


ARTICLE

# John Owen, Puritan Politics, and the Fall of the Cromwellian Protectorate

Adam Quibell 

School of Philosophy, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, China and School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK

Email: [aquibell@zju.edu.cn](mailto:aquibell@zju.edu.cn); [aquibell01@qub.ac.uk](mailto:aquibell01@qub.ac.uk)

## Abstract

The English protectorate began in 1653 with a conspiracy of politicians, army officers, and religious leaders against a theocratic strain of puritanism. Among the plotters was John Owen (1616–83), the leading religious authority of the Interregnum, vice-chancellor of Oxford University, and the ‘Cajoler of Cromwell’. When amid a military and republican coup parliament was dissolved and Richard Cromwell removed in 1659, Owen was again at the heart of events. But the narrative became that this time he had used his influence to oppose the Cromwells. As minister of a congregation at the centre of the nation’s halls of power composed of the military and political elite, Owen became seen as Richard Cromwell’s ‘instrument of ruine’. This article challenges that narrative and its appearance in histories of early 1659 and of Owen’s biography by utilizing new sources and re-evaluating known evidence within the broader context of religious and political divisions at the end of the protectorate. Owen supported whatever political form could best preserve the long-term safety of the English commonwealth and godly rule against the Stuarts. Yet Owen’s legacy became contested among the godly after the Restoration, as the agent of the protectorate’s fall and the failure of puritan politics.

John Owen’s preaching was causing controversy. At a private opening fast on 4 February 1659, he preached to the MPs of the third protectoral parliament about the responsibilities and glories of a faithful Christian nation. As former vice-chancellor of Oxford, dean of Christ Church, and spiritual guide to Oliver Cromwell and the army’s senior officers, Owen was used to wielding ‘an incalculable influence on leading members of the commonwealth and protectorate regimes’.<sup>1</sup> He warned parliament that the country risked losing its special place as leader of the godly interest in a new era for the Protestant world. This was a role which Owen, like many of his puritan colleagues, believed God had providentially given to England, part of the

<sup>1</sup>Vivienne Larminie, ‘Owen, Dr John’, in Stephen Roberts, ed., *The history of parliament, the House of Commons, 1640–1660* (9 vols., Woodbridge 2023), VII, pp. 479–85.

'good old cause' won through the army's victory in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.<sup>2</sup> Owen preached that the pursuit of gain instead of godliness, the quest for perfect political forms rather than trusting in God's blessing for the righteous, indifference to religion, and sectarians posing as the only Christians threatened England with God's judgement. Republican opponents of the protectorate disliked what they heard. Criticism spread among MPs connected with the republican theorist James Harrington due to the sermon's apparent political implications. As we shall see, their impression was that for Owen successful civil constitution depended on biblical rather than rational forms, and the kind of godliness in leaders likely to pass tests of grace for Congregational church membership. Owen rejected their understanding in the preface to the published text.<sup>3</sup> But securing godliness in politics and through political power was a theme that would dominate the last days of the commonwealth.

Within a few months of his sermon, parliament and protector had been removed by the collective pressure of republicans, sectaries, and soldiers. Accusations of Owen's direct involvement in the collapse of the regime, the most decisive moment in the downfall of the puritan project and the return to Stuart monarchy, followed him for the rest of his life.<sup>4</sup> In creating corporate memory, many post-Restoration religious dissenters rationalized their experience of defeat by scapegoating Owen.<sup>5</sup> One of Owen's posthumous defenders labelled this blaming as 'the famous story, never to be forgiven, never to be forgotten'.<sup>6</sup> Scholarly accounts of parliament's dissolution and the fall of the protectorate usually support this view of Owen's role and his fellow actors, arguing that they opposed a potential revival of Presbyterian uniformity and anti-tolerationist views through the religious policy of Richard Cromwell.<sup>7</sup> For the events of early 1659 were intertwined with the broader themes

<sup>2</sup>All pre-1800 works were published in London unless otherwise stated. John Owen, *God's work in founding Zion* (1656), p. 47; idem, *The works of John Owen*, ed. William Goold (24 vols., Edinburgh, 1850–5), VIII, p. 425 (henceforth *Works*). See 'good old principles' as a variation on this phrase which Owen used in 1659, John Owen, *The glory and interest of nations professing the gospel* (1659), Wing O.756, p. 17; *Works*, VIII, p. 467.

<sup>3</sup>Owen, *The glory and interest of nations*, sig. A3r; *Works*, VIII, p. 455.

<sup>4</sup>There was no inevitable relationship between the fall of the protectorate and the Restoration (e.g., Ruth Mayers, *1659: the crisis of the commonwealth* (Woodbridge, 2004)). Yet if the protectorate had remained or continued a conservative turn toward Cromwellian monarchy, the question of whether any of the political experiments between May 1659 and May 1660 could have lasted becomes a non-issue.

<sup>5</sup>See below discussion and Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the formation of Nonconformity* (2011; repub. Abingdon, 2016), pp. 243–66. On memory formation following the Restoration, Jonathan Scott, *England's troubles: seventeenth-century English political instability in European context* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 161–81.

<sup>6</sup>Trepidantium Malleus [Samuel Young], *Vindiciæ anti-Baxterianæ* (1696), Wing Y.89, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup>Sarah Cook, 'A political biography of a religious Independent: John Owen, 1616–83' (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1972), pp. 264–5; Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English puritanism: experiences of defeat* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 200–1; idem, 'Owen and politics', in Crawford Gribben and John W. Tweeddale, eds., *T&T Clark handbook of John Owen* (London, 2022), p. 100; Ronald Hutton, *The Restoration: a political and religious history of England and Wales, 1658–1667* (Oxford, 1985), p. 35; Austin Woolrych, 'Historical introduction', in Robert Ayers, ed., *Complete prose works of John Milton*, VII: 1659–1660 (rev. edn, New Haven, CT, 1953), p. 63. The most nuanced and extensive discussion appears in Cooper, *Nonconformity*, particularly chapters 8 and 9. However, in qualifying his negative role in Richard's fall, Owen's involvement becomes a 'small and indirect' part (Cooper, *Nonconformity*, p. 252, quoting affirmatively the judgement in Peter Toon, *God's statesman: the life and work of John Owen, pastor, educator, theologian* (Exeter, 1971), p. 114).

of Interregnum religious politics – the relationship between church and state, toleration, apocalyptic thought, and navigation of identity, unity, and division between religious groups and their competing visions for a second reformation.<sup>8</sup> But despite the attention Owen's part has received from scholars, his actions and their possible motivations in the downfall of parliament and protectorate need further clarification. As the most highly placed religious figure of the Interregnum, this contested aspect of Owen's biography is important for understanding the religious politics behind why parliament was dissolved by a military coup and how the protector fell with it.<sup>9</sup> This article argues that Owen's reputation as the architect of Richard's downfall is not sustained by the sources that most closely report his behaviour. His pre-eminence as a religious authority meant he was always near the centre of events. But rather than through fears of revived religious uniformity or a commitment to republican politics, Owen was moved by the threat to the army's integrity and its godly generals. For he believed the army formed the lone bulwark against a future return of Charles Stuart and the failure of the godly interest in England for which the civil wars had been fought. Yet as a military coup brought not only the parliament, but the protectorate to an end, Owen found that the success of puritan politics would have to rely more than ever on the right people rather than the right political forms.

## I

Owen preached his sermon to parliament on 4 February 1659 in an atmosphere of uncertainty. News out of London was pessimistic. 'I foresee a heate in the publique', the natural philosopher John Beale had replied to troubling reports from the intelligencer Samuel Hartlib one week before the sermon.<sup>10</sup> For the lead up to the new parliament, and its sitting, displayed deep divisions inside and outside Westminster.<sup>11</sup> Beale worried that schisms over forms of political government threatened to incapacitate the state and distract England from common enemies abroad. Religious tensions were also building. Hartlib received correspondence on 4 January from one of his contacts in the country. Moses Wall, a friend of John Milton, had retired from London and undergone a transformation in principles that many would experience over the coming months. He believed that the commonwealth under a protector was a veneer, covering the same pomp, pride, and vanity of the old court.<sup>12</sup> England had apostatized from God's cause against kingly power under Cromwell the usurper. Those who had gained positions of power, while claiming to represent the godly interest, were false saints.<sup>13</sup> Wall railed against the system

<sup>8</sup>Anthony Milton, *England's second reformation: the battle for the Church of England, 1625–1662* (Cambridge, 2021).

<sup>9</sup>See references to the scholarly consensus on Owen's importance in the introductory section.

<sup>10</sup>John Beale to Samuel Hartlib, 28 Jan. 1659, Hartlib papers, 51/65A–69B, ed. M. Greengrass, M. Leslie, and M. Hannon (The Digital Humanities Institute, University of Sheffield, 2013, [www.dhi.ac.uk/hartlib](http://www.dhi.ac.uk/hartlib)) (henceforth HP).

<sup>11</sup>For broader accounts of this period, Austin Woolrych, *Britain in revolution, 1625–1660* (Oxford, 2002); idem, 'Historical introduction'; Hutton, *Restoration*; Henry Reece, *The army in Cromwellian England, 1649–1660* (Oxford, 2013).

<sup>12</sup>Moses Wall to Hartlib, 4 Jan. 1659, HP, 34/4/17A–18B.

<sup>13</sup>Wall to Hartlib, 9 Jan. 1659, HP, 34/4/19A–20B.

of triers for approving clergy on which Owen sat, and the tithes which supported the national ministry, as 'Jewish & popish in the originall...Antichristian'.<sup>14</sup> The idea of a national confession and the international Reformed churches, cornerstones of Owen's domestic and foreign religious policy, were 'drawn from that popish and putrid fountaine of The Schoolmen'.<sup>15</sup> Wall found more truth in the writings of the increasing numbers of Quakers. He was an example of an adherent to a particular interpretation of the 'good old cause'. This phrase became shorthand for differing interpretations of the original goals of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. For those like Wall, the 'good old cause' had been a godly republic – not rule invested in a single person – liberty of worship, and preparation for the apocalyptic expectation of Christ's direct rule on the earth.<sup>16</sup> The advocates of this definition were largely defeated in 1653/4, as Owen took part in the coup which established the protectorate. Booksellers like Livewell Chapman and the Crown in Popes Head Alley bookshop kept them in print.<sup>17</sup> But they had no meaningful platform in Westminster or the army headquarters again until early 1659, when a concerted print and petition campaign by republicans, the religious sects, and elements of the army sought to remove the apostasy represented by the protectorate's civil and religious establishment.

As Wall tried to convince Hartlib of his anti-establishment views, Presbyterian leaders in Scotland were on a very different mission.<sup>18</sup> Their representative in London, James Sharpe, was to advocate among clergy and MPs against religious toleration, and for the church's inviolable jurisdiction over its affairs.<sup>19</sup> The Presbyterian Thomas Manton, one of Sharpe's targets, wrote to Richard Baxter on 27 January, the day of the parliament's first meeting, wondering whether it was the right time, and what strategies might be best, for a new assembly of divines to settle religious questions. Manton reported that many friends in parliament were favourable.<sup>20</sup> Three months earlier, the Presbyterian Edmund Calamy had signed a preface to a treatise continuing debates about church government.<sup>21</sup> Though as usual he referred to the Congregationalists as brethren, he recommended the treatise because it removed the 'absurdities' that grew from their views of church government. The policy of the Congregationalists to be content with doctrinal agreement – to agree to differ on church government – was proving an elusive goal under Scottish influence in London. Baxter wrote back to Manton on 1 February, unsure himself

<sup>14</sup>Wall to Hartlib, 22 Jan. 1659, HP, 34/4/21A–22B.

<sup>15</sup>Wall to Hartlib, 25 Jan. 1659, HP, 34/4/23A–24B.

<sup>16</sup>Austin Woolrych, 'The good old cause and the fall of the protectorate', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 13 (1957), pp. 133–61.

<sup>17</sup>See John Spittlehouse, *An answer to one part of the lord protector's speech* (1654), Wing S.5003; idem, *The royall advocate* (1655), Wing S.5014; John Canne, *The time of the end* (1657), Wing C.443.

<sup>18</sup>Kyle Holfelder, 'Factionalism in the kirk during the Cromwellian invasion and occupation of Scotland, 1650 to 1660: the Protester–Resolutioner controversy' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1998).

<sup>19</sup>William Stephen, ed., *Register of the consultations of the ministers of Edinburgh and some other brethren of the ministry* (2 vols., Scottish History Society, third series, Edinburgh, 1921–30), II, p. 148 (henceforth *Consultations*).

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Manton to Richard Baxter, 27 Jan. 1659, in N. H. Keeble and G. F. Nuttall, eds., *Calendar of the correspondence of Richard Baxter* (2 vols., Oxford, 1991), I, no. 546 (henceforth *CCRB*).

<sup>21</sup>Samuel Hudson, *A vindication of the essence and unity of the church-catholick visible* (1658), Thomason Tract E.960[2] (18 Nov. 1658).

about a new assembly. He worried that it meant exacerbating divisions rather than 'Establishing of the Doctrine & Discipline & Worship that we all agree in, & leaving the rest to a peaceable liberty'.<sup>22</sup>

On 3 February, the day before Owen's sermon, Baxter received a proposal from the Presbyterian leaders Calamy, Thomas Whitfeld, William Jenkyn, Simeon Ashe, William Cooper, William Wickins, and Matthew Poole. It was a scheme to 'rectify the errors about Church government, which have occasioned so many distractions'.<sup>23</sup> The planned publication would answer Congregational objections, challenge the gathering of churches out of churches, and argue for an accommodation based on the common ground between themselves and the leading Congregational authors. Baxter replied that he was only interested if the project attempted Presbyterian reconciliation with Congregationalists.<sup>24</sup> Richard Cromwell had received similar advice for a reconciliatory approach from George Monck in Scotland, who urged the new protector to accommodate differences among Presbyterians and orthodox Congregationalists by calling a new assembly of divines – 'that wee may have unity in things necessary, liberty in things unnecessary, and charity in all; which will put a stop to that progresse of blasphemy and profanes, that I feare is too frequent in many places by the great extent of toleration'.<sup>25</sup> Monck urged Richard that this was the most important task of his administration, likely afraid of the growth of Quakerism and other anti-magisterial sects. Sharpe's presence in London, and the strategy of those like Manton, Calamy, and Monck to tighten religious authority and to call a new assembly to settle the national religion could be seen as creating an atmosphere where Congregationalists like Owen feared a new imposition of Presbyterianism. But ongoing efforts to reconcile Presbyterians and Congregationalists, alongside their mutual commitment to maintaining orthodox religious authority, provides important context to delimit the potential subjects of Owen's dissatisfaction with the direction of the country. For it was in this atmosphere of disagreement over the political and religious way forward that parliament held its first fast, and Owen preached his last parliamentary sermon of the protectorate.

Owen was almost not invited to assist with devotions. Two of Monck's Presbyterian moderates, Manton and Edward Reynolds, were chosen by the Commons without controversy. But great debate ensued over choosing the Presbyterian Calamy or Owen.<sup>26</sup> Yet we cannot read much into a Presbyterian direction in Richard's parliament through this debate. It was the Congregational minister Hugh Peters who opened the business with prayer, and the later printing of Owen's sermon was supported by a Presbyterian member.<sup>27</sup> But something of a change in favourites may be indicated by the first preachers almost being entirely selected from among the 'gravest sort of moderate presbyterian divines' named by Monck,

<sup>22</sup>Richard Baxter to Thomas Manton, 1 Feb. 1659, CCRB, I, no. 550.

<sup>23</sup>London Presbyterian ministers to Richard Baxter, late Jan. to early Feb. 1659, CCRB, I, no. 549.

<sup>24</sup>Richard Baxter to Matthew Poole, Feb. to Mar. 1659, CCRB, I, no. 558.

<sup>25</sup>T. Birch, ed., *A collection of the state papers of John Thurloe* (7 vols., 1742), VII, p. 387.

<sup>26</sup>28 Jan. 1659, J. T. Rutt, *Diary of Thomas Burton, Esq.* (4 vols., London, 1828), III, pp. 11–15 (henceforth *Burton*).

<sup>27</sup>4 Feb. 1659, *Burton*, III, pp. 66–8.

and Owen's place secured by the support of two army grandees. After his sermon, there was more disagreement before permission was given to print.<sup>28</sup> The republican Arthur Haselrig was against publication. He was likely unhappy with Owen's message that declension in true godliness was the cause of national troubles. As the Scottish MP Archibald Johnston of Wariston would later comment, Haselrig was 'less for godly men'.<sup>29</sup> While Owen's most recent parliamentary sermon in 1656 had been registered in five days, this time it took more than two months to appear in the Stationer's Book.<sup>30</sup> Owen was noticeably defensive in the preface against unnamed opposition to the sermon going to press, claiming that events had spurred him to publish.<sup>31</sup>

By the time the sermon was entered with the stationers, on 14 April, the development of political and religious affairs must have provided plenty of motivation to print. At the end of February, the inventor William Potter had written to Hartlib in response to his political intelligence from London.<sup>32</sup> Potter wondered at the factionalism on display in parliament as splits emerged over the nature of political authority. Some in parliament sought to undermine the army's indemnities for past actions. The army faction sought to keep itself from the absolute judgement of the people's representative, on the basis that it was they who had delivered the people through shedding their own blood. This was the kind of development that likely dissatisfied Owen. For withholding indemnities brought into question the application and success of the military force, praised by Owen in earlier sermons, which had been the instrument for achieving the 'good old cause'. Owen's use of the phrase in *God's work in founding Zion* (1656) was one of the earliest to appear in print.<sup>33</sup> In 1659, it saw a significant increase in use, becoming widely employed to justify various and sometimes opposing political, religious, and social causes. Owen may have suspected that debate over indemnities, or perhaps even the refusal by the Commons to treat the other house as a House of Lords, which had a considerable army presence, was a sign of discomfort with the cause – a renewal of the 'malignant spirit' he had warned about at the February fast. From his days at the siege of Colchester in 1648 and likely before, Owen had become invested in the army as the defenders of the godly interest. It is important to understand the proper objects of Owen's sermonic warnings within the context of religious and political tension we have seen surrounding the sermon if we are to parse what he meant by events moving him to publish, and position ourselves to understand his activities at the dissolution of parliament and protectorate.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>3 Oct. 1659, G. M. Paul, D. H. Fleming, and J. D. Ogilvie, eds., *The diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1919–40), III, p. 139 (henceforth *Wariston*).

<sup>30</sup>A transcript of the registers of the worshipful company of stationers; from 1640–1708 A.D. (3 vols., London, 1913), II, pp. 94, 221.

<sup>31</sup>Owen, *The glory and interest of nations*, sigs. A2r–A3r; *Works*, VIII, p. 455.

<sup>32</sup>William Potter to Hartlib, 28 Feb. 1659, HP, 0/3/7A–8B.

<sup>33</sup>Owen, *God's work in founding Zion*, p. 47; *Works*, VIII, p. 425. There were some earlier uses, but Henry Vane's was not the first in May 1656 (Hutton, *Restoration*, p. 23).

## II

Owen had spoken to parliament on 4 February about the self-important plans of those who ruled through 'deep counsels and politick contrivances' rather than by God's word, who gloried in 'the state and magnificence of their governments, the beauty of their laws and order'.<sup>34</sup> One of his targets in the sermon may therefore have been the large party of republicans in the Commons for whom either the godly interest was not the main political concern, or who wanted a radical change in the relationship between civil authority and religion.<sup>35</sup> Baxter, for instance, was worried that if Henry Vane the Younger were elected there would be chaos in church and state.<sup>36</sup> Vane was against an established ministry, for universal toleration, and a leading anti-protectoral voice. Baxter considered him a closet Jesuit whose task was to subvert English society until it looked to Rome for refuge.<sup>37</sup> Arthur Haselrig was another of the most prominent republicans. Hartlib was told that through Haselrig's obstructionism, there was greater chance of finding a place for honest men on the moon than in England.<sup>38</sup> A hint of the relationship of the sermon to the republican cause appears through a reference made by Owen in the printed preface about a controversy following his sermon. Owen confessed 'that I was a little moved by some *mistakes* that were delivered into the hands of *report*, to be mannaged [sic] to the discountenance of the honest and plain truth contended for, especially when I found them without due consideration exposed in Print unto publick view'.<sup>39</sup> This reference to printed opposition to his sermon has not previously been identified. But doing so provides important context to Owen's decision to print his sermon. For Owen was stirring controversy among the leading theorists of a renewed republican politics.

While there may have been ephemeral literature that has not survived, James Harrington, the leading republican theorist, was Owen's most likely reference. For Harrington mocked Owen in print over the sermon, after reports circulated about the quality of his political commentary.<sup>40</sup> Owen had apparently preached that a state could only be successful with laws based on God's word. Deriding Owen as naïve by invoking Venetian political order, Harrington reported that 'they say, Mr. Dean Owen to the parliament at their Fast, was positive *That no Government upon meer humane principles can be good or lasting*. Therefore the *Venetians* are greater Saints then the *English*.' The italicized phrase was not in the printed sermon, which Owen in the preface insisted was accurate. Whether Harrington's phrasing was intended as a quote or not, despite Owen's objection, it was a reasonable summary of the sermon's content. The MPs were warned that '*humane wisdom*' aimed to preserve human society, but generally produced strife.<sup>41</sup> For God judged the 'politick contrivances' of elites

<sup>34</sup>Owen, *The glory and interest of nations*, pp. 8, 11; *Works*, VIII, pp. 461, 463.

<sup>35</sup>The oppositional politics of distinct factions and interests were a feature of the third protectoral parliament, Roberts, ed., *History of parliament*, I, pp. 259–302.

<sup>36</sup>Benjamin Woodbridge to Baxter, 6 Jan. 1659, CCRB, I, no. 539.

<sup>37</sup>Richard Baxter, *Key for catholicks* (1659), Wing B.1295, pp. 329, 338.

<sup>38</sup>Beale to Hartlib, 19 Mar. 1659, HP, 51/93A–96B.

<sup>39</sup>Owen, *The glory and interest of nations*, sigs. A2v–A3r; *Works*, VIII, p. 455.

<sup>40</sup>James Harrington, *The art of law-giving in III books* (1659), Wing H.806, p. 103.

<sup>41</sup>Owen, *The glory and interest of nations*, pp. 7–8; *Works*, p. 461.



who did not know how 'to take the Law of their proceedings from the mouth of God'. Owen perhaps hoped he could still address republican attention to political forms in the printed version, while convincing readers that his message was a general rebuke of disunity and neglect of the godly interest.

Owen had two other targets in the sermon – those indifferent to true spirituality, and the self-proclaimed spiritual believers who neglected the outward forms of Christian religion. The latter addressed the sects, and particularly the Quakers. For while it is tempting to favourably compare Owen's sermon language (the godly, the saints, the interest of Christ) with that employed by anti-ministry Independents, Fifth Monarchists, Anabaptists, or Quakers in the 'good old cause' print campaign, what he meant must be separated from more radical discourse. For what Owen was addressing forms a crucial background to understand his potential allegiances when by April the parliament was dissolved and the protectorate was under threat. The predominant view of the 'good old cause' building in the pamphlet campaign of late February to March was not Owen's. Its politics identified with the mindset Owen had warned about in *The glory and interest of nations*: the wise few with their rationalized 'politick contrivances', such as Harrington or Haselrig, whom Owen saw as marginalizing God's word.<sup>42</sup> Its religion required universal toleration, uncoupling the ten commandments from the magistrate and thereby undermining the established clergy and university learning for ministers.<sup>43</sup> Owen saw these as errors that he and his magisterial Congregationalist colleagues had combated throughout the commonwealth and protectorate.<sup>44</sup> It is difficult to imagine that the 'good old cause' pamphlet campaign had made Owen re-evaluate his actions from 1652 to 1658, during which he helped shape the religious policy now being attacked as an antichristian apostasy from the original cause of the civil wars and commonwealth. Owen believed his sermon showed what it really meant to seek the national interest, and the true definition of godliness essential to achieving it.<sup>45</sup>

Owen dedicated *The glory and interest of nations* to parliament – a reminder that amidst criticism he was merely following the Commons' request to print. Their duty was to improve the lesson by meditating on the message. But they would have no opportunity. For when his first readers purchased the sermon, the 'Commons Assembled in parliament' to which it was preached and dedicated had already been dispersed.<sup>46</sup> Owen's role and his allegiances in the removal of his erstwhile hearers were unclear to his contemporaries. The timing of the printed sermon may have been read as intentional, an explanation that parliament had failed to serve the true glory and interest of nations ending in its providential removal. If so, it would not

<sup>42</sup>Owen, *The glory and interest of nations*, p. 8; *Works*, VIII, p. 461. See discussion above of Owen's parliamentary sermon.

<sup>43</sup>Woolrych, 'The good old cause', pp. 133–61.

<sup>44</sup>'To the right honourable the lord mayor', 13 Sept. 1653, in Peter Toon, ed., *The correspondence of John Owen* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 59–61; *A declaration of the faith and order owned and practiced in the Congregational churches in England* (1659), Wing N.1488, pp. 41–2.

<sup>45</sup>Owen, *The glory and interest of nations*, sig. A2v; *Works*, VIII, p. 455.

<sup>46</sup>Based on the date of entry in the Stationer's Book referenced above it is possible that it appeared in print just before 22 April. Owen may have delayed publication because the sermon risked tying himself to a parliament with 'an uncertain future' (Gribben, Owen, p. 199). If so, the delay turned out to be very counterproductive.



have helped Owen's case before those who then laid the blame for the revolution firmly at his feet. Owen had warned parliament about the plans of the self-wise elite ending in chaos.<sup>47</sup> But as parliament and protectorate were ending, Owen was earning his own reputation for joining the wise few in deep counsels and political contrivances.

### III

Between February and May 1659, Owen decided to contribute to the issue of proper government. Milton, Lewis Du Moulin, Harrington, Baxter, and others were busy with writings on politics and church-state relations.<sup>48</sup> Owen was as usual too stretched, and too busy exerting his influence directly among those in political or religious authority to contribute directly. Instead, he published the manuscript of a commentary on Israel's greatest king entrusted to him by the author's widow. William Guild's (d. 1657) *The throne of David...the pattern of a pious and prudent prince* appeared around the end of May.<sup>49</sup> Owen published Guild's treatise for its 'choice mixture of spirituall, morall and politicall observations'.<sup>50</sup> But the timing was ironic. Owen and the Congregationalists had affirmed commitment to the 'pious prince' Richard Cromwell in the preface to their confession of faith published by early March.<sup>51</sup> Owen's Guild project to guide 'a pious and prudent Prince' was available by 28 May.<sup>52</sup> But by then there was none to advise. Richard Cromwell had resigned as protector a few days prior. Like *The glory and interest of nations* a month before, Owen had missed the moment.

Almost immediately, Owen became the subject of insinuations, ridicule, and claims that he greatly influenced Richard's fall. These accounts became so prevalent over the ensuing decades that an early critic of Baxter's autobiography, which repeated accusations that Owen was the main actor in Cromwell's removal, called the idea 'the famous story, never to be forgiven, never to be forgotten'.<sup>53</sup> As Baxter was finishing his political treatise the *Holy commonwealth* (1659), he heard of events in London and appended a virulent rebuke to the army and their helpers as the chief causes of trouble in the nation since 1646. But it was not until after the Restoration that Baxter wrote that 'Dr. Owen and his Assistants did the main work' in the dissolution of parliament and the fall of the protectorate.<sup>54</sup> These words remained unpublished until both he and Owen were dead. Baxter must have formed the view through opinions and reflections gained in London, possibly following the restoration of the Stuart monarchy, when the Congregationalists had lost public favour. An

<sup>47</sup>'laying their deep counsels and politick contrivances in a subserviency to their own lusts and ambition', Owen, *The glory and interest of nations*, p. 8; Works, VIII, p. 461.

<sup>48</sup>John Milton, *A treatise of civil power in ecclesiastical causes* (1659), Wing M.2185; Lewis Du Moulin, *Proposals...towards the settling of a religious and godly government* (1659), Wing D.2552; Harrington, *The art of law-giving*; Richard Baxter, *A holy commonwealth* (1659), Wing D.2552.

<sup>49</sup>William Guild, *The throne of David* (Oxford, 1659), Wing G.2212.

<sup>50</sup>John Owen, 'To the reader', in Guild, *The throne of David*, sig. E3v.

<sup>51</sup>*A declaration of the faith and order owned and practiced in the Congregational churches in England* (1659), University of Oxford, Balliol College Library, Special Collection – 910 d 1 (6).

<sup>52</sup>Guild, *The throne of David*, Thomason Tract E.984[8] (28 May 1659).

<sup>53</sup>[Young], *Vindiciae anti-Baxterianae* (1696), p. 41.

<sup>54</sup>Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. Matthew Sylvester (1696), Wing B.1370, I, p. 101.

account from the prominent minister Thomas Manton, discussed with Calamy and other Presbyterian clergy, reached Baxter. Manton said that from outside a room at the army headquarters he heard Owen say that 'he must down, and he shall down', concluding after Richard's resignation it was a call for the protector's fall.<sup>55</sup> In 1664, Baxter recorded a reference to Manton's report in his autobiography.<sup>56</sup> For Baxter, Richard fell 'especially at the instigation of Dr. John Owen'.<sup>57</sup> These details have become an established part of a more critical and balanced approach to Owen's life in recent scholarship compared with the defensive methods of earlier writers of his biography on this episode.<sup>58</sup> They had Owen's own precedent to follow. For when described in a public letter twenty years later as Richard's 'Instrument of Ruine', Owen replied that he had nothing to do with the end of the regime.<sup>59</sup> The accusation hit a sore spot, judging by the force of Owen's response. For Owen had much to do with it. But the nature of that involvement was more adversarial, and yet more political, than either his contemporary accusers, or recent historical accounts, have suggested.<sup>60</sup>

The earliest insinuation of Owen's involvement in the revolution appeared in print as quickly as late May, in a list of eighteen satirical queries neglected by scholarship on the coup's aftermath. The writer asked whether Owen and Goodwin would scruple to become archbishops if invited by the state to 'reward their endeavours', and recommended Wallingford House as the new banqueting hall for the overthrowers of the protectorate to feast in triumph.<sup>61</sup> Next to Whitehall, Wallingford House was the London home of the English army's leading officer Lord Charles Fleetwood, the headquarters of the senior army officers, and became the focal point for events surrounding the dissolving of parliament and the end of the protectorate. James Sharpe reported on 8 March that 'Owen hath lately erected a congregation about Whythall, of which Fleetwood, Desburrie, Lambert, Berrie, Whaley are members, upon a state project'.<sup>62</sup> Other names included Colonel Sydenham and Major General Goffe.<sup>63</sup> It is unclear from Sharpe whether he meant the project was the state's, or the state the project. Arthur Annesley informed Henry Cromwell in Ireland that 'diverse constructions [are] put upon it and is not, that I can heare, very well liked at Whitehall'.<sup>64</sup> Owen's position as minister at Wallingford House put him in direct contact with the highest affairs of state, and within easier reach of his London-based networks than in his usual place as dean of Christ Church. With no personal diary

<sup>55</sup>Cooper, *Nonconformity*, p. 249.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>57</sup>Dr William's Library, Ms. BT iii.109v, item #62(2), cited in Cooper, *Nonconformity*, p. 266.

<sup>58</sup>E.g. John Asty, 'Memoirs of the life of John Owen, D.D.', in *A complete collection of the sermons of the reverend and learned John Owen, D.D. (1721)*, pp. xvii–xviii; A. Thomson, 'Life of Dr Owen', *Works*, I, p. lxxvi.

<sup>59</sup>See George Vernon, *A letter to a friend concerning some of Dr. Owens principles and practices* (1670), Wing V.247, p. 28, and Owen's reply in *An expository letter to the author of the late slanderous libel against Dr. O. with some short reflections thereon* (1671), Wing E.3890, p. 17; *Works*, XVI, p. 274.

<sup>60</sup>See the introductory section for scholarly accounts of Owen's role.

<sup>61</sup>Anon., *Eighteen new court-queries* (1659), Thomason Tract E.984[1] (26 May 1659).

<sup>62</sup>James Sharpe to Robert Douglas, 8 Mar. 1659, *Consultations*, II, pp. 157–9.

<sup>63</sup>Gribben, *Owen*, p. 200.

<sup>64</sup>Peter Gaunt, ed., *The correspondence of Henry Cromwell, 1655–59* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 475, qu. in Gribben, *Owen*, p. 200.

to draw on, Owen's geographical and social proximity to these events makes reconstruction difficult. But a little extant evidence can reveal a lot for a figure in the centre of London's oral networks of intelligence, power, and influence.

In early April, Richard granted a general council of officers to meet at Wallingford House following divisions in parliament over recognizing the other house.<sup>65</sup> Provisions for two houses were in the *Humble petition and advice* (1657), the protectorate's second constitution.<sup>66</sup> In November 1658, the army had promised Richard that they supported this provision, along with those settling religion, and government in a single person.<sup>67</sup> The other house contained some of the most effective supporters of the protectorate as well as the army, and its weakening by the Commons and particularly the republican elements posed danger to the long-term survival of both. Richard perhaps thought that granting an officers' council would create a more favourable balance. But by early April, the effects of the campaign for the 'good old cause' by republicans and the busy sectarian press of Livewell Chapman had taken effect. The campaign had produced deep dissatisfaction with the government among many junior officers and soldiers in London. They now saw the protectorate as an apostasy from the principles of the early commonwealth, and thereby from God's special moment of blessing on the nation.<sup>68</sup> The senior officers underestimated their control over the general council, and not even Fleetwood was part of the republican-dominated committee which drew up a petition for the protector.

The senior officers managed to temper the wording presented to Richard on 6 April.<sup>69</sup> The petition majored on indemnities for acts commanded by a superior, and opposition to any disparagement of the army, the Rump of the Long Parliament between 1648 and 1653, and Oliver Cromwell's achievements in service of the 'good old cause'. But this was not the message the lower ranks had intended. Immediately the junior officers and soldiers of Colonel Pride's old regiment, who had purged parliament in 1648 to achieve the army's political goals, published an address to Fleetwood and the senior officers.<sup>70</sup> The address thanked them for their commitment to the 'good old cause', the removal of 'that Family', the Stuarts, and for gaining the nation's freedoms. But there was no mistaking the resolve by Pride's old regiment to 'hazard as formerly' against cavaliers 'or any other party which shall endeavour to bring us into the like thralldom and bondage'. Fleetwood and the grandees were being warned – the Wallingford House interpretation of the 'good old cause' espoused in the petition to Richard Cromwell needed to align with their own.

<sup>65</sup>To avoid repetitive footnoting, the well-established aspects of the dissolution of parliament and resignation of the protector draw from Hutton, *Restoration*, pp. 37–9; Reece, *The army*, pp. 192–7; Woolrych, *Britain in revolution*, pp. 720–1; idem, 'Historical introduction', pp. 64–6.

<sup>66</sup>Charles Firth and Robert Rait, eds., *Acts and ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660* (3 vols., London, 1911), III, pp. 1048–56.

<sup>67</sup>Hartlib to Oldenburg, 2 Dec. 1659, Alfred Hall and Marie Hall, ed. and trans., *The correspondence of Henry Oldenburg* (13 vols., London, 1965–86), XIII, p. 193; Charles Firth, ed., *The Clarke papers* (4 vols., London, 1891), III, pp. 164–8.

<sup>68</sup>Woolrych, 'The good old cause', pp. 133–61.

<sup>69</sup>*To his highness Richard lord protector* (1659), Wing T.1367.

<sup>70</sup>*To his excellency the Lord Fleetwood... The humble address of the inferiour officers and souldiers of the late Lord Pride's regiment* (1659), Thomason Tract E.974[5] (8 Apr. 1659).

The tempered petition was well received by Richard, but several events then further agitated the army's lower ranks. The Commons failed to address raising funds for significant arrears in army pay. Sharpening the issue of indemnity, proceedings began against a major general for following Oliver Cromwell's orders against a royalist's estate.<sup>71</sup> There was progress towards a religious settlement and plans for a national fast of repentance for tolerating sects. Quaker petitioners were removed from parliament for opposing magistracy and ministry. This drew Quaker concerns together with anti-magisterial groups such as many of the Anabaptists, Fifth Monarchists, and broad tolerationist Independents like John Goodwin, where otherwise there was little doctrinal commonality.<sup>72</sup> These religious developments fit exactly the account of apostasy from the 'good old cause' of liberty and spiritual worship which exercised the army's lower ranks.

On 13 April, Owen and Hugh Peters gave devotions for the officers' council at Wallingford House. Peters claimed to be unclear on the goal of the gathering.<sup>73</sup> This may be true, given the senior officers themselves were unclear, and matters did not reach a head until a few days later. On 17 April, Lord Broghil's chaplain recalled that Owen offered a long prayer at that day's officers' council. Desborough followed with a speech calling for a purge of malignants who had 'crept in amongst them', by requiring a test oath swearing that the execution of Charles I had been lawful.<sup>74</sup> This was well received, and the officers agreed to demand parliament vindicate the king's execution. This would hinder any who desired to unravel the revolution and restore the Stuarts, whom the senior officers and their spiritual leaders like Owen saw as the greatest threat to the godly interest. Meanwhile the protector's parliamentary and army friends discussed their options. Colonel Goffe, a member of Owen's congregation, offered to restore Richard's authority at Wallingford House by force. There was obviously division between Owen's pastoral charges among the officers. On 18 April, parliament resolved to ban officers' meetings if without consent from the protector and both houses. Fleetwood acquiesced and stopped the next meeting for 20 April, while Cromwell assured the senior officers of his goodwill. Richard discussed dissolving the parliament with his advisers – most of whom agreed, probably remembering the past efficacy of pre-emptive actions by Oliver toward political crises. But as MPs discussed new controls on the national militia, the army believed they were to be disbanded and replaced by the local trained bands as a precursor to restoring Charles Stuart. Fleetwood called a rendezvous of the regiments at St James's. Richard called his own at Whitehall. Among the few who answered the protector were Goffe and Whalley, both members of Owen's Wallingford House congregation. The following day, 22 April, Richard was convinced by Desborough to dissolve the parliament.

The court immediately 'shrunk out of *Whitehall* into *Wallingford House*', shifting power towards the officers and away from the protector.<sup>75</sup> Pressure from pamphleteering and the junior ranks calling for the return of the Rump took matters beyond the intention of the senior officers, who it appears had no firm plan. The

<sup>71</sup>Hutton, *Restoration*, p. 36.

<sup>72</sup>16 Apr. 1659, Burton, IV, pp. 440–6; *Commons journal*, VII, p. 640.

<sup>73</sup>Carla Pestana, 'Peter [Peters], Hugh (bap. 1598–1660)', *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (ODNB).

<sup>74</sup>Thomas Morrice, ed., *A collection of the state letters of the right honourable Roger Boyle* (1742), p. 27.

<sup>75</sup>Arthur Annesley, *England's confusion* (1659), Wing A.3167, p. 9.

Anabaptist naval office commissioner Nehemiah Bourne wrote shortly afterwards that the senior officers had intended to

mende up that crakt Gouverment; And I am suer what I say is truth, (haueing oportunity enough to know there debaits) the utmost they had in vew when this was first entered upon was, to Settle the Malitia in safe hands, take away his [Richard Cromwell's] Negative, And Remove his Sicophants, and Parasits, And fill up the Counsel wth good and able men.<sup>76</sup>

The politician Arthur Annesley put it more succinctly and cynically – the senior officers thought to leave ‘the Protector a Duke of Venice, for his Fathers sake who raised them’, a largely powerless figurehead of a republican state. Charles I’s advisers had warned of the same result from parliament’s nineteen propositions to the king in 1642.<sup>77</sup> Edmund Ludlow, an MP in Richard’s parliament, claimed in his diary that Owen visited him sometime between 26 and 29 April. According to Ludlow, there was question whether enough former Rump members still survived for a recall and Owen requested from him a list of names and took it to Wallingford House for consideration.<sup>78</sup> Owen also met with Wariston along with Colonel Sydenham, a member of his Wallingford House congregation, the Congregational minister George Griffith, and Fleetwood among others to discuss political settlement and whether to recall the Rump.<sup>79</sup> But while senior figures met at Wallingford House, the main pressure for a republican settlement and recall of the Rump came from junior officers gathering at St James’s, where they had held long prayer and preaching meetings since at least September 1658. Two sources previously unused in scholarship on these events placed Owen as a key actor in the junior officers’ meetings. The first appears in the memoirs of the politician and historian Philip Warwick:

at Wallingford-house a modell of government is framing; and Fleetwood is declared Commander in chiefe of the Army. But no sooner is this on foot among the chiefe Officers, but Dr. Owen get’s together at St. James’s Chappel the inferior Officers: (for all the Congregation was righteous, and Moses and Aaron take too much upon them, and Lambert countenances these) so as Fleetword, the Commander in chiefe, and Desborough must strike saile, and the Protectors chiefe Confidants in the Army, Colonel Ingoldsby, Howard, and Norton, &c. are discarded; and articles are proposed to oblige the succeeding parliament to sett up a Common-wealth but the armys wisest friends prevaile with them for not imposing this, as a condition of their sitting. But the Army, instead of calling a new parliament, recall the old Members.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup>‘An account of the fall of the protector, Richard Cromwell, in a letter from Nehemiah Bourne’, Firth, ed., *Clarke papers*, III, p. 214.

<sup>77</sup>Annesley, *England’s confusion*, p. 9; *A part of the late king’s answer to the humble petition and advice of both houses of parliament* (1659), Wing C.2536, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup>Charles Firth, ed., *The memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, lieutenant-general of the horse in the army of the commonwealth of England, 1625–1672* (2 vols., Oxford, 1894), II, p. 74.

<sup>79</sup>30 Apr. 1659, Wariston, III, p. 106.

<sup>80</sup>Philip Warwick, *Memoires of the reigne of King Charles I, with a continuation to the happy restauration of King Charles II* (1701), pp. 391–2.

Here, Owen, like the biblical rebel Korah, was chief instigator of a split in the army: he pressurized the senior officers at Wallingford House by inciting the junior officers and soldiers at St James's.<sup>81</sup> Warwick wrote his memoir between 1675 and 1677 and it is unclear if he used older papers or how much existing histories influenced the account. But in 1659, he was a well-connected royalist with reported Presbyterian sympathies. His account shows how Owen had gained a long-standing reputation as an agitator for political revolution in April to May 1659 which placed decisive pressure on senior commanders to abandon the protector. The second source is from a continuation of the popular history *A chronicle of the kings of England*, expanded by Edward Phillips, nephew and biographer of John Milton. It records a similar story:

whilst many of the Superiour Officers of the Army met at Wallingford-house, in further consideration of a Model of Government, the inferiour Officers being the most numerous, assembled in the Chappel at St. James's, having Dr. Owen, and other Independent Ministers, to assist at their Devotion, where the matter was artificially so contriv'd, that the ... Long parliament, was much magnified; with some Intimations of Advice, to return to that Government, with which the auditors were very much affected, but nothing more was done at that time.<sup>82</sup>

Phillips was detailed and methodical in his recording of the timeline of late April and early May, drawing on a range of original material, including Monck's own papers. While unlikely to have relied on first-hand knowledge, Phillips was well informed and well connected. The story of Owen's role at St James's must represent a tradition circulating reasonably widely within five years of the events. Phillips's work was regularly reprinted and even copied verbatim by another historian.<sup>83</sup> Though it appeared too late to influence Baxter's 1664 manuscript of *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, Phillips's account likely helped to later cement the idea of Owen's role. If these two accounts are accurate, or were at least commonly believed versions of events, it is easy to see why Baxter also believed Owen was the chief culprit. While Fleetwood and the senior officers hesitated about the best course, whether to call a new parliament, whether to recall the Rump, and either way, intending to keep Richard in place, Owen ensured the junior officers and soldiers pressured Wallingford House to secure the Rump's return and a republic.

#### IV

There are, however, reasons to complicate this version of Owen's activities. There is the already known report recorded by John Asty, the son of Robert Asty. Robert had known Owen since the early 1640s and was a member of Owen's congregation with his son John in the 1670s. John Asty recounted that Owen sought a replacement for his Whitehall preaching in May 1659.<sup>84</sup> He had become ill over proceedings

<sup>81</sup>Referencing Numbers 16:3 and Korah's rebellion against Moses and Aaron's leadership.

<sup>82</sup>Richard Baker and Edward Phillips, *A chronicle of the kings of England* (4th edn, 1665), Wing B.505, pp. 698–9.

<sup>83</sup>William Gearing, *The history of the church of Great Britain from the birth of our saviour untill the year of our lord, 1667* (1674), Wing G.435B, pp. 362–3.

<sup>84</sup>Asty, 'Memoirs', p. xix.



at Wallingford House about Richard Cromwell. This came to Asty from the minister James Forbes, and it is worth expanding on his connections with Owen.<sup>85</sup> Forbes became a Congregationalist in 1655 and part of a Gloucester Congregationalist petition against Cromwell accepting the crown in 1657, a cause in which Owen was instrumental. Forbes was at the Congregational assembly in 1658. Increase Mather stayed with him in 1659 on a visit from New England. According to the correspondence of John Davenport the New England Congregationalists with whom Owen had and would maintain deep connections were suspicious that Jesuit plots were behind Richard's fall.<sup>86</sup> Like much evidence for Owen's actions or intentions in April to May 1659, Forbes's account relied on his hearing from someone else – here Owen's reported stand-in. But Forbes was well connected in Congregational circles and in a natural position to receive this kind of information. Owen's apparent substitute was likely a leading Congregationalist to be eligible to replace him at Whitehall. While those like Manton could have merely misunderstood what they saw or overheard from Owen's comings and goings, Forbes, or the minister who was asked to replace Owen, would have had to actively fabricate the account. Forbes's evidence is therefore more reliable.

Concerning leaders around Owen, Baxter stated that Hugh Peters was against dissolving parliament and collapsing Richard's government.<sup>87</sup> Like Owen, Peters officiated at devotions for the officers' council in mid-April. Baxter believed Peters, yet never revised his opinion of Owen after he likewise denied involvement in the dissolution of parliament and Richard's fall.<sup>88</sup> Baxter also accepted Owen's fellow Congregational leader Philip Nye's denial of approving the coup.<sup>89</sup> Peters told Sharpe that Nye was open to the protector becoming monarch instead of the Rump and a republic.<sup>90</sup> Peters also told Sharpe in the same meeting that concerning debates over religion in parliament, he personally favoured a moderate Presbyterian settlement. Peters later explained in his dying testimony that moderate Presbyterianism was perfectly consistent with New England Congregationalism.<sup>91</sup> So Sharpe's report of Peters's words and Nye's opinion appears true – they did not favour the Rump's republican cause. Nor were moderate Presbyterian inclinations in parliament a religious motive for a coup fomented by the Congregationalist leadership. Nye had also preached at Owen's installation as minister at Wallingford House. Nye's privately transcribed sermon was a conventional exposition of the duties of pastor and flock, with no hint of the political ends we saw earlier were rumoured as the purpose behind the congregation's formation.<sup>92</sup> Regarding other Congregational leaders, the available evidence reveals no direct involvement by Thomas Goodwin, Joseph Caryl, or William Bridge. If Owen were the chief architect of the end of the regime, he

<sup>85</sup>Stuart Handley, 'Forbes, James (1628/9–1712)', *ODNB*.

<sup>86</sup>John Davenport to John Winthrop the Younger, Newhaven, 5 June 1659, Isabel Calder, ed., *Letters of John Davenport, puritan divine* (New Haven, CT, 1937), pp. 138–41.

<sup>87</sup>Cooper, *Nonconformity*, p. 264.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>90</sup>*Consultations*, II, p. 164.

<sup>91</sup>Hugh Peters, *A dying fathers last legacy to an onely child* (1660), Wing P.1698, p. 107.

<sup>92</sup>See the transcription by Smith Fleetwood, Charles Fleetwood's son (Edinburgh, New College, MS Comm 1, fos. 21–36).

was not only against most of the senior officers – including members of his own congregation at Wallingford House – but also splitting with at least some of the Congregational leadership. This would place him opposite his colleagues of many years – with whom he would continue to work for the remainder of 1659. He would also then be among the unfamiliar ranks of republicans and religious radicals like John Rogers and Christopher Feake at St James's.

But there is more direct evidence that Owen, like Peters, was 'contented with any good Government that would keep things together'.<sup>93</sup> Wariston was present throughout April to May 1659 and his diary is a crucial witness. As mentioned, he reported a meeting on 30 April with Owen and others which has been cited as evidence supporting the accuracy of Baxter's view.<sup>94</sup> Sharpe reported two days before this meeting that 'the superior officers are for proceeding upon the Petition and Advice' – in other words, for the preservation of rule in a single person with two houses.<sup>95</sup> Wariston's account of 30 April represented Owen, Colonel (then Lord) Sydenham, a 'King', George Griffith, and Fleetwood as being in agreement to 'byde one be another and manteane civil and spritual libertyes already obteained'. Rather than expressing division or agreement over restoring the Rump, they were waiting to see 'what gouverment God shal inclyne them to'. Philip Warwick reported that Owen fomented a division among army ranks, rushing to St James's to incite the junior officers to pressurize Wallingford House in favour of the Rump. If accurate, it is strange to then find Owen in a group with senior officers Sydenham and Fleetwood who wanted to preserve the protectorate. The figure Wariston referred to in the meeting as 'King' appears to be Ralph King (1619–c. 1666), who was MP for Londonderry and Coleraine in every protectoral parliament.<sup>96</sup> In early May, King acted as courier for Richard to Henry Cromwell because the protector believed he had 'seen things and understood more by his general converse then myself'.<sup>97</sup> These five figures who met on 30 April formed a strange union if Owen was publicly agitating at St James's and Wallingford House for the Rump.

The group's reference to maintaining civil and spiritual liberty most naturally meant wanting to retain the status quo of the revised protectoral constitution of the *Humble petition and advice*, as Sharpe's report collaborates from 28 April.<sup>98</sup> This also fits with Owen's claim in 1658 that the settlement of the *Humble petition and advice* had met his view on the balance of toleration and the magistrate's power in religion.<sup>99</sup> Yet this was precisely the settlement which supporters of the anti-magisterial definition of the 'good old cause' rejected, arguing that the protectorate had undermined religious liberty rather than finding the correct balance between order and freedom.

<sup>93</sup>Peters, *A dying fathers last legacy*, p. 105.

<sup>94</sup>Cooper, *Nonconformity*, p. 250.

<sup>95</sup>James Sharpe to Robert Douglas, 28 Apr. 1659, *Consultations*, II, pp. 176–7.

<sup>96</sup>Patrick Little, 'King, Ralph (1619–c.1666)', in Roberts, ed., *History of parliament*, VI, pp. 401–3.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, VI, p. 402.

<sup>98</sup>28 Apr. 1659, *Consultations*, II, pp. 176–7.

<sup>99</sup>John Owen, 'An answer to a late treatise of the said Mr Cawdrey about the nature of schisme', in John Cotton, *A defence of Mr. John Cotton from the imputation of selfe contradiction* (Oxford, 1658), Wing C.6427, pp. 66–7; *Works*, XIII, p. 295; Adam Quibell, 'John Owen's lost Huguenot letters: French reformed Protestants and the reception of Congregational English puritan ecclesiology and politics', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 75 (2024), pp. 335–58 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022046923001318>).

But these were not the politics of Owen, the other Congregational leaders, or the senior officers. Wariston also recorded that the 'Protector was not very sensible of his condition, tho Doctor Owen spoke thryse with him'.<sup>100</sup> Wariston believed Owen had attempted to awaken the protector to action before it was too late. At least by 30 April, it is difficult to reconcile Wariston's up-close account with Owen being the chief culprit in the Rump's restoration and Richard's removal, a republican agitator with the junior officers and soldiers.

On 3 May, Owen and Wariston met again. Owen told Wariston that he now had better hopes than before to 'eschow [eschew] the calling of the Long parliament', by which he meant the surviving members of the Rump, unless it were to be 'secured anent [about] the gouverment'.<sup>101</sup> By securing the government, Owen must have been referring to the meeting of army representatives and republicans around 30 April, where the latter had refused to agree to army proposals in advance of recalling the Rump. The proposals included retaining a second house, a controversial point in the third protectoral parliament. A second house would secure against the Commons ever restoring the Stuarts or neutering the army and achieving the same result. Owen's words to Wariston – that avoiding the Long Parliament was politically preferable, and a more hopeful prospect by 3 May – make little sense if he had originally been in favour of recalling the Rump and was agitating at St James's to achieve it. Owen's expression to Wariston suggests that he had not favoured recalling the Rump but was pessimistic about avoiding it before the beginning of May. Owen's words likely indicate his gratification at Lambert's disappointment in the performance of Vane, Haselrig, Ludlow, and other Long Parliament men at the 30 April army-republican meeting to discuss a political settlement. Wariston explained that Owen told him 'what they thought fittest, to keepe the Protectors title and dignitie, to haive an good Counsel and the uther House or Senate fixed, and a new representative qualified'.<sup>102</sup> Owen's report of the preferred outcome among his associates is decisive for reconstructing his stance on the Rump and the fall of the protectorate. As a direct explanation to Wariston in person, this dialogue from 3 May is the most significant extant evidence of Owen's desires and should be given greater weight than the various second-hand accounts or those based only on observations of his meetings with different groups.

Owen also had little reason to conceal his preferences from Wariston. He had become an ally in religious controversy since arriving in England in 1657 on behalf of a faction in the Church of Scotland for which Owen helped seek Oliver Cromwell's favour. By 1659, Wariston considered Owen one whom he could 'lippen [trust] most to'.<sup>103</sup> Sharpe, who belonged to an opposing faction in the Church of Scotland and appears to have detested Wariston, reported that by 12 May Owen had wielded his considerable political influence to secure Wariston's place as the only Scot on the new council of state.<sup>104</sup> Owen was likely trying to secure a godly, anti-Stuart, and

<sup>100</sup>Wariston, III, p. 107.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., III, pp. 107–8.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 111. 'Lippin v.', Dictionary of the Scots language (2004), Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd: [www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/lippin](https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/lippin) (accessed 13 Mar. 2024).

<sup>104</sup>James Sharpe to Robert Douglas, 8 Mar. 1659, *Consultations*, II, p. 180.

pro-magistrate voice in a group of 'such diversity of interests and complexions'.<sup>105</sup> For on 9 May, two days after Owen had preached the opening sermon for the part of the Rump Parliament newly restored, he and Wariston had agreed that security lay in having the right people in government, rather than the right political form.<sup>106</sup> Owen's intervention for Wariston was one of his last actions before leaving the chaos of London. On 13 or 14 May, he suddenly returned to Oxford.<sup>107</sup> But before departing, Owen informed Wariston that he had gone to rebuke the officers 'to their Humilitation'.<sup>108</sup> Wariston did not expand on this reprimand. But it ties with the account received by James Forbes about Owen's request for a replacement preacher at Whitehall. These factors give credence to the primacy of Wariston's diary as conveying a first-hand account of what Owen was doing. If Owen had been for the Rump and the ruin of Richard, his behaviour is difficult to understand.

Owen's later claim that he had nothing to do with the fall of Richard was, at best, an exaggeration.<sup>109</sup> He was at the centre of a complex coup and attempts to resettle the government. But Owen was not an agitator for the republican interpretation of the 'good old cause' – the Rump on principle, no rule in a single person, and no House of Lords. At most, he had as much responsibility for Richard's fall as Fleetwood and other officers. Despite Owen's warning to parliament about division in *The glory and interest of nations*, he and his colleagues failed to counter the alliance of republicans, sectarians, and soldiers.<sup>110</sup> The dominant political narrative was allowed to become a tale of opposition between the army's godly cause and the protector with his parliament. As we have seen, once parliament had been dissolved, and two members of Owen's Wallingford House congregation had been cashiered for advising Richard to resist by force, Owen had urged the protector without success to see the seriousness of his position. Given the context reconstructed here, it is difficult to understand what the exhortations to Richard were about if Owen were not encouraging the protector to defend his position.

Reflecting on events, the biographer and translator Lucy Hutchinson, a later associate of Owen's congregation in the 1670s, commented on the expectations that Richard would achieve a peaceful settlement and continue England's status as God's chosen leader of the Protestant world. For 'there was nothing desirable in a prince which might not have been hoped for in him, but a great spirit'.<sup>111</sup> Yet this was exactly what Richard had needed amid the factious atmosphere of Interregnum

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 180.

<sup>106</sup> 13 May 1659, *Wariston*, III, p. 109. Owen preaching the restored Rump's first sermon is not significant evidence of his mindset. Peters had given the devotions to the army in mid-April but did not agree with their direction. The London Presbyterian William Cooper also preached for the Rump soon after. As we saw from Owen's sermon on 4 Feb. 1659, a call to preach to parliament could be a contested affair, and a platform for the preacher to deliver thanksgiving, exhortation, or an uncomfortable rebuke.

<sup>107</sup> Wariston wrote that he had been expecting to meet Owen and Sydenham (14 May 1659, *ibid.*, p. 111).

<sup>108</sup> 13 May 1659, *ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>109</sup> *An expostulatory letter*, p. 17; *Works*, XVI, p. 274.

<sup>110</sup> The pamphleteer and polemicist William Prynne called this group 'the confederated *Triumvirate*'. Prynne blamed them for deceiving the people by redefining the idea of the 'good old cause' in the popular imagination. William Prynne, *The re-publicans and others spurious good old cause, briefly and truly anatomized* (1659), Wing P.4052, p. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the life of Colonel Hutchinson*, ed. Julius Hutchinson and Charles Firth (London, 1906), p. 304.

religious politics which had required his father's strength to control.<sup>112</sup> Among the political observations for which Owen had commended *The throne of David* was that a gentle and indecisive prince would make 'hardy Rebels'.<sup>113</sup> In the process of fashioning collective memory, post-Restoration accounts found in Owen just such a scapegoat for the puritan experience of defeat. Owen's adjacency to political revolution against parliament, in support of the army as the means to preserve the godly interest, proved a grave miscalculation. For only a government with enough support to control the narrative of the 'good old cause' could have survived the volatility of puritan politics. Owen did not intend to remove Richard and was therefore not the instigator of his fall as the tradition became. But neither was Owen free of responsibility as he later claimed. Through the conviction that protecting the true godly interest required backing army allies above all – protector or parliament – he ultimately enabled the republicans, sectaries, and junior ranks in the 'good old cause' campaign to realize their aims. Owen, an architect of Oliver's elevation in 1653, became a key but accidental instrument in Richard's ruin and the fall of the Cromwellian protectorate.

**Acknowledgements.** I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the invaluable guidance and encouragement given by Crawford Gribben and Ian Campbell. My thanks to Martyn Cowan and Scott Dixon for their generous feedback on an earlier version of this material, and to the anonymous reviewers for providing such supportive and detailed suggestions. The research and writing of this article have been supported during the author's Ph.D. studies at Queen's University Belfast and subsequently as a postdoctoral researcher at Zhejiang University.

**Competing interests.** The author declares none.

<sup>112</sup>See the analysis that Richard failed to resolve unrest partly because he did not act with the boldness and decisiveness of his father in similar cases of opposition from parliament or by assuring the army he was strong enough to maintain their interests (Reece, *The army*, pp. 195–6).

<sup>113</sup>Guild, *The throne of David*, p. 67.