



On 21 November 1983 ballooning enthusiasts had good cause to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the first free-flying manned ascent in the ornate hot-air balloon illustrated on our front cover. This event was the climax to feverish activity and experiment by the French Montgolfier brothers but their success was quickly followed by further flights in the hydrogen-filled balloons pioneered by the rival Jacques Charles and the Robert brothers. Paris was said to be balloon mad.

To a smaller extent, some experiment had been carried out with unmanned hydrogen filled balloons, mainly at the instigation of continental visitors, in this country. One such balloon was released from Bath in January 1784 which travelled almost ten miles towards Bristol and descended in the area which still bears the name of Air Balloon Hill. A month later James Sadler made the first English manned flight in a hydrogen balloon from Queens College, Oxford. The following year, 19 April 1785, a manned ascent was made by a Mr Decker from a field in St Philips, Bristol. He drifted towards Lansdown and, after 67 minutes, landed near Chippenham. Many years later, in 1820, James Sadler the first British aeronaut, was to accompany William Clayfield in an ascent from Stokes Croft, an event which was commemorated by William Edkins in a water colour in the City Art Gallery collection.

In our **Journal 16**, H Mary Wills writes about ballooning activity by some famous exponents in Bath. The first manned hydrogen balloon which ascended from Sydney Gardens (well-known for its other historic transport associations) is also illustrated on our front cover accompanying the Montgolfiere.

To the left on this page an illustration from **The Graphic** 24 September 1881, shows Mr Powell and Captain Taylor in the **Saladin** before their disastrous accident. JMD

