

When the Balloon Didn't Go Up

Cynthia Brown

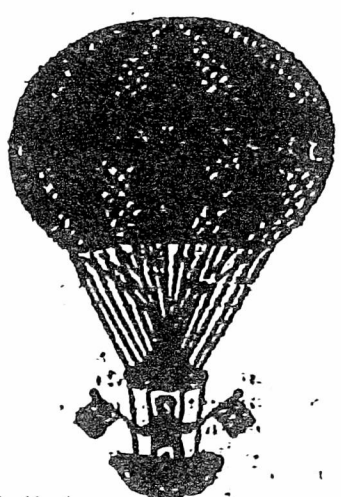


Ken Hillier's article in the *Leicestershire Historian* about Dolly Shepherd, the 'Edwardian Parachute Queen', who made her descents from hot air balloons, (1) prompted me to follow up some references to balloon ascents in *Wallace's Local Chronology of Leicester*, including an unsuccessful attempt from the Wharf Street Cricket Ground in August 1836 by Mrs Margaret Graham. They are interesting examples in their own right of nineteenth century public 'spectacles', and the enormous crowds that they could attract. They also give some insights into the technology of ballooning at that time, and the considerable costs involved. However, because the expectations of the crowds were so high, unsuccessful attempts to ascend could provoke not only the 'unmeasured complaints' that followed Mrs Graham's failure to take off in 1836, but also rioting and destruction of property, including the balloon itself on one occasion. I would like to consider some such episodes here for what they might tell us about the nature of these protests, the response of the authorities, and the life of a professional 'aeronaut'.

Charles Green,
English aeronaut c1830s.
(Reproduced by permission of the
Science Museum, London).

The first successful demonstration of a hot air balloon, an unmanned linen balloon lined with paper, was staged in June 1783 by the Montgolfier brothers, Jacques and Joseph, papermakers of Annonay in southern France. The first manned flight took place on 21st November that year, when Pilatre de Rozier and the Marguis d'Arlandes ascended from Paris in a Montgolfier balloon, returning safely to earth thirty minutes later. In both cases the balloon was inflated over a fire of straw, but before the end of that year a balloon invented by the French physicist Professor Jacques Charles and inflated with hydrogen gas also took off from Paris. This used a new technique of coating silk with rubber, and a valve-and-ballast system to control its altitude which became the model for hot air balloons for many years to come.


By the 1820s balloon ascents were well established in Britain as a form of public entertainment, with the 'aeronauts' travelling from town to town to demonstrate their skills. The first recorded ascent from Leicester appears to have been on 26th July 1824, when Mr Charles Green took off from ground adjoining the Gas Works in Navigation Street, off Belgrave Gate. (2) Mr Green's own first ascent was from St. James's Park in London in July 1821, in a balloon inflated with coal gas. He made over 500 flights before retiring in 1852, including an overnight flight in his Royal Vauxhall balloon in November 1836 from Vauxhall Gardens in London to Nassau in Germany – the balloon being renamed the 'Great Nassau' to commemorate this achievement.



CORONATION BALLOON
Under the patronage of the Worshipful the Mayor of
MR. GREEN
RESPECTFULLY announces to the
Inhabitants of Leicester and its vicinity
that he purposes,
On **MONDAY, July 26th,**
At Three o'clock in the Afternoon; making his
EIGHTEENTH AERIAL VOYAGE,
From a commodious situation belonging to
Mr. BRADLEY, adjoining the GAS WORKS.
Tickets of admission to witness the Inflation,
Attaching the Car, and Launching the Balloon,
at 2s. and 3s. each, may be had of Mr. Combe,
Mr. Chamberlain, and Mr. Cockshaw, Book-
sellers.
Bands of Music will attend, and Seats, with
other accommodations will be provided.
Order of Signals.—A Gun will be fired to an-
nounce the commencement of inflation; a second
Gun will be fired when the process is completed,
and the ascent will be notified by a third Gun
and a Pilot Balloon. To afford the Public an
ample an opportunity as possible for inspecting
the Balloon, the doors will be opened at Twelve
o'clock.

Advertisement for the first recorded ascent from Leicester by Mr Green on 26th July 1824. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland).

Mr Green's second ascent from Leicester, the 36th of his career, took place on 27th July 1825, when he was accompanied by Miss Stocks, 'the young lady who fell with Mr. Harris when he was unfortunately killed, and who has since evinced her undiminished courage by ascending with Mr. Green at Leeds and Stamford'. (3)



CORONATION BALLOON
UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE
WORSHIPFUL THE MAYOR.
MR. GREEN
HAS the honor to announce to the
Nobility, Gentry, and the Public, that he
purposes,
ON **WEDNESDAY, JULY 27th,**
At Half-past three o'clock, P. M. making his
36th **AERIAL VOYAGE,** from Mr. BRADLEY'S
Close, adjoining the Gas Works, Leicester; of
which occasion (unless a considerable premium
is offered by some person desirous of ascending
with Mr. G.) he will be accompanied by
MISS STOCKS,
The young Lady who ascended from Leodop
with the unfortunate Mr. HARRIS, and who,
from the sudden and total escape of the Gas,
literally fell with the Balloon from a height of
nearly a mile in Beddington Park, near Croyden.
To afford the Public an ample opportunity of
inspecting the Balloon, the doors will be opened
at two o'clock. Tickets of admission to witness
the inflation attaching the Car, and launching the
Balloon, 2s. or 3s. each.
N. B. An enclosure near the Balloon will be
fitted up with seats for the accommodation of
Ladies.
The **Duke of Rutland's Band** will perform
during the Inflation.

Advertisement from the Leicester Chronicle July 1825 for the 'aerial voyage' of Mr Green, accompanied by Miss Stocks. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland).

The newspaper report also refers to 'the collection in the meadow [that] was not equal to the expectation of the individuals who kindly undertook the trouble of collecting, the amount only reaching £21 16s. 4d. – a sum trifling considering the immense number of persons congregating together on the occasion'. Nevertheless, Mr Green placed a notice in the *Leicester Chronicle* to publicly acknowledge the support which he experienced. (4)

BALLOON.

MR. GREEN cannot take his departure from Leicester without publicly tendering his grateful acknowledgments for the distinguished patronage and support which he experienced on his ascent from this town yesterday.

To the Worshipful the Mayor; to Mr. Worthington, and the gentlemen constituting the Committee; to Mr. Bradley, for the use of his close; and to the individuals who lent him their waggons, awnings, &c. Mr. Green feels himself especially indebted, assuring them, that their kindness will be long remembered by him with sincere thankfulness.

July 28, 1825.

Mr Green's acknowledgement in the Leicester Chronicle 30th July 1825 for the 'distinguished patronage and support' he received in Leicester for his balloon ascent the previous day. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland).

The usual practice at ascents was to charge for entry to the enclosure from which the balloon was launched, leaving other spectators to watch from whatever vantage points they could secure. The newspaper's belief that 'Mr. Green was otherwise handsomely remunerated for his daring enterprise'

suggests that this was the arrangement here. Perhaps Miss Stocks also paid for the privilege of flying as a passenger. This was also common practice, as was displaying the balloon to the crowds while it was still safely tethered by ropes. On this occasion, it was:

at times permitted to rise above the enclosure sufficiently to show the car to the surrounding multitude... about half-past four, it was launched afloat, and a more beautiful ascent was never seen. It quitted the earth with a motion so slow and lingering – with such tardy reluctance, and at an angle of inclination so acute, as to afford the highest possible delight to the numerous spectators assembled. A discharge increasing its buoyancy, it soared aloft like an eagle.... (5)

Not all such attempts ended in success. In August 1836, large numbers of spectators came from town and county to witness an ascent by Mrs Margaret Graham from the Wharf Street Cricket Ground. While thousands reportedly paid for entry, many more congregated on the Spinney Hills and Dane Hills and ‘the house tops were occupied by expectant gazers’. However, Mrs Graham’s planned ascent at 5 p.m. was reportedly delayed by an escape of gas during an accident at the Gas Works, and when she finally took off around two hours later the balloon was insufficiently filled with gas and failed to gain height. After hitting a building at the entrance to the ground, it cleared this ‘only to run foul of a house on the opposite side of Wharf Street. Great was now the consternation and alarm of the beholders... the confusion which prevailed is inconceivable by those not present...’. Mrs Graham was eventually forced to climb from the car:

into the chamber-window of the house with which she had come into contact; on the roof of which the lubberly balloon was lying “all its long length”, pulling down the chimneys by its struggles, and rending its brown silken sides. With considerable difficulty, the huge monster was disentangled... [and] fell down to earth a flabby mass, discharged of its noisome contents which half-poisoned the throng... Who shall venture the attempt to convey an adequate idea of the general disappointment. (6)

On this occasion, the crowd’s disappointment resulted in nothing worse than ‘warm feeling... [which] vented itself in unmeasured complaints, the whole affair being declared a trick...’. (7) Far worse consequences attended an unsuccessful ascent in September of that year by Mrs Graham’s husband George, though in neither case should failure have been entirely unexpected. The Grahams had already made a number of near-disastrous ascents, including one from Plymouth in 1825 which ended in the sea after 14 minutes, destroying the balloon and requiring them to be rescued by boat. (8) As suggested by the *Leicester Chronicle*

under the headline ‘GRAHAM’S “SPLENDID BALLOON” – DISAPPOINTMENT THE THIRD’, Mr Graham’s failure to ascend from the Wharf Street Cricket Ground on 28th September 1836 was not the first such incident locally:

Mr. Graham’s balloon, which, through ill-luck or bad management, made bungling ascents (if ascents they could be called) at Hinckley and in this town, was this week again advertised for an ascension from the Cricket Ground... the inflation to be accomplished by “pure hydrogen gas”...

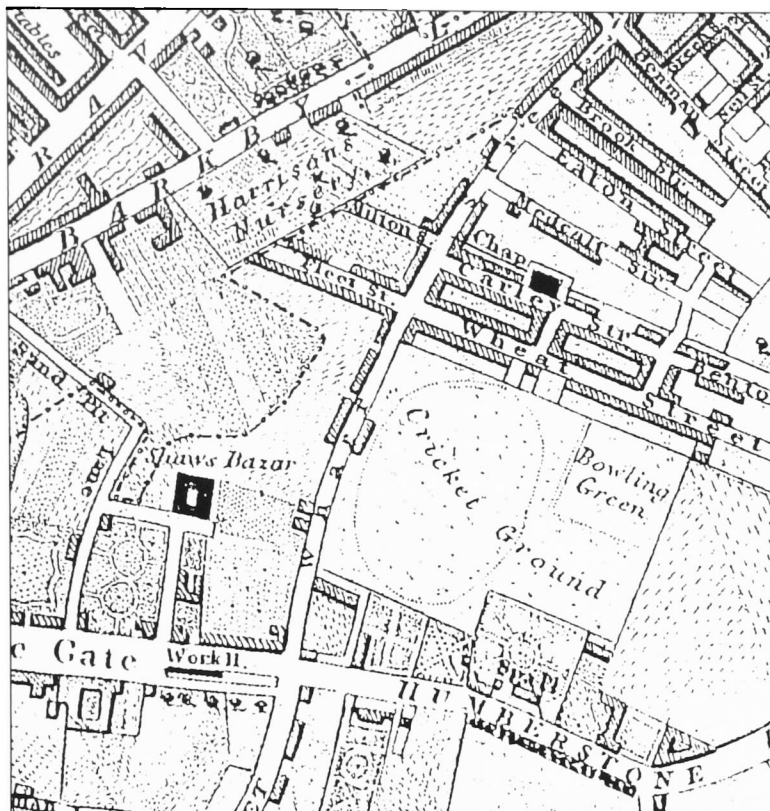
In an interesting insight into the process, the *Chronicle* also reported that the public was admitted to the ground for a fee of one shilling to watch the process of filling the balloon with 12,000 cubic feet of hydrogen gas:

About a score of casks were filled, in whole or in part, with a mixture of iron fillings, sulphuric acid, and water; the gas they thus generated was conveyed by means of pipes into a cask containing lime-water, and thence into the balloon. The quantity of sulphuric acid consumed was not less than a ton and three-quarters. (9)

Despite these careful preparations, Mr Graham’s flight on take-off was, in the words of the *Chronicle*, ‘horizontal, not perpendicular...[it] required a “heave-up” from the bystanders to enable it to clear a pallsiding of the enormous height of some three feet eight inches!’. Mr Graham’s own ‘top-heaviness’, it suggested, had ‘perhaps some connection with his failure to ascend’. However, no doubt due to his promise to make another attempt on the following day, the response of the crowd to this initial failure was restrained: ‘John Bull, though sorely vexed at this renewed disappointment, retained his good humour most admirably; and after perpetrating sundry jokes... departed from the ground in peace’. (10)

On returning to the Cricket Ground the following day however, the would-be spectators discovered that Mr Graham had already taken off without waiting for the crowd to reassemble. Some of them broke into the ground and made a bonfire of the casks used to generate the gas, to which was added ‘other combustibles’ including a water-tub, a bench, a table and ‘the folding gates of the principal entrance...’ (11) The crowd had to be dispersed by the Borough police force, and several people were arrested and brought before the Magistrates the next day. John Armes, alias ‘Bacco Jack, a coal-higgler, was identified by a waiter at the Cricket Ground as ‘a sort of general’ who ‘officiated as “stoker” at the fire which was kindled’. Armes ‘declined to make any defence’ and was fined £2 plus costs, with imprisonment with one month’s hard labour in default. Three other men were fined 15 shillings each for throwing

stones, but several others were dismissed without punishment 'in consideration of their previous good characters'. (12)



Detail from Cockshaw's 1828 map of Leicester, showing the location of the Wharf Street Cricket Ground from where a number of balloon ascents took place. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland).

This relatively lenient approach was echoed by the statement of the Mayor, the banker Thomas Paget, that:

He was resolved from the first that the Riot Act should not be read, if it could possibly be avoided, and that the military should not be called in. Indeed, he had at first tried to dispense with the police, but he was obliged to call in that force... Nothing could be more prompt than the assistance which they rendered, and their great forbearance was most exemplary. No disturbance of such a nature had been got rid of with less individual injury... He had no fear it would ever be necessary in Leicester to call in the military... (13)

Mr Paget was perhaps mindful of the serious rioting that had occurred just a few years earlier in Bristol, Nottingham and other urban centres (though not in Leicester itself) during the agitation for the reform of Parliament, and the involvement of the military in quelling it. As the first Mayor of the reformed Corporation, now elected by the ratepayers under the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835, his response to the destruction provoked by Mr Graham's non-ascent may be explained in part by a wish to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Borough police in dealing with civil disturbances. In the process, this might serve to justify the increased burden on the ratepayers that its formation represented, for: 'The

protection of life and property, the preservation of public tranquillity, and the absence of crime, will alone prove... whether the objects for which the police were appointed have been attained'. (14)

However, it seems clear that the Mayor and his fellow magistrates also shared the view of the *Leicester Chronicle* that:

The populace, though their recourse to "Lynch Law" cannot be justified, were not without palliation, the disappointment-upon-disappointment being very mortifying and exasperating; and the resistance which they made to the constituted authorities of the Borough was comparative [sic] trifling. (15)

The 'principal author' of the disturbance, in Mr Paget's view, was not 'Bacco Jack but William Barker, landlord of the Anchor Inn on the corner of Halford Street and Charles Street, and lessee of the Cricket Ground:

your conduct in this affair has been very blameable. You must be aware that the excitement of yesterday arose out of the treatment which the people received in connection with the balloon... On the first occasion, you were perhaps excuseable: and the disappointment was borne by the crowd with great forbearance. I have not a word to say in extenuation of the disturbance which followed the second disappointment; but I must say that after the experience which you had of Mr. Graham's want of skill, you should not have engaged him again. Your taking the money of the public a second time, and a second time disappointing them, is unpardonable. You are the immediate cause of the sufferings of the men who have today been visited with punishment, and of the excitement and alarm which yesterday prevailed. I must also say that, although you were the principal author of the disturbance, you did as little as you possibly could to repress it. (16)

Mr Barker, while admitting that he was at fault, claimed that 'after the first failure he was anxious... to do something to satisfy the public mind', but 'he was yesterday quite unable to quit the house, being too lame to walk'. In the circumstances however, it was little wonder that the next aeronaut to be engaged by Mr Barker, a Mr John Hampton, approached his ascent in August 1839 – only the 19th of his career – with 'delight... mingled with much anxiety and fear... aware as I was of the lamentable failures of Mr. and Mrs. Graham on a former occasion, and how much prejudice and doubt I had to remove to regain the confidence of the town in supporting my aeronautic exhibition'. (17) Mr Hampton had served in the Royal Navy before becoming a professional aeronaut, making his first ascent in June 1838.

(18) In the event, he put on 'a magnificent exhibition', despite his 'Albion' balloon being:

about a third less in size than the great "Nassau", manufactured, we understand of the same description of material, and got up at an enormous expense, indeed, we had no idea the outlay could be so great... its appearance when fully inflated is very imposing, and presents to the eye in its buoyant state, with the bright glare of the sun upon its huge bulk, a truly gorgeous and magnificent picture. At six o'clock to the minute, the tremendous acclamations of the joyous throng announced the launch of the aerial machine into its native element. (19)

The 'great satisfaction' afforded by his ascent persuaded the lessees of the Cricket Ground to make arrangements for another ascent two days later. Attendance at this was reported to be 'numerous and highly respectable, and the police arrangements under the direction of Mr. Goodyer [Chief Constable] were in every way efficient'. (20) Nevertheless, given the expense of mounting such spectacles, both to the aeronauts whose living depended on them, and the promoters of the events themselves, arguments about who should bear the responsibility and the costs of maintaining public order were almost inevitable when things went wrong.

Balloon ascents seemed to be as popular as ever in the 1840s. Mr Green's ascent in his 'Nassau' balloon in June 1846 attracted a 'brilliant assemblage on the cricket ground [and] thousands of spectators on the neighbouring hills'. (21) The report of an ascent by Mr Green in July 1847, accompanied by Mr Hildyard, the Borough Recorder, and Mr John Moxon, refers to special trains for the spectators, and 'the appearance of a general holiday' in the streets. (22) However, the crowd that witnessed Henry Coxwell make 'one of the best ascents ever made from Leicester' in July 1858 was reportedly 'not so numerous as that seen on similar occasions', (23) and as they became less and less of a novelty, balloon ascents increasingly appeared as part of larger programmes of entertainment such as annual fetes, rather than events in their own right.

Arguments about responsibility and the costs of maintaining public order at such events resurfaced in Leicester in July 1864 when Mr Henry Coxwell's 'Britannia' balloon was destroyed during a Foresters' fete. The Wharf Street Cricket Ground having been sold for housing development in 1860, the annual 'Demonstration and Fete' of the Midlands and North Eastern Counties Foresters' Courts was held on the Racecourse in Leicester on 11th July 1864. Mr Coxwell, a former dentist who made his first ascent in 1844, was billed to make an ascent: 'in his new MAMMOTH BALLOON, Britannia. Just exhibited at the Crystal Palace. This balloon

is 90 feet high, 180 feet at its greatest circumference, and the Car is capable of accommodating 25 persons'.

Tickets for the 'Final Ascent' (for passengers accompanying him on the flight) were £3. 3s.; those for a partial ascent (tethered by ropes) 2s. 6d. Other attractions included foot races 'for a silver cup and money', Germain's Coloured Opera Troupe giving 'their inimitable Negro Entertainment accompanied by recitations', and fireworks to conclude. Special trains run by the Midland Railway 'at extremely low rates' brought spectators from as far afield as Wakefield, Birmingham and Bedford, and the crowd was estimated at around 50,000. (24) However, whether by accident, as the *Chronicle* suggested; by design, as some of the crowd apparently believed; or through wanton destruction, as Mr Coxwell himself held, the balloon never took off. This provoked, in the words of one spectator:

a disgraceful riot. The arrangements for the keeping of the ground... were so bad as to preclude the possibility of Mr. Coxwell making his necessary, and of course, most important arrangements. The temporary barriers around the balloon were broken down soon after 2 p.m., and the dense mob rushed in, surrounding the balloon, and setting Mr. Coxwell at defiance... He could get no clearance... Mr. Coxwell opened the valve and allowed the gas to escape. As soon as the mob perceived this, they rushed to the balloon on all sides, clinging, tearing and trampling, and then some brutal persons seized upon Mr. Coxwell, knocked his cap from his head, tore his coat from skirt to collar, and hustled him in every direction... I never witnessed such barbarous ignorance, baseness, and injustice in my life... (25)

At this point Mr Coxwell was escorted from the ground by the police, allegedly pursued by cries of 'Rip him up', 'Knock him on the head' and 'Finish him'. While it was generally agreed that the police had 'done what they could', there were reportedly only eight on duty, and 'owing to their insufficient number they were of little use... Many people left the ground expressing their strong disapprobation of the failure. The proceedings went on afterwards much better, and the omission was atoned for somewhat by the unexpectedly magnificent display of fireworks'. (26)

Mr Coxwell, in a letter to *The Times* on the following day, said that he had been forced to let out the gas 'so as not to endanger the lives of my passengers, among whom were two ladies... nothing short of the destruction of my balloon, and indeed an attempt on my own life, appeared a sufficient sacrifice'. He strenuously denied accusations heard among the crowd that 'the balloon then present was not my largest and newest balloon, but a small one' – and that 'there existed a disinclination on my part to ascend'. Instead, he

laid the blame squarely on 'a want of foresight in providing sufficient policemen to keep in check so large a gathering...' (27).

In scenes somewhat reminiscent of a riot in 1773, in which framework knitters in Leicester destroyed a hosiery machine seen as threatening their employment 'and carried the fragments in triumph through the streets', (28) the hoop of Mr Coxwell's balloon was later paraded through the town, along with shreds of the balloon itself which were sold as trophies. While they were less common than in the past, Leicester was no stranger to riots in the mid-nineteenth century. The number of working men in the town with a parliamentary vote was still limited after the 1832 Reform Act, and rioting remained a form of protest against perceived attacks on custom and tradition, or violations of what was seen as fair and just. In February 1847 a violent disturbance took place in The Newarke in protest against the suppression of the Shrove Tuesday tradition of the 'Whipping Toms', which in the words of one rioter was 'an immemorial custom and ought not to be put down'. (29) In May 1848, during the so-called 'Bastille Riots', windows were broken in houses of the Poor Law Guardians in protest against the administration of poor law relief under the reform of 1834. (30)

However, while there are echoes here of the 'direct action' that characterised local riots in the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries, the 'balloon riots' discussed above were clearly underpinned by the principle that paying spectators should get what they had paid for. On the other side of the equation, professional aeronauts incurred significant costs in pursuing their careers: in procuring the balloon in the first place, in conveying it from town to town, and in paying for the gas to inflate it. In a letter to the *Chronicle* on 8 October 1836, Mr Graham gave the total cost of his appearance in Leicester as £61. 3s. 10d., much of it related to making the gas on the ground. It included £7. 18s. 6d. for the iron filings, £5. 16s.

THE BALLOON RIOT AT LEICESTER.

To the Editor of the Times.

Sir,—The wanton destruction of my new Britannia balloon, the burning of the car in which Mr. Glaisher and I have made all the scientific ascents, together with my own escape from personal injury, are matters sufficiently important for troubling you with an explanatory letter. I was engaged to ascend on Monday, the 11th, at Leicester, the occasion being a grand demonstration of the Foresters on the racecourse, where about 15 acres had been closed in, and a special enclosure made for the protection and inflation of my large balloon, just recently constructed.

The subordinate arrangements were not, however, in harmony with the extensive arrangements made before the fête day. There was no barrier around the balloon, and there were, as I heard stated in the presence of the town clerk, only eight policemen engaged, and throughout the day I was often left to shift for myself without that assistance being received which belongs to so great an undertaking.

Although 50,000 persons were present, I had to beg hard for a policeman; but it is only an act of justice to acknowledge that, when one was sent, he proved a most efficient constable. Early in the afternoon a gentleman, reported to be a professional man, gave it out that the balloon then present was not my largest and newest balloon, but a small one.

This was a cruel libel, and aroused, I am told, an angry feeling among the visitors. The lack of policemen to maintain order soon manifested itself, for on a band entering the balloon-ground the boards were carried at once, and thousands of persons broke in and harassed my operations excessively. It was in vain that I entreated and that several gentlemen succeeded in clearing an open space—the deficiency of strong barriers having afforded access, all subsequent attempts to stop the tide of human pressure proved unavailing. What made matters worse was the fact that before the ascent could possibly take place the balloon must needs be removed into an open space. Considerable time was occupied in pulling down the scaffold, poles, and hoarding, and those who promised to do this were found wanting when their services were most required. At last the balloon was taken out; but here we were in a perfect sea of clamouring spectators to the number of 50,000 persons, no one appearing to understand that any impediment was offered, and yet everybody demanding an instantaneous ascent. A third difficulty was this,—I had agreed to a share-arrangement as to the seats in the car, and those who had paid their money and obtained tickets pounced into the basket in such a rude unceremonious manner that all operations were stopped, and the passengers themselves were preventing their own departure. One person seated in my car was a disgrace to his town, as by his gestures and foul language he excited the mob, and induced the belief that there existed a disinclination on my part to ascend, whereas I was imploring the opportunity of being able to do so with safety to those who entrusted themselves to my care. The pressure of the mob was now so great that my car was damaged, the network broken in several places, owing to persons hanging on to the lower meshes, and a bottle was thrown into the balloon, which, by the bye, I was not aware of myself at the time. I now threatened that unless a ring was made I would let out the gas, so as not to endanger the lives of my passengers, among whom were two ladies. As I only got abuse for my earnest appeal, especially from one or two in the car, I forthwith executed my threat. There were no doubt around me the sum of the collected thousands, but I should be sorry to charge them or suppose them to be Foresters. A few, however, certainly belonged to that order, as they wore the distinguishing marks, and I could readily identify them.

Inspector Haynes and Sergeant Chapman were now doing honour to the police force and were battling away manfully with the crowd. It was brave but hard work, for nothing short of the destruction of my balloon, and indeed an attempt on my own life, appeared a sufficient sacrifice. While the work of demolition was proceeding Sergeant Chapman led me away amid yelling and derision. My clothes were soon torn, and then the cry was raised, "Rip him up," "Knock him on the head," "Finish him," &c., all of which would have inevitably been executed had I not followed the inspector's advice. I was kindly sheltered and protected by Mr. Stone, the Town Clerk of Leicester, whose residence is near the Racecourse.

It soon transpired that the car had been made a bonfire of, the hoop that would not burn through, was paraded in the streets, the balloon itself was torn to shreds, and the pieces sold at various prices; and I verily believe that all this was attributable simply to a want of foresight in not providing sufficient policemen to keep in check so large a gathering of Foresters.

I remain, Sir, yours obediently,
Tottenham, July 12. HENRY COXWELL.

Mr Henry Coxwell's letter to The Times as it appeared in the Leicester Chronicle 16th July 1864, under the heading 'The Balloon Riot in Leicester'. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland).

for casks, £7. 2s. 11d. for the sulphuric acid, £5 for 'water and labour', and £12 for 'Posting back to Bath to be in time for ascent with balloon as agreed upon'. In return, Mr Barker paid him £20 plus half the receipts at the gate. (31)

Clearly, the loss of a balloon could be disastrous for an aeronaut, particularly one with such a high public profile as Mr Coxwell's new 'Britannia'. In evidence given on oath, and thus likely to be accurate, he calculated the damage to the balloon in Leicester at £700. Further incensed by a letter to *The Times* from the Chairman of the Foresters, which 'insinuated that it was [his own] duty to provide for protecting himself against a crowd', he resolved to recoup the cost from the offenders. He appeared unexpectedly at the Town Hall in Leicester later in July 1864 at the conclusion of the Magistrates' business, accompanied by his solicitor, citing a law that anyone convicted of causing more than £30 of 'wilful damage' was liable for a fine 'in proportion to the damage, and in default, imprisonment...'. He therefore 'wished to make a complaint, to put himself under examination on oath, and to enter into recognisances to appear and prosecute any offender that might be discovered. It would be well that the offenders should know what their liability was...' (32)

Following a discussion between Mr Coxwell's solicitor and the Town Clerk as to whether the relevant Act applied in this case—given that 'at the time the Act was passed balloons were not contemplated'—his evidence was taken down under oath; but as he was unable to identify those people responsible for the damage, it appears that no prosecution was ever brought. (33) Given that they were reputedly among the 'rougher' elements of the crowd, had the culprits been convicted it seems unlikely that he would have recouped anything like the full cost of the damage from them. Help was forthcoming, however, through a subscription raised by James Glaisher, F.R.S. of the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, with

whom Henry Coxwell had made a number of ascents to study the effects of altitude on the human body, including one in 1862 to a height of almost 30,000 feet. (34) In late August 1864, in a rather belated attempt to restore the reputation of the town, a subscription was also opened in Leicester to help reimburse the cost of the balloon, supported by Foresters in the local area. (35)

No further incidents of this nature appear to have occurred in Leicester, though balloon ascents continued to be part of annual events such as the Belgrave Flower Show, and ‘one-off’ spectacles like the ‘Clarendonia’ festival in 1888 featuring ‘the BRAVE LEONA DARE, who rises 8,000 ft. into the air suspended by her Teeth only’ from a balloon piloted by Signor Spelterini. (36) Rare as they were however, they did serve to illustrate the reluctance of the local authorities in Leicester to take responsibility for ensuring public order and safety at such gatherings beyond providing a small number of police officers. Passing by-laws regulating drinking, gambling and other aspects of spectators’ behaviour was one thing; ‘interfering’ in the contractual arrangements between aeronauts and the promoters of their ascents in the free market environment of the nineteenth century was another thing altogether. Given the expanding ‘market’ for commercial leisure opportunities during that century, it seems clear that arguments about where the responsibility did actually lie – with the organisers of ascents or the aeronauts themselves – were less concerned with public order and safety *per se* than with the large amounts of money that stood to be lost or gained from such ‘spectacles’.

References and Notes:

1. Kenneth Hillier, ‘A remarkable century: the adventures of an Edwardian lady parachutist’, *Leicestershire Historian*, 44 (2008), pp.33-36.
2. J.D. Bennett, ‘When the balloon went up’, *Living History Newsletter*, 26 (Leicester City Council, 1999).
3. According to John Timbs, *Curiosities of London* (1867), on 25th May 1824 ‘Lieutenant Harris, R.N., ascended from the Eagle Tavern, City Road, with Miss Stocks; the former killed by the too rapid descent of the Balloon’. (<http://www.victorianlondon.org/entertainment/ballooning.htm>).
4. *Leicester Chronicle*, 30th July 1825. The notice itself is dated 28th July 1825. *Wallace’s Chronology* notes that Mr Bradley had a timber yard near to the Gas Works, which were located off Belgrave Gate, adjacent to the canal.
5. *Leicester Chronicle*, 29th July 1826. The balloon landed an hour later at Atherstone, where Mr Green no doubt released the customary carrier pigeon with a note of their location, to enable it to be retrieved.
6. *Leicester Chronicle*, 13th August 1836.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Science and Society Picture Library (www.scienceandsociety.co.uk). In 1851 their Victoria and Albert balloon was also destroyed in an ascent to celebrate the Great Exhibition, and over a career of some thirty years they became ‘as famous for their apparent good fortune in surviving these adventures as for their aeronautical skills’.
9. *Leicester Chronicle*, 1st October 1836.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Sir Richard Mayne, 1829 (Metropolitan Police, <http://www.met.police.uk/history/definition.htm>).
15. *Leicester Chronicle*, 1st October 1836.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Leicester Journal*, 9th August 1839.
18. In October of that year he became the first Englishman to make a successful parachute jump, from a height of 6,000 feet above Cheltenham, taking 12 minutes 40 seconds to descend.
19. *Leicester Journal*, 9th August 1839.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Leicester & Midland Counties Advertiser*, 27th June 1846.
22. *Leicester Chronicle*, 3rd July 1847. This was probably the John Moxon listed in the 1841 Census as a tailor in High Street, Leicester.
23. *Leicester Chronicle*, 31st July 1858.
24. *Leicester Chronicle*, 9th July 1864.
25. *Leicester Chronicle*, 16th July 1864.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Henry Coxwell letter to *The Times*, reprinted in the *Leicester Chronicle*, 16th July 1864. However, one eye-witness, in a letter also published in the *Chronicle* on 16th July 1864, referred to the view expressed by members of the crowd that it was ‘one of his *old dodges*’, suggesting that it was not the first time Mr Coxwell had failed to make an expected ascent.
28. Mrs Fielding Johnson, *Glimpses of Ancient Leicester*, (John & Thomas Spencer, 1891), p.256.
29. *Leicestershire Mercury*, 20th February 1847.
30. Jack Simmons, *Leicester: the Ancient Borough to 1860*, (Alan Sutton, 1983), p.165.
31. *Leicester Chronicle*, 8th October 1836.
32. *Leicester Chronicle*, 23rd July 1864.
33. There is no reference to any prosecution in reports of the next Borough Quarter Sessions in October 1864.
34. *British Medical Journal*, 13th December 1862.
35. *Leicester Journal*, 2nd September 1864.
36. *Leicester Chronicle*, 4th August 1888. She did, however, have a safety rope in the event of need. ‘Clarendonia’ was held on land opposite the former Racecourse, now Victoria Park, and organised by Mr J.H. Clarke, manager of the West End Cycle Works.