

Up, Up and Away... in My Transferware Balloon

By Michael Weinberg

For humans, dreams of flight have always been real. Numerous ancient myths --including the one we are most familiar with, Daedalus and Icarus, and modern science fiction highlight attempts to defy gravity and soar over the landscape and to the stars. It is not surprising, then, that there exists a transferware pattern that features early human flight – the hot air balloon. More than 60 years before the Wright Brothers flew over Kitty Hawk, NC, hot air balloons were the only way for humans to soar above the treetops.

Earlier this summer, a striking red transferware piece in Dennis Berard's booth at the New Hampshire Antique Dealers Association show in Manchester caught my attention. The view on the base of a covered serving dish showed a single hot air balloon above a grandiose curved building with an urban landscape and church steeples in the distance. To me, the building resembled The Royal Crescent, the magnificent 18th-century structure in Bath, England, which has stood since the 1770s. Surely, a balloon flying over the Royal Crescent (if indeed that is what the building represents) must have some significance, and thus began an intriguing internet search, looking for a source print or an explanation of the scene.

While there have been unmanned balloon flights since the Chinese first accomplished the feat in the 3rd Century A.D., the first "occupied" hot air balloon flight did not happen until September, 1783, when Pilatre de Rozier launched a flight from Paris. It lasted 15 minutes, and incidentally, the passengers were a sheep, a duck and a rooster. Later that year, 2 Frenchmen, the Montgolfier brothers, were the first to fly in a balloon (some sources attribute the feat to Rozier and Francois Laurent d'Arlandes). The first English flight was accomplished in 1784 by an Italian, Vincenzo Lunardi, who made the flight with a cat, a dog and a caged pigeon for company. John Pierre Blanchard and the American John Jeffries crossed the English Channel from France to England by balloon in 1785, and the first American flight took place in 1793 with George Washington observing.*

But none of the fascinating information I found included flights over Bath. For a while, I thought I might be on the right track, when I found the name James Sadler. In October 1784, he was the second person in the UK (and first Englishman) to fly a balloon, but he took off from the Christ Church Meadow in Oxford. Clearly, his exploits were not the one featured on the Staffordshire dish. But were they? Searching Google Images, I came across a rep-



Central transfer on "Balloon" pattern vegetable dish base, showing a hot air balloon soaring over a large crescent-shaped building with an urban landscape in the background.



"Balloon" pattern vegetable dish base, red or pink transfer, 12 1/4" x 9 3/4", no mark, unknown maker. Photos by author; permission to photo the dish compliments of Dennis and Dad Antiques.

resentation of Sadler's balloon, and it looked remarkably like the image in the Staffordshire transfer. But then again, most 18th and early 19th Century balloons looked similar, at least to the 21st Century eye. And perhaps the engraver of the transfer scene used a familiar image to represent the balloon.

*Numerous other balloon flight firsts, in case anyone is planning an appearance on *Jeopardy*, include: first military use of balloons, in 1794 at the Battle of Fleurus; first woman to fly in a balloon, in 1784, when a French opera diva took a ride, perhaps in search of her high-C; and the first parachute jump out of a balloon (from 6500 feet) in 1787 – talk about a brave or desperate man!

Enter a character named George Graham. On an obscure website (www.ridgeway-friends.org.uk) I came across a reference to one George Graham. In July, 1824, he purportedly made a successful balloon flight over The Ridgeway, Britain's oldest road, which starts in the Southwest, not far from Bath. This flight, from Sydney Gardens in Bath to Ramsbury, occurred during Bath Race Week, a benefit event for Bath General Hospital (it is not clear to me if "Race Week" refers to horse racing, or if there actually were hot air balloon races, etc.). Graham completed the event and landed safely (something that did not happen too frequently, I learned). Perhaps because Graham, who frequently flew with his wife Margaret (an American) was almost a folk-figure in the UK because of his daring and reckless flying exploits (it is said that most of his flights ended in disaster, yet both he and Margaret died peacefully "in their beds" at respectable ages, despite getting banged-up and sometimes dragged over the English countryside by runaway balloons), an unknown Staffordshire potter thought a transfer showing his successful flight over Bath might appeal to the buying public. (Note that veggie base is a red transfer and Coysh & Henrywood indicate that the pattern is found in other colors, including blue, telling me, that it was marketed both in the UK and in the US.).

One piece of my puzzle remained: to be more confident that curved building in the transfer was Bath's Royal Crescent. Not being familiar with other such structures, I assumed it might be and did a Google Image search of the building. As luck will have it, an aerial photo (ironically taken from a hot air balloon, the source indicated) of the Roy-



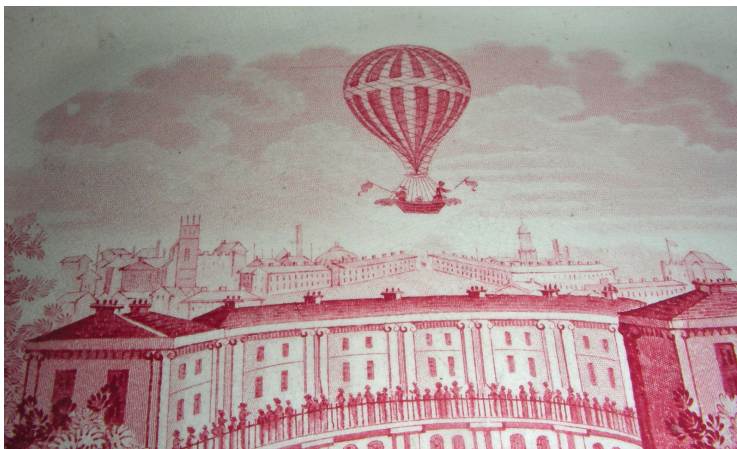
Grape Cluster and Vine border on "Balloon" pattern dish.



Close-up of the hot air balloon, as shown on the transfer printed dish.



Late 18th or early 19th century drawing of James Sadler's hot air balloon that he used to become the first Englishman to fly in 1784.



Detail of the urban landscape behind the crescent shaped building. Note the shape of the church steeple to the right and the large multi-story buildings in the center.



Detail of the crescent-shaped building found on the "Balloon" transfer that your author believes to be the Royal Crescent in Bath.

al Crescent as it stands now and taken from approximately the same angle as the transfer portrays, shows a good bit of Bath in the background. If you look carefully, and I realize that much has changed in 180 years, you will see that many of the buildings, including the more telling church steeples, appear to be similar and, in fact, in the right positions, etc.

This may be a leap of faith, and any TCC Member who has more definitive information is invited and encouraged to share it with the group, but I am willing to identify the subject of the “Balloon” transfer pattern (by maker unknown) as George Graham’s flight over Bath during Bath Race Week in 1824. Now that we have that issue solved, we can all sleep easier.

The “Balloon” pattern is recorded in the TCC Pattern & Source Print Database.



Modern aerial photo from Getty on the web showing the Royal Crescent in Bath and its surroundings. Note the similarities of the landscape (even if the church has wandered) and the shapes of the large buildings to those shown on the “Balloon” transfer.

Minton Tile in the U.S. Capitol

By Margie Williams

Reading Wendy Harvey’s delightful article, *A Brief History of Transfer-Printed Tiles* was indeed a pleasure; ending the article with an account of the American industry introduced me to an American business I had previously overlooked. But that’s another story... Mentioning another American use of English tiles is the purpose here.

Perhaps the most significant use of English tiles in America was the extensive application of Minton encaustic tiles in the additions to the U.S. Capitol. Begun in 1851 and completed in 1865, two new wings, to accommodate the growing number of legislators, were added to the existing structure: on the south, a new chamber for the House of Representatives and, on the north, a new chamber for the Senate. Architect Thomas U. Walter’s fourteen-year project (1851-1865) has been called “the most ambitious architectural project of mid-nineteenth-century America.” Installation of the tile floors began in 1856.

Withstanding continuous foot pressure over the years proved damaging to even Minton’s superior product and, in 1924, “marble tile in patterns of a simple or-

der” were employed to replace the original tile. At that time, an appropriate replacement was unavailable, thus marble – assumed to have superior durability – was chosen. By the 1970s, the assumption was no longer believed and the search for encaustic-type inlaid tile began.

Following an exhaustive search, contact was made with H & R Johnson Tiles Ltd. of Stoke-on-Trent, a successor to the Minton firm. An ongoing replacement program has been developed, using exact replicas of the nineteenth-century originals. The first acceptable tiles were delivered in 1986; “this project was begun on the first floor of the Senate Wing, where the effects of wear and tear were most noticeable.”

While difficult and slow, this process seems the only fitting response to the colorful history of the Capitol, restoring the original elegance and beauty to these unique and historic floors and assuring their continued splendor for years to come.

For more information about Minton tile in the U.S. capitol – including photographs – see this link: <http://www.aoc.gov/cc/capitol/minton.cfm>