

**Ronald Cohen  
Letter  
Collection**

**Reference:  
MS 78**

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

MS78

Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

1785-1892

Artificial collection of miscellaneous letters, made by Ronald A. Cohen, specifically on the subject of the history of dentistry.

A number of the letters are written to Sir Richard Owen (1804–1892), biologist, comparative anatomist and palaeontologist between 1831 and 1853. During this time he held the position of assistant to William Clift, conservator of the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons and, in 1849, he succeeded Clift in this position.. He was also appointed as Hunterian professor in the Royal College of Surgeons in 1836, hence a number of letters being addressed to him as Professor Owen. Although these letters are mostly on the subject of natural history specimens, particularly jaws and teeth - reflecting his research in the early part of his career in the studies of teeth, both of existing and extinct animals (see his published work on Odontography, 1840-1845), they do not appear to have any specific connection with each other. The collection also includes what appears to be an incomplete page of one of his writings.

There is also a small group of three letters to Samuel Adams Parker (LDS, RCS), the son of S. W. Langston Parker, a well known Birmingham surgeon and founder of the dental hospital in Birmingham relating to his resignation from the said branch of the British Dental Association, April-May 1892.

Two other letters are to Robert Nasmyth, an Edinburgh surgeon, both from John Barclay (1758–1826), anatomist. The remaining letters are from other individual authors, the most notable being Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), physician and botanist.

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

Where appropriate, a brief biographical entry about the author of a letter has been added to the item level description.

**Administrative history:** Robert Alban Cohen (1907-2001) was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham and the Birmingham Dental School where he qualified as L.D.S. in 1930. He became a dentist in Warwick and was also a dental surgeon at the Warneford Hospital in Leamington Spa and the Central Hospital in Warwick in the days when leading practitioners staffed voluntary hospitals. During the Second World War, he also worked in the Emergency Medical Service at Warwick Hospital. Cohen's link to the University of Birmingham continued when he was appointed as Honorary Lecturer and Senior Research fellow at the Dental School in a Dental History Unit which he founded and which was later supported by the Wellcome Trust. In 1997, the library at the Dental School was renamed the Ronald Cohen Library in his honour.

He was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, one of the first to be created a Tomes Medallist by the British Dental Association and the first recipient of the Lindsay Medal of the Lindsay Society for the History of Dentistry of which he was a Founder and later Honorary Member. He was also Honorary Member of the American Academy of the History of Dentistry and the Societe Francaise d'Histoire de l'Art Dentaire. At various times he held other offices including serving as President of the Birmingham Dental Students Society (about which he wrote a history), of the Central Counties Branch of the Birmingham Dental Association and of the Odontological Section of the Royal Society of Medicine.

Cohen was a leading author in dental history and produced some 100 papers. To mark his 90th birthday in 1997, the Lindsay Society reprinted a selection of his major historical papers. Cohen also

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

wrote the introduction to a facsimile edition of Charles Allen's 'Operator for the Teeth, 1685', the first dental book written in England and he edited 'The Advance of the Dental Profession', a history of the British Dental Association produced for its centenary. He also lectured to lay and professional audiences on dental history in Britain, France and the Netherlands as well as Ireland where for 21 years he was an extra-mural lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast. He gave the Menzies Campbell Lectures at the Royal Colleges of Surgeons of England and Edinburgh, was Wallis Lecturer at the Royal Society of Medicine and the Macgregor Lecturer in Birmingham.

Reference: Bonham's sale catalogue for 'The Collection of the late Ronald A. Cohen. Books, Prints and Related Objects Illustrative of the History of Dentistry and Teeth'. The sale took place on 10 December 2002.

**Arrangement:** Arranged in a single sequence in chronological order as far as possible

21 items

Access: Open

**Access conditions:** Access to all registered researchers

**Copyright:** Permission to make any published use of any material from the collection must be sought in advance in writing from the Director of Special Collections (email: special-collections@bham.ac.uk). Identification of copyright holders of unpublished material is often difficult. Special Collections will assist where possible with identifying copyright owners, but responsibility for ensuring copyright clearance rests with the user of the material.

**Language:** English

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

**Custodial history:** Ronald Cohen appears to have acquired these from booksellers over a period of more than 20 years. Information about the acquisition of one item, together with notes about a number of letters and some manuscript and typescript transcripts can be found on the deposit file. Three items formerly mounted on a single sheet - /1, /12 & /15 - were clearly acquired together. The two letters from Samuel Adams Parker to W. Palethorpe were purchased with Parker's 'Remarks upon Artificial Teeth and upon the state of the mouth in which they should and should not be used, with a description of the material best suited to particular cases, and an appendix, etc.' (Birmingham, 1862).

**Acquisition:** These letters were purchased at Bonham's auction of 'The Collection of the late Ronald A. Cohen. Books, Prints and Related Objects Illustrative of the History of Dentistry and Teeth' on December 2002, comprising lots 502 (part), 641 and 643

**Related material:** The Special Collections Department holds a small archive of Cohen's correspondence, some manuscript and printed bibliographical notes, and other research materials principally relating to dental history US71

MS78/1

Letter from Erasmus Darwin to Richard Dixon

1785

Letter, written from Derby and dated 18 March [17]85, is addressed 'My dear friend' and signed E. Darwin.

The address panel gives the recipient's details as Mr Richd. Dixon, Herford-end Mill, Felsted, Essex. The subject matter relates to medical and dental advice and Darwin begins by expressing pleasure at Dixon's loss of seven pounds in weight: 'the reason I advised you to emaciate yourself was because I believed your shortness of breath to be owing to some

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

fat about the lungs or heart'. He goes on to suggest that Dixon should acquire false teeth: 'you would find that another consolation, as you would speak easier'. He recommends ivory instead of the horn of the sea-horse [narwhal] and [Thomas] Beardmore in Bolt Court, Fleet Street as a good person to get them from.

**Administrative history:** Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), a physician, established a dispensary in Lichfield, founded the Philosophical Society at Derby in 1784. and formed a botanical garden near Lichfield in 1778. He was the author of a number of works including *The Love of Plants* (1789), *Economy of Vegetation* (1791) and *Temple of Nature or the Origin of Society* (1803).

Reference: *Concise Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 1992)

1 item

Access: Open

MS78/2

Letter from William Moncrieff to Lieutenant Colonel Stanhope

1816

Letter, dated 14 April 1816 and written from Hajeepoor, [Hajipur, India] is addressed 'My dear Stanhope'.

The address panel gives the recipient's details as The Hon Lt Col Stanhope, Government House, Barrackpore. It is a lengthy letter about oral hygiene, giving Stanhope 'a few hints towards preserving your teeth'. Moncrieff describes how the teeth should be cleaned and how a twig of a 'Neem Tree or of the Sobora' can be fashioned into a brush (with diagram). He also provides a recipe for tooth powder and gives information about healthy gums

1 item

Access: Open

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

MS78/3 Letter from John Barclay to Robert Nasmyth [early 1820s]

Letter, dated Tuesday evening, is addressed 'My Dear Sir' and the address panel gives the recipient's details as Robt Nasmyth Esq Surgeon, George Street.

Barclay writes to ask for the loan of 'a case or two of your tooth instruments for a lecture to students

**Administrative history:** John Barclay (1758–1826), anatomist, M.D. Edinburgh, 1796. He lectured on anatomy in Edinburgh, 1797-1825 and published works on anatomy. He built up a sizeable collection of specimens, which he gifted to the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1821.

Reference: Concise Dictionary of National Biography

1 item

Access: Open

MS78/4 Letter from John Barclay to Robert Nasmyth 1823

Letter, dated 2 July 1823, is addressed 'My Dear Sir'; the address panel gives the recipient's details as Robt Nasmyth Esq, Surgeon and Denist [sic], St Andrews Square.

The letter concerns Nasmyth's Probationary Essay ['A probationary essay on tic douloureux, submitted ... to the examination of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh', published in 1823]. Barclay thanks him both for the copy and for the honour of the dedication and makes observations and comments on the content of the essay

**Administrative history:** John Barclay (1758–1826), anatomist, M.D. Edinburgh, 1796. He lectured on anatomy in Edinburgh, 1797-1825 and published

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

works on anatomy. He built up a sizeable collection of specimens, which he gifted to the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1821. Reference: Concise Dictionary of National Biography

1 item

Access: Open

MS78/5

Letter from Sir Mark Wood to William Beacall

1825

Letter, written in the third person from 'Pall Mall 66 Next House to Prince Leopolds', is dated Saturday morning and postmarked 14 May 1825. The address panel gives the recipient's details as Mr Wm Beacall, Surgeon and Dentist, 13 Newman Street, Oxford Street [London].

Mr Beacall is asked to call at his home 'to look over his Teeth and Gums'

**Administrative history:** Sir Mark Wood (1747-1829), colonel, Bengal engineers, entered George III's service as colonel, 1795 and created baronet 1808. Reference: Concise Dictionary of National Biography

1 item

Access: Open

MS78/6

Letter from John Grant Malcolmson to Richard Owen

1831

Letter, dated 1 May 1831, is addressed 'My Dear Sir', written from Bombay and signed John G. Malcolmson. The address panel gives the recipient's details as Professor Owen, care of a James Malcolmson, 9 King William St, London.

He sends half a tooth of a hippopotamus for 'the museum, if worth a place' and regrets that he has not been able to get a 'young one' for Owen or a tooth of the rhinoceros but the African merchants are

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

obtaining them from 'wild tribes' in the interior. He notes that one huge tooth of an elephant came to Bombay and the other arrived in London from Sierra Leone. He comments on the difference in teeth originating from the Red Sea, Zanzibar and Mozambique and asks Owen if he has an interest in this subject. Finally he reports that the west coast of India is 'beginning to prove rich in fossil bones'

**Administrative history:** John Grant Malcolmson (1802-1844), doctor and geologist, first studied mathematics, chemistry and natural history. at King's College, Aberdeen, 1816-18 and then at Edinburgh University from where he graduated in medicine in 1822. He subsequently held a series of posts with the army in India. At the time of writing this letter, he was serving with the 3rd Light Cavalry and it was also in this year that he published an article 'On a remarkable aerolite' in the *Prinsep's Journal*, an early indication of his interest in geology.

Source: Friends of Falconer Museum website:  
<http://www.falconermuseum.co.uk/heads-malcomson.html> (accessed November 2007)

1 item

Access: Open

MS78/7

Letter from the Earl of Egremont to an unnamed correspondent

c1833

Letter, dated Tuesday and addressed 'My Dear Sir', is written from Petworth.

Egremont begins with a reference to a Mr Nossor, whom he remembers 'as a Dentist at this very house in Portland Street', but the subject matter of the letter is largely about his interest in fine art. Egremont has received a second letter from Nossor about 'his Raphael' and he

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

asks his correspondent if he has ever heard of him and his paintings. He also refers to a catalogue which includes 'an immense number of Stothard's works'. The last sentence concerns a boat 'which is safe in my riding house waiting for the antiquarians'

This letter is undated but the paper bears a watermark dated 1833

**Administrative history:** Sir George O'Brien Wyndham (1751-1837), the third earl of Egremont was patron of fine art

1 item

Access: Open

MS78/8

Letter from H. T. Maire Witham to Richard Owen [1830s]

Letter, dated 30 April written from Lartington [Durham], is addressed 'Dr Sir'. The address panel gives the recipient's details as Richard Owen Esqr care of T. Hepworth Esq.

Witham writes in connection with a specimen of an animal's jaw and teeth from 'Burdie House quarry near Edinburgh' which he sent Owen for comment

**Administrative history:** Henry Thomas Maire Witham (1779-1844) was a botanist and palaeontologist

1 item

Access: Open

MS78/9

Letter from J. Chanin Pearse to Richard Owen 1841

Letter, dated 8 October 1841 and written from Bradford is addressed 'My dear Sir'. The recipient is named at the foot of the letter as Professor Owen.

Pearse writes that he has despatched a box to Owen 'containing the turtle from

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

Purbeck', mentions his collection of Saurian bones, describes his work on fish teeth and jaws (with sketches) and refers to a planned visit from Owen when he can show him other things in his museum. He also asks Owen to send him information about future meetings of the Geological Society so he can arrange to various specimens to show Owen and other members which include 'several species of ammonite with the prolongation of the mouth in its various stages of growth'

1 item

Access: Open

MS78/10

Letter from John C. Warren to Richard Owen 1846

Letter, dated 7 January 1846 and written from Boston [Massachusetts, USA] is addressed 'My dear Sir'. The recipient is named at the foot of the letter as Professor Owen.

Warren encloses a 'communication on the subject of the Mastodon Gigantens' which he asks for Owen to place before an appropriate scientific body and, if printed, for a copy. He also refers to other papers he had written on mummies and on health and to Owen's own work on teeth which reminded him of Owen's kindness in showing him sections of teeth and of Owen's lectures which he attended in 1838

**Administrative history:** John Warren Collins (1778-1856)

1 item

Access: Open

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

- MS78/11 Letter from Robert H. Schomburgk to Richard Owen 1847
- Letter, dated 2 April 1847 and written from Surbiton near Kingston, Surrey, is addressed 'My dear Sir'. The recipient is named at the foot of the letter as Professor Richard Owen F.R.S.
- Schomburgk sends Owen some fossil sharks' teeth from Barbados and asks for his opinion as to whether they all belong to the same species
- Administrative history:** Sir Robert Hermann Schomburgk (1804-1865), a botanist
- 1 item
- Access: Open
- MS78/12 Letter from H. George Hancock to Joseph Houlton junior 1849
- Letter, written from 59 Harley Street [London] and dated 21 August 1849, is addressed 'My dear Houlton.
- This is a letter of congratulation on the result of his examination [the award of his M.D.] and he expresses pride that Houlton was one of his pupils
- 1 item
- Access: Open
- Physical description:** Mounted on paper on the reverse of /1
- MS78/13 Letter from William Cunningham to Richard Owen 1852
- Letter, dated 23 March 1852 and written from Devizes is addressed 'Sir'. The recipient is named at the foot of the letter as R. Owen Esq.

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

He writes that 'the teeth from the Green Sand of Warminster are quite at your service' if Owen wanted to write a supplemental note on the subject to his paper on 'Cretaceous reptilia'

1 item

Access: Open

MS78/14

Letter from Colonel Valerian Kiprianoff to [Richard Owen] 1853

Letter, dated June 1853 and written from Saint Petersburg [St Petersburg, Russia] is addressed 'Sir'. No further information about the recipient is given but a reference to him being the author of 'Odontography' indicates that he is Richard Owen. More details of the author of the letter is found at the foot of the letter: 'Monsieur Le Colonel Kiprianoff, Chef de la premiere section du Departement de voies de Communication, pres du pont Ismaloff, Saint Petersburg'.

A lengthy letter which begins 'Your great scientific merit and well-known European reputation, have inspired me with so much admiration', the author refers to his 'Geognostic exploitations in the South-West basin of the central region of Russia' from where he has made a large collection of 'the remains Saurien'. He is having difficulty in identifying some of the teeth he has acquired and although he has access to various reference books, other published works are not available to him in St Petersburg. He itemises a number of books with a request to Owen to send them to him. The final part of the letter includes a description of his own collection, with particular reference to two species of Pleosaurus and he encloses a sketch of the tooth of this animal.

2 items

Access: Open

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

MS78/15 Letter from James Copland to Mrs Piggot 1861

Letter, written from 5 Old Burlington Street, London, is dated 20 May 1861.

Copland writes that he has sent the brief memoir that he has written of her 'much respected father' to the Medical Times and Gazette for publication

**Administrative history:** James Copland (1791-1870), physician, was a practitioner in London and published 'Dictionary of Practical Medicine' (1832) and other medical works.

Reference: Concise Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford University Press, 1992)

1 item

Access: Open

**Physical description:** Mounted on paper on the reverse of /1

MS78/16 Letter from Felix Weiss to an unnamed correspondent 1876

Letter, dated 21 November 1876 written from 7 Montague Place, Bedford Square [London], in which Weiss was wrote in response to a letter from his correspondent.

He describes various cases of interesting correlations of growth between teeth, hair and nails. He also mentions being hard at work on his book 'Notes from a Dentist's Casebook'.

1 item

Access: Open

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

- MS78/17 Letter from S. Trout to Dr Young [mid to late 19th century]
- Letter, dated Friday 'Mg' and addressed 'My dear Doctor Young'. The address panel gives the recipient's address as 'The Green'
- He describes a violent attack of toothache and has been unable to leave for Surrey that morning because of 'this volcano of suffering'
- 1 item
- Access: Open
- MS78/18-20 Letters of Samuel Adams Parker 1892
- Letters of [Samuel] Adams Parker, a surgeon dentist of 22 Newhall Street, Birmingham to Mr W. Palethorpe [as Secretary of the Central Counties Branch of the British Dental Association], and to Mr C. B. Cave relating to his resignation from the said branch of the British Dental Association, April-May 1892. These letters are all written on his business headed notepaper:
- /18 21 April 1892
- /19 23 April 1892
- /20 13 May 1892
- Administrative history:** Samuel Adams Parker (LDS, RCS), the son of S. W. Langston Parker, a well known Birmingham surgeon, was the founder of the dental hospital in Birmingham in 1858. He was the author of 'Remarks upon Artificial Teeth and upon the state of the mouth in which they should and should not be used, with a description of the material best suited to particular cases, and an appendix, etc.' (Birmingham, 1862) and other works
- 3 items
- Access: Open

## Ronald Cohen Letter Collection

MS78/21

Part of draft manuscript text, possibly of  
Richard Owen

[mid 19th  
cent]

Part of a page, paginated as page 6,  
which also is annotated with 'Mss of  
Professor Owen'.

The text is clearly a draft, indicated by the  
insertions and deletions and is perhaps  
part of a text for publication, as there is a  
reference in the text to a figure. The  
subject matter appears to include a  
discussion about the use of teeth by a  
variety of mammals in killing its prey, with  
particular reference to the otter

1 item

Access: Open