St. Gregory’s was in Northgate, a poor relation as a religious house to the Cathedral Priory and St. Augustine’s Abbey. Until recently it was even more obscure than the three Canterbury houses of friars, whose sites were known. All that could be said of the priory buildings was that they lay to the east of Northgate, just outside the city walls and near High Street St. Gregory’s. This situation was changed by a series of excavations undertaken by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust 1988-89, starting with the Lay Cemetery under a car park to the south of High Street St. Gregory’s, and progressing north across the sites of the churches and priory buildings, most recently occupied by the G.P.O. Sorting Office. The area in the angle between Northgate and Union Street was to have been developed for housing, but was eventually covered by a new student accommodation block for Canterbury Christ Church University College. The final report is not yet published, but interim reports covered archaeology and history.

In the excitement of uncovering the site of the church, there was an idea the religious use might go back to a pre-Conquest guild of priests. However, mature consideration suggested that the church was probably Lanfranc’s. So the origin of the house was in fact as stated by R.C. Fowler ‘the foundation of this house is by common consent attributed to Lanfranc ... but different accounts of its original status are given’. In the consideration of its original status came the discovery that some modern scholars now regard Lanfranc’s foundation charter to be a thirteenth-century forgery, so that the apparently clear account of its purpose and possessions is no longer

2 V.C.H. Kent. ii (1926), 157.
reliable. The question of relics at St. Gregory’s has also been discussed. Saints’ lives have usually been regarded as ‘sad rubbish’ but in the last thirty years or so there has been renewed interest in them as historical sources. Anglo-Saxon Kent was a place of many saints, some of them royal, and subsequently there was a library of Kentish saints’ lives. Since St. Gregory’s at one time claimed relics of three female saints and those of some Anglo-Saxon archbishops, the house inevitably has a part in the ‘Mildrith Legend’. In view of all this a re-assessment of St. Gregory’s for the readers of Archaeologia Cantiana seems to be needed.

FOUNDATION 1085-1133

Fortunately, there is sufficient evidence for the foundation by Lanfranc to make the loss of the charter less important. Lanfranc was archbishop 1070-89 and was a great builder, as well as administrator, scholar and statesman. He rebuilt the cathedral and the priory buildings there, and beside them built a new palace for the archbishops. In addition he founded two hospitals, St. Nicholas at Harbledown as a refuge for lepers, and St. John’s in Northgate as an almshouse for the poor and sick. The foundation date for these is 1084. Lanfranc’s obit gives evidence that he also put clerks at St. Gregory’s outside the city wall to care for the dying and to bury the poor without charge. Eadmer in his account of Lanfranc adds that the canons were to live under a rule and were to have the pastoral care of the men and women at St. John’s, which was across the street. He also records that Lanfranc gave lands and tithes to support the clergy. It is possible that St. Gregory’s was in existence by 1085, when relics from Lyminge were brought there and that the mention of the ‘guild of clerks’ in Domesday Book (1086) refers to its ‘canons’ as does the record of the ‘clergy at St. Gregory’s in Domesday Monachorun (c. 1100).

Eadmer’s use of the word ‘canons’ for the clergy at St. Gregory’s and his notice that they lived under a rule have suggested to some


Fig. 1. The location of St. Gregory's Priory, Canterbury

scholars, including William Somner, that this was the first house of Augustinian Canons in England. Canons are clergy who live under a rule: there was a revival of life under a rule in Italy in the mid eleventh century, but it did not spread to England until just before 1100. There was a sense in which the clergy at St. Gregory's might
reasonably have been called 'canons', but they did not belong to the reformed or organised group, later called Canons Regular of St. Augustine, who followed a rule based on a writing of St. Augustine of Hippo. Canons of this kind were introduced to St. Gregory's in 1133 by Archbishop William of Corbeil (1123-36), himself an Augustinian Canon. It has long been known that Archbishop William instituted the canons, for example from a charter of Archbishop Theobald. The exact date comes from a fragment of a Canterbury chronicle in B.L. MS Cotton Galba E iii, which runs from 1035-1273. A party from Merton Abbey, founded in 1114, came to Canterbury to begin the new foundation, as recorded in their chronicle.

William of Corbeil was not perhaps a desirable refounder. He probably came from Corbeil just south of Paris, and he studied at Laon under Anselm (not the archbishop) which should have been a good training. He was a clerk to the household of the notorious Ranulph Flambard, Bishop of Durham, and got to know Richard of Belmeis, Bishop of London. When the Bishop of London founded an Augustinian Priory at St. Osyth, Essex, in 1121 he made William, who had become a canon, prior of the new house. He was a compromise candidate for the Archbishopric of Canterbury in 1123, chosen by the cathedral monks as being a member of a religious order. At the time of the dedication of the new choir at the cathedral in May 1130, Henry I gave to the church at Canterbury the church of St. Martin in the town at Dover. William decided to refound it as a house of Augustinian canons. He chose a new site and began to build, but the cathedral monks thought St. Martin's had been given to them. They refused to allow a colony of canons to take possession, and after William's death in 1136 they installed monks instead and held St. Martin's as a dependant priory. Perhaps because he realised he would have no success at Dover, William refounded St. Gregory's with canons from Merton. This suggests loyalty to his order, if nothing more positive. If the scheme for canons at Dover had been successful, it is possible that the clergy at St. Gregory's might have continued simply with their role as hospital and cemetery keepers.

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7 1133 is at fol. 37. I am grateful to Dr. N.L. Ramsay for this reference.
9 V.C.H. Kent ii (1926), 133.
ST. GREGORY’S PRIORY, CANTERBURY
REBUILDING AFTER 1145 AND EXTENSION OF THE SITE 1227

It is not known whether William provided any new buildings for the new community. There was a fire in 1145 which destroyed the church and cloister, and a very large new church was begun under the patronage of Archbishop Theobald (1139-68). The church had a very long nave, against which lay the cloister to the north, with Prior’s Lodging, refectory, dormitory and Chapter House. The Chapter House was unusual in its site against the north end of the nave; the north transept was to the east, because of the great length of the church. An infirmary and small cloister were added later (? thirteenth century) and also a Lady Chapel (only known from documents). The kitchen and yards were to the north of the refectory. To the south of the church was the lay cemetery: the canons’ cemetery was to the east. Beyond it there was a garden, running across the line of the present Military Road (and the lead pipes of the cathedral priory aqueduct) to Old Ruttington Lane, which became the eastern boundary of St. Gregory’s land.

Within the garden was the house of the Archdeacon of Canterbury, perhaps from the time of Lanfranc. The archdeacon would of course travel with the archbishop on his journeys, but the house was his base, and perhaps his office, in Canterbury. Archbishop Stephen Langton set up his brother, Archdeacon Simon, in a house beside the church of St. Stephen at Hackington and in 1227 Langton gave to St. Gregory’s the house and garden which had belonged to the archdeacon, providing that they maintained the chapel there, said to have been built by Thomas Becket (Archdeacon 1154-63). Further the canons must allow the workmen from the cathedral priory access to the garden to mend the aqueduct, and they undertook to bring a basket of fruit from their orchard in the second week of September each year for the monks to eat in their refectory. By 1234 the canons had planted and enclosed the garden.10

FOUNDATION CHARTER

The charter was probably forged in the 1230s, after Stephen Langton had given the canons extra land, and before the writing up of the St. Gregory’s Cartulary, the earlier part of which is dated c. 1240.11 There

11 Cambridge University Library MS Li. ii. 15, A.M. Woodcock, op. cit. note 3, Charter 1.
is no surviving charter of Lanfranc with any substantial claim to authenticity, so a comparison is not possible. Various features suggest a late twelfth- or thirteenth-century date, especially the fact that the charter is written in the first person plural. The mention of magistri, university trained men, in the witness list is again a mid or late twelfth-century feature. Some phrases suggest an early thirteenth-century date. From the known history of the priory there seems no obvious date when a forgery was specially needed, but after the third Lateran Council required a charter as evidence for a grant of tithes (1179) and various small acquisitions of land in the 1220s, the canons presumably thought it time to provide themselves with a foundation charter. They did not claim very much that they had not been given — in fact they did not include some twelfth-century acquisitions. It is probable that they wished to set out their version of the place Lanfranc intended them to have in Canterbury, as well as safeguarding their tithes, churches and land. Forgery of this kind was not regarded as very sinful, rather it was a means of dealing with thirteenth-century ecclesiastical bureaucracy, unthought of by the original founders.

The charter begins with Lanfranc’s intention to build a church, in honour of his most blessed patron, and that of all England, Gregory the Great, for the good of his own soul, and that of King William (whose minister Lanfranc had been). Relics were to be set in the church of three female saints, and some relics of the Anglo-Saxon archbishops. This was going beyond the early evidence as only one set of relics is mentioned in the Easter Table Chronicle. There was a fierce fight with St. Augustine’s Abbey about relics at the end of the eleventh century. The forger was simply maintaining the position of that time.

The charter continues with provision for six priests and twelve clerks who are to live in common and under a rule and who are to serve the poor at St. John’s Hospital, as confirmed by Eadmer. They were licensed to hear confessions, both of strangers and citizens, to baptize, and to bury without charge. The burials are confirmed by Lanfranc’s obit, but confessions and baptisms would interfere with pastoral care by the local parish priests, against whom this part of the forgery may be aimed. A further part of St. Gregory’s work in the locality in Lanfranc’s charter is the keeping of schools within the priory precinct for boys from the city and nearby villages, a song school for younger children and a grammar school for older ones.

12 I am grateful for correspondence with Dr Martin Brett about the date of the charter.
This item is of special interest, in that the Canterbury city grammar school cannot be traced before 1259 (site unknown). Later it was at St. Alphege's Church. Since the schools were included in the forgery, it is reasonable to suppose they still existed at St. Gregory's by say 1230 or later. It is tempting to think that the grammar school was moved within the walls, and may have been Lanfranc's foundation: the archbishops appointed the schoolmaster.

The forger took some care with the part of the charter which concerned property. The land and churches were probably those given by Lanfranc, the tithes came from the land of the archbishop's tenants by knight-service, whose names are well known from the time of Domesday Book and on into the thirteenth century. It seems that the forger was using a real list of c. 1110, and he used five of the eleven names for knights in the notional witness list of the charter. Other witnesses were Gundulph of Rochester and Abbot Scolland of St. Augustine's, two monks, and the magistri. The magistri were a mistake, but Gundulph and Abbot Scoliand might well have assisted Lanfranc with his foundation at St. Gregory's. It is likely that there was some narrative of the early days, which the forger could use. In spite of the re-founding by Archbishop William in 1133, the canons at St. Gregory's perhaps liked to think that their house belonged to the great days of Lanfranc at Canterbury.

RELICS

The charter mentions four sets of relics - Eadburg, Mildrith, Ethelburg, all from Lyminge, and relics of Anglo-Saxon archbishops, presumably from the cathedral. When Lanfranc rebuilt the cathedral after the fire of 1067, the relics of the Anglo-Saxon archbishops were set in wooden chests on the north transept gallery. In the new choir dedicated by Archbishop William in 1130 the Anglo-Saxon archbishops were all reburied in various chapels, carefully listed by Gervase, the cathedral chronicler. It is possible that some small relics were taken from the chests and given to other churches, either by Lanfranc, or by William, but the evidence is against St. Gregory's - at best they were making much of a small donation.

St. Eadburg's relics were sent to St. Gregory's in 1085, as witnessed by the Easter Table Chronicle, in which it is explained that the relics came from Lyminge. There is nothing to indicate who Eadburg was -

\[14 \text{ R. Willis, } Canterbury Cathedral (London, 1854), 16, 37.\]
she may have been a member of the Lyminge community of nuns, or (as the St. Gregory’s clergy said) the Abbess of Minster in Thanet (d. 751). The possible connection with Minster encouraged them to say that they had a second set of relics, also from Lyminge, those of St. Mildred or Mildrith. She was descended from the Kentish royal house, and also Abbess of Minster (d. c. 700). Her relics had been at St. Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury from c. 1030 after the abbey had been given former Minster lands in Thanet. By 1088, the clergy at St. Gregory’s were in conflict with St. Augustine’s about St. Mildred’s relics. To defend themselves they produced a book—a pamphlet in the eighteenth-century antagonistic sense—saying that the Minster relics had been reburied at Lyminge in some kind of attempt to flee from the Danes. They muddled Eadburg with Ethelburg, the foundress of Lyminge, daughter of King Ethelbert, who had lived about 150 years earlier.

Just about this time, perhaps in 1089, Goscelin, a monk from Flanders, came to St. Augustine’s Abbey. He was a diligent and successful writer of saint’s lives, and also a skilled arranger of church services. He witnessed (and perhaps organised) the translation of the Anglo-Saxon saints at the abbey and their re-arrangement in shrines in Abbot Scolland’s new church in 1091—he wrote an account of this (including most usefully the development of the earliest churches) and he wrote the lives of the saints translated, including St. Mildred.15 Goscelin took on the clergy at St. Gregory’s in a rival pamphlet (libellus) demolishing two of theirs. He pointed out their errors and absurdities, mixing Eadburg with Ethelburg and not realising that the Danes were at Lyminge as well as Minster. They could not explain clearly how the relics came to be at Lyminge—had the two saints gone themselves to Lyminge and been buried there, or had later members of their community fled there with relics?16 The probable result of this controversy was that most local people believed that Mildred was at St. Augustine’s, but some later chroniclers elsewhere were unsure of the outcome.17

This disedifying argument happened before the Augustinian canons came to St. Gregory’s, but as can be seen from the forged charter, they kept up their predecessors’ view of the importance of their relics. To

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16 The probable texts from St. Gregory’s and Goscelin’s life of St. Mildred are published in D.W. Rollason, The Mildrith Legend (Leicester, 1982) and Goscelin’s ‘Contra Usurpatores’ in M.L. Coker, op. cit. note 4, 60-105.
17 M.L. Coker, op. cit. note 4, 62.
include Ethelburg was foolish, since there was no case for her, but Eadburg and Mildred had become part of the foundation, even if notional. This can be observed in the seals of St. Gregory’s. A twelfth-century seal shows Lanfranc or Pope Gregory seated on a throne with right hand blessing and left hand holding a book. A mid thirteenth-century seal shows Lanfranc seated on a throne within a niche with Mildred on his right and Eadburg on his left in smaller niches.18

A modern result of the relics controversy had been the suggestion that Lanfranc founded St. Gregory’s as some kind of check on the ambitions of St. Augustine’s Abbey. Margaret Gibson probably thought this because she supposed the charter to be a genuine account of Lanfranc’s intentions; but a small house such as St. Gregory’s could never have had a significant effect on so large and ancient a Benedictine Abbey.19

ARCHBISHOP’S LEGAL OFFICE AND TREASURY

An interesting insight into the archbishop’s use of St. Gregory’s is provided by William Thorne’s Chronicle of St. Augustine’s Abbey in the entry for 1181. Archbishop Richard of Dover and Abbot Roger I were in controversy about the abbey’s exemption from the archbishop’s jurisdiction. The archbishop alleged (quite rightly) that the abbey’s privileges (early legal documents) were forged. The Pope required an inspection of the privileges by independent assessors. The meeting was called at St. Gregory’s, where Theobald’s new building’s must have been complete. The long nave was in use, with the assessors as judges, and the opposing parties before them as in a law suit. Thorne (or his source) remarks that St. Gregory’s was regarded ‘as a sort of parlour of the archbishop himself’. On several future occasions when there was a trial of privileges, St. Gregory’s ‘on a convenient law day’ was chosen for the meeting, for example under Archbishops Pecham and Winchelsey.20 This suggests that other business may have been conducted there on law days. The use of the church as a court for the archbishop’s business is mentioned in Archbishop Chichele’s register for 1426.21

18 W. de G. Birch, Catalogue of Seals in the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum (London, 1887), nos. 2854, 1855.
19 M.T. Gibson, op. cit. note 5, 186-90.
21 (Ed.) E.F. Jacob, Chichele Register, Canterbury and York Society, 45, 1 (1943), 106.
The Consistory Court of the Diocese of Canterbury met within the north-west tower of the cathedral which was probably regarded as part of the Archbishop's Palace. By the early fifteenth century the court was sometimes held at Eastbridge Hospital on Saturdays, and by the 1460s it met in the morning at the cathedral, and in the afternoon at St. Gregory's. In 1483, Henry Trewonwall, the registrar of the Consistory Court was buried in the nave of St. Gregory's, before the High Cross. Henry Cooper, Commissary General 1490-3 (in charge of the Consistory Court), was buried in the Lady Chapel in 1500. These requests for burial show loyalty to the house and church on the part of legal officials who had worked there.

Perhaps because St. Gregory's had this legal function, or maybe because it was 'a sort of parlour of the archbishop himself' the house was chosen in 1293 as the place where the Chancellor of England should lodge, if he were in Canterbury. Two visits are recorded, in 1329 and 1372, when the Great Seal of England was in use in the hall at St. Gregory's. As a result of the long drawn out quarrelling between the Cathedral Priory monks and several archbishops, the archbishops used St. Gregory's for legal work and hospitality which might otherwise have been carried out at the Palace or in the cathedral. An extreme case was Archbishop Edmund Rich's consecration of the Bishop of Rochester at St. Gregory's in 1238, because he would not go to the cathedral.

In the same year as a result of the quarrel with Edmund Rich, the Pope ordered a separation of the muniments of the Church of Canterbury between the archbishop and the monks, with those of common interest being held by the archbishops who should provided the monks with copies at his own convenience. Dr Irene Churchill noticed that in Pecham's Register there was an entry stating that a certain document was at St. Gregory's, Canterbury, in the Treasury of the Archbishop. Professor Du Boulay gives other references, and adds the fact that the documents remained at Canterbury presumably at St. Gregory's, after the Dissolution. The Treasury may have been

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24 T.F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England* iii (Manchester, 1928) 293.
in the north-west tower of St. Gregory’s Church, which remained standing when the prior’s house was converted for domestic use after 1537. By 1633, the documents had probably been moved to Lambeth.

DAILY LIFE AND VISITATION

It was the duty of the archbishop to ‘visit’ the churches and religious houses of his diocese, to inspect them, and see if all was well. If the state of a church or house were unsatisfactory, he gave instructions for improvement. In some cases the visitation records survive, from which it can be observed that at St. Gregory’s there were usually a prior and nine or ten canons, with one or two sometimes away studying. The prior was often busy with the archbishop’s affairs, so the sub-prior was important. There was also the sacrist in charge of the fabric and treasures of the house, the precentor in charge of services, and the cellarer in charge of domestic affairs. In so small a community it was sometimes difficult to find competent canons for these posts. In the house there was the chaplain of Henry Cliff’s chantry (founded in 1326), and a few corrodians or pensioners, retired servants of the king or the archbishop for whom a payment was made and the canons had to find them lodging, fire and food so long as they lived. They probably lodged near the Little Cloister and the Infirmary. Senior employees who came in from elsewhere were a lawyer, an auditor and rent collectors. Of the many servants only the butler and the gatekeeper occur in documents, and those who fetched food from St. John’s Hospital, but there would have been servants in the kitchen and buttery, stables and gardens.

The visitations reveal a bad period in the 1320s to 1340s, after which the community settled down. There was nothing serious when Archbishop Langham came in 1368. No evidence remains from the visitations of Archbishop Arundel in 1397 or Chichele in 1415. In the Chronicle of John Stone, a monk at the cathedral priory, a procession is described on St. Gregory’s Day (March 12th) 1462, when the monks came out of the Green Court Gate and down Northgate after vespers. When they reached the church they sang the responsory for St. Gregory. Two canons stood by the door in green copes and welcomed the procession with incense. There was a sermon in the choir, and then the monks went back along Northgate. In August

28 V.C.H. Kent, ii (1926), 158.
1470, the General Chapter (meeting) of the Augustinian Canons of England was held at St. Gregory's and the cathedral monks attended a sermon wearing red copes - clearly they had friendly relations with the canons who lived over the wall. Some evidence about the church comes from wills of people wishing to be buried there: the belfry (possibly the south-west tower), the nave with the high cross, the choir, the Lady Chapel with Lady Statue, the window to St. Martin in the north aisle, a lamp to burn at the High Altar at the time of mass.

THE FINAL YEARS 1500-1537

A visitation of Archbishop Warham (1503-32) in 1511 provides valuable evidence for the continuity of life and work at St. Gregory's. The prior, William Weld or Welles had been appointed in 1505. Like Warham he was a Wykehamist, having been a scholar at Winchester and New College, Oxford, where he was a fellow in 1484. He was a theologian and attained to a doctorate in Divinity. He was Warham's chaplain, and went on to become an assistant bishop in Canterbury diocese with the title of Bishop of Sidon in 1515. He usually held two parishes in the diocese as well as his post at St. Gregory's. He accompanied Warham on the 1511 visitation, and preached the sermon on the day the Canterbury parish churches were inspected. The evidence from the parishes shows that he had sent canons to act as vicars (which was permitted) at the appropriated churches of Holy Cross by Westgate and Thanington. At St. Mary Northgate it was said that the canons were too active in the chapel of St. John's Hospital, so that the parishioners went there instead of to St. Mary's. It would seem that through the centuries the canons continued with the spiritual oversight of the people at St. John's Hospital.

The visitation of the priory itself gives the impression that the prior did not spend much time there, but the only specific complaint was that he did not show up written accounts. The canons complained of the precentor who quarrelled and could not sing, and the butler who provided bad beer. There were eight canons, plus a student at Cambridge. Probably the finances were in quite good order: the canons had recently built houses in Northgate to the north and south of their

30 Testamenta Cantiana (London, 1906), 63-4; E. Hasted, op. cit. note 23, 142.
31 Kent Records xxiv (1984), St. Gregory's 6-10: parishes 56, 60, 70, 195, 222.
front gate and walls, an investment which in time would bring in money in rents. The prior was obviously alert to make or save money where he could and not to forget the maintenance of the buildings — there was a legacy for mending the cloister in 1516. Weld died in 1526 and asked to be buried in the church, next to his predecessor, Edward Guildford (d. 1505).

Weld’s successor, William Brabourne, became involved in the religious repercussions of Henry VIII’s proposal to divorce Katharine of Aragon. As prior he had a seat at convocation, the ecclesiastical ‘parliament’ of the southern province. In April 1533, he is listed in company with John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, and Hugh Cooke, Abbot of Reading, and several canon lawyers who had voted ‘against the government’, maintaining that the Pope had power to allow Henry VIII to marry his brother’s widow and that the marriage was legitimate. He should have said the marriage was illegitimate, allowing a divorce: a month later Thomas Cromwell put pressure on Brabourne to resign, which he did. Opposition was not yet treason, for which Bishop Fisher and Abbot Cooke later died.32

The last prior was John Symkins, Cellarer of the Augustinian Priory of St. Bartholomew, Smithfield, London, who was recommended to Archbishop Cranmer and perhaps to Cromwell by the Abbot of Holy Cross, Waltham, Essex. Symkins wrote politely to Cromwell to thank him, with no thought that in four years he would be pensioned off and his house dissolved. By January 1535, he and only six canons accepted the Royal Supremacy (the King as Head of the Church in England, not the Pope). Some canons had perhaps left and gone abroad.33

In the spring of 1535, Symkins made a workmanlike job of listing the assets and expenses of his house for the Valor Ecclesiasticus. The income came to £166 4s. 5½d.34 They owned the churches of Waltham and Bethersden, recorded in Lanfranc’s charter, and Thanington, Nackington, Stalisfield, Elmstead and Bekesbourne, all given in the twelfth century, and carefully not included in the charter. There were houses, gardens, and rents in Canterbury suburbs and land mostly near the churches. The most important item was the manor of Howfield, worth £15, the first piece of land mentioned in the charter.

33 V.C.H. Kent, ii (1926), 159.
34 Valor Ecclesiasticus, i (1810), 24-6. In 1384, the income had been £133 15s. Trans. Davis, Thorne’s Chronicle, op. cit. note 20, 627.
The Canterbury churches, Northgate, Westgate and St. Dunstan’s, which were sometimes served by canons, came under a separate heading in the Valor. Some of the tithes from the archbishop’s tenants by knight service were still being paid in 1535, but some seem to have been lost.

On the expenses side of the accounts there is, for example, money given to poor on St. Gregory’s Day and other special days; the payment for the chaplain of Henry Cliff’s chantry (from 1326) and payment for the light before the High Altar (from 1392). Vicars of the churches had pensions, and fees were paid to legal officers and rent collectors. Magister Leonard Hethrington, ‘a servant of the Archbishop’ was a corrodian on whom 53s. 4d. was expended. The various expenses come to £44 9s. 4½d. so the net income was £121 15s. 1d.. When it was decided in 1536 that all houses worth less than £200 should be dissolved, St. Gregory’s could no longer survive. On February 23rd, 1537, the monastery was suppressed and the canons were sent away. John Symkins had a pension of 20 marks per annum.

When it was decided in 1537 that all houses worth less than £200 should be dissolved, St. Gregory’s could no longer survive. On February 23rd, 1537, the monastery was suppressed and the canons were sent away. John Symkins had a pension of 20 marks per annum. In 1540, he became a canon of the New Foundation at the Cathedral at Rochester, where he remained until his death in 1576, apart from six years’ exile in the reign of Mary I. There appears to be no survey or inventory of St. Gregory’s amongst the Augmentation Office papers. The St. Gregory’s site and estate were returned by the King to the archbishop in an exchange of property in 1537 and the site was let by the archbishop as a private house, based on the Prior’s Lodging, after the destruction of other buildings.

The Black canons or Augustinian Canons do not have a good reputation, partly because they had many small houses in the country, such as Bilsington on the edge of Romney Marsh and Combwell in Goudhurst, where the canons were few, poor and disobedient. Larger houses such as Cirencester, and Waltham Abbey and St. Osyth in Essex, maintained fine buildings, and in the case of Waltham, splendid liturgy and music. St. Gregory’s was a small house, but as a result of its position in Canterbury respectable and reasonably well ordered (apart from some years c.1320-1340). The value of a university education was recognised, and one or two young canons were often away studying. The obligations to St. John’s Hospital and parochial work seem to have been continued, and the use of the church for a court brought to the priory highly trained members of the archbishop’s staff who perhaps prevented muddle and mediocrity. The idea that Lanfranc intended St. Gregory’s as a ‘threat’ to St. Augustine’s is absurd, since the house was too small to be a ‘threat’ to anyone, except to the Canterbury parochial clergy. But it was a decent small scale establishment and should not be regarded as negligible.