

Gregory Martin, Scholar, Translator and Author (about 1542 to 1582)



Gregory Martin may be the earliest author in this collection. He was born in about 1542 at Maxfield – a small manor near Three Oaks, in the Parish of Guestling. The small Maxfield manor is mentioned several times in Battle Abbey's history as it belonged to the abbey estate. It was originally the almoner's manor and was used by Abbot Hamo de Offyngton as a hunting lodge where he entertained the Archbishop of Canterbury during the 100 years' war. As with most of the abbey estate it passed to Sir Anthony Browne in the year after the dissolution. Part of the still existing house called Great Maxfield has 13th century features.

In the Lay Subsidy 1524/5 Rolls for Guestling three people surnamed Marten paid what were then quite substantial sums. John paid £10, William £28 and another William £24, so if Gregory was from this family it would have been well off for the times. The parish registers as far back as 1542 do not exist for Guestling, but one William Martyn married Margaret Mote at Rye on 21 January 1539/40 and a Richard Martyn married Margaret Morton there on 30 May 1540. Unfortunately Martin/Martyn/Marten etc. is a relatively common name in Sussex and it is very unlikely that either could have been Gregory's father.

It would seem that he received an excellent Catholic education. We do not know exactly where, but as with the martyred Thomas Pilcher (*see article, Section F*) it may have been via the Montagu recusants and their priests and schoolmaster at Battle Abbey. In a later letter to his sisters Gregory only said '*It pleased my parents to bring me up in learning*'. An attempt has been made to link him with the Merchant Taylors School, originally sited in the City of London, but that school was not founded until 1561, by which time he was at university.

Like Thomas Pilcher he went on to Oxford, but to the newly founded St John's College in 1557 which was founded in 1555 by the London merchant Sir Thomas White, intending to provide a source of educated Roman Catholic priests to support the Counter-Reformation under Queen Mary. In all Gregory Martin spent 13 years at Oxford, but left when things got too difficult for Catholics as the Protestants started to get the upper hand under Queen Elizabeth I. At first he tutored the children of the Duke of Norfolk at Arundel, but in 1570 he left to join Dr William Allen's English College at Douai, then in the Spanish Netherlands, to train for the Catholic priesthood. He was ordained in 1573.

Originally the English College at Douai was intended as a college for exiles from England, where they could continue their studies in a way no longer possible for Catholics in England. Allen recognised its potential as a place for training priests ready for the return to England when 'the new religion' had run its course. The new priests, however, proved impatient to wait for that event and Douai College found itself dedicated very largely to the training of missionary priests. 158 college graduates were to meet a martyr's death.



Gregory Martin

Note the initials GM and the words AN(O) ÆTITIS 31 (year of his age 31) and the year 1573 which would correspond to his presumed birth year of 1542 and was the date of his ordination). Source unknown.

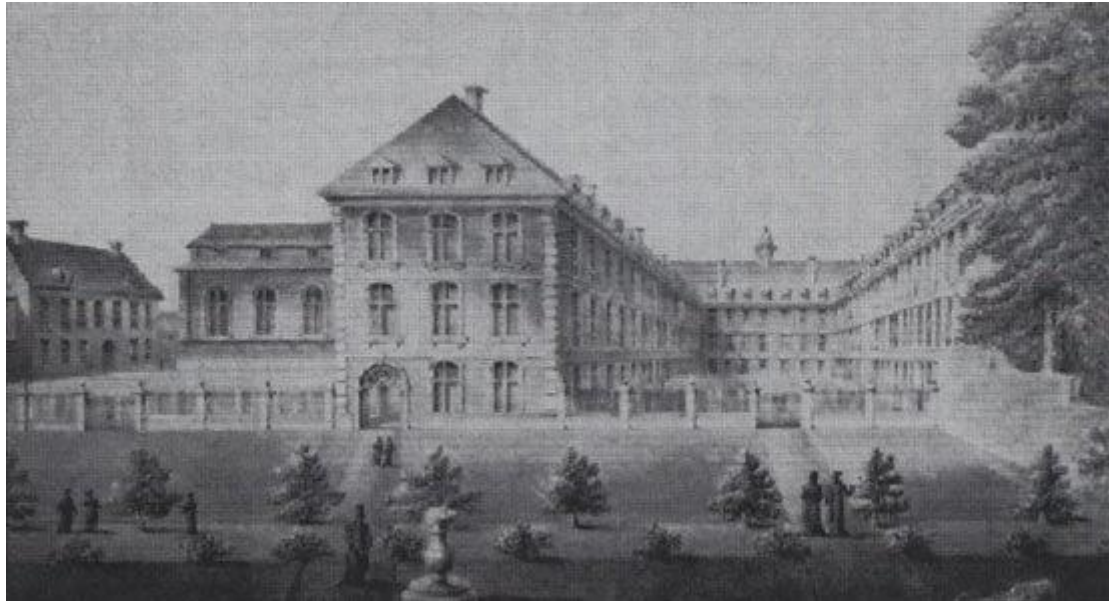


Cardinal William Allen

Father Gregory Martin was not destined to be a missionary priest, with the hazard that entailed. He was clearly a learned scholar and not a man of action and became a Doctor of Divinity. Two years later he went to Rome with Allen to found another English College. He stayed there two years organising a course of studies, but appears to have had some difficulties with entrenched personalities and Allen recalled him to Reims, in France, to which the English College at Douai had removed because of political troubles.

Allen announced in September 1578 that a new Catholic version of the Bible was to be produced in English, as part of the fight back against radical Protestantism and to re-convert England. Interestingly Allan's forward to this new bible would show that the translators did not really approve of making a version available in ordinary spoken languages, as '*it was not always wise for just anyone to read the Bible, which they felt needed to be carefully explained by Church officials*'. So this was a 'political' Bible and in parts it would address the

critical need to answer Protestant interpretations and because Protestants had published so many 'erroneous' Bibles.



The English College at Douay

Gregory Martin was the man chosen to do the new translation, using as a basis the Latin Vulgate Bible, the Catholic Bible approved by the Council of Trent¹, rather than the original Hebrew and Greek texts, which Gregory would still refer to. The difficulty with this was that if it proved difficult or even impossible to find a suitable English word an anglicised Latin word would still be used. This made it cumbersome in places, but importantly to the translators it was accurate.

Gregory undertook the vast bulk of the translation, working forward through the Old to the New Testaments at two chapters a day, with 1300 chapters to go – at that rate it would be just under two years' work. He was assisted by Thomas Worthington, Richard Bristow, William Rainolds and William Allen himself in revisions and also in preparing suitable notes to the passages of the Bible most used by Protestants to attack Catholics. It was finally ready in July 1580 and Gregory forwarded the work to Allen with a covering letter.

S. P. in *Domino*,

R. Praeses¹ et fratres.

This booke, and whatsoever other my lesser pamphlettes; now or hereafter, I do wholly committe to your wisdom and charitie: to consider, whether, when, what and in what order, it may or may not be published, onely to the honour of God, the profite of our Countrymen, and disadvantaging of the Adversaries. Your judgements every way shall make me secure and carelesse: having otherwise some scruple, if I should not (specially by advise and counsel) at the least communicate with you, that which, my Superiors tell me might do more good abrode, then in my studie. Use it in all respectes as your owne, observe opportunities onely of doing good, cutte of all scandals and offenses. briefely, as if it were yours, and not mine, so do as your conscience leadeth you, that nothing passe through our fault, to hurt so good a cause that in it self cannot possibly have any fault. Valete, et pro me orate, et pro omnibus fratribus nostris qui hic sunt, sicut et nos vicissim pro vobis omnibus. April 9 1581.

Servus vester in Christo,
Grego. Martinus.

¹ Dr William Allen, president of the English College of Reims.

Gregory Martin produced a parallel and contentious book of over 300 pages - "Discovery of the Manifold Corruptions of the Holy Scripture by the Heretikes of our Daies" published immediately after the New Testament and this (no doubt as intended) provoked many and continuing Protestant replies, including a lengthy one by Fulke published 1583.

The Reims New Testament was printed and published in early 1582, with a forward by Allen, but apparently Martin's drafting of this shows through. The work and his other writings had taken its toll on Father Gregory Martin and he developed pulmonary tuberculosis. William Allen sent him to Paris and Rouen to try a cure but too late. He returned to Reims to die on 20 September 1582.

William Allen was created Cardinal Allen in 1587. The English College went back to Douai in 1593, but was dissolved at the time of the French Revolution. The Douai-Reims Old Testament was not to be immediately published, although finished, but it would be published nearly 25 years later in two volumes in 1609 and 1610.

The following is a list of Gregory Martin's authored works:

Principal translator of the Latin Vulgate Bible into English (the Douai-Reims Bible). His version, in Bishop Richard Challoner's third revised edition (1752), was the standard Bible for English Roman Catholics until the 20th century, and his phraseology influenced the Anglican translators of the Authorized, or King James, Version (1611).

Treatise of Schisme (Douai, 1578)

Discovery of the Manifold Corruptions of the Holy Scripture by the Heretikes of our Daies (Reims, 1582)

Treatise of Christian Peregrination (Reims, 1583)²

Against the Marriage of Priests (1584)

Of the Love of the Soul (St. Omer, 1603)³

Gregorius Martinus ad Adolphum Mekerchum pro veteri et vera Græcarum Literarum Pronunciatione (Oxford, 1712)

Roma Sancta (written by 1581)⁴

Collections of his letters are published in the Douai Diaries

Keith Foord with Neil Clephane-Cameron 2017 ©BDHS

Also see Section F (Pilcher)

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Endnotes

1 The Council of Trent was held (at Trento and Bologna) in stages from 13 December, 1545, and closed on 4 December, 1563. Its main object was the definitive determination of the doctrines of the Catholic Church in answer to the heresies of the Protestants; a further object was a thorough reform of the inner workings and life of the Church by removing the numerous abuses that had developed within it.

2. This contains three letters to heretics – to a married priest– and an Oxford dignitary whom Martin accuses of dissembling his Catholicism plus that referred to in 3 below.

3. This contains Gregory Martin's second letter to heretics - to his sisters 'trained in heresy' and married to Protestants.

4. .This is an account of Rome at the end of the 16th century as the Catholic Church was starting the counter-revolution against Protestantism. For some reason Allen decided not to publish this, but it was finally published in Italian in 1900 and in English in 1969 as 'The Life and Works of Gregory Martin', the long preface of which has been very useful in producing this paper.