

# The Declaration of Independents



## **The Truth Behind Piers Gaveston**

by Brandy Purdy

To those who know his name, Piers Gaveston was the dark power lurking behind the throne of the weak-willed and pliant king, Edward II; whispering in his ear, goading him on to further extravagance; an arrogant, avaricious commoner raised to glory too high and too fast, like "a night-growing mushroom," a parasite feasting on the royal treasury. To others of a more romantic bent, Gaveston is half of a pair of star-crossed lovers centuries ahead of their time, born into a world where homosexuality was a crime punishable by death. To still others, Edward and Gaveston were simply devoted friends who swore a symbolic oath of blood-brotherhood that has been misinterpreted as an illicit sexual union.

So what is the correct answer? Who was Piers Gaveston really, and what was the true nature of his relationship with Edward II? We don't know. The answers to those questions are lost in the mists of time.

Here, then, is what we do know:

Piers Gaveston was presumably close to Edward II in age; therefore, he must have been born around 1284. His father, Sir Arnaud de Gaveston, was a prosperous Gascon knight who had faithfully served Edward I. Thus, Piers was not the lowborn commoner of popular imagination. He also had a well-born mother, Claremunnda of Marcia or Marsan, spellings vary. Legend has it that she was burned at the stake as a witch, a scenario far too intriguing for many novelists, myself included, to resist. Whether fact or fantasy,

the story was widely circulated, so this is why an aura of witchcraft has always clung to Gaveston. To quote one medieval chronicler, "The King loved an evil male sorcerer more than he did his wife."

Piers Gaveston first appeared on the pages of history when he joined the army of Edward I in 1297. He made such a good impression that he was chosen to become a companion to

knowledge of military tactics. He also had a quick and wicked wit, which he either could not or would not curtail, especially when it came to mocking those who considered themselves his betters. He gave nicknames to the most powerful men in the land and apparently struck a communal nerve, as it was an insult that would never be forgiven or forgotten.

The only information about the first meeting of Edward and Gaveston comes from a medieval chronicler: "When the King's son saw him, he fell so much in love that he entered upon an enduring compact with him, and chose and determined to knit an indissoluble bond with him, before all other mortals."

But apparently in choosing Gaveston to be his son's companion, the King got more than he bargained for. He soon became alarmed by the closeness that developed between the two, and Gaveston was sent away, with a pension from the King and a ship full of gifts from the Prince. But their separation was short-lived. When the old King died, the new King's first act was to recall his beloved "Perrot." As one chronicler put it: "And so he had home his love, Piers Gaveston, and did him great reverence, and worshipped and made him great

and rich. Of this doing fell villainy to the lover, evil speech and backbiting to the love, slander to the people, harm and damage to the realm."

Before he even set foot back on English soil, Gaveston was made Earl of Cornwall, an unprecedented



Painting of King Edward II, done circa 1700.

the Prince, later to be known as King Edward II. Gaveston was handsome and vivacious, proud as a peacock and as splendid as one when it came to matters of dress. But he was much more than just a pretty boy, he was intelligent and skilled in the arts of war and, when given the opportunity, displayed an admirable

honor for one not of royal blood. He was also betrothed to Edward's niece. Whether Gaveston had any prior knowledge that these and other honors were about to be heaped on him, we do not know.

Soon Gaveston was seen to have a stranglehold on royal patronage, as a seemingly endless shower of titles, sinecures, jewels, manors, and all manner of costly gifts deluged him. The established nobility, with Gaveston's chief enemies (the Earls of Lancaster, Warwick, Pembroke, and Lincoln) at the helm, greatly resented this; but "the more virulently people attacked Gaveston, the more keenly the King loved him." Gaveston's personality did nothing to salve the situation, as he paraded an insufferable pride and mocked his enemies.

When Edward crossed the channel to marry Isabelle of France, he further enraged the nobility by leaving Gaveston to rule as regent, when the honor should have gone to a man of greater years and experience. When the royal couple returned, as soon as the ship docked, Edward ran down the gangplank and flung himself into Gaveston's arms. He proceeded to forget all about his bride, and even gave her jewels to Gaveston. At Edward's coronation shortly afterwards, Gaveston appeared in royal purple instead of in cloth-of-gold like the other earls. And at the banquet, Edward had eyes and ears only for Gaveston. Soon Isabelle was writing home to her father that her husband was a stranger to her bed, and for this she blamed Piers Gaveston.

Pressure was brought to bear on Edward, and Gaveston was banished—but not in disgrace. He was sent to Ireland to act as Governor, where he more than amply demonstrated his intellect and prowess as a military commander. But Edward was "lovesick for his minion," to quote the famous play by Christopher Marlowe, and soon Gaveston was back in England again. Things went on much the same as before.

Eventually, the earls joined forces as

the Lords Ordainers and sought reforms that would also diminish the King's power. After a campaign in Scotland failed, Gaveston was again banished from the realm, this time for perpetuity. But he did not stay away for long; some historians think he returned so he could be present for the birth of his first and only legitimate child, Joan, in 1312. (Controversy surrounds a possible bastard daughter known as Amy Gaveston.)

Soon the earls were amassing an army and civil war was a serious threat. Edward and Gaveston fled to Newcastle, and then to Scarborough Castle, where Edward left Gaveston so he could try to raise an army of his own.

Ill-equipped to withstand a siege, Gaveston surrendered to the Earl of Pembroke, who, being the most honorable and least self-interested of Edward's nobles, swore an oath on everything he possessed that no harm would come to Gaveston while in his custody. But Pembroke was not infallible. In the mistaken belief that Gaveston would be safe there, Pembroke left him at the rectory in the little village of Deddington while he went on to nearby Bampton to spend the night with his wife. One night was all Warwick and Lancaster needed. They swept in, taking everyone unawares. Gaveston, barefoot and wearing only his shirt, was forced to walk, in chains and humiliation, to Warwick Castle, where he was thrown into the dungeon.

After a brief trial, where the verdict was a bygone conclusion, Gaveston was taken on June 19, 1312 to the top of Blacklow Hill. He was first stabbed in the heart and then beheaded. So ended the life, but not the legend, of Piers Gaveston.

But what of Piers Gaveston the human being? All the chroniclers speak of Edward's "mad folly" and "immoderate love" for him, but on the subject of Gaveston's own feelings they are conspicuously silent. Nor do any letters or diaries exist

to enlighten us. Not one scrap of evidence tells us what the royal favorite thought or felt for his king and benefactor and the unique and powerful position, likened to that of one of the great royal mistresses, that he occupied. A biography of Piers Gaveston reads more like an outline of events and an inventory of honors and gifts. We don't even know what he looked like, beyond that he was considered handsome—not even the color of his eyes, or whether he was tall or short, dark or fair.

Historical novels are built on a framework of facts that is then embroidered, or filled in, by the author's imagination. *The Confession of Piers Gaveston* goes against the grain of popular belief and presents a shockingly different interpretation, since—when the facts are scant and the unknowns far outnumber the knowns—in fiction anything is possible. And, as Gaveston says in the first chapter, "there are two sides to every coin." ■

Brandy Purdy is the author of *The Confession of Piers Gaveston*. For more information please visit her website [www.brandypurdy.com](http://www.brandypurdy.com).



### Say What? Where Accents Come From

by Al Past

As an English professor and a closet linguist, I used to encourage off-the-wall questions having to do with language; partly to foster curiosity but also because my students were woefully innocent of the history and workings of their mother tongue—something English classes ignore but shouldn't.

A question that was asked semester after semester was about accents: why do groups of people speak English in the peculiar way they do? The detailed explanation is a matter for dialecticians (a subset of linguists), but I defy the average person to pick up a scholarly book on dialectology

and make much sense of it. (There are popular works too, for those who might want to pursue the matter.) I am no specialist in dialects, being more an applied, generalist sort of linguist, and I understand how the average person wants a simple, basic answer, and never mind the exceptions. So...

Spanish and Italian and Portuguese, after Latin speakers were isolated way out in the hinterlands once the Roman Empire fell. Folks hunkered down and didn't travel, so their Latin coalesced regionally. Those regions ultimately became modern France, Spain, Italy, and Portugal.

went to Pennsylvania and more northern states. But we're concentrating on Southern English for now.)

To recap, what we think of today as a Boston accent or a Southern accent—say, the accent we hear when someone is interviewed on television after some



newsworthy event has taken place—is the result of centuries of immigrants' accents blending together. Probably back in colonial Boston a dialectician could have identified any number of British dialects, mostly coastal; but over time these merged,

... Let's focus on just two dialects, Boston and the American South. We all recognize those when we hear them. "I pahked my cah by the watah." Boston, right? "Wah thank yew! Mah poah mutha will jes' doah these loveleh playints!" Southern, more or less. (There are regional sub-varieties of these but never mind.) We're all Americans, aren't we? So why do we speak with these differences?

How do people acquire dialects in the first place? Well, we learn them as children, from those around us. We speak like those we grew up with. So where did the people we grew up with acquire their accents? Same answer: from those around them when they grew up. They're passed down, from generation to generation. People in Boston tend to talk the way they always have. It's the same in Charleston, Savannah, Appalachia, "Noo Yawk," and so on. Our speech does change, to be sure, but slowly, over generations.

The ultimate reason for dialects, though, lies in history. People living in contact for hundreds or even thousands of years, communicating more with each other than with "foreigners" from far away, eventually begin to talk alike. Given enough time, their speech can change so much they might not even be able to understand people from far away who used to speak the same language. That's how Latin became French and

But what about America? America was "put together" in roughly a century. That wouldn't be enough time to develop the Bostonian or Southern dialects, would it?

No, it wouldn't. The precursors of the Bostonian accent and the Southern accent were brought here! Look at who settled where. Boston, for the most part, was settled by people from the port and coastal cities of England—London and Liverpool, to name two—and from coastal fishing areas. If you had been an Englishman involved in import/export, shipbuilding, fishing, even manufacturing, and you wanted to seek new opportunities in the New World, where would you go? A bustling port city like Boston was a popular choice. Once there, you would find plenty of folks who talked like you did.

But suppose you were an agriculturalist, growing wheat or raising livestock in England. You'd not have lived in London, you'd be inland, where the fields are, and you'd associate with other rural people. Your ancestors would have done much the same for centuries. If you immigrated to the New World you would look for new opportunities for growing crops, for large expanses of arable land with lots of pasture for animals: you'd go to one of the southern states. And once there, you'd find neighbors who had immigrated from the same general area as you, and whose speech was similar. (OK, some

leaving us with today's Boston accent. The original differences, as between Liverpoolian and London accents, evened out.

Imagine if we could take every English speaker in Heathrow Airport today, transplant them to a tropical island, and leave them there. After 200 years of going to schools, living next to each other, and intermarrying, it's easy to imagine how they'd pretty much all come to speak alike. On a larger scale, then, modern accents are the result of a couple hundred years of contact in one area (plus other influences that we'll overlook, like Black English, Spanish and other languages, plus television and radio, and so forth).

Today, when we hear someone speaking "Southern," or "like a hillbilly," or someone who sound like the Kennedys of Massachusetts, we are hearing the actual sounds of hundreds, maybe thousands, of years of human migration patterns. Our ancient history and culture are right in front of us every single day, and our children are passing it on.

*Al Past is the author of the Distant Cousin trilogy, in which a young woman speaking an extinct Indo-European language lands on Earth. Visit [www.distantcousin.net](http://www.distantcousin.net) for more information.*



**God's Writing Prompts**

by Janet Elaine Smith

Where some people say the devil is in the details, I find that the Lord is in my writing. Sometimes Divine inspiration will prompt me as to what I should write about.

I started writing my first book twenty-five years ago. It finally got published twenty years later. During the interim I kept writing: books, magazine articles, lesson plans, all sorts of things. Several things kept me going which I would like to share with you, so you won't fall into that "what's the point" frame of mind that will make you throw in the towel, or throw out the pen. My book was going to be a fun little romance set during the Regency era, but with a "Christian twist."

However, as I began to write the story, I told my husband that I really needed—as a plot device—some sort of hidden treasure in Great Britain. Without a moment's hesitation he replied, "Why don't you just use our family's jewels?"

I laughed, but he was serious. He began to tell me of the Keith clan (his great-grandmother was Caroline Keith) and the Scottish regalia which they had hidden at Dunnottar Castle to keep Oliver Cromwell from melting it down, like Cromwell had already done to England's royal jewels, crown and such.

I have always loved a challenge, but this idea wound up giving me a whole new book, set about 150 years before the Regency era, and one which would go on to be my "ticket to publishing success." The change in my plans was caused by God's little writing prompt to me—through my husband.

Meanwhile, as I worked on *Dunnottar*, which became a big historical epic instead of a little Regency romance, I heard someone make a comment that changed the way I looked at my fiction writing from that moment on. What did they say that was so earth-shattering? It was an ostensibly Christian woman who told me, "When I look for a really good book, I never go to a Christian bookstore."

The wheels in my mind began to whirl. My intent is not to preach to my readers, but I do want to provide

an underlying message of faith to as many people as possible. So if I wanted to reach the non-Christian populace with my books, what could I do?

That is when God's second prompt took hold. I would write a book that would be acceptable to the general public, but my characters would be the ones who would draw the readers to the Lord. There would be no preaching in the books, nor would there be any great narrative orations. It has been said so often that it has become trite, but it is still true: what you *do* speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you *say*. Yes, my characters would show the readers the path to God, not through their dialogue so much as by their actions.

This has followed with all of my writing. I don't write "religious" books; I write books of faith.

As I said earlier, it took twenty years for *Dunnottar* to get published. But what happened to that book was just the tip of the iceberg. I rewrote it five times. Each time it was to suit the wants of a specific editor at some publishing house or other, but they all still sent me one of those "good rejections" I have in my filing cabinet. So when *Dunnottar* finally came out, I made sure it was the way I had originally written it—the way it was meant to be all the time!

When I was at a book signing at our local Barnes & Noble bookstore, someone walked up to me, handed me a paper, and asked, "Have you seen this?" It was a printout of an amazon.com page, showing that *Dunnottar* was their No. 1 best-selling Scottish book! And that was out of over 8,000 other titles at the time! God's prompt was working!

And who was reading it? People who also bought books by James Patterson, John Grisham, Heather Graham—authors whose books were in every bookstore in the country, people who probably have never been inside a Christian bookstore.

Now don't get me wrong. I stand foursquare behind Christian bookstores. But that isn't where you will find the people who need the message my books (subtly) contain. I don't want to preach to the choir! I want to go on the highways and byways with the message that there

is redemption for everyone!

When I get reviews like these, I know that God doesn't make mistakes:

[*Pampas*] explores ethical and religious issues—and it does all of that with humor.

While the author never preaches, and never allows her characters to do so, either, their faith in the Higher Power watching over their lives comes through loud and clear [in *In St. Patrick's Custody*].

Do you believe in miracles? A *Christmas Dream* will make a believer out of you.

God, romance, and an old west pioneer spirit wrap their arms around this part western, part historical romance novel .... [*Dakota Printer*] is an exquisite book with a superb message ....

Yes, eighteen published books later and living my dream life, God's prompts have proven themselves over and over again. I get at least thirty e-mails a day from people all over the country who are walking into bookstores and finding my books, or ordering them online. I am convinced that they are reaching people wherever they are.

I'm not sure it would have worked nearly as well if I had planned it myself. I'd probably be writing "religious" books that very few people were reading. I've learned, years ago, that God is a whole lot smarter than I am!

Janet Elaine Smith is a prolific writer. Information on all of her books, including her most recent, *Hi, Daddy!*, can be found at her website: [www.janetelain smith.com](http://www.janetelain smith.com).



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