

224 is the newsletter of the Deddington & District History Society. During our season we meet at 7.30 on the second Wednesday of the month, normally at Deddington's Windmill Centre. Membership is £9/16 pa singles/ couples or £2.50 at the door for visitors, who are equally welcome. The editor actively encourages contributions to be sent to 1 South Newington Road, Barford St Michael OX15 0RJ. Email editor.224@nehoc.co.uk

Piers Gaveston

Who was Piers Gaveston?

He was a man whose life intersected with the life of Deddington probably for about 12 or 15 hours on the night of Friday 9 June and early morning of Saturday 10 June 1312. Gaveston was the notorious royal favourite of Edward II, possibly the king's lover, murdered by Edward's baronial enemies after his capture at Deddington.

Piers Gaveston was a younger son of Arnaud de Gabaston (in Béarn, bordering the Pyrenees and the English province of Gascony). Arnaud was a loyal servant and vassal of Edward I for 20 years, 1282-1302. Piers Gaveston first appears in England in 1297 as a member of the king's household, where he must have been introduced by his father. By 1300 he had transferred to the household of the heir to the throne, young Edward, Prince of Wales. This was the beginning of a relationship that had enormous consequences. Piers was almost certainly put into the prince's household by the old king, possibly as some kind of role model (though a very bad role model he proved to be!). It is likely that he was about 20 years old, four years the prince's senior.

Background

Dominating the whole political scene in 1307 was war with Scotland. It began in 1295 and would culminate at Bannockburn in 1314. One of Edward II's misfortunes was to inherit an unfinished war in Scotland, a war that was also unpopular since it brought with it heavy taxation and burdensome demands for military service with little prospect of gain.

Within England the political world had at its apex King Edward II, a man of very limited political or military experience.

Rightly distrusted by his father, he was never given much independence. He was notably lacking in political wisdom. In many ways he was a very odd man, notable for instance for distinctly un-regal hobbies like ditching and rowing. Below the king in the political hierarchy was the baronage, headed by ten great earls. The senior of these, Henry Lacy, earl of Lincoln, had been a loyal servant of Edward I. Others we need to keep in mind are Thomas of Lancaster, Edward II's cousin; Guy Beauchamp, earl of Warwick; Aymer

From the Chair

Welcome to a new issue of 224 and to our new season.

Members have asked if they might read the talk that John Maddicott gave on Piers Gaveston. Dr Maddicott generously handed over his notes, which I have turned into a short article. Enjoy reading it, but blame me for any errors!

At the back of this issue read Colin Cohen's outline of an exciting project involving the Deddington school records. It promises to be of immense value to the school and to the whole community.

Chris Day

2006-07 programme

13 September John Wilson, 'Harvest Home'

11 October Mallams Auctioneers, Oxford, An 'Antiques Roadshow' (only items that can be easily carried please, and no stamps) **Guests £3**

8 November Jan Warner, 'Survival of the fittest', A history of child-rearing from the 17th century

13 December A Victorian Christmas evening with dinner

10 January Adrienne Rosen, Recent discoveries about Chipping Norton

de Valence, earl of Pembroke. They were the crown's natural supporters. There was no necessary antipathy between the king and those great men, though all that would soon change.

Politics, 1307-12

Gaveston was brought back to England on Edward I's death and immediately given the earldom of Cornwall, *ie* he was intruded into the top group of powerful men, the earls. Moreover, the earldom of Cornwall had traditionally been reserved for members of the royal family; it was almost deliberately provocative to give it to Gaveston. Then Gaveston was married to Margaret de Clare, sister of Gilbert de Clare, earl of Gloucester—an immediate social promotion. Opposition to Gaveston grew very rapidly.

In December 1307, at a tournament at Wallingford Castle, Gaveston and his men defeated an earls' team. In the same month he was appointed regent of the kingdom while Edward was in France for his marriage to Isabella, daughter of Philip IV of France. At Edward's coronation in February 1308, Gaveston was given the position of greatest honour, carrying the crown itself, immediately preceding the king. The upshot was the demand from the earls for Gaveston's exile. Edward had alienated their initial support by making Gaveston in effect the first person in the kingdom after himself. In June 1308 Gaveston was sent to Ireland.

Gaveston was brought back by the spring of 1309, having been away for less than a year. It was

a period of growing baronial discontent, culminating in a demand for the general reform of the kingdom, rather like the movement that had led to Magna Carta in 1215. In March 1310 a group of magnates and churchmen known as the Ordainers was appointed to reform the realm. Gaveston was sent north by Edward, ostensibly to campaign against the Scots, but actually to keep him out of the way of the Ordainers. Then, in August 1311, they published a thoroughgoing plan of reform. Many of the king's actions, including royal grants, were henceforth to be subject to baronial consent. Most significantly from our viewpoint, Gaveston was exiled once more, possibly to Flanders.

Why was Gaveston so hated?

We need to look back at Gaveston's character and relationship with Edward to see why he was so detested. There are four points to bear in mind:

1 Gaveston's manner He was haughty, arrogant, and conceited. For one thing, he was a very flashy dresser. Before his first exile, Prince Edward sent him two outfits, one of green velvet embroidered with pearls and gold and silver piping. At the coronation banquet in 1308 Gaveston wore purple, a regal colour, trimmed with pearls. The other nobles were content with simple cloth of gold! Worse still, Gaveston had no respect for his elders and betters: any earl wanting to do business with the king had to kneel before Gaveston with his request. Worse still

again, he gave the earls insulting nicknames. The earls were men of high dignity and standing, very conscious of their social position. Gaveston's behaviour was incredibly foolish. What made it possible was that he basked in the king's favour and protection.

2 Control of patronage Patronage was essential in the Middle Ages. Who should get it? The deserving, determined by office, ancestry, and service to the Crown. Gaveston had none of those qualifications, yet he monopolised the king's patronage for himself and his dependents. Others had access to royal patronage only through Gaveston, who controlled access to the king and funnelled royal patronage towards his own friends, thereby ensuring that he always had a large following.

3 Gaveston's relationship with Edward Was it homosexual? Certainly emotionally, possibly physically. There is no doubt that Edward was besotted with Gaveston. All the chronicles comment on it: Edward loved Gaveston 'beyond measure', 'beyond reason and measure', 'I do not remember that one man so loved another'. One chronicler, albeit later, speaks more plainly: Edward indulged excessively in the 'vice of sodomy' (I particularly like that 'excessively', as though a modicum of sodomy would have been all right!). It is difficult to know what to make of all this. The tastes of neither man can have been exclusively homosexual. Edward had four legitimate children and one bastard, Gaveston had one, possibly two, daughters. It certainly seems to

have been assumed by contemporaries that the relationship was homosexual. That was highly dangerous to Edward - a relationship deeply repugnant to magnates and churchmen, and morally offensive.

The relationship had powerful political repercussions. Edward was commonly accused of favouring Gaveston over Queen Isabella in the early days of their marriage. Again, it is difficult to know what to make of this since Isabella was only about twelve at the time of her marriage. But it is highly significant that Philip IV, Isabella's father, was furious at Edward's treatment of his daughter. It was reported to him that at the coronation banquet Edward spent more time on Gaveston's couch than the queen's. Philip therefore backed the magnates in exiling Gaveston in 1308. Philip had a very high sense of the standing and dignity of his family. He later had flayed alive two knights foolish enough to commit adultery with his daughters-in-law.

4 The political situation Edward was faced with major political problems at his accession. The biggest was a resurgence of Scottish power. Edward's infatuation with Gaveston made it impossible to deal with this effectively. His first action was not just to recall Gaveston but to call off his father's Scottish campaign. There was to be no further campaign until 1310, and that only to keep Gaveston out of harm. Meanwhile Robert the Bruce was firmly established on the Scottish throne, and in 1309 held his first parliament. Humiliatingly, some English castles were captured. The baronial

view was that money that might have been spent on defeating the Scots was being lavished on Gaveston. There seemed to be a direct connection between patronage of Gaveston and failure in Scotland.

The Final months

Gaveston's exile in November 1311 was soon over and he re-joined Edward at Knaresborough in Yorkshire in January 1312. When this became known it precipitated something close to civil war. The magnates, led by Thomas of Lancaster, immediately gathered their forces against him. Gaveston and the king fled northwards to Newcastle, where they were nearly captured and where immense hoards of Gaveston's and Edward's jewels and treasure fell into the magnates' hands. Edward and Gaveston turned tail and headed back south to Scarborough, where Edward committed the tactical error of leaving Gaveston in the castle while he went off to York. Scarborough was besieged by the earls of Warenne and Pembroke and the northern magnate Henry Percy, and on 19 May Gaveston surrendered to them. By the terms of surrender Gaveston was to be kept in safe custody, presumably in the hope that some final settlement would emerge. Pembroke took charge of him and escorted him southwards, probably intending to arrange a meeting with the king, possibly in his own castle at Wallingford.

Deddington

On Friday 9 June 1312 Pembroke and Gaveston reached Ded-

dington, one imagines quite late in the day. Pembroke left to visit his wife, who was at Pembroke's castle at Bampton, south-west of Witney. Gaveston, meanwhile, was put up in the rectory (known as Castle House today), not in Deddington castle, which was then in a state of decay, described in 1277 as 'an old demolished castle' and in 1310 as 'a broken-down castle containing a chamber and a dovecote'. Gaveston was left with only a small guard at the unfortified rectory. That later gave rise to suspicions, unjustified, that Pembroke had colluded in what happened next.

Early on Saturday morning Gaveston's oldest enemy, the earl of Warwick, 'black dog of Arden', arrived at Deddington with a large force of men. He must somehow have got wind of Gaveston's presence there, suggesting that the stop at Deddington had been arranged at least some days before. Warwick and his men entered the rectory courtyard and called out 'Arise, traitor, thou art taken'. There may be a bit of chronicler's imagination here, but one imagines that something like that was said! Gaveston dressed and came down. He was led off, humiliatingly, on foot, though to speed things up he was soon put on an old nag. The party went first to Elmley Castle, on the slopes of Bredon Hill, a Warwick stronghold about 30 miles away. They must have gone via Chipping Norton, Stow and Toddington. They then went on to Warwick.

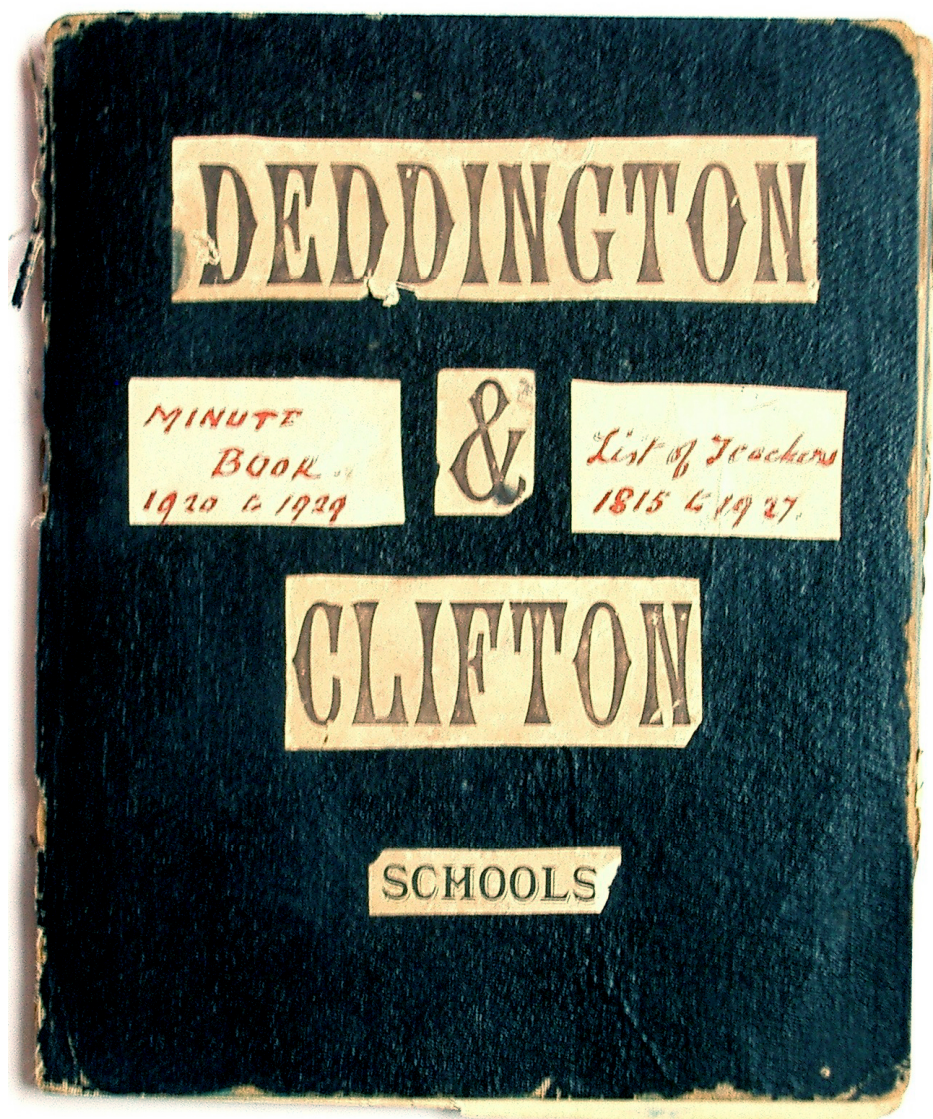
There was a sort of trial, with Lancaster and Warwick sitting in judgement on Gaveston. The

magnates entered into written agreements taking joint responsibility for their actions. This done, Gaveston was led off to Lancaster's land at Kenilworth. There he was handed over to two Welshmen, one of whom ran him through the body and the other of whom beheaded him. His body was taken to the Dominican Convent in Oxford (the site of which lies beneath the Westgate shopping centre), where it remained for two years before being reburied at the royal manor of King's Langley.

Conclusion

Gaveston's murder was an act of extraordinary violence. No royal favourite had ever suffered a similar fate. It shows the depth of hatred for him. The immediate consequence was almost a civil war, defused by negotiation, and a split in magnate ranks. The murder set up a feud between the king and his barons. Edward never forgot Gaveston's death or forgave those responsible. Thomas of Lancaster's execution during the civil war of 1321-2 was an act of revenge. Edward's reign was notable for a remarkable amount of political violence, culminating in his own murder in 1327.

Dr John Maddicott's talk on Piers Gaveston was originally given to the society in February 2005. Dr Maddicott, MA, DPhil, FBA, FRHistS, is Lecturer in Modern History at Exeter College. He has published on the political and social history of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England and on Anglo-Saxon history. He is currently working on the early history of Parliament. We are grateful to him for permission to reproduce his talk: the text is edited from his notes, so that any inaccuracies are the editor's.



The Deddington School records

The Society has just started what is likely to be its most ambitious project to date. By kind permission of the Head teacher, Mrs Judith Tinsley, we will be cataloguing the school records and photographing every page. The record books go back to the school's nineteenth-century origins and include admittance, punishments, attendance, log books, etc.

These books are in regular use, and are certainly showing their age. We look upon this as a conservation project and hope that once all 6,000 pages have been photographed and put onto CDs

or DVDs there will be less of a need to handle the originals.

In due course we hope to make the data available to a wider audience, but this will need to be considered in the light of the Data Protection Act, etc.

Given the size of the task those involved need not worry about having nothing to do as the evenings draw in.

Colin Cohen

