

THE LIFE AND CAREER OF THOMAS GREENE MP (1794–1872)

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Introduction

Thomas Greene's name was extremely well known in nineteenth-century Lancaster. He was a prominent member of the local landowning gentry and he served as the town's MP for 32 nearly continuous years between 1824 and 1852, and 1853 and 1857. He occupied a prominent position in the town's judicial and administrative life and contributed to its philanthropic causes and schemes of civic improvement. Illustrative of his local stature was the obituary published in the *Lancaster Gazette* on 10 August 1872.

"... For nearly forty years the hon. gentleman represented Lancaster in Parliament and, during that protracted period of public service the interests of the constituency whose confidence he enjoyed to the last were his constant and unremitting care, no needful attention to any local want being for one moment delayed. In private life Mr. Greene was an exemplar which all of us might be proud to follow. As a magistrate, just and independent – as a landlord, kind and considerate – as a neighbour the very pattern of benevolence and Old English hospitality, the poor finding in him a ready helper, and his social equals a friend and companion, whom to know was to love ..."¹

This article presents a brief account of Greene's life with a particular focus on his political career. Despite his contemporary prominence, he is little known in Lancaster today, although visitors to the Judges' Lodgings in Lancaster will be unwittingly familiar with some of Greene's domestic arrangements. Richard T. Lonsdale's *The Drawing Room at Whittington Hall* (c. 1843–4) depicts an interior from Greene's home with several members of his family.

Thomas Greene: his background and early life

Thomas Greene was born on 19 January 1794 into a family of minor landowners who had owned estates near Lancaster at Slyne and Hest Bank since the early seventeenth-century. His father, also Thomas, was a successful lawyer and patron of the Cumbrian portraitist George Romney. Greene's mother, Martha, was the daughter and co-heir of Edmund Dawson, a wealthy Southwark brewer who owned land at Warton and may have originated from there. Born two years after his parents' marriage in 1792, Thomas's early years were divided between London, where his father had chambers at Gray's Inn, and a town house at 39 Bedford Square, and the ancestral family home at Slyne. Greene would fondly recall a boyhood which had fostered a strong attachment to Lancaster and its locality.² In 1801 Greene was sent to school. There is uncertainty as to where: he was claimed by both Eton College and Lancaster Grammar School. Between 1811 and 1814 he studied at Oriel College, Oxford, and Gray's Inn, before a continental 'Grand Tour' in 1816–7.³

Despite being called to the Bar two years after his return to England in 1819, Greene chose not to practise law. Instead, he settled into the life of a northern Lancashire squire, taking on responsibility for running the family estates and cutting a prominent figure in Lancaster's civic and social life. In 1820 he married Henrietta Russell, daughter of Sir Henry Russell, 1st Baronet Russell, a former Chief Justice of Bengal. Six children were born between 1821 and 1826 and, to accommodate his family, Greene began renting Whittington Hall in the Lune Valley from the summer of 1822. He bought the house in 1830 and had it entirely rebuilt by the Kendal architect George Webster.⁴

It had been an ambition of Greene's from boyhood to serve as parliamentary representative for Lancaster.⁵ An early attempt to become a parliamentary candidate in the autumn of 1819 came to nothing. However, in April 1824, he won the by-election which followed the death of Major General Gabriel Doveton, a former East India Company army officer, who had served as Lancaster's MP since 1812.⁶ Thereafter, he was successively re-elected eight times between 1826

and 1847, briefly lost his seat in 1852, regained it a year later, and held it until his retirement in 1857. Before exploring Greene's political career, I shall discuss Lancaster in the first half of the nineteenth century and locate Greene within it.



Figure 1 Thomas Greene (detail from portrait by John Hanson Walker). Lancaster City Council

Lancaster in the first half of the nineteenth-century

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, Lancaster's trans-Atlantic trade collapsed, taking with it many of the maritime-centred industries it had supported. The economic damage which this inflicted was exacerbated by the collapse of Lancaster's two banks, Thomas Worswick, Sons & Co. and Dilworth, Arthington and Birkett in 1822 and 1826 respectively. Lancaster remained an important market centre and benefitted from a revival of coastal trade and the development of a textile-manufacturing industry in the 1820s and 1830s. Greene played a role in the economic recovery, supporting the development of Hest Bank Quay in 1820. Unfortunately, it proved impossible to replace the prosperity which had been lost. Indeed, during the nationwide depressions of the 1840s, coastal trade contracted while the town's mills went into steady decline. Moreover, although the coming of the railways in the 1840s and 1850s preserved Lancaster's status as a communications hub, they brought limited economic benefit. In these unpropitious circumstances, demographic growth slowed as did the expansion of the town, although textile mills and workers' housing proliferated in the town centre and along the canal.⁷

Lancaster maintained a significant presence within the wider life of the county. It remained a major administrative centre, which included the county gaol in Lancaster Castle, of which Greene served as Constable from 1865 until his death. The town remained a meeting place for the county Assizes, despite losing its monopoly over them in 1835. Greene won respect for his vigorous efforts defending the town's judicial monopoly. Furthermore he was a prominent county magistrate. This status brought with it a range of judicial and administrative responsibilities for Lancashire as a whole. Greene's career as county magistrate began in 1822 and continued until the late 1860s. Lancaster was home to institutions such as the County Lunatic Asylum constructed in 1811–6. Greene's role as a county magistrate brought him into direct involvement with overseeing such establishments and in later life he was involved with the foundation of the Royal Albert Hospital.⁸

Despite the resilience of Lancaster and its institutions, it is undeniable that the town's status diminished during the first half of the nineteenth century. The loss of the Assizes encouraged the decline of the town's 'season'. Lancaster's image as a fashionable resort was further damaged by the town's notoriously poor sanitary conditions and the absence of a public water supply. The dire state of the latter was highlighted in a series of reports published in 1842, 1844 and 1848. However, the cost of potential remedies dissuaded the town's authorities from taking immediate action. The

nature of that authority had changed markedly in the preceding 25 years. By the end of the 1810s, the town's traditional governing body, the Borough Corporation, was experiencing serious financial difficulties. These resulted from poor administration and the wider challenges caused by the collapse of Lancaster's maritime economy. By the mid-1830s, provision of urban amenities such as street lighting, policing and firefighting had largely devolved to the Police or Improvement Commission. Established with the backing of Lancaster's social elite, this body received some financial assistance from the Corporation. However, unlike the Corporation, it was able to levy rates. This enabled it to provide a basic range of services and engage in limited civic improvement.⁹ It largely held on to these responsibilities following the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act which swept away the old Corporation and replaced it with a town council.¹⁰ There were very few things which the new council was formally obliged to do beyond policing the town. Consequently, for the next fourteen years a dual system operated in Lancaster whereby the provision of amenities remained largely the responsibility of the Police Commission. A desire to keep the rates low tempered the pace at which the town's authorities pursued urban improvement. In the case of the town's sanitary arrangements, damning medical reports and two cholera epidemics persuaded the council to intensify development of an adequate water supply in the early to mid-1850s.

An important driving force in municipal improvement were Lancaster's professional classes of doctors, lawyers, architects, surveyors etc., who formed a notable proportion of Lancaster's population. Among the authors of the reports published on the town's sanitation in the 1840s was the chief physician at the County Asylum, Dr Edward Denis de Vitre. Greene counted many of these individuals, including de Vitre, as his personal friends. Lancaster also possessed a significant body of shopkeepers, artisans, craftsmen and institutional workers. The absence of a large community of mill and factory workers within the town has been interpreted as having contributed to the relative tranquillity of Lancaster's popular politics during this period. Except for the Plug Riots in 1842, the town was largely unaffected by the industrial disturbances elsewhere in Lancashire.¹¹

The town's tradition of paternalism was given fresh impetus by the evangelical revival of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Charitable giving and endowments enhanced the status of Lancaster's urban elite and remained integral to civic life. Greene's philanthropic activities were extensive and are beyond the scope of this article to document in full. However, his name frequently appeared on subscription lists for charitable causes and in association with the patronage of Lancaster institutions such as the Mechanics Institute.¹²

Lancaster's political life in the first half of the nineteenth-century

Lancaster was an 'ancient borough': its right to send two representatives to Parliament was traceable to the thirteenth-century. This right lapsed early in the fourteenth century, not to be revived until 1523, yet it remained a source of great civic pride. The franchise was vested in 'freemen of the borough' – a status attainable through inheritance, apprenticeship, as a gift from the town authorities or through outright purchase. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, one fifth of 'freemen' resided in the town of Lancaster while the remainder dwelt either in the town's rural hinterland or elsewhere in southern Lancashire.¹³ Dominance of borough politics by the freemen changed little after the Great Reform Act of 1832. Nationally, the Act extended the borough franchise to householders occupying property worth at least £10 per annum and whose residence had exceeded a period of six months.¹⁴ However, a series of amendments to the three reform bills which passed before parliament in 1831–2 preserved many of the voting rights held by freemen.¹⁵ The consequence of this was that, in Lancaster, the freemen continued to constitute the majority of the borough's electorate until its disenfranchisement in 1867.¹⁶

Prior to the mid-1830s the candidates for whom the freemen voted were drawn from the local mercantile and landed elite, and their selection was left to the local gentry and aristocracy. In 1824 Greene acquired the support of the Earl of Derby as a preliminary to his standing in the election that

followed Gabriel Doveton's death. Two years later, Greene even received the grudging backing of Alexander Hamilton, 10th Duke of Hamilton, a Scottish aristocrat and local landowner who, for reasons which remain obscure, engaged in hostile manoeuvring against Greene in 1824. The corporation maintained an official neutrality in electoral contests. Yet, a candidate who secured the corporation's backing was invariably successful. Greene's active defence of Lancaster's monopoly over the Assizes as High Sheriff, amongst other actions, helped to win him the Corporation's backing in 1824. These rather comfortable arrangements were upset from the 1830s as members of the town's growing band of textile manufacturers, led by the Greg, Armstrong and Gregson families, attempted to break into borough politics.¹⁷

The elections themselves were substantial public spectacles. After a writ for the holding of an election had been issued, candidates put themselves forward and embarked on canvassing the electorate. The hustings took place in public in Lancaster's Market Square and, if the election was contested, the opening of the polls would be frequently followed by further rounds of canvassing and voting spread over several days. Voting took place in public and, once the new members had been returned, they would be seated in a richly decorated chair, borne aloft and paraded through the centre of Lancaster. After the ceremonial 'chairing', the victorious candidate would typically retire to celebrate with his supporters. The 7 August 1830 edition of the *Lancaster Gazette* described one such chairing participated in by Greene and his fellow MP John Fenton Cawthorne.

"... Mr. Greene then returned to the Royal-Oak, and was shortly afterwards chaired. The procession moved from the Market-place, down Cheapside, over the Castle-hill, and down Market-street, to the Market-place again. Mr. Cawthorne's flags and band preceding it, and followed by his Committee, a large number of his friends. The blue flag next,¹⁸ and Mr. Greene's after it, with his band, followed by his Committee, and a large body of his friends. Mr. Greene on a richly decorated chair. At each stoppage, the several parties were applauded most vociferously. On the arrival of the chair near the Town-Hall Mr. Greene left it, and it [the chair] was in a few minutes demolished by the congregated mob, as has lately been usual ..."¹⁹

The destruction of the chair by the mob illustrates the extent to which violence was never far from the surface during borough elections. They had always been opportunities for public carousing that became suffused with party-political warfare. The nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of an organised party-political system. If partisan affiliation arguably mattered little in Lancastrian politics prior to the Great Reform Act, it undoubtedly assumed increasing significance from 1832 onwards. Party labels could be extremely fluid. However, prior to the mid-1830s, the borough was a 'Conservative' stronghold. From 1835, a 'Liberal' challenge began to emerge. Liberal candidates were unsuccessful in the general elections of 1837 and 1841. Yet the 1847 victory of Samuel Gregson marked the beginning of an eighteen-year period in which borough representation was largely shared between the Liberals and Conservatives. It should be observed that the political divide in Lancaster intersected with a socio-economic one. The 'Liberal' challenge came from the textile manufacturers whose presence in the town's politics grew from the 1830s onwards, while gentry backgrounds predominated amongst their 'Conservative' rivals.²⁰

Throughout his career, Greene insisted that he was an independent political actor. On the hustings at Lancaster in 1824, despite indicating his support for the administration of the Prime Minister, Robert Jenkinson 2nd Earl of Liverpool, he declared that he was not:

"... one of those zealous and violent partisans, who could consent to give his vote in favour of a measure which he himself might deem of an injurious tendency ... he would not surrender his opinions to any man or set of men; he would judge for himself, and if he differed in opinion from those with whom he should be in the habit of acting, conscientiously thinking that the measures they proposed were of an improper and mischievous nature, God forbid that he should in any one instance lend his countenance or support ..."²¹

It has been written of Greene that in his early parliamentary career he manoeuvred between different party-political positions in order to preserve his local support. Nevertheless, what Rix has described as Greene's "fluid party allegiance" had by the mid-1830s settled into a moderate 'Conservatism', which he would retain until the end of his political career.²²

Political malpractice was never far from the surface in borough politics. The nature of the franchise both before and after the Great Reform Act meant that there was considerable potential for influencing the outcome of an election by bribing the electorate. Historians have questioned the extent to which corrupt practices meaningfully influenced borough politics prior to 1867. Nevertheless, high-profile accusations of corruption and petitions against election results in the 1840s and 50s gave Lancaster an unpleasant national reputation.²³ It was into this complex political world that Greene was to venture in 1824.

Thomas Greene's parliamentary career, c. 1824–52 and 1853–7

Greene's career as an MP got off to a robust start. Late in the 1824 parliament, he won local approval for his assertive promotion of tithe reform. Tithes were an annual tax where a tenth of all agricultural produce was paid to Anglican clergy or to lay owners of ex-ecclesiastical land to which an entitlement to collect tithes had been attached. Against an early-nineteenth-century backdrop of rapid industrialisation, religious dissent and periodic agricultural depression, tithes were predictably unpopular. They were governed by a mosaic of Acts of Parliament. Greene favoured legislative reform of this system and spent much of the early portion of his career pressing for it. Despite some uncertainty as to his determination to contest another election, Greene stood in 1826 and was returned unopposed. The next six years witnessed his manoeuvring amidst the fraught political currents of the late-1820s and early-1830s. February 1828 witnessed the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts which for well over 160 years had barred Protestant Dissenters from holding any office in local or central government. This was a sensitive issue in Lancaster given the town's sizeable non-conforming community and Greene gave every appearance of being in sympathy. He presented petitions for repeal in the summer of 1827 and the winter of 1828 before voting for repeal on 26 February 1828. This contrasted with the stance he took on Roman Catholic emancipation. In 1828–9, Greene was a determined opponent of removing the civil disabilities on British Roman Catholics. He voted against relief on 12 May 1828, and in March 1829 he presented and endorsed petitions against emancipation from Lancaster's Corporation and inhabitants. He voted consistently against the relief bill brought in by Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington. He denounced it as a threat to the Protestant establishment, although praising English Catholics themselves.²⁴

The election which took place in the summer of 1830 was an important one for Greene as it marked his first experience of a contested election. He stood alongside his fellow MP John Fenton Cawthorne, a veteran of Lancaster politics who had represented the borough on and off since 1806. Theoretically, both men should have been returned unopposed. Efforts within the constituency to put up Patrick Maxwell Stewart, a London West India merchant and associate of the Duke of Hamilton, as a rival candidate had come to nothing. However, Greene, the sole candidate to appear on the hustings, faced an unexpected challenge. Robert Hyde Greg, a textile manufacturer and brother of John Greg the proprietor of Caton mill and a cotton mill in Lancaster, was proposed as a third candidate. This challenge was unsuccessful, yet it was a foretaste of things to come. Greene also confronted the growing popular pressure for parliamentary reform. Judiciously reading the mood of the gathered crowd, Greene expressed his support for the enfranchisement of growing industrial towns such as Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield. This, he argued, was not only in line with the "principles of our constitution" but necessary for the prevention of "violent inroads and more sweeping reforms" antithetical to that same constitution.²⁵ Parliamentary reform was not the only national issue to affect Greene. Escott has described the abolition of colonial slavery as an "emotive issue" in Lancaster "on account of Lancaster's many dissenters and declining West India trade" and he has depicted Greene as steering a course between different

constituencies of opinion. Rix has observed of Greene that he was essentially “favourable” to abolition, albeit as a gradual process rather than through a “sweeping legislative enactment”.²⁶

Local pressure over reform mounted during 1831. Cawthorne’s death in March led to a by-election which was contested and won by the aforementioned Stewart. The day after the by-election both Stewart – well known to be pro-reform – and Greene were invited to endorse a Lancaster petition in favour of the reform bill which Charles Grey, 2nd Earl Grey, had introduced to Parliament. This Greene did, declaring his pleasure at discovering that his sentiments towards reform were shared by his constituents. Moreover, on 22 March he voted in favour of the bill at its second reading in the House of Commons. The failure of the bill a month later precipitated the dissolution of Parliament and a general election. On the hustings at Lancaster, Greene positioned himself as a supporter of moderate reform and enjoyed an unopposed return as member alongside Stewart.²⁷ Before the election Greene received the support of the local press. In the case of the Conservative-leaning *Lancaster Gazette*, this was not surprising. However, Greene was also lauded in the short-lived, Whig-aligned and pro-reform *Lancaster Herald*. In the spring and summer of 1831 the *Herald* lionised Greene as a true promoter of reform. The 30 April edition carried an editorial which spoke in glowing terms of both Stewart and Greene. It described them as having:

“... with manly sincerity, and unfettered independence, given their aid to the measures of a wise and honest Administration, acting under the complete sanction of a virtuous and patriotic King. THEY ARE BOTH ADVOCATES FOR REFORM IN OUR REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEM! ...”²⁸

Similarly, the 7 May edition wrote in glowing terms of the address which Greene delivered on the hustings.²⁹ The approval of the *Herald* indicated that Greene had convinced his constituents that he stood with those who desired change to the electoral system. If anything, he may have gone too far. The reporting of the election in the *Gazette* hinted at the presence of unease, amongst Lancaster’s Conservative voters, that Greene had become so pro-reform as to have retreated from an earlier commitment to oppose reforms directly opposed to the Constitution.³⁰ Bolstered by a pro-reform majority in the House of Commons, Grey introduced a second reform bill in the summer of 1831. Greene once more lent the ministry his support for the bill, although he voted on 30 August for an amendment preserving freemen voting rights. This was significant because it indicated the limits of Greene’s support for reform.³¹ It also presaged an increasingly lukewarm attitude towards him in the pages of the *Herald*. Greene’s failure to evince pro-reform sentiments at a civic feast in the autumn of 1831 prompted the paper to declare that his “hesitating policy” was:

“... vastly beneath his upright, honourable, and manly character, and unworthy of a member who certainly never would have obtained his present dignified position had he not *pledged* himself to support the very measure concerning which he displayed, at the Lancaster Civic Feast, so singular and extraordinary a quantity of coyness ...”³²

The second reform bill made its way through the Commons. However, it was rejected by the House of Lords in October. The popular backlash to this was sufficiently intense for the threat of a total breakdown of public order to seem a real possibility. In December, Grey tried again, introducing a third reform bill to the Commons. In an effort to overcome opposition in the House of Lords, Grey proposed the creation of fifty new Whig Peers to force the bill’s passage through the Upper House. William IV balked at the prospect, prompting Grey to resign in May 1832. Against the backdrop of frenetic extra-parliamentary agitation, the Duke of Wellington attempted and failed to form a replacement Tory administration. From this point, opposition to the reform bill began to crumble. Grey returned to office, extracting from the King a promise to appoint new Whig Peers. In order to prevent this, further Conservative opposition to the bill was abandoned. What was to become the Representation of the People Act passed safely through the Lords and was given Royal Assent in June 1832³³. At the general election in December 1832, Greene was once more returned alongside Stewart. However, it is worth noting that Greene had by this point come under attack in the pages of the *Herald* for temporising between opposing political views. The 29 September edition acidly

remarked of a recent parliamentary address given by Greene that it had said “just as much as can be safely said without saying anything at all”.³⁴ This suggested that Greene’s efforts to steer between different constituencies of opinion in Lancaster was not without political risk.

Having spent the autumn of 1834 on a French tour, Greene returned to England amidst the collapse of the ministry led by William Lamb, 2nd Viscount Melbourne. An election loomed and, on the hustings at Lancaster in January 1835, Greene performed a political *volte face* by publicly avowing support for Sir Robert Peel and the principles of moderate conservatism laid down in the Tamworth Manifesto. Despite his resentment at Peel’s deliberate wrecking of his 1828 Tithes Commutation Bill, Greene had gravitated towards the up-and-coming statesman from the end of the 1820s. He had waited on Peel during the latter’s north-western tour in October 1828 and, despite his position on Catholic emancipation, he supported Peel at the Oxford University by-election of 1829.³⁵ Although Greene was returned unopposed alongside Stewart, he was the subject of hissing from the assembled electors.³⁶ Nevertheless, Greene was now to align himself firmly with Peel and doggedly supported the Prime Minister during his brief first administration. Throughout Melbourne’s second ministry of 1835–41, Greene remained more or less consistently aligned with the Conservatives at Westminster. Slightly ironically, he was representing a constituency becoming markedly more politically Liberal. In the wake of the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835, Liberals came to dominate Lancaster’s new town council. The disconnect between the political principles of the council and at least one of the town’s MPs was remarked on in the edition of the *Manchester Times* on 6 August 1836. The paper damned Greene by commenting that his well-established reputation for “amiable conduct” was insufficient to justify his status as parliamentary representative.

“... He is, we believe, an excellent master, neighbour and landlord – very good reasons why he should be faithfully served by his dependents, visited and invited by his acquaintances, or treated to an annual *fete* of dancing and bell-ringing by his tenantry and their peasants – but certainly not valid reasons why he should be deputed by the population of an important town, a dozen miles distant, to represent them in parliament; - a population, too, professing diametrically opposite political opinions to those professed by Mr. Greene, if we may judge by the late return of members of the town-council, *every one of whom is a Liberal!* ...”

Something of this tension was discernible in the general election of 1837, which witnessed a revival of Liberal efforts to wrest a share of Lancaster’s representation from the Conservatives. William Rathbone Greg, another brother of John Greg, stood as Liberal candidate. The 27 July edition of the *Westmorland Gazette* described Greg being drawn into the town by the “rabble” and noted with asperity that the “factory people” annoyed the Conservative candidates with their “discordant yells”. For the first time in Greene’s career, he faced competition in the form of a rival Conservative candidate, a fellow member of the local gentry, George Marton of Capernwray Hall. Greene declined to form a coalition with Marton. Yet, despite this and the opposing Liberal challenge, he enjoyed a comfortable victory and indeed topped the poll. However, Stewart lost his seat to Marton. The announcement of the result prompted what the *Westmorland Gazette* described as the “mobility”, to launch a “simultaneous attack” upon ‘Mr. Marton’s friends, his colours, band, and the hustings’. Marton’s committee room was subsequently attacked and its windows smashed. None of this violence seems to have been visited on Greene or his supporters. This may have reflected the fact that it was Marton, not Greene, who had displaced Lancaster’s one non-Conservative representative. However, it is tempting to think that it also indicated how Greene’s reputation – his “amiable conduct” – was of greater local weight than his party-political affiliations. In the years that followed, Greene’s attendance in Westminster gradually increased.³⁷ Nevertheless, he remained a significant presence in Lancaster and its locality. There is a faintly feudal air about the “several hearty peels” which the village church at Whittington rang for Greene’s return home in February 1838. Yet it underlines an important point that serving as an MP was for Greene simply a part of a broader status as a landed gentleman with all of the responsibilities and functions which this entailed. For example, in the summer of 1838 Greene was sworn on to the Grand Jury at the

Lancaster Assizes and attended the subsequent Assize Ball. In September, he appeared at the Gala Day of the John O’Gaunt’s Bowmen and continued to extend his patronage to local philanthropic causes, such as a January 1841 fund for relief of the poor.³⁸

In the 1841 general election, Greene and Marton saw off a fresh Liberal challenge from John Armstrong, proprietor of Galgate silk mill, with Greene again topping the poll and declaring on the hustings that he had not been “an idle member”.³⁹ His appointment as chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means in September signalled his growing prominence in Westminster where he remained aligned with Peel. Important for his standing in Lancaster was his decision to vote in the spring of 1845 for an increase in the subsidy paid to a Roman Catholic seminary in Ireland. The Maynooth Grant intensified Conservative anxiety over the security of the established Church, and in Lancaster, where sectarian feelings were to run high throughout the decade, news of Greene’s votes for the Grant gave “mortal offence” to his supporters.⁴⁰ Equally significant were Greene’s votes on 27 March and 15 May 1846 for the repeal of the Corn Laws. These were the protective tariffs which the government of Lord Liverpool imposed on the import of foreign cereals into the United Kingdom in 1815. They were intended to protect British agriculture during economic uncertainty after the Napoleonic Wars. Nevertheless, they attracted intense criticism, with their opponents characterising them as protecting the landed interest at the expense of the rest of the country. Extra-parliamentary clamour for repeal had grown against the backdrop of the Reform Crisis of 1831–2 and from the mid-1830s the movement known as the anti-Corn Law League played a significant role in mobilising middle-class opposition. The Corn Laws were ultimately repealed in 1846 by Peel’s administration. Peel had been a supporter of Free Trade since the 1820s and it seems likely that from the beginning of his premiership in 1841 he anticipated repeal. In 1842 he amended the sliding scale introduced during the 1820s – whereby import restrictions were eased at moments of significant increase in corn’s domestic price – which moderated the operation of the Laws. Why Peel chose to wait until 1846 for repeal is a complex question. However, Evans has argued that both a febrile domestic climate in the early 1840s, coupled with the need to win over protectionist voices within the Conservative Party, encouraged Peel to delay acting. As Evans has commented, in 1845–6 the onset of the Irish potato famine provided the occasion, if not necessarily the catalyst, for government moves towards trade liberalisation.⁴¹

Broadly speaking, Greene was a long-standing supporter of the Corn Laws, voting consistently against any repeal measures such as those brought by Charles Villiers during the late-1830s and early-1840s. Nevertheless, on the hustings at Lancaster in December 1830, he stated that protectionist measures needed to be commensurate with “the duty of Parliament” to provide cheap bread to the “poorest classes”. Eleven years later he declared his opposition to a fixed duty on corn and support for a sliding scale of tariffs on imports. Greene voted for Peel’s amendments to the existing scale in spring 1842. This was a prelude for his final conversion to repeal and his decision to vote in support of Peel in 1846. Voting for repeal probably enhanced Greene’s reputation in Lancaster. Nevertheless, that Greene was among the ‘Peelite’ MPs who split from the Conservative Party following the Prime Minister’s resignation in June 1846, augured challenges ahead.⁴²

Greene entered the summer 1847 general election in an uncomfortable position. The candidacy of Samuel Gregson, a wealthy merchant whose father had been manager of the Lancaster Canal Company, meant that he yet again faced a Liberal challenger. However, he was also in competition with an additional Conservative candidate, Edward Dodson Salisbury, a former Mayor of Lancaster. Greene’s affiliation as a ‘Peelite’ removed any possibility of forming a coalition with Salisbury and, to make matters worse, many of the borough’s Conservative voters had neither forgotten nor forgiven Greene for voting in favour of the Maynooth Grant. Indeed, the *Lancaster Gazette* exhorted its readership not to vote for Greene, while over 150 electors put their names to a public declaration stating their:

“... decided unwillingness, to vote for any candidate who will not avow his determination to resist the endowment of Popery ...”⁴³

Greene was well aware that he was in trouble and on the hustings freely declared that he had not gone “far enough for either party” and had “doubtless lost many votes”.⁴⁴ Yet he held on to his seat, but was pushed into second place by Gregson. Furthermore, the *Gazette* archly remarked that “nothing but the greatest personal regard felt for Mr. Greene saved him from the most decided defeat”. Some months later Greene himself wrote candidly to Edward Smith-Stanley that the 1847 election had been the most “objectionable” he had ever experienced.⁴⁵

Over the next few years, Greene’s prominence in Westminster continued to grow. In 1848, he was appointed one of the three commissioners to oversee the completion of the new Palace of Westminster.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, this seems to have done little to buttress his reputation in Lancaster. He remained a significant presence within the borough’s civic life, involving himself in the preparations for the October 1851 visit of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort.⁴⁷ His activities as county magistrate continued unabated.⁴⁸ He also continued to put in prominent appearances at local events, for example the *Gazette* of 16 August 1851 recorded his munificence at a charitable bazaar in aid of the Lancaster Infirmary.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the general election of 1852 marked the crisis of his local political fortunes. Samuel Gregson had lost his seat in 1848 amidst allegations of bribery and corruption. The by-election which followed saw John Armstrong’s son, Robert Baines Armstrong, returned as member. However, in 1852, Gregson chose to stand and contest Greene’s seat. Furthermore, Greene again faced an additional Conservative challenger, John Ellis, who stood as an opponent of the Maynooth Grant and publicly attacked Greene for the stance he had taken on it. On the hustings, Greene attempted to make a virtue out of his past actions by asserting that he had deliberately attempted to align his own views with broader shifts of public feeling. Even so, with the Conservative vote divided, Greene lost his seat to Armstrong. It is clear that Greene was deeply affected by what took place and perhaps struggled to comprehend precisely why the electorate had turned against him.⁵⁰ Acknowledging the result on the hustings, Greene declared:

“... I know not whether it be usual or not for a rejected candidate to attend for the purpose of hearing the announcement of his defeat, but I have been too long and too closely connected with you, to retire from the position I have so long held, without coming forward publicly to bid you farewell. I cannot help expressing the regret I feel at the course pursued by many, who were heretofore my supporters, and I am entirely at a loss to understand what part of my conduct has caused them to sever themselves from me, and hence to give a triumph to an opposite party. I wish them to look fairly into my conduct, and duly weigh the course I have pursued, and I think they will find, that they had no cause to withdraw this confidence from me ...”⁵¹

There was a further feature of the election worth commenting on. The edition of the *Northern Star* on 26 June 1852 – a newspaper associated with the Chartist movement – drew attention to a very public protest against Greene in Lancaster. Earlier that year the Militia Bill had come before Parliament. The purpose of this legislation was to constitute a militia force against the backdrop of an increasingly turbulent international scene. During the debates Greene voted to maintain flogging as a punishment for militiamen. He later claimed that this had reflected a desire to see the militia operate under the same regulations which governed the regular army and yeomanry cavalry. Nevertheless, one of his constituents was sufficiently appalled by Greene’s actions that he disseminated around Lancaster a grisly reminder of their representative’s vote – a placard in the shape of a human torso with “red streaks and splashes strongly resembling human blood”. On the placard was a denunciation of the practice of flogging and a charge of hypocrisy levelled against Greene’s voting for the measure. Greene’s eldest son Cornelius was by this time a commissioned officer in the 43rd Regiment of Foot and consequently exempt from flogging.

“... I don’t know that he himself ever deserved a flogging; if he did deserve it, he did not get it, because he is the son of a rich man. But if a poor man’s son was forced into the militia against his will, he is liable to be flogged; and this is what Mr. Greene has been voting for. Elector! That

smooth-tongued man will soon ask thee in soft tones to vote for him again as thy representative in Parliament. What should the answer be? No Greene! No Tories! No bloody backs! ...”⁵²

What if any effect these words had on the outcome of the election is unclear. Yet, it is without doubt that the placard shocked and angered Greene. On the hustings, he strongly rejected any imputation of a “cruelty of disposition”. He argued that he had not voted for a new law introducing flogging to the militia but had extended existing rules for the army and yeomanry. He hinted that the placard was an underhand strategy by his political opponents to discredit him.⁵³ It is potentially indicative of the impact of this attack that Greene kept a copy of the placard amongst his parliamentary papers.

Events now conspired to ensure that Greene would not be absent from his seat for long. In November a petition was launched against the result of the election claiming that Armstrong had engaged in corrupt practices to secure his return. Within the space of three months, the result of the election had been declared null and void and a by-election took place in the spring. Greene’s decision to stand as a candidate was criticised in the pages of the Liberal-aligned *Lancaster Guardian*. The paper attacked Greene’s past changes of political position: “his talents have chiefly been exercised in the way of turning round”.⁵⁴ However, it also depicted him as a figure of the past, fundamentally out of touch with contemporary Lancaster and its political sympathies. An editorial on 26 March argued that the town was firmly Liberal in allegiance and would vote for the Liberal candidate, John Armstrong.⁵⁵ Coverage of the election in both the *Gazette* and *Guardian* certainly indicates that Greene’s candidacy was far from universally welcomed. When he stood to speak, the cheers of his supporters were claimed by the *Guardian* to have been drowned out by a “perfect storm of hisses and groans”.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Greene won. Armstrong, with the backing of the *Guardian*, presented a petition against Greene’s return, alleging corrupt practices. Whatever the truth, by the end of May Armstrong had withdrawn his petition and Greene was again Lancaster’s MP.⁵⁷ The next three years were a relatively quiet time for Greene and in April 1856 he announced that he would not stand as a candidate at the dissolution of Parliament. This was a decision ascribed by the 19 April edition of the *Preston Chronicle* to Greene’s “increased years” and “infirmity”.⁵⁸ He stepped down in 1857. In 1861 he received a public testimonial of thanks for his services to the borough as its representative and was presented with a silver candelabrum.⁵⁹

After Greene’s retirement, Lancaster reached the nadir of its mid-nineteenth-century political fortunes. The victory of two Liberal candidates in the 1865 general election prompted fresh Conservative accusations of corruption and a petition against the result. This occurred as the Liberal government of Edward Smith-Stanley, 14th Earl of Derby, was anxious for constitutional reform and was striving to be seen to take a firm stance on political malpractice. A Royal Commission was established to enquire into Lancastrian elections and its damning report resulted in Lancaster’s disenfranchisement in 1867. This meant that the borough lost its right to send two representatives to Westminster. It was absorbed into the county constituency of North Lancashire. This was a state of affairs only to be reversed eighteen years later in 1885. The Redistribution of Seats Act restored the town’s separate representation, although only as a single member constituency with extended boundaries which incorporated many of the rural districts around Lancaster.⁶⁰

Life after politics, c. 1858–72

What view, if any, Greene took of the dissolution of the constituency which he had so long represented is not known. On the occasion of the public testimonial, marking Greene’s time as borough representative, Lancaster’s Mayor declared that Greene had not retired into “the life of any easy country gentleman” but remained “employed in doing good”.⁶¹ In Lancaster, Greene remained a familiar presence, attending local events and contributing to schemes for urban improvement. Involved in the creation of Williamson Park, he also presided from 1860 over a special committee on asylum accommodation, taking a keen interest in the development of what would become the Royal Albert Hospital. His activities as county magistrate continued unabated and between 1860

and 1866 he held the chairmanship of the Lonsdale Hundred Quarter Sessions. The culmination of Greene's continued civic role came in the spring of 1865 when he assumed the ceremonial role of Constable of Lancaster Castle. Nevertheless, by the late-1860s age and ill health had begun to take their toll and in spring 1869 he resigned from the chairmanship of the annual sessions of the county magistracy. He retreated into seclusion at Whittington Hall where he died on 8 August 1872. His funeral five days later was marked by a private ceremony at Bolton-le-Sands Parish Church.

Conclusion

Among the many tributes paid to Greene was a letter of condolence addressed to his wife Henrietta and signed by 24 county magistrates from across Lancashire, Westmorland and the West Riding of Yorkshire. "To most of us" the signatories declared:

"... Mr Greene was known, more or less intimately – others were more fortunate in the enjoyment of his close personal friendship, but all who knew him can bear willing testimony to his invariable kindness and consideration towards all around him of whatever class or station in life. He leaves behind him an honoured and much respected name and his long career furnishes a bright example of a high-minded Christian Gentleman, and as a Magistrate it may be most truly said of him that he laboured to do Justice and loved Mercy ..." ⁶²

It was a fitting testimonial. For well over a quarter of a century, Greene had represented Lancaster in the House of Commons and administered local authority and justice in its environs. As a parliamentarian, his efforts to reconcile his principles with fluid constituency sentiment were not always successful. During the latter stages of his career, he appeared increasingly out of step with political and social changes in the town. However, his record of diligent and humane service to town and locality deserves to be accorded its rightful place within the history of nineteenth-century Lancaster.

Author profile

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Preston Chronicle

TNA PROB The National Archives, Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, *Will of Edmund Dawson of Saint Olave Southwark, Surrey*

LA DDGR (Lancashire Archives, Dawson-Greene family of Whittington – c1230–1993) C8 Correspondence bdle. 2 *Letters from Margaret Greene Bradley 1796–1815*

LA DDGR (Lancashire Archives, Dawson-Greene family of Whittington – c1230–1993) C9 Correspondence bdle. 2 *Letters to Henrietta, wife of Thomas Greene III from various people including her mother-in-law, Martha Greene, her son Dawson Cornelius Greene and a letter of condolence from Magistrates on Thomas Greene's death, 1822–1872*

LRO 920 DER (14) (Liverpool Record Office, Papers of Edward Geoffrey Stanley 14th Earl of Derby) 65/8/41 *Thomas Greene MP*

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Endnotes

¹ *Lancaster Gazette* 10/08/1872

² Escott, 2009a, 401; Owen, 1986; TNA PROB 11/1138/236; *Lancaster Gazette* 28/09/1861

³ Copeland, 1981, 14–15; Escott, 2009a, 401; LA DDGR C8, blde.2

⁴ Escott, 2009a, 401–02; Copeland, 1981, 18–19

⁵ *Lancaster Gazette* 28/09/1861 cited in Rix, ‘Thomas Greene’: History of Parliament Trust, London, unpublished article on Thomas Greene/Lancaster for 1824–52 and 1853–7 section by Kathryn Rix. I am grateful to the History of Parliament Trust for allowing me to see this article in draft.

⁶ Escott, 2009a, 402; Escott, 2009b, 570

⁷ Winstanley, 2001, 174–8, 179–81, 194; Gooderson, 1975, 42–3, 152; Escott, 2009a, 402; White, 2004, 92

⁸ Winstanley, 2001, 184–8; Escott, 2009a, 401; Gooderson, 1975, 49–55; Copeland, 1981, 16–7

⁹ The Commission was not an elected body. Membership was open to all owners of property valued at £70 per annum or tenants of premises valued at £40 for poor rate purposes. This did not include those running licensed premises. See: Winstanley, 2001, 214

¹⁰ Winstanley has observed that the Act sought the destruction of the privileges of traditional borough Corporations and the establishment of more democratically accountable modes of local governance. Lancaster and boroughs like it gained a limited form of democracy underpinned by property qualifications. From 1835 onwards, resident male ratepayers elected eighteen councillors. Representing three wards: Queen’s, Castle and St. Anne’s, these individuals were responsible for electing two aldermen for each ward and a mayor. See: Winstanley, 2001, 214

¹¹ Winstanley, 2001, 184, 196–8, 208–14; Gooderson, 1975, 29–30, 61–62, 118–28, 153–8)

¹² Gooderson, 1975, 30, 136–48, 158–9

¹³ Mullett, 2001, 81; Winstanley, 2001, 215

¹⁴ The Representation of the People Act of 1832 – popularly known as the Great Reform Act – instituted far-reaching changes to the electoral system of England and Wales. The government of Charles Grey, 2nd Earl Grey, introduced three reform bills to Parliament between March 1831 and 1832. The first two foundered. The third was successful and received royal assent in the summer of 1832. The changes were broadly as follows. Fifty-six boroughs in England and Wales lost the right to send a representative to Parliament. Thirty-one boroughs were reduced to only one. Sixty-seven new constituencies were created. A uniform franchise was introduced for borough constituencies, granting the vote to householders occupying property worth £10 per annum or more and who could satisfy a six-month residence qualification. There was an additional broadening of property qualifications in county constituencies. However, the majority of the working male population and all women still lacked the vote. See: Evans, 1989, 87–93; Salmon, 2009, 374–412

¹⁵ The second reform bill, brought before Parliament in the summer of 1831, permitted existing freemen to pass on their voting rights to sons, born prior to the passage of the Act, and to apprentices, as long as both resided in the borough in question. These rights were extended, with provisos, by the third iteration of the bill, presented to Parliament in December 1831. See: Salmon, 2009, 374–80

- ¹⁶ Winstanley, 2001, 215.
- ¹⁷ Escott, 2009b, 571; Gooderson, 1975, 90; Winstanley, 2001, 215–6; Manai, 1993, 157–9
- ¹⁸ Campaign colours were an important means of asserting and rallying partisan loyalty in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century electioneering. Banners frequently bore the colours of a particular candidate's party affiliation or indicated the cause to which he was attached. Blue, which carried connotations of loyalty and order, was an especially contested colour in this context. It was generally associated with the Tories, the political alignment of both Cawthorne and Greene. See: Eagles, 2023
- ¹⁹ *Lancaster Gazette* 07/08/1830
- ²⁰ Winstanley, 2001, 215–6; Manai, 1993, 157–9
- ²¹ *Lancaster Gazette* 24/04/1824
- ²² Rix, 'Thomas Greene'.
- ²³ Winstanley, 2001, 216–7; Manai, 1993, 159–64
- ²⁴ Escott, 2009a, 402–3; Evans, 1989, 76–7; Escott, 2009b, 571
- ²⁵ Escott, 2009a, 403–4; Escott, 2009b, 571–2; *Lancaster Gazette*, 07/08/1830
- ²⁶ Escott, 2009a, 402; Rix, 'Thomas Greene'
- ²⁷ Escott, 2009b, 572
- ²⁸ *Lancaster Herald* 30/04/1831
- ²⁹ *Lancaster Herald* 07/05/1831
- ³⁰ *Lancaster Gazette* 07/05/1831. See also: Escott, 2009a, 403; Escott, 2009b, 572
- ³¹ Evans, 1989, 90; Escott, 2009b, 572
- ³² *Lancaster Herald* 05/11/1831
- ³³ Escott, 2009a, 402–3
- ³⁴ *Lancaster Herald* 29/09/1832
- ³⁵ Escott, 2009a, 402–3
- ³⁶ *Lancaster Gazette*, 10/01/1835
- ³⁷ *Manchester Times*, 26/08/1836; Rix, 'Thomas Greene'; Bean, 1890, 283; Manai, 1993, 157; *Westmorland Gazette*, 29/07/1837
- ³⁸ *Lancaster Gazette*, 10/02/1838, 11/08/1838, 15/09/1838, 23/01/1841
- ³⁹ Bean, 1890, 283; Manai, 1993, 157; *Lancaster Gazette*, 19/06/1841, cited in Rix, 'Thomas Greene'
- ⁴⁰ Cited in Rix, 'Thomas Greene'
- ⁴¹ Evans, 1989, 14–15, 54–5; Evans, 1991, 62–6
- ⁴² *Lancaster Gazette* 18/12/1832; Rix, 'Thomas Greene'
- ⁴³ *Lancaster Gazette*, 03/07/1847
- ⁴⁴ *Lancaster Gazette*, 31/07/1847, cited in Rix, 'Thomas Greene'
- ⁴⁵ *Lancaster Gazette*, 31/07/1847; LRO 920 DER (14), 65/8/41
- ⁴⁶ Rix, 'Thomas Greene'
- ⁴⁷ *Lancaster Gazette*, 27/09/1851
- ⁴⁸ See for instance: *Lancaster Gazette*, 19/08/1848, 16/08/1851
- ⁴⁹ *Lancaster Gazette*, 16/08/1851
- ⁵⁰ Manai, 1993, 157–8; Bean, 1890, 284–5
- ⁵¹ *Lancaster Gazette*, 17/07/1852
- ⁵² *Northern Star*, 26/06/1852
- ⁵³ *Lancaster Gazette*, 10/07/1852
- ⁵⁴ *Lancaster Guardian*, 09/04/1853
- ⁵⁵ *Lancaster Guardian*, 26/03/1853
- ⁵⁶ *Lancaster Guardian*, 16/04/1853
- ⁵⁷ Bean, 1890, 284–5
- ⁵⁸ *Preston Chronicle*, 19/04/1856
- ⁵⁹ *Lancaster Gazette*, 28/09/1861
- ⁶⁰ Manai, 1993, 155–9; Winstanley, 2001, 217–8
- ⁶¹ *Lancaster Gazette*, 28/09/1861, cited in Rix, 'Thomas Greene'
- ⁶² LA DDGR C9, bdle.2