The author of the petition was Dr. John Owen, a prominent theologian and Independent minister. Owen had served as chaplain to the army during the Dunbar campaign and shared the views of the army officers. Importantly for Pride he was also sympathetic to Independent polity, ministering to conventicles that were convened in worshippers homes and believing it was necessary for Christians to separate themselves from unwarranted ceremony and church worship in order to avoid being tainted by the sins of others.[2]

That Desborough had found an ally in Pride is understandable because there was a similarity in their characters. Both men had a reputation for being outspoken in their views. Desborough, like Pride, was mocked by his opponents for his rustic manners: he managed a Cambridgeshire estate, which allowed his opponents to write him off as a yokel with no understanding of government (while conveniently ignoring the fact that he was a qualified attorney). Furthermore, Pride and Desborough had marital ties to Cromwell's extended family, a closely-knit oligarchy that had positioned itself at the centre of English government. In January 1656 a further link to Cromwell's establishment had been forged when Pride had allowed himself to be knighted by the Protector at Whitehall Palace. This was grist to the mill for those who felt that Pride was bent on self-aggrandisement, one former army officer declaring that he 'was real before, but now he was knighted he was grown as bad as the rest'.[3] Understanding Pride's role in persuading Cromwell to reject the crown is important if we are to appreciate his particular strain of republicanism.

Ludlow's assertion that Pride was the driving force behind the army's statement of opposition is borne-out by the fact that it was Pride's erstwhile comrade, John Mason, who gathered signatures for the officers' petition and then led a delegation to Westminster to obtain more. On 8 May, the morning that Cromwell was to address the Commons and give his answer to the question of Kingship:

> some 26 or 27 officers came with a petition to the parliament, to desire them not to presse H. H. [His Highness – Cromwell] any further about kingship. The petition was brought to the barr by lieutenant colonel Mason, who was the cheife man, who promoted it, and went up and downe from man to man to get hands thereunto.[4]

Pride's animosity towards Cromwell's decision went even further, if Arthur Onslow, a future Speaker of the Commons, is to be believed. Onslow relates that Pride confronted Cromwell personally, threatening that if the latter accepted the crown 'he would (if nobody else would) shoot him through the head, the first opportunity he had for it'.[5] As Onslow was not born until 1691 this anecdote is second-hand at best, but it found its place among the myths that surrounded Pride because to voice such a threat did not seem out of character. The early 18th century text *The History of King-Killers* puts Pride's objections to kingship down to his 'hauty Temper'.[6] What Cromwell's reaction was to Pride's attitude is not recorded but he seems to have been quite familiar with the colonel's forthright manner. 'I think wee must labour to have Collonel Pride's Common Councill again',[7] was Cromwell's wry comment when he was considering dissolving the First Protectorate Parliament, 'Pride's Council' being shorthand for a blunt response to complicated political difficulties.

Pride's name had become a byword for candid, no-nonsense problem-solving. His objection to Cromwell's acceptance of the crown, however, was not merely a knee-jerk reaction to all things regal. A closer understanding of his thoughts can be gleaned from the wording of the petition that John Mason presented to Parliament. This declared the army officers' belief that they had:

> hazarded their lives against monarchy, and were still ready so to do, in defence of the liberties of the nation: that having observed in some men great endeavours to bring the nation again under their old servitude, by pressing their General to take upon him the title and government of a King, in order to destroy him, and weaken the hands of those who were faithful to the publick; ... for the preservation of which [the officers] for their parts were most ready to lay down their lives.[8]

The tone is unmistakably belligerent, and clearly the belief was that it was pro-Royalists who wished Cromwell to accept the crown in order to stir rebellion. A hereditary head of state had already crept back into English government. Placing the crown on Cromwell's head would have affirmed the idea of monarchy even more strongly, serving only to bolster the Royalist cause and bring the restoration of the 'old servitude' one step closer. The wording of the petition revealed the determination of Pride (and others) to avoid such an action, using force if necessary, and to 'discountenance all such persons and endeavours, and continue steadfast to the old cause'.[9] Intended to be read before the House, the petition in fact never made it that far. Firth wrote in 1894 that the petition 'was printed, but does not seem to be in existence now; great care was taken to suppress it.' General Monck was ordered to seize any copy of it that found its way to Scotland.[10] Cromwell urged its reading before the House be postponed and there are indications that, following his meeting with Desborough, he had already decided to refuse the title of King.[11]

Given Pride's role in organising a resistance to the monarchists, it can be no coincidence that this period of the Protectorate was the only time in Pride's life that he played an active role in central government. In December 1656 Pride stood for election at Reigate in Surrey.[12] The second Protectorate parliament had been called the previous September, but now was the time that the question of Cromwell's constitutional role was being discussed. It is possible that Pride, who already had some influence at a local level in Surrey, saw the need to secure himself a place in Parliament in order to influence the direction that the government was taking.

As with nearly everything in which Pride involved himself, his election as member for Reigate was not without controversy. As the winning candidate in