

The Society's Library

Early Ballooning Lithographs and Prints

The Royal Aeronautical Society Library houses one of the world's finest collections of early ballooning material (books, pamphlets, newspaper cuttings, prints and lithographs and commemorative medals) which has been used by researchers from Germany, France and the United States.

Complementing the fine collection of early ballooning and aeronautical books is a major collection of around 700 early ballooning lithographs/prints/posters. This collection — which is based mainly on the holdings of the Cuthbert-Hodgson Collection (which was in 1947 purchased in its entirety by Sir Frederick Handley Page and presented to the Society, and described by J.L. Pritchard in the Society's Journal in June 1953 as "... the oldest aeronautical collection in the world") and the C.F.A. Pierce Collection — is a historically

important visual record of man's early ascents into the air at the very dawn of aviation as portrayed by illustrators and engravers of the time.

The balloon was born in France in 1783 during the late-18th century Enlightenment pursuit of scientific knowledge; the ability to travel through the air opened up peoples' minds to the possibilities of aerial navigation and news of the early ascents was transmitted rapidly across Europe. A part of this process was the production of numerous lithographs/prints commemorating particular ascents or aerial voyages, and the Library holds examples of many views of ascents across Britain, France and other European countries, occasionally with the same scene printed in different countries with national variations in the supporting text or people depicted. There are also a number of portrait



George Cruickshank 'Taxi Balloons' — 'A scene in the Farce of "Lofty Projects"' (1825) [Cuthbert-Hodgson Collection].

engravings of the leading aeronauts of the time and posters publicising forthcoming ascents.

The balloon — a vehicle of gas and air which could be inflated or deflated — became, for caricaturists, a symbol that

Left: James Gillray. 'He Steers His Flight: Or, Tentanda via est qua me quoque possim tollere humo' (1810) [A cartoon of Lord Grenville's Installation as Chancellor of Oxford. Grenville, seated in a balloon, is ascending into the air. He is attired in his Chancellor's gown, with a crucifix on his back]. [Cuthbert-Hodgson Collection]. **Second left:** Watercolour of Charles Green's 'Royal Vauxhall' (later known as the 'Nassau') balloon over the Medway, 7 November 1836. After a flight of some 480 miles lasting 18 hours Green — accompanied by Robert Hollond (MP for Hastings) and Thomas Monck Mason — landed at Weilburg in the Duchy of Nassau, the longest flight that man had accomplished up to that time. [Cuthbert-Hodgson Collection]. **Third left:** George Biggin, Letitia Sage and Vincenzo Lunardi ascending from St George's Fields, London, 29 June 1785 based on an original eyewitness drawing by Rigaud (C.F.A. Pierce Collection) Stipple engraving hand-coloured by Francesco Bartolozzi [Mrs Letitia Ann Sage was the first Englishwoman to ascend into the air] [Cuthbert-Hodgson Collection]. **Right:** William Elmes 'Prime Bang Up at Hackney' [Caricature of Sadler's 18th Ascent form the gardens of the Mermaid Tavern, Hackney. 12 August, 1811]. [Cuthbert-Hodgson Collection].



