

BALLOONMANIA REVEALED: A NOVELTY HANDKERCHIEF OF 1783

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This handkerchief, V&A 1872-1899 (fig.1), was produced in Alsace (now part of France) in commemoration of the first ascent of a manned, hydrogen-filled balloon from the Tuileries Palace on 1 December 1783. It will be displayed in the Victoria & Albert Museum's new Europe 1600-1800 Galleries, opening in December 2014. In a display entitled 'Balloonmania', it will help to convey how early balloon flight caught popular imagination across Europe and how this enthusiasm was reflected in the production of fashionable and domestic goods.

The handkerchief is a cotton square, plain-weave, block-printed in red, yellow and black, and pencilled with indigo dye.¹ The two vertical edges of have been left as raw selvages, whilst the horizontal edges have been tightly hemmed. Each side of the handkerchief's border (fig.2) is composed of a symmetrical pattern which shows a classical building (the Tuileries Palace) in the background. The foreground contains a fountain, a line of trees and a number of promenading figures, the majority of whom are gesturing to, or looking up at, the balloon above them in the centre of the design. The balloon is shown within a stylised medallion, suggestive of a cloud, contained in a red square. Suspended from the balloon by ropes is a decorative gondola basket containing two men, each holding a flag. The balloon and gondola both have a vertical line of symmetry through the centre. At each corner of the handkerchief is a silhouette cameo of key individuals involved in the flight (fig.3). Each medallion is decorated with foliage and blue ribbon, with the individual's name lettered around the top: *Ludovicus XVI*; *Montgolfier*; *Charles*; and *Robert*. The whole design is framed by a printed edging pattern of beading.

The depiction of the balloon and the Tuileries Palace on the handkerchief can be recognised in a number of contemporary prints recording the flight. The handkerchief design combines and adapts elements from different sources; both aesthetic and practical considerations would have informed the production process. Comparison with textual accounts of the event allows identification of the ways in which the design distorted the story of the event or included factually incorrect information.

This handkerchief was probably intended to be used by individuals partaking in the growing fashion of snuff-taking. A snuff-taker would have sneezed into it and wiped his or her

¹ See Production and Consumption section below.

face and hands on it. The brown residue resulting from snuff use would appear unsightly on handkerchiefs with paler designs and so, as the fashion for snuff increased, there was a growing market for more practical designs which would help to disguise these stains. The busy design around the edges and the expanse of red and black in the centre of this handkerchief would have been suited to this purpose. Its intended use as a snuff handkerchief, in addition to other factors, could account for the apparent rarity of surviving examples of this design.²

Balloonmania

All the Conversation here at present turns upon the Balloons.

Benjamin Franklin³

The development of balloon flight was a scientific feat that caught popular imagination in late eighteenth-century Europe. The Montgolfier brothers, Jacques-Etienne and Joseph, made the first public demonstration of their ‘hot-air’ balloon in Annonay on 4 June 1783. The flight covered 2 km and lasted 10 minutes, and the balloon reached an estimated altitude of 2,000 metres.

Jacques-Etienne Montgolfier then went to Paris to give further balloon demonstrations. Other important ballooning landmarks include: the first tethered balloon flight with humans on board at the Folie Tiron, Paris on 19 October 1783, with the scientist Jean-François Pilâtre de Rozier, the wallpaper manufacture manager Jean-Baptiste Réveillon and Giroud de Villette in the basket; and the first successful untethered, *free* flight with human passengers on 21 November 1783, when Pilâtre de Rozier and the Marquis d'Arlandes ascended from Versailles in a hot-air balloon constructed by the Montgolfier brothers.

Early ground-breaking achievements in ballooning occurred exclusively in France but reports of ballooning successes later inspired a host of imitators and innovators to take to the air in other parts of Europe. The public spectacles of balloon flights were widely disseminated through printed material and the conspicuous impact of ballooning was reflected in a deluge of academic papers, journal reports, pamphlets, and through poetry and consumer items. A spreading ‘balloonmania’ helped trigger the production of numerous objects decorated with ballooning iconography, as people of varying social positions demonstrated their fascination with or admiration of balloon flight. The vast range of objects produced commercially included

² In research undertaken for this article, only two other examples of this design were able to be located, both in the Musée de l'Impression sur Etoffes. The example numbered MISE 858.76.1M featured in two exhibitions at the Musée Oberkampf, the first *L'Histoire vue à travers la Toile Imprimée* in 1981 (cat. no. 29, p. 17) and in 2008-9. The other example is featured in Margarete Braun-Ronsdorf, *The History of the Handkerchief* (Leigh-on-Sea, England: F. Lewis, 1967), fig.67 and appears to be a different colourway.

³ In a letter sent to Dr. Price from Passy, near Paris, 16 September 1783. *Private Correspondence of Benjamin Franklin*, vol.1 (London: Published for Henry Colburn, by R. Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1833), p.123.

high-end and cheaper ceramics, glass beadwork, printed textiles and domestically-produced items such as samplers or bedcovers (figs.4-6).⁴ Even clothing came to incorporate balloon elements, as puffed sleeves on dresses, large hats, coiffures and waistcoat designs could all be adapted to become ‘au ballon’.

‘Balloonmania’ swept through the arts and literature so rapidly that, as with many other fashions of the time, it became a prime target for satire and caricature. Numerous humorous prints were published satirizing outlandish aspects of ballooning fashions and a number of plays were staged, for example *Aerostation*, a satirical farce by F. Pilon that played at Covent Garden in 1784 ‘with tolerable success’.⁵

The popularity of ballooning and balloon-related objects was at its zenith immediately following the early achievements of balloonists during 1783 and, due to the location of early flights, was demonstrated most intensely in France. This places the production of our handkerchief at the peak of France’s ‘balloonmania’. However this great fascination with ballooning seized Europe for a strikingly brief period; Régnal Fortier has proposed that France’s ‘mania’ for balloons came to an end as early as 1785.⁶ Fortier has also suggested that the rapid decline in public enthusiasm may have resulted from the high number (perhaps up to 60%) of balloon flights in the provinces ending in failure, sometimes resulting in gathered spectators turning hostile.⁷ The celebration of scientific achievement and wonder came to be overshadowed by increased complaints and concerns for public safety. The subsequent introduction of restrictions, prohibitions and permit requirements applied to ballooning lead to a decrease in the number of flights taking place in France and further diminished public interest.⁸

The Event Commemorated

This handkerchief design provides a commemorative depiction of a specific balloon flight: the first manned, hydrogen-filled balloon that ascended from the Tuileries Palace on 1 December

⁴ The design of one of the most famous printed cottons made (as a furnishing fabric) at the pioneering cotton-printing factory in Jouy-en-Josas depicts two incidents from the launch of the first unmanned hydrogen-filled balloon on 27 August 1783.

⁵ Recorded by Stephen Jones in *Biographia dramatica; or, A companion to the playhouse: containing historical and critical memoirs, and original anecdotes, of British and Irish dramatic writers from the commencement of our theatrical exhibitions*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown [etc.], 1812).

⁶ Régnal Fortier, *The Balloon Era* (Canada Aviation Museum, 2004), p.20.

⁷ Fortier, *The Balloon Era*, p.20.

⁸ The city of Lyon issued a prohibition on hot-air balloon flights in April 1784 and later the central government introduced the requirement for balloon pilots to possess an official permit. Public enthusiasm may have also been dampened by the death of Pilatre du Rozier in an attempt to cross the channel in June 1785. Although enthusiasm waned in France, ballooning did gain popularity outside of France and created further personalities, such as Jean-Pierre Blanchard who demonstrated balloon flight in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland, before making the first balloon flight in North America in 1793.

1783. Key features of the design that allow us to identify this flight are the inclusion of the Tuileries Palace and the silhouette cameos of the four men central to the enterprise. The lecturer and physicist Jacques-Alexandre-César Charles oversaw the project and was the designer and pilot of the balloon. Nicolas-Louis Robert and his brother Anne-Jean, both manufacturers of physics instruments, worked with Charles to construct the balloon.⁹ Nicolas-Louis Robert also accompanied Charles on the flight. Louis XVI is depicted in acknowledgement of his royal favour in supporting the flight and giving permission for the ascent to be made from the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris.¹⁰ The silhouette named as Montgolfier is probably intended to represent Joseph Montgolfier, whom Charles honoured by asking him to release the small, green pilot balloon to assess the wind and weather conditions before the flight.¹¹

The handkerchief's depiction of the balloon and gondola also correlates with contemporary descriptions of the rubberised silk panels, painted alternately in yellow and red, attached to a blue and gold Rococo gondola.¹² In particular, the 'stern' of the gondola basket was recorded as showing a fleur-de-lis surmounted by a crown and these can be seen suggested in the handkerchief design.

Charles and Robert ascended from the Tuileries just ten days after Rozier and d'Arlandes' flight from Versailles. Charles' project had been partly funded by contributions from the elite of Paris and the flight was a major public event in the city. The crowd of spectators at the Tuileries reportedly numbered about 400,000, with a number of them having bought subscription tickets to view the launch from a special enclosure.¹³ Notable spectators included Joseph Montgolfier and Benjamin Franklin, the diplomatic representative of the United States of America.¹⁴ The flight lasted over two hours, with the balloon finally coming to a land at Nesles-la-Vallée, 12 kilometres south of Boulogne.¹⁵ Charles later described his emotions during the flight as follows:

Nothing will ever quite equal that moment of total hilarity that filled my whole body at the moment of take-off. I felt we were flying away from the Earth and all its troubles forever. It was not mere delight. It was a sort of physical ecstasy. My companion

⁹ Nicolas-Louis was also known as Marie-Noël Robert and Robert le jeune.

¹⁰ Fortier, *The Balloon Era*, p.10.

¹¹ <http://www.fiddlersgreen.net/models/Aircraft/Balloon-Charles.html>, Accessed 28.04.2013.

¹² Fortier, *The Balloon Era*, p.5.

¹³ *Le Temps des Ballons Art et Histoire* (Paris: Éditions de La Martinière, 1994), p.36.

¹⁴ T.A. Heppenheimer, *A Brief History of Flight: From Balloons to Mach 3 and Beyond* (John Wiley & Sons, 2000), p.15.

¹⁵ *Le Temps des Ballons*, p.36.

Monsieur Robert murmured to me – I'm finished with the Earth. From now on it's the sky for me! Such utter calm. Such immensity!¹⁶

The Académie des Sciences de Paris awarded the title of supernumerary associate to both Charles and Robert in recognition of their flight.¹⁷ Charles never took to the skies again, but his role in the development of balloon flight is recorded in numerous ways, including the many commemorative objects produced. In addition, hydrogen balloons came to be referred to as *Charlières* in his honour.

The key distinguishing scientific feature of Charles and Roberts' balloon, compared to those that had gone before, was that it ascended due to the balloon envelope being filled specifically with hydrogen. The apparatus used to fill the balloon with hydrogen can be seen depicted in the centre of the design along each edge of the handkerchief. Six steaming barrels are shown connected to a large central pipe (fig.7). These barrels were used as chemical generators to create the hydrogen required. Each barrel was filled with iron filings and acid, the resultant hydrogen then flowed through the pipes to a central enclosure filled with water before rising into the balloon.¹⁸

The accuracy of other details of the event featured in the handkerchief's depiction was affected by considerations of decorative design and production methods. The vertical line of symmetry in the depiction of the Tuileries and the balloon necessitates the loss of certain details, such as the specific shape of the gondola basket and the flag that was recorded being flown from the palace. There is also no suggestion of the temporary viewing enclosure that was reportedly built for spectators – perhaps it was thought that such additional details would make the design too cluttered.

The promenading figures being depicted in two scales emphasizes the use of artistic licence to create an eye-catching decorative design rather than a strictly accurate representation. The larger scaling allows the figures' fashionable clothing to be seen, whilst the smaller scale figures demonstrate the grand size of the Tuileries Palace and help to provide a greater sense of height to the balloon's flight.

Certain details of the handkerchief design also reflect discrepancies found recorded in print sources. For example, it was recorded that Charles had fitted a hydrogen release valve to the balloon envelope, a long and narrow neck that could be opened or closed by hand to allow

¹⁶ Quoted in Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (HarperPress, 2009).

¹⁷ Fortier, *The Balloon Era*, p.12.

¹⁸ Heppenheimer, *A Brief History of Flight*, p.12.

excess gas to escape.¹⁹ Some prints do not include this detail, others show it as a plain tube installed at an angle and others as a version of the valved pipe used in the initial inflation of the balloon. The handkerchief shows a pipe with two valves reaching from the opening of the balloon into the basket, its central vertical position dictated by the line of symmetry. Such discrepancies could occur for a number of reasons. Sometimes visual depictions were produced by individuals who had not witnessed the event or they were created before a flight had taken place in order to take advantage of the crowds of potential customers gathered at the event.

The accuracy of contemporary visual portrayals of balloons and specific flights range from meticulous depictions to fantastic imaginings. Artists and manufacturers aimed to exploit the market for ballooning memorabilia and their tendency to use artistic licence (e.g. combining elements from different flights and creating non-specific balloon motifs) can hinder identification or dating of an object's production. For example, the design of Charles and Roberts' gondola can be found repeated in depictions of subsequent balloon flights.

Handkerchiefs

The functional and social roles of handkerchiefs have altered over time, with changes in fashions and etiquette prompting alterations in their appearance and use.²⁰ Examinations of inventories, bills and contemporary accounts support the proposal that the use of handkerchiefs was most widespread in the eighteenth century.²¹ This most likely resulted from the growing popularity of snuff-taking during this period. The fashion for snuff-taking also helped to prompt a shift in handkerchief styles, from delicate, pale-coloured handkerchiefs decorated with lace to larger and sturdier, coloured handkerchiefs, more suited to the practical needs of snuff-takers (fig.8).

Tobacco first entered into Europe during the sixteenth century and snuff, a ground form of tobacco, was initially used in late seventeenth-century Europe for medicinal purposes. The taking of snuff for pleasure later developed into a fashion amongst European royalty and aristocracy, and by the eighteenth century snuff had become the tobacco product of choice among Europe's elite. In a letter of 1713 Lisolette von der Pfalz (Elizabeth Charlotte, Princess Palatine, Duchess of Orleans) described her disgust at the popularity of snuff at the French court: 'It makes me furious to see the women here with their noses as dirty as if they had plunged them

¹⁹ Heppenheimer, *A Brief History of Flight*, p.14.

²⁰ Mary Schoeser, *Printed Handkerchiefs* (London: Museum of London, 1988), p.1.

²¹ Braun-Ronsdorf, *The History of the Handkerchief*, p.27.

into filth. They put their fingers into the snuff boxes of every man they meet'.²² She revisited the subject in a letter three days later:

There is nothing in the world that disgusts me more than the habit of snuffing tobacco. [. . .] With a nose soiled with tobacco, a person looks as if he had fallen into the mud. The King hates it, but his children and grand-children take it, although they know that it displeases him.²³

Despite its critics, the fashion for snuff-taking continued to spread throughout Europe over the century, adopted by both men and women outside of the aristocracy. The spread of snuff-taking and the accompanied requirement of a handkerchief across different socio-economic groups can be found reflected in research undertaken by Daniel Roche, who used large samples of inventories to record the general increased presence of handkerchiefs in the wardrobes of French men between c.1700 and c.1789.²⁴ Most notable are the increases from 60% to 100% amongst the nobilities, 27% to 53% amongst domestics and from 0% to 12% amongst 'wage-earners'.

The eighteenth century also saw alterations in how handkerchiefs were publicly carried. Although still a fashion accessory, the conspicuous display of a handkerchief by carrying it in the hand gave way to the less obtrusive use of pockets by men and of tie-on bags and pouches by ladies. It is not clear whether this change in handkerchief etiquette was the result of a desire to conceal unpleasant snuff stains in public or if the fashion coincidentally facilitated this.

The production of souvenir handkerchiefs can be traced to the seventeenth century, with designs including depictions of battle victories, royal events, performers, maps and unusual events.²⁵ These designs could help to satisfy patriotic sentiments, signify particular allegiances, with the medium providing an opportunity by which to disseminate propaganda. The move to carrying handkerchiefs in a more concealed manner could also allow them to take on the role of an unexpected or witty statement rather than an accessory that required close co-ordination with the rest of the user's attire. Supported by the increased market for handkerchiefs for snuff-taking, by the second half of the eighteenth century handkerchiefs were among the most common commemorative items produced.

²² In a letter to Raugravine Louisa on 5 August 1713, Marly, quoted in Gertrude Scott Stevenson (trans. and ed.), *The Letters of Madame*, vol. II 1709-1722 (London: Arrowsmith, 1925), p.67.

²³ In a letter to Raugravine Louisa on 8 August 1713, Marly, quoted in Scott Stevenson, *Letters*, p.92.

²⁴ Daniel Roche, translated by Jean Birrell, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Past & Present Publications and Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁵ Valerie Cumming, C. W. Cunnington and P. E. Cunnington, *The Dictionary of Fashion History* (Berg Publishers, 2010), p.99.

The lack of construction required to produce the physical structure of a cotton handkerchief meant that, dependant on the intricacy of the design, once the printing blocks were prepared, production could be relatively brisk and economical. This allowed manufacturers to respond quickly to topical events. However, as the popularity of a commemorated event may be short-lived, there was a need to be cautious about the extent of production, to avoid being left with a surplus of unfashionable or dated designs that would be difficult to sell. The requisite (time-) limited production runs of these topical, commemorative designs aided the transition of handkerchiefs from useful objects into souvenirs and collectors' items.²⁶

Production and Consumption

This handkerchief is a five-colour woodblock print, with additional application blue indigo. A number of blocks would have been required to create the final design, with separate blocks used for the application of each of the colours. Each block would have been made with 'pitch pins' protruding from it, which were used to register the required position of the blocks in the process of printing and ensure that the colours were transferred correctly. Registration marks from these pins are visible in certain areas of the design, including around the edge of the central cloud, the edges of the silhouette cameos and at points on the beading edge. Flaws in the printing process, alongside the cameos of Montgolfier (fig.9) and Charles (fig.10), allow us to identify one of the points in the design where two blocks met.

Whilst the design offers some detailed features, the execution of the block-printing is relatively crude. The clear linear appearance of the Tuileries Palace and the simplicity of the balloon envelope help to endow the overall design with a sense of precision and clarity.

The two raw selvages demonstrate that the design occupied the whole width of the material used to produce it. The design would have been printed in repeat along the length of a roll of cotton and then be vertically cut into the individual squares, leaving only two rough edges which required hemming.

Blue colouring has been used throughout the design, applied using a method known as *pencilling*: the direct application of indigo dye on to the surface using a pencil or brush. This pencilling brings touches of lightness into what could have become a rather murky colour palette. The hand application of the indigo dye would have increased the time required to produce the handkerchiefs but, as it is used for colouring rather than drawing design details, complete

²⁶ Mary Schoesser, *Printed Handkerchiefs* (1988), p.3.

accuracy was not essential and so it would not have been too time-consuming an addition to the design.

The cloth used for this handkerchief was woven using an average of 18 to 20 threads per centimetre. This thread count can be used to estimate the structural quality of the handkerchief and its probable level of market placement. Philip A. Sykas' 'rule-of-thumb' for plain weave cottons suggests that this cotton constitutes a 'cheap material', implying that the handkerchief was not intended to be marketed as a high-end or exclusive purchase.²⁷

This handkerchief was produced in Mulhouse, in the Alsace region, which was emerging as one of the main centres of production for printed textiles.²⁸ At this time Alsace was not yet fully incorporated as part of France and enjoyed considerable autonomy under the French Crown.²⁹ Alsatians were able to take advantage of being outside the French customs system and developed a thriving transit trade. Of particular note is the 1686 ban France implemented on the domestic production and importation of printed cottons to France, an attempt to protect its silk-weaving industry.³⁰ Alsatian manufacturers did not suffer this ban to the extent that the French manufacturers did and so were able to further experiment and develop their production methods.

The handkerchief uses a red dye, which, alongside varying shades of brown, was a popular colour for textiles at this time. Red was one of most difficult colours to achieve by dyeing and European manufacturers undertook many experiments as they strove to achieve the brilliant Indian and Adrianople red of East Asiatic textiles. Efforts were also made to increase its dye-fastness, as colours which ran when washed would be particularly impractical for textiles such as handkerchiefs. Further testing is required for confirmation, but the red here is possibly the result of Turkey-red dyeing, known in France as *rouge d'Andrinople*.³¹ It was a method introduced to Europe from India or Turkey in the 1740s that came to be widely used for dyeing cotton throughout the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Unhampered by government restrictions, Alsace's success in developing their red-dye capabilities helped the area to become regarded as specialists in the production of printed handkerchiefs, neckerchiefs, scarves and shawls. The eventual revocation of France's 1686 ban in 1759 opened up a well-populated country of consumers to which the developed Alsace companies could supply such goods.³²

²⁷ Philip A. Sykas, *Identifying Printed Textiles in Dress 1740-1890* (DATS in partnership with the V&A, 2007) p.5. Sykas suggests the following 'rule-of-thumb' estimations: '10-20 threads per centimetre can be seen to indicate a cheap material; 20-30 threads per centimetre can be seen as a medium-grade material, and 30-40 threads per centimetre indicates a high-end material'.

²⁸ Siegle Starr, *Toiles for All Seasons: French and English Printed Textiles* (Bunker Hill Publishing Inc., 2004), p.67.

²⁹ Mulhouse became a part of France through The Treaty of Mullhouse in 1798.

³⁰ Judith Straeten, *Toiles De Jouy*, (Biggs Smith, 2002), p.4.

³¹ This is made using the root of the rubia plant, by means of a long and laborious process.

³² Sarah Grant, *Toiles de Jouy French Printed Cottons* (V&A Publishing, 2010), p.127.

Elements of the design suggest a recognition of and response to contemporary fashions, such as the inclusion of silhouette portraiture which was extremely popular throughout Europe during this period.³³ The use of single block-colour allows a visually bold, yet suggestively accurate, representation of individuals to be achieved here through block-printing. The balloon flight took place during daylight hours and so the dark 'sky' above the Tuileries Palace here could be a design conceit to make the colouring of the overall design appear more striking and to draw attention to the silhouettes. It could also have been a response to the popularity of printed cottons featuring a dark ground.³⁴

In research undertaken for this article, only two other examples of this design were able to be located, both in the Musée de l'Impression sur Etoffes, one of which is in an alternative colourway, featuring a pale-coloured sky.³⁵ This implies that the manufacturers experimented with different colour combinations. However it is not clear if further colourways existed or which of these, if any, became the preferred selection for production. Whilst the production methods and design are suggestive of mass-production, contemporary records detailing the scale of production runs have not yet been identified to corroborate this.

Pre-cleaning tests undertaken by the Victoria & Albert Museum's Textile Conservation Department have revealed that the dyes (most notably the brown) are not entirely fast. This would help to account for the apparent scarcity of other surviving examples. The handkerchiefs appeared to be suited for practical use, which would already lead to their eventual degradation, but if users were to discover that the colours ran or faded when washed, they were probably be less inclined to preserve them. The V&A's handkerchief features some stains which could suggest that it was put to some use. However, the edges, particularly the two hemmed sides, show little evidence of wear. This implies that it was rarely, if ever, used and intentionally kept in good condition. The handkerchief was acquired by the V&A in 1899 as part of a large collection of textiles purchased from Dr Robert Forrer, a Swiss-born archaeologist and antiques dealer, but no details of its previous provenance are available.

Mary Schoesser has proposed that the 'ephemeral nature' of the images on commemorative handkerchiefs 'suited a localized market'.³⁶ This particular design can be interpreted as an accessory that would help display the user's patriotic sentiments, by celebrating the scientific achievements of France. Therefore it was probably mainly targeted at French, more

³³ E. Neville Jackson, *The History of Silhouettes* (London: The Connoisseur, 1911), pp.3-11.

³⁴ Gerald W.R Ward, *The Grove Encyclopedia of Materials and Techniques in Art* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p.148.

³⁵ See Braun-Ronsdorf, *The History of the Handkerchief*, fig.67.

³⁶ Schoesser, p.3.

specifically Parisian, consumers. However, given the great scale of the event within the metropolitan city of Paris, it is probable that these handkerchiefs would have been attractive to a wider audience wishing to commemorate their attendance at the flight or to present themselves as particularly ‘trendy’.

The slightly crude nature of the woodblock print and ‘cheapness’ of the cotton indicate that this handkerchief was not aimed at an exclusive or luxury market and that it would likely have been an achievable purchase for a wide range of consumers. The commemorative design would perhaps encourage it to be considered a whimsical design for the upper-classes and more of a commemorative keepsake for those who were economically less well-off. Snuff is recorded as being used by both men and women but there is little information available on the handkerchief designs adopted by women for this purpose. Whilst it may be supposed that women would have probably opted for the floral handkerchief designs being produced, it is conceivable that this handkerchief could have belonged to a man or woman. The presence of an embroidered ‘B’ (fig.11) in the corner is the only suggestion we have as to the handkerchief’s original owner. Whilst this does not allow us to identify the individual, it does indicate that he or she placed some value on the handkerchief by making this basic attempt to prevent its irrevocable loss.

The popularity of commemorative handkerchiefs continued to grow in the late-eighteenth century, with the introduction and increased use of copper-plate printing enabling production to be sped up at decreasing costs. Conversely, the intense popularity for balloon-related objects began to wane towards the end of the century, with the novelty and excitement wearing off as flights became more common-place. This handkerchief provides us with an example of ballooning merchandise produced at the peak of the ‘balloonmania’ in France, at the moment where woodblocks were coming to be overaken by copper-plates in the printing process (fig.12).

The handkerchief’s design reflects how the scientific achievement of balloon flight caught the attention of a wide audience and came to affect the production of fashionable goods. It also demonstrates manufacturers’ ability to respond quickly to public interests and events, and to produce a commemorative and fashionable yet practical object, which was both appealing and attainable for a wide cross-section of society. The ‘mass-produced’ nature of the handkerchief design initially appears incongruous with its apparent low survival rate. This fact becomes more comprehensible when considered in the context of the handkerchief’s production as a functional object using impermanent dyes. It could also be chosen to be interpreted as reflecting the vivid, dramatic and yet fleeting nature of ‘balloonmania’.

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