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**Shakespeare's Cousin, Thomas Greene**

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## SHAKESPEARE'S COUSIN, THOMAS GREENE

Thomas Greene, of a Warwickshire family, was town clerk of Stratford-on-Avon from 1603 to 1617, and among many local activities was concerned in property transactions with William Shakespeare. When he entered the Middle Temple in 1595, Greene's sureties were John Marston of Coventry and his son John (1575?-1634), later the well-known dramatist. He may also have been the Thomas Greene who welcomed king James with a poem in 1603, and wrote a sonnet to Drayton (who had Warwickshire connections), published in the same year.<sup>1</sup> But perhaps the most interesting—or intriguing—thing about Greene is that in 1614 and again in 1615 he referred to the poet as 'my Cosen Shakespeare'.<sup>2</sup>

Sir Edmund Chambers (*William Shakespeare*, II, 149-152) gives details of Thomas Greene's life, and mentions that when he left Stratford in 1617 he went to live in Bristol. In his later years he practised at the London bar, becoming treasurer of the Middle Temple in 1629; he died in 1640.

There does not seem to have been any previous reference in our *Transactions*, and little elsewhere, to Greene's association with Bristol and Gloucestershire, but it was in their Visitation of Gloucestershire, 1623, that his pedigree *overleaf* was registered by the Heralds.

Thomas Greene of Bristow is definitely identified with the ex-town clerk of Stratford by the uncommon Christian name of his wife, Lettice.

As Bristol residents were recorded in the Somerset Visitation of 1623, it appears likely that Greene was living outside the city on the Gloucestershire side. My attempts to find traces of him locally were not very fruitful, but he is doubtless the 'Mr Thomas Greene' who was a candidate for election as steward of the Sheriff's Court at Bristol on 15 May 1618 (Proceedings of the Bristol Common Council, 1607-1651, Bristol City Archives). He secured a good many votes, but the other candidate, George Salterne, was elected. Greene was perhaps practising as an attorney in the Bristol Sheriff's Court, otherwise known as the Tolsey Court. A borough account book of Thornbury contains an entry of 1621: 'Item, to Mr. Greene of Bristoll for his advise touching the poores land, . . . 10s.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Attention is drawn to these literary connections by Mark Eccles in his valuable little reference book, *Shakespeare in Warwickshire* (Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1963).

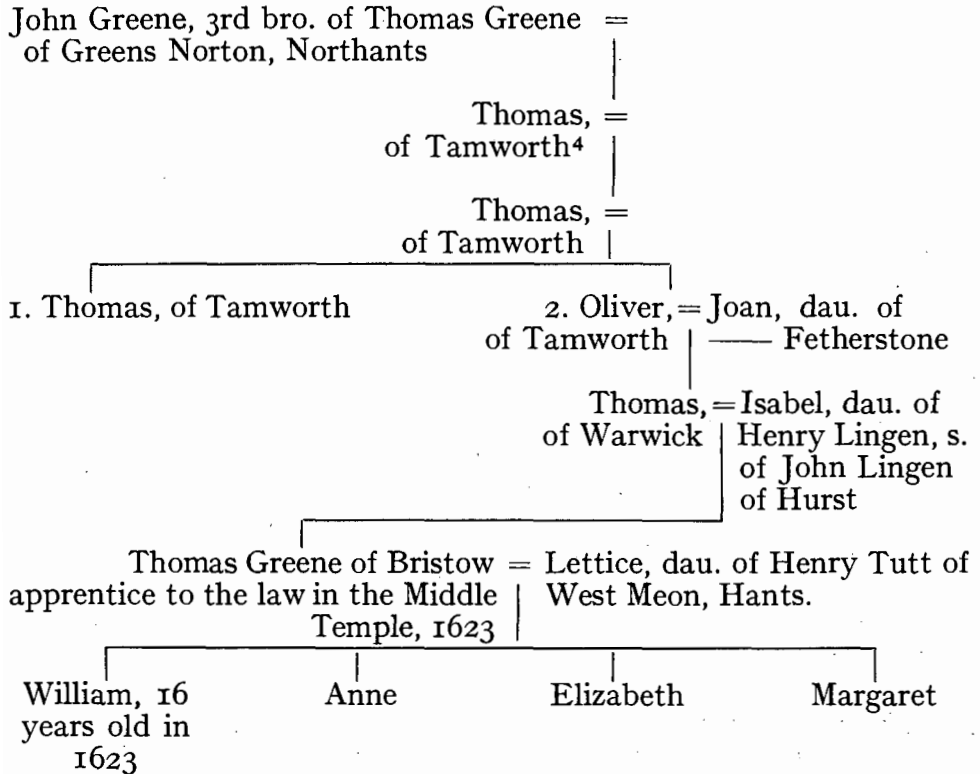
<sup>2</sup> In Greene's memoranda concerning the Welcombe inclosure; see E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, II, 142-143.

<sup>3</sup> Glos. R.O., D282/C1a.

*GREENE PEDIGREE*

*Arms:* Azure, 3 bucks trippant or, in chief a mullet pierced.

*Crest:* A buck's head couped ermine, charged with a mullet pierced for difference.



In 1963 our member the late Mr Christopher Whitfield, whose painstaking research into Shakespeare's possible friends and connections in the Stratford neighbourhood and in north Gloucestershire provided several interesting papers for the *Transactions*, had some correspondence with me on the subject of Thomas Greene and the Shakespeare relationship mystery. 'Cousin' was a loose term in the seventeenth century, and the kinship may have been fairly distant. I am inclined to think that Christopher Whitfield was right in surmising that it may have been through the children of John Hill of Bearley, Warws., whose widow Agnes married Robert Arden, the

<sup>4</sup> This has been found to be a mistake for Tanworth, Warws. (near Henley-in-Arden), the identification being confirmed by other records of the Greene family.

poet's grandfather. Arden had no children by Agnes, but his children (including Shakespeare's mother Mary) and Agnes's children, by their previous marriages, were no doubt brought up together, though there was no blood relationship.

One of the Hill children, Mary, married John Fulwood, of a family of some standing at Little Alne, a hamlet in the parish of Aston Cantlow, near Alcester, Warws. Eleanor, a daughter of John and Mary Fulwood, married a William Green of Little Alne (Fulwood pedigree in the Visitation of Warwickshire, 1619). Thus, *if* William Green were a near relation of Thomas Greene the Stratford town clerk, some sort of cousinship or step-cousinship might be established.

This is about as far as Mr Whitfield got, but it is worth recording. I have this much to add: an Oliver Green was farming at Little Alne in 1585 (Dugdale Society, *Ecclesiastical Terriers*, Vol. 1) and he or another of the same name was churchwarden of Great Alne, the next parish to Aston Cantlow, in 1617 (*V. C. H., Warws.*).

Now, as the Gloucestershire Visitation pedigree shows, Thomas Greene was a son of Thomas Greene of Warwick, but his grandfather was Oliver Green of Tanworth ('Tamworth' in the pedigree, but see footnote 4). This not very common Christian name suggests a relationship between the Tanworth/Warwick Greens and the Little Alne family. It has not been possible to find any confirmation of this in the Aston Cantlow parish registers, where Mr M. W. Farr, Warwickshire County Archivist, kindly made a search for me; but the surviving registers start only in 1578. Further research, particularly in wills, might prove more fruitful.

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