New Light on Dr. John Owen

In the first volume of The Works of John Owen (ed. W. H. Goold, 1850) nine letters written by John Owen are to be found. The words printed immediately before seven of the letters read: “the following letters embrace all the Correspondence of Dr. Owen which has been preserved and is of any importance”. This was a rather careless statement for the editor to make since in the first volume of The Works of John Owen (ed. T. Russell, 1826) far more than nine letters are either printed or referred to in the text or footnotes.

Interest in the life, work and thought of John Owen has been reawakened in the last four years through at least two factors. First, the Goold edition has been reprinted, partly in England and partly in the U.S.A. Secondly, Dr. Geoffrey F. Nuttall discovered a manuscript containing a transcript of fifteen letters of Owen in the library of New College, London. It seemed, therefore, to the present writer that, as a preliminary investigation before he attempted to write a biography of Owen, he should make a thorough search for all the extant correspondence of this great Puritan. What follows is the result of his search.

The Correspondence of John Owen.

Abbreviations.

Browne — John Browne, History of Congregationalism in Norfolk and Suffolk, 1877.
C.S.P.D. — Calendar of State Papers Domestic.
R.C. — “Register of Convocation, 1647-1659”, in the Bodleian Library.

1 The nine are numbers 60, 67, 71, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 81 in the list below.
2 Volumes I-XVI by the Banner of Truth Trust, London (but the Latin Orations delivered at Oxford 1652-57 are omitted from Vol. XVI); and Vols. XVIII-XXV by the Sovereign Grace Publishers, U.S.A. Vol. XVII which contains various Latin treatises has not been reprinted.
4 The only serious attempt to write a biography of Owen was by William Orme in 1820. Two studies published in 1904 and 1911 by James Moffatt were based on Orme's work and add very little to it.
5 The list cannot claim to be exhaustive. There may be other letters in archives in the U.S.A., U.K. and Europe. If any reader knows of any letter the writer will be very glad to hear from him/her.
<table>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>To or From</th>
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<tr>
<td>31 Aug. 1653</td>
<td>From Irish Commissioners</td>
<td>A request for help in obtaining ministers</td>
<td>Bodlavian Tanner MS. 52.48.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Aug. 1654</td>
<td>From Henry Lawrence, D.N.B.</td>
<td>A request that a suitable place be found at Christ Church for Richard Griffiths.</td>
<td>C.S.P.D. (1654) p. 345.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1654</td>
<td>To Oliver Cromwell</td>
<td>A petition from the Dean and Chapter about the rectory at Great Torrington, D.N.B. s.v. John Howe.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>To Henry Wilkinson of Christ Church, D.N.B.</td>
<td>Should Thomas Ireland be restored to his studentship at Christ Church?</td>
<td>Tanner MS. 69.182.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Oct. 1655</td>
<td>To O. Cromwell</td>
<td>Croke worthy to be made a judge.</td>
<td>C.S.P.D. (1657/8) p. 30</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 July 1657</td>
<td>From H. Lawrence, D.N.B.</td>
<td>Owen to attend meeting about Scottish Church Settlement.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Sept. 1659</td>
<td>From Richard Salway, D.N.B.</td>
<td>A request that Owen preach before Council of State.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 1652</td>
<td>From Lewis Du Moulin, D.N.B.</td>
<td>Dedicatory epistle.</td>
<td>R.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 Oct. 1652</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>A recommendation that John Boncle be given the degree of Master of Arts, C.R.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1652</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>A request that Boncle be made a Bedel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Nov. 1652</td>
<td>To Henry Savage, D.N.B.</td>
<td>Permission granted for James Purefoy to move from Balliol College.</td>
<td>R.C. 'Register Book of Balliol College'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Sept. 1653</td>
<td>To City of London</td>
<td>Convocation congratulates the City on its recent address to Barbonian Parliament.</td>
<td>R.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Oct. 1653</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>Owen to attend meeting about Scottish Church Settlement.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>24 Oct. 1653</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>A request that Leonard Lichfield be made a Bedel.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28 Dec. 1653</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>Nomination of Owen as V.C. for 1653/4.</td>
<td>R.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 March 1654</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>Allotment to Bedels to be increased.</td>
<td>R.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Sept. 1654</td>
<td>From Edward Lowe, D.N.B.</td>
<td>A request that his salary as organist at Christ Church be paid.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>31 Oct. 1654</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>Nomination of Owen as V.C. for 1654/5.</td>
<td>R.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1654</td>
<td>To O. Cromwell</td>
<td>Congratulations on achieving peace with the Dutch.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1654</td>
<td>From John Harmar, D.N.B.</td>
<td>Dedicatory epistle.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1654</td>
<td>From John Wallis, D.N.B.</td>
<td>Dedicatory epistle.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1654</td>
<td>From Robert Wickens</td>
<td>Dedicatory epistle.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1654</td>
<td>To Continental divines</td>
<td>Commending John Dury and Protestant unity.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25 Mar. 1656</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>A request that Peter Vashen be given the degree of Bachelor of Medicine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 1656</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>Nomination of Owen as V.C. for 1656/7.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Apr. 1657</td>
<td>From O. Cromwell</td>
<td>Commending his attempt to refute Fur praedestinatus by Henricus Slatius.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 July 1657</td>
<td>From Richard Cromwell</td>
<td>A request that Robert Whitehall be given the degree of Bachelor of Medicine.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>29 July 1657</td>
<td>From Richard Cromwell</td>
<td>A request that Robert Whitehall be given the degree of Bachelor of Medicine.</td>
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NEW LIGHT ON DR. JOHN OWEN

39  9 Sept. 1657  To Henry Cromwell, D.N.B.  Advice on new statutes for Dublin University.
40  5 Oct. 1657  From R. Cromwell  Nomination of John Conant as V.C. for 1657/8. D.N.B.

Official Correspondence as a member of the Board of Visitors

41  26 Nov. 1655  From H. Lawrence  A request that the case of Dr. Michael Roberts of Jesus College be examined. D.N.B.
42  Jan. 1658  To John Maidstone, cofferer to R. Cromwell  A request that a decision about the disputed elections in All Souls be delayed.

43  1652  To Parliament  Help should be given to missionary work in New England.
44  19 Jan. 1654  To Congregational Churches  The Danger of Fifth Monarchy Opinions
45  31 Oct. 1659  To General George Monck.  A request that he meet delegation from the Clarke Papers

50  8 Mar. 1670  To Hitchin Cong. Church  Advice on internal problems.
51  21 Aug. 1671  From Massachusetts  A request for help to keep open Harvard College.
52  5 Feb. 1672  To Massachusetts  Reply to No. 51.
53  19 Nov. 1659  To Monck  Two great evils face the Commonwealth
54  29 Nov. 1659  From Monck  Desire to see country freed from the intolerable slavery of sword government.
56  Sept. 1662  To John Thornton, chaplain to Duke of Bedford.  A Comment on a Presbyterian Petition to Parliament of late August.
57  April 1663  To John Thornton, chaplain to Duke of Bedford  Mrs Mary Owen unable to visit her children at Hanslope in Bucks.
58  1663  To John Thornton, chaplain to Duke of Bedford  Twenty items of current news.
59  20 Oct. 1663  From Massachusetts  Invitation to become minister at Boston.
60  25 Jan. 1669  To Richard Baxter  Suggestions for agreement on doctrine and church order.
61  16 Feb. 1669  From Baxter  A reply to no. 60 with many comments.
62  10 Nov. 1667  To Mr. Nicholls  Illness prevents Owen seeing him.
63  1672?  To John Eliot  Sabbath Observance.
64  1673?  To Lord Philip Wharton, D.N.B.  Anne Lee, a possible wife for Thomas Wharton? D.N.B. for Lee & Wharton.
65  1673?  To Lord Philip Wharton, D.N.B.  Advice on marriage negotiations.
66  1673?  To Lord Philip Wharton, D.N.B.  Description of a journey into Warwickshire.
67  1674?  To Lady Hartopp, D.N.B.  The death of her daughter (Anne?).
68  3 July 1675?  To Sir John Hartopp, D.N.B.  Owen hopes that Lady H's health will improve.
69  21 Aug. 1675?  To Sir J. Hartopp, D.N.B.  Owen hopes that Lady H's health will improve.
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<td>2 Sept. 1675?</td>
<td>To Sir J. Hartopp</td>
<td>Owen’s conversation with Thomas Cole, ibid.</td>
<td>D.N.B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 March</td>
<td>To Robert Asty</td>
<td>Advice concerning the call from Norwich ibid.</td>
<td>C.R.</td>
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<td>2 Jan. 1679</td>
<td>To Robert Asty</td>
<td>Advice concerning differences with John Cromwell, C.R.</td>
<td>ibid.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Sept. 1679</td>
<td>To Robert Asty</td>
<td>Further advice. ibid.</td>
<td>ibid.</td>
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<td>1679?</td>
<td>To</td>
<td>Elders in Congregational churches. ibid.</td>
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This correspondence reveals the wide interests and influence that John Owen exerted from 1650 until his death in 1683. His concern for the extension of the kingdom of God is also revealed in two pamphlets which are neither printed nor listed in any edition of his works. First, he was the person chiefly responsible for the **Humble Proposals for the Propagation of the Gospel** submitted to Parliament in 1652. Secondly, he wrote a short manual for ordinary church members entitled **A Guide to Church Fellowship and Order**, which was published posthumously in 1692. Further, he wrote many prefaces for the books of other men. Since Goold’s list of these is incomplete what is hoped is a complete list is given below.

**A LIST OF BOOKS WHICH CONTAIN ‘PREFACES’, ‘EPISTLES TO THE READER’, OR ‘COMMENDATIONS’ BY DR. JOHN OWEN**

1. **Henry Whitfield**  
   Strength of Weakness  
   1652

2. **Thomas Taylor**  
   A Collection of the Works of T. Taylor  
   1653

3. **William Twisse**  
   The Riches of God's Love  
   1653

4. **William Eyre**  
   Vindiciæ Justificationis Gratulææ  
   1654

5. **Louis Du Moulin**  
   Paraenesis ad Aeclesiastas imperii in imperio  
   1656

6. **Philolaecerus (pseud.)**  
   The Private Christian’s Non Ultra  
   1656

7. **Owen**  
   Banners of Grace and Love  
   1657

8. **John Cotton**  
   A Defence of Mr. John Cotton  
   1658

9. **William Guild**  
   The Throne of David  
   1659

10. **Patrick Gillespie (?)**  
    Ark of the Testament Opened  
    1661

11. **James Durham**  
    Clavis Caniticæ  
    1669

12. **Theophilus Gale**  
    The True Idea of Jansenism  
    1669

13. **Henry Larkin**  
    An Introduction to the Holy Scripture  
    1669

14. **Mrs. Alleine**  
    The Life and Death of ... Joseph Alleine  
    1674

15. **Jean Dailé**  
    Sermons on the Epistle ... to the Colossians  
    1672

16. **Joseph Caryl**  
    The Nature and Principles of Love  
    1673

17. **Henry Whitfield**  
    The Divine Will Considered in the eternal decrees  
    1673

18. **Vavasor Powell**  
    A New and Useful Concordance  
    1673

19. **Thomas Gouge**  
    The Surest and Safest Way of Thriving  
    1674

20. **Henry Scudder**  
    The Christian’s Daily Walk  
    1674

21. **Samuel Petto**  
    The Difference between the O and New Covenant  
    1674

22. **James Durham**  
    The Law Unsealed  
    1676

23. **Patrick Gillespie**  
    The Ark of the Covenant Opened  
    1677

25. **Samuel Corbyn**  
    An Awakening Call (in later editions entitled, The  
    1677

26. **Elisha Coles**  
    A Practical Discourse of God’s Sovereignty  
    1678

27. **Stephen Lobb**  
    The Glory of Free Grace  
    1680

28. **Bartholomew Ashwood**  
    The Best Treasure  
    1681

29. **Samuel Clark**  
    The Holy Bible with Annotations  
    1690

**Notes.**

1. In 1671 a preface signed ‘J.O.’ appeared in *The Freedom of the Grace and Love of God* by William Bridge. Owen denied that he wrote this in his ‘epistle’ in Caryl’s *Nature ... of Love* (1673).

2. In *The Life and Death of Mr. Henry Jessoy* (1671) there is a poem attributed to ‘J.O.’ but this is not Dr. John Owen.

3. *Banners of Grace and Love* (1657) seems to be a revised edition of Whitfield’s, *Strength of Weakness* (1652).