the north , Edward received news from London that the Earl of Lincoln had died on 6 February 1311 . This meant that a moderating influence on the baronial party had been lost , at the same time as the antagonistic Earl of Lancaster ? who was Lincoln 's son @-@ in @-@ law and heir ? emerged as the leader of the Ordainers . With the Ordainers ready to present their programme of reform , Edward had to summon a parliament . In late July he appointed Gaveston Lieutenant of Scotland , and departed for London . Bruce still evaded the English successfully , in early August even staging a raid into northern England , and shortly after this Gaveston withdrew to Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland . When parliament met on 16 August , the King was presented with a set of proposed reforms of the royal household , as well as specific attacks on individuals , including a demand for the renewed exile of Piers Gaveston . Edward initially offered to agree to the reforms as long as Gaveston was allowed to stay , but the Ordainers refused . The King held out for as long as he could , but eventually had to agree to the Ordinances , which were published on 27 September . On 3 November , two days after the allotted deadline , Gaveston left England for the last time .

= = Return and death = =

It is not quite clear where Gaveston spent his time abroad ; the conditions of his exile banned him from staying in any of the lands of the English king . This precluded both Aquitaine and Ireland , where he had spent his previous exiles . There is some evidence that he might have gone to France initially , but considering the French king 's hostile attitude towards him , he is not likely to have stayed there long . Flanders is a much more likely candidate for Gaveston 's third and final exile . This time his absence was even shorter than the second time , lasting no more than two months . Returning around Christmas 1311 , he was reunited with the King early in 1312 , probably at

Knarborough on 13 January . The reason for his quick return might have been the birth of his child , a daughter named Joan , around this time . On 18 January , Edward declared the judgement against Gaveston unlawful , and restored all lands to him .

The royal and baronial parties now both began preparations for war . In March , Gaveston settled at Scarborough , and began to fortify the castle . Around the same time , he was pronounced excommunicate by Archbishop Winchelsey at St Paul 's . At the same meeting the barons ? under the leadership of Lancaster ? divided up the realm to oppose the King . Pembroke and Warenne were given the responsibility of capturing Gaveston . On 4 May , the King and Gaveston were at Newcastle , and barely escaped a force led by Lancaster , Henry Percy and Robert Clifford . Gaveston then returned to Scarborough , while the King left for York . Scarborough was soon besieged by Pembroke , Warenne , Percy and Clifford , and on 19 May Gaveston surrendered to the besiegers . The terms of the surrender were that Pembroke , Warenne and Percy would take Gaveston to York , where the barons would negotiate with the king . If an agreement could not be reached by 1 August , Gaveston would be allowed to return to Scarborough . The three swore an oath to guarantee his safety . After an initial meeting with the King in York , Gaveston was left in the custody of Pembroke , who escorted him south for safekeeping .

On 9 June , Pembroke left Gaveston at the rectory at Deddington in Oxfordshire , while he himself left to visit his wife . When Warwick found out about Gaveston 's whereabouts , he immediately rode out to capture him . The next morning he appeared at the rectory , where he took Gaveston captive and brought him back to his castle at Warwick . Pembroke , whose honour had been affronted , appealed for justice both to Gaveston 's brother @-@ in @-@ law Gloucester and to the University of Oxford , but to no avail . At Warwick , Gaveston was condemned to death for violating the terms of the Ordinances , before an assembly of barons , including Warwick , Lancaster , Hereford and Arundel . On 19 June , he was taken out on the road towards Kenilworth as far as Blacklow Hill , which was on the Earl of Lancaster 's land . Here , two Welshmen ran him through with a sword and beheaded him .

= = Aftermath = =

Gaveston 's body was simply left behind at the site of his execution . One chronicle tells of how four shoemakers brought it to Warwick , who refused to accept it , and ordered them to take it back outside his jurisdiction . Eventually , a group of Dominican friars brought it to Oxford . A proper burial could not be arranged while Gaveston was still excommunicate , and it was not until 2 January 1315 , after the King had secured a papal absolution for his favourite , that he could have his body buried in an elaborate ceremony at the Dominican foundation of King 's Langley Priory ; the tomb is now lost . In 1823 , a cross with inscription was erected at Blacklow Hill by local squire , Bertie Greathead , at the place believed to be the location of Gaveston 's execution .

Edward also provided a generous endowment for Gaveston 's widow Margaret , who in 1317 married Hugh de Audley , later Earl of Gloucester . The King tried to find a suitable marriage for Piers ' and Margaret 's daughter Joan , but these arrangements came to nothing when Joan died in 1325 , at the age of thirteen . There is also some evidence that Gaveston might have fathered another , extra @-@ marital daughter ; one contemporary document refers to an " Amie filie Petri de Gaveston " . This Amie was a chamberlain of Edward III 's wife , Queen Philippa , and later married John Driby , a yeoman of the royal family .

Edward 's initial reaction to the news of Gaveston 's execution was rage ; according to the Vita Edwardi he swore to avenge the act . Circumstances , however , prevented him from taking immediate action against the executioners . During the previous raid on Newcastle , the King and Gaveston had to flee quickly , leaving behind horses and jewels worth a great amount of money . At the same time , the barons ' extralegal action had alienated many of their former associates ; the Earl of Pembroke in particular became strongly tied to the King 's cause after the affront to his honour . Through the arbitration of the Earl of Gloucester and others , a settlement was finally reached on 14 October 1313 , whereby the barons were given a pardon and the horses and jewels were returned to the King . The following years were marked by a constant power struggle between

Edward and Lancaster , centred on the maintenance of the Ordinances . The matter was not finally settled until 1322 , when Lancaster was defeated at the Battle of Boroughbridge , and executed .

= = Question of homosexuality = =

It was hinted at by medieval chroniclers , and has been alleged by modern historians , that the relationship between Gaveston and Edward was homosexual . The Annales Paulini claims that Edward loved Gaveston " beyond measure " , while the Lanercost says the intimacy between them was " undue " . The Chronicle of Melsa states that Edward " particularly delighted in the vice of sodomy " , without making special reference to Gaveston . The portrayal of Gaveston as homosexual continued in fictional portrayals , such as Christopher Marlowe 's play Edward II from the early 1590s , and the 1924 adaptation of that work by Bertolt Brecht and Lion Feuchtwanger .

Modern historians have been divided on the issue . T. F. Tout , writing in 1914 , rejected the idea . J. S. Hamilton , who wrote a biography of Gaveston in 1988 , on the other hand says that " there is no question that the king and his favourite were lovers . " Pierre Chaplais , writing a few years later , had more reservations . Chaplais cites the fact that Edward had four children with his wife ? and even an extra @-@ marital son ? as well as the relative silence of contemporary commentators on the topic . He also finds it hard to believe that Philip IV of France would have allowed the English king to marry his daughter Isabella if Edward was known to be homosexual . Mark Ormrod has pointed out the inherent anachronism of speaking of homosexuality in a medieval context . Instead Ormrod suggests the focus should be on the motivation behind the use of sexuality in contemporary attacks on the King and Gaveston .

If the King and Gaveston were indeed lovers , the question remains of what effect this had on their respective careers and eventual downfalls . John Boswell , in his Christianity , Social Tolerance , and Homosexuality , calls Gaveston Edward 's lover , and writes that there is little doubt " that [Edward 's] wife and the barons of England were violently hostile to Edward 's sexual proclivities , although he more than fulfilled his royal duties by fathering four children with Isabella . " Boswell argues that Edward and Gaveston fell victim to a new @-@ found concern about sexual morals among the secular powers of Europe , manifested shortly before in the trial of the Knights Templar in 1307 . This interpretation is disputed by Hamilton . " The favourite was murdered because of his control of patronage , " writes Hamilton , " not because of his access to the king 's bedchamber " . This same view is also expressed by Roy Martin Haines , in his 2003 biography of the King .

= = Historical assessment = =

Contemporary and near @-@ contemporary chroniclers were generally negative in their attitudes towards Gaveston , blaming the royal favourite for many of the problems of the reign . Gaveston was accused of such various crimes as draining the treasury , orchestrating the arrest of treasurer Walter Langton , and filling the court with foreigners . According to the Lanercost Chronicle , " There was not anyone who had a good word to say about the king or Piers . " Nevertheless , the chroniclers did not deny that he had certain good qualities . Irish chroniclers were appreciative both of his military and his administrative skills during his period in Ireland . Likewise , Geoffrey the Baker called him " graceful and agile in body , sharp witted , refined in manner , [and] sufficiently well versed in military matters . " Marlowe , however , focused exclusively on the negative aspects of Gaveston 's biography , portraying him ? according to Hamilton ? as " a sycophantic homosexual with a marked tendency towards avarice , nepotism , and especially overweening pride . " This was the impression that lived on in the popular imagination .

The first modern historians to deal with the reign of Edward II ? William Stubbs , Thomas Frederick Tout and James Conway Davies ? added little to the understanding of Gaveston . While generally agreeing with the chronicles , they allotted him no importance within their own main field of interest , that of constitutional history . For later generations of historians , the focus shifted from constitutional to personal issues . From the 1970s onwards , the topic of study became the personal relations between magnates and the crown , and the distribution of patronage . It is to this school of thought

that Hamilton 's biography belongs , in which he argues that it was Gaveston 's exclusive access to royal patronage that was the driving force behind the baronial animosity towards him . Chaplais , on the other hand , takes a different approach to the study of Gaveston and his place in the reign of Edward II . According to Chaplais , Edward was more or less indifferent to the practice of kingship , and essentially delegated the job to Gaveston . As an alternative to a homosexual relationship , Chaplais suggests that the bond that existed between the King and Gaveston was that of an adoptive brotherhood . This concept had a Biblical precedent in the traditionalist , platonic interpretation of the relationship between David and Jonathan , and also existed in the Middle Ages , as exemplified in *The Song of Roland* , the story of Roland and Olivier .

In modern popular culture , Gaveston has been portrayed in a variety of ways . In Derek Jarman 's 1991 film , based on Marlow 's play , Edward and Gaveston are presented as victims of homophobia and prejudice . In the 1995 movie *Braveheart* , on the other hand , Gaveston (thinly disguised as the character ' Phillip ') is again caricatured as arrogant and effeminate . There is also an Oxford University dining and drinking club called the Piers Gaveston Society .