

Richard Crosbie's Aerial Voyage from Limerick, 1786

by Larry Walsh

The balloonists of the eighteenth century, pioneers in the first successful method of conquest of the air, were men of science comparable to the astronauts of the 1960s, attracting the same public excitement and receiving similar international publicity. The first ascent was made by Pilatre de Rozier in a balloon made by the brothers Joseph and Etienne Montgolfier at Paris on 21 November, 1783. The first ascent in Ireland or Britain was a 90 minute voyage made by a Mr. Rosseau, accompanied by a boy drummer, at Navan, Co. Meath, on 27 April 1784, when the drummer could still be heard beating the Grenadiers March for 15 minutes after the balloon became totally invisible.

The best known of the Irish balloonists was Richard Crosbie, who was born in Co. Wicklow in 1755 and was the son of Sir Paul Crosbie. He received a good education, and developed an exceptional mechanical ability at an early age. He was described as "a stately gentleman of six foot three inches tall with a fat ruddy face and possessed a smattering of all sciences and there was scarcely an art or trade of which he had not some practical knowledge. His chambers at College were like a general workshop of all kinds of artizans. He was very good-tempered, exceedingly strong and as brave as a lion, but as dogged as a mule, and nothing could change a resolution of his when once made".

Late in 1784, Crosbie exhibited his "Aeronautic Chariot" at an exhibition at Ranelagh Gardens in Dublin. Made of wood covered with cloth, designed and built by himself, the Chariot resembled a

boat, with rudder and sails, intended to enable navigation in the air, reducing reliance on wind direction. His first flight took place on 19 January, 1785 at Ranelagh, witnessed by more than 35,000 people. The balloon and Chariot were beautifully painted with the arms of Ireland supported by Minerva and Mercury, and with emblematic figures of the wind. Crosbie's aerial dress "consisted of a robe of oiled silk, lined with white fur, his waistcoat and breeches in one, of white satin quilted, and morocco boots, and a montero cap of leopard skin". Crosbie intended to cross the Irish Sea, but as darkness fell early in the winter evenings, he decided to land at Clontarf. He attempted a channel crossing on 19 July, 1785, (defying a ban on balloon flights by the Lord Mayor of Dublin because the population of the city was spending long periods gaping at the sky instead of working), but came down half way across due to a severe storm, and was rescued by the Dun Laoghaire barge *Captain Walmitt*, which was following his progress.

By the end of the year, he was planning his Limerick ascent. The preparations and flight were reported in the *Limerick Chronicle*, from which the following accounts are taken. His balloon was inflated with hydrogen, then known as "Inflammable air", which was produced by the action of concentrated sulphuric acid (oil of vitriol) on scrap iron and zinc.

19/12/1785: HIBERNIAN BALLOON. The Proprietors of the Assembly Room have been kind enough to allow the use of it for the exhibition of Mr. Crosbie's balloon, in order to assist in raising a fund for defraying the expense of an ascent which he proposes shortly to make from this city. As Mr. Crosbie would wish that the gratification derived from this novel exhibition should extend as far as possible, he has fixed the terms of admission to non-subscribers at 1s. 1d. each. Hours of admittance from ten in the morning till four each day.

N.B. The Room will be open tomorrow, the 20th inst., and a few succeeding days, Sunday excepted. Good fires will be continually kept.

26/12/1785: At the meeting held this 24th of December at the Tholsel, Edmond Henry Pery Esq. in the chair, Resolved that a committee of nine be chosen from the gentlemen present to solicit subscriptions &c &c and that they have power to enlarge their number if necessary. Resolved that John Howley be appointed treasurer.

Resolved that the following gentlemen are appointed to constitute said committee: George Smyth Esq., Capt. Petries, Edm. Henry Pery Esq., Hon. and Rev. Dean Crosbie, Doctor Maunsell, Philip

Roche John Esq., Richard Harte Esq., Charles Sargent Esq., Henry Fosbery Esq. And the following gentlemen were then nominated in addition to the above: Right Hon Silver Oliver, Sir Henry Hartstonge Bart, Sir Vere Hunt Bart, Sir Richard de Burgo Bart, John Tuthill Esq., Thomas Jackson Esq., Ed. Moore of Moores Fort, Co. Tip Esq., Augustine Fitzgerald Esq., Walter Widenham Esq., George Maunsell Esq., Rev. John Quin, Standish Grady Esq.

The committee having then consulted Mr. Crosbie as to the time most convenient to him for making his intended experiment, are at liberty to assure the subscribers that it will take place within three weeks after the subscription is secured and that the earliest notice possible will be given of the day on which he is to ascend, if not prevented by extreme wetness or fog, in which case the experiment will be made the day ensuing that which shall be first appointed.

Resolved that each subscriber of one guinea shall be entitled to seven tickets (including his own) and that no less subscription than one guinea be received, non-subscribers tickets on the day of ascension, 4s. 4d. each.

Resolved that the thanks of this meeting be given to Lieut. Colonel Knight for his polite offer of assistance from the garrison to preserve regularity etc.

Resolved that this committee is adjourned until Tuesday next at 1 o'clock.

Resolved that the above be published in the Limerick newspapers.

Edmond Henry Pery.

The balloon with the carriage, which is now nearly completed, will continue to be exhibited in the Assembly Room until further notice; a few miniature balloons will also be afloat in the room.

12/01/1786: At a meeting of Mr. Crosbie's committee at the Exchange on Saturday the 7th inst. Resolved that Thursday the 2nd of February next be fixed on for Mr. Crosbie's ascension, the place to be notified in a future advertisement.

Resolved, That (as Mr. Crosbie sets out for Dublin on Monday next to send down the necessary materials for inflation) this committee do meet on Saturday next the 14th inst at one o'clock to transact such business during his absence as they may see requisite preparatory to his ascent.

Resolved. That the transferable tickets of the subscribers be left at Mr. Watson's, printer, and that any person producing there the non-transferable ones belonging to a subscriber and endorsed by him shall



Richard Crosbie.

receive six, to entitle the bearers to be admitted into the ground on the morning of the ascent. The name of the person subscribing to be written on the back of each transferable ticket.

The subscribers tickets are to be had by any of the committee, from John Howley, Esq., treasurer.

The balloon may be seen at the Assembly Room every day but Thursdays and Sundays, from 11 in the morning 'til 4.

23/01/1786: At a meeting of the committee held this 23rd of January 1786, the committee give this public notice that Mr. Crosbie's ascent must be postponed on account of some unavoidable delay in providing the materials for the inflation of

the balloon. When the day is fixed notice will be given to the public.

09/02/1786: The committee do most earnestly request that those gentlemen who have undertaken to collect the subscriptions will immediately pay them into the treasurer in order to defray the expense of the Oil of Vitriol, as the iron filings and all the other materials are ready, and this is the only delay that prevents the experiment from taking place immediately.

20/03/1786: Aerial Voyage. Mr. Crosbie is now returned from Dublin, whence he has sent his apparatus and part of the materials for inflating his balloon, and as

the delay of his ascent from this city has been hitherto occasioned by the insufficiency of the subscriptions and the non-payment of part of those collected to the treasurer, he hopes that such gentlemen as have been kind enough to promise their assistance to his ascent (which must be attended with considerable expense on account of some new experiments toward the further improvement of this art) will exert themselves to enable him to put it in execution without further loss of time. The oil of vitriol must be sent for to Dublin before he can ascend.

23/03/1786: At a meeting of Mr. Crosbie's committee held this day, Sir Vere Hunt Bart in the chair, RESOLVED that as it is inconvenient to call a meeting for the purpose of discharging every small sum requisite, that Mr. Howley, the treasurer, shall pay all such bills as Mr. Crosbie shall certify, as far as the subscription money in his hands will admit. RESOLVED that such gentlemen as have received subscriptions do pay them in immediately to the treasurer that the experiment may be no longer retarded. RESOLVED that the thanks of the committee be given to the governors of the House of Industry for their kindness in giving the square and garden for the experiment. RESOLVED that Colonel Prendergast Smyth and William Causabon Harrison Esq. be appointed of the committee, and that they be requested to use their influence in collecting subscriptions. RESOLVED that as soon as the subscriptions shall be found nearly adequate to the expense, that proper notice shall be given in all the papers of the day of the ascent.

27/03/1786: Mr. Crosbie is removing all his apparatus to the poor house and is making every preparation for his ascent. Travelling in the air is an improvement in science which has excited the admiration of all Europe; scarce a town in Scotland but enabled Mr. Lunardi to gratify their curiosity by generous subscription and donations. It is indeed a spectacle grand and beautiful beyond description, and it will reflect great credit on the taste of the inhabitants of Limerick to encourage Mr. Crosbie in his exertions for their entertainment.

27/03/1786: Aerial Voyage. The subscribers to Mr. Crosbie's aerial voyage are requested to endorse their non-transferable tickets and send them to Mr. Watson's near the Exchange, for each of which they will receive six transferable ones. NB. When the stipulated sum is subscribed, Mr. Crosbie will peremptorily fix a day for his ascent.

03/04/1786: A correspondent observes that the public cry in this city is very much raised against the gentlemen who have undertaken to collect a subscription to support the expense of Mr. Crosbie's experiment, as it appears they do not at all

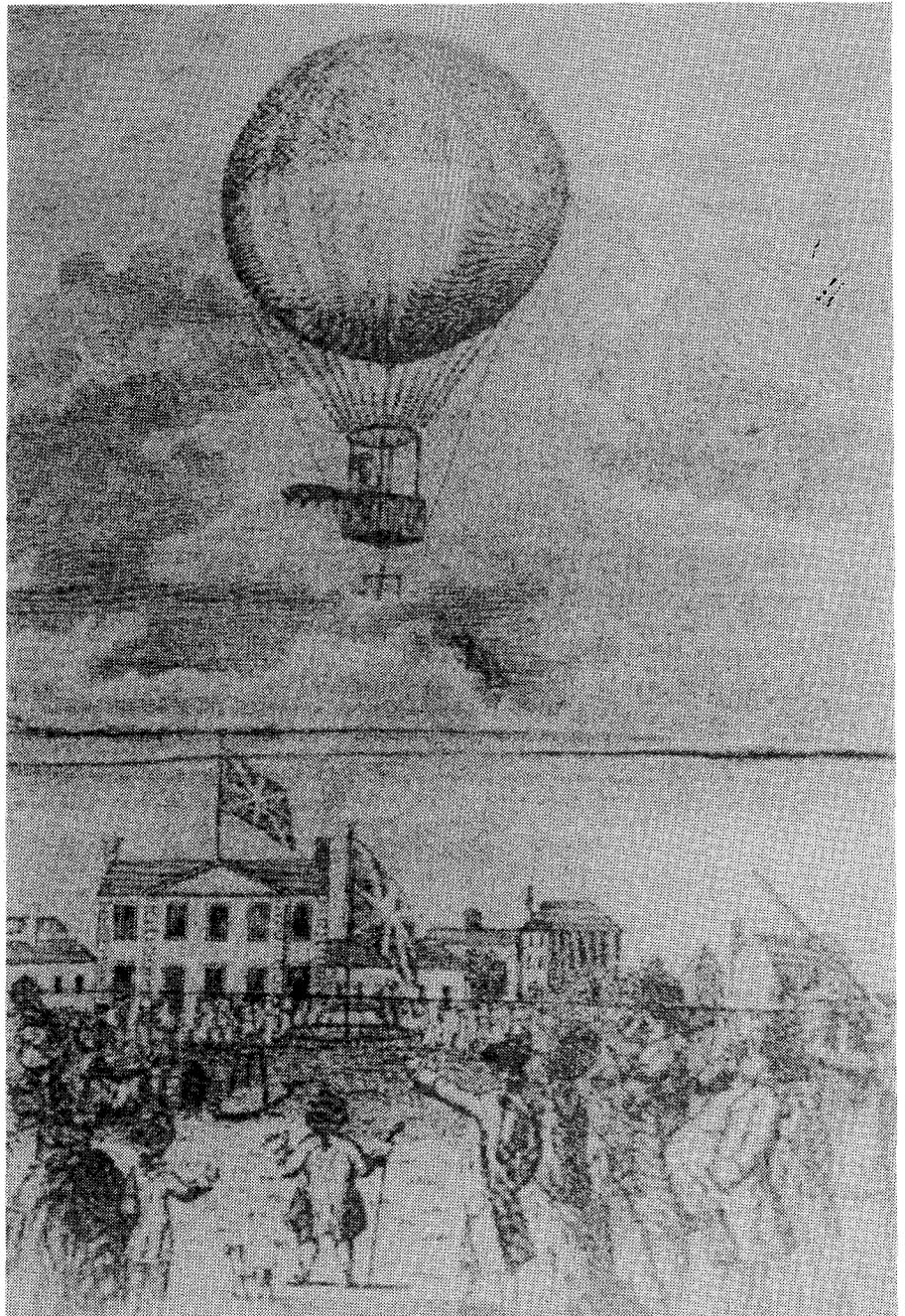
exert themselves, and numbers are ready to contribute if called upon. Our correspondent adds he is sorry to say that such a sum as is required would soon be raised for a horse race or a cock fight, where the gambler only could reap any advantage, and the mind of the cruel and inhuman alone a real fascination, while science and art is despised, and the most delightful of all exhibitions which would enlighten the understandings and charm the eyes of the learned as well as the illiterate, is trampled upon and neglected. Oh! Irishmen, when will you become friends to yourselves and act consistent with reason and wisdom?

03/04/1786: Aerial Voyage. Since Mr. Crosbie's return from Dublin he has made every effort in vain to be informed accurately as to the subscription raised for his experiment, which he has reason to think the public opinion is deceived in, but as Mr. Crosbie would wish to pay every just compliment in his power to the persons who have contributed to it, he intends to publish a list of the subscribers as friends and encouragers of art and science in next Thursdays paper. He therefore hopes that each gentleman who has obtained any will return their names with the several sums annexed to the treasurer (Mr. Howley) on or before Wednesday the 5th instant. N.B. Mr. Crosbie requests a meeting of the committee tomorrow at 12 o'clock at the House of Industry on earnest business.

06/04/1786: The publication of the list of subscribers to Mr. Crosbie's experiment is unavoidably postponed until next Monday, as the returns have not been made to the treasurer agreeable to request.

20/04/1786: Aerial Voyage. Mr. Crosbie's ascent from Limerick is fixed for Wednesday the 26th inst., the place and hour will be specified in a future advertisement. Mr. Crosbie pledges himself to the public that nothing but bad weather shall prevent him from making his experiment on the above day, and if it should prove unfavourable, it will take place on the next favourable day ensuing. N.B. As the subscription for the above experiment at present does not amount to one fourth of the expense, Mr. Crosbie relies on the immediate payment of such subscriptions as are intended or have been promised. John Howley Esq., treasurer, or any of the committee will receive them. A list of subscribers will be published as friends to science.

24/04/1786: Limerick Aerial Voyage. Mr. Crosbie will ascend from the House of Industry on Wednesday next, the 26th inst, weather permitting. The process of inflation will commence at 12 o'clock, and the balloon ascend at 2. Admittance to non-subscribers, 4s. 4d. each. It is requested that the company may come early that they may be properly and satisfactorily accommodated, as every care shall be taken to render the situation of



The ascent of Crosbie's balloon over the House of Industry, on 27 April, 1786.

the spectators perfectly agreeable, and that such carriages as pass over Thomond Bridge to the House of Industry may be ordered not to return until after the experiment, but remain on the Strand or elsewhere beyond the House, that the approach of others may not be obstructed.

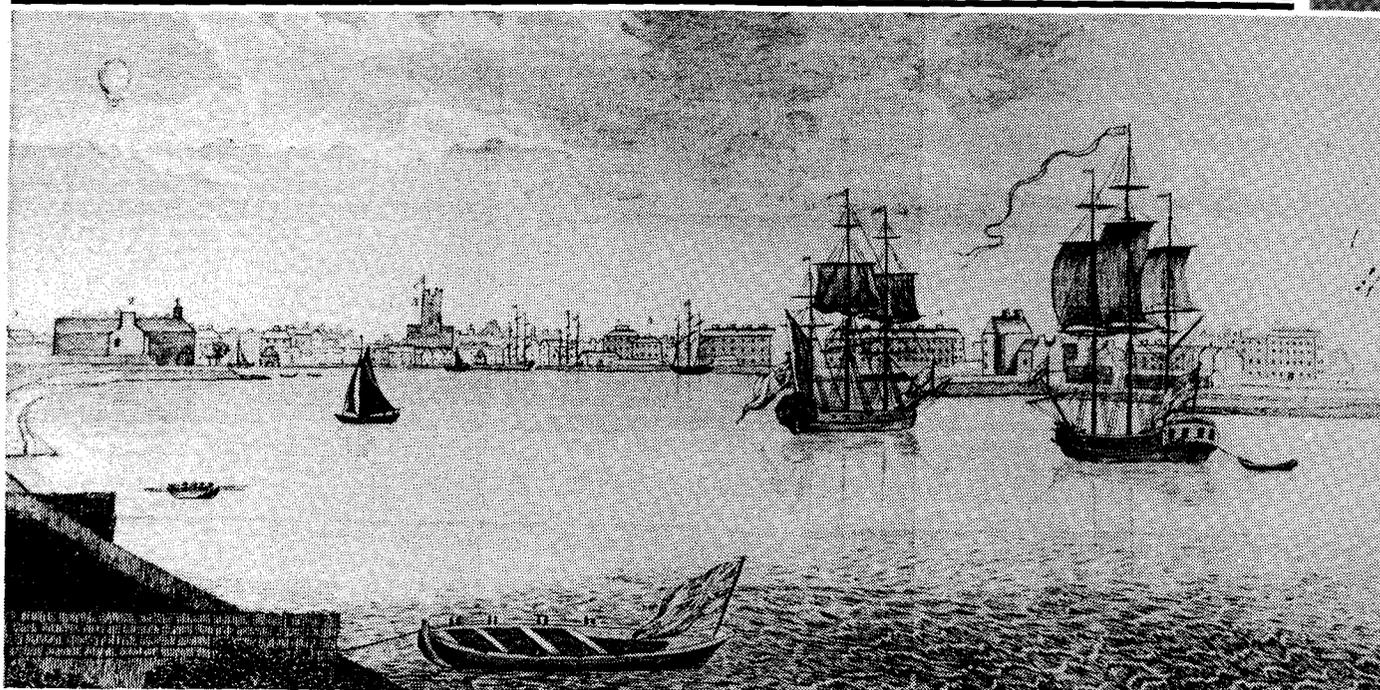
N.B. As the principal motive for soliciting such a respectable committee was that they might use their influence on the day of the ascent to preserve order and regularity, it is requested that all the gentlemen of the committee will attend, and be at the House of Industry at 10 o'clock on the above day. A special meeting will be held tomorrow at the Exchange, between the hours of 10 and 11 o'clock, to take into consideration the properest means to be observed to effect the above purpose. Subscriptions will be closed after this day and a list of the subscribers published in next Thursdays paper. The doors will be open this evening

and tomorrow for such persons as choose to see the apparatus &c. Subscribers producing their non-transferable ticket will be admitted. Non-subscribers 1s. 1d. each.

On account of the number of company that will be in town on Wednesday next, the day of Mr. Crosbie's ascent, there will be an assembly on that night and a drum on Thursday.

We hear several gentlemen are prepared with good horses to follow the course of Mr. Crosbie's balloon next Wednesday.

27/4/1786: Yesterday pursuant to Mr. Crosbie's advertisement, there was a very brilliant assemblage of the gentry of this city and neighbourhood at the poor house to see his aerial execution; but from the casks not being sufficiently staunch to hold the vitriolic spirit and other unavoidable causes, the balloon could not be inflated. The company saw that Mr.



Engraving for John Ferrar's *History of Limerick*, 1787, showing Crosbie's balloon drifting over the Shannon.

Crosbie used every possible exertion and could not be blamed; every man of humanity, every lady of sensibility, felt for his situation, and they bore the disappointment not with the least marks of anger, but with that good temper which is ever the characteristic of politeness. Mr. Crosbie has requested their forgiveness, and given notice of his ascent today.

01/05/1786: Mr. Crosbie has been so obliging as to favour the public with the following account of his aerial voyage from Limerick on Thursday the 27th of April 1786:

After so many and such very flattering testimonies of approbation which I have met with in this city, I should think myself wanting in duty and gratitude if I omitted any relation that might communicate amusement or gratify a laudable curiosity. I shall therefore offer my humble tribute, which I hope may prove acceptable to my readers.

The anxiety I laboured under from the apprehension of any accident happening in the process of inflation (which would inevitably prevent my ascent) obliged me to proceed with caution, and I fear trespass too long on the obliging patience of my friends; as no more materials could be procured in town, it was necessary to allow proper time for the operation and to pay it that attention which the goodness and activity of the gentlemen who assisted enabled me to do. They will I hope accept my grateful thanks, and the public admit that fact as my apology.

The happy moment at length arrived which put me in sole possession of all that could charm the eye of man and gratify my warmest ambition. As I gradually ascended, the expanding landscape presented such a scene as no pen can describe; the River Shannon with all its little islands formed a pleasing variety I had before been unacquainted with. I determined to take a drawing of it,

and had scarcely ended my salutations to the fair assemblage I had left, now become undistinguishable, when I assumed my paper and pencil and began my chart, but when I reached a considerable altitude, I found my drawing had been false, as I commenced it on an extended scale that was still diminishing as I ascended. I now examined my barometer, which had stood a 30.1-10 on earth, and found it had fallen to 15. I hung out my grappling in order to clear the rope to which it was fastened, and that it should act as a plummet, by which means I could accurately perceive the course I took, and as I was exceedingly tossed about by the agitation of the atmosphere in the ascent, I concluded there prevailed several different currents, which I at once determined to explore, and the experiment in the end gave me exquisite delight.

I observed the course I was now taking was almost due west, exactly over the Shannon and could perceive a rapid approach towards the Western Ocean. I made a note of the degree at which my barometer stood 15 and ascended till it fell to 13, where I got into a current from N.N.E., by which I was conveyed over Tarbert and part of the county of Kerry. I was anxious to see the mountains of Kerry, but could perceive nothing more in appearance than a figured plain chequered like a carpet. The prospect was unbounded, but by accumulating clouds which formed my horizon, I could plainly see the Lake of Killarney, but those sonorous hills which surround it were levelled with the surface. On taking an observation I now perceived I was stationary, and on looking at my barometer, found it had fallen to 12 2/10. I continued perpendicular over a small green field for upwards of half an hour, during which time I eat my dinner (that from fasting and fatigue before, was become very necessary) and drank my

bottle of wine to the health of my numerous friends on earth. I had been obliged before from cold to put on my oil silk wrapper, and now experienced its utility; my feet and hands however were very cold, and as (I) was determined to explore a higher region, I had recourse to a phial of strong lavender drops, which I drank off without observing the strength of them, and every humid thing about me had been frozen, the lavender drops and the bottle they were in felt as warm as if they had been at the fire.

After using this precaution, I ascended to an higher altitude than I had ever been before; the barometer fell to 10 5/10; the difficulty of breathing I had before experienced was now increased to a considerable degree, my heart beat with astonishing rapidity, and my ears, from the dilation of the cellular vessels, felt as if going to burst. My breath congealing on the instant of respiration fell like a light snow, and collected on my lap as it dropped. As I had not taken any additional covering but my loose gown, my feet and hands became intensely cold and my fingers cramped, but to my astonishment, the difficulty of breathing gradually decreased, and the pain in my ears became less; these circumstances, added to my having got into a current which carried me eastward, and in a right direction for Limerick again, determined me to remain at the same altitude until I had got nearly over the city.

The variety of currents I had before experienced I could now plainly see under me, and by observing from my notes the different degree at which the barometer stood in each, and descending accordingly, I could take any of my former courses at pleasure. I regretted the lateness of the hour (now near six o'clock) and the unprepared state I was in to withstand the cold, and flattered myself with the expectation of alighting near the city whence I set out; but as I did not

continue long enough in the eastern current, and thereby provide for a contrary inclination in my descent, I was carried with the lower one to the N.W. over Dromoland, the seat of Sir Lucius O'Brien, the cultivated appearance of which tempted me to accelerate my descent in order to alight there; but the wind blowing much stronger than I had thought, hurried me a little beyond the house before I reached the earth; after my grappling, as I imagined, had secured its hold on a rock, I put out my barometer and some other loose articles and endeavoured to secure my balloon &c.

I leaped out, still keeping my hands and as much of my weight as I could on the boat, calling loudly for assistance; one or two rustics, who I saw in a field for some time, observed me, and I thought were coming to my assistance, but to my great mortification it was quite the reverse, astonishment and fear lent them wings and they fled from me with precipitation. I destroyed a considerable deal of the balloons power of ascent, but found the difficulty of holding it myself so great that after the grappling quitted its hold, I was obliged to yield with the car until it came to a dry wall. I now imagined I had it secure, as I intended when an intermission from squalls would allow me to load it with stones, but this business being too much for one, and a very heavy squall of wind coming on, the wall gave way and after being dragged thro' the breach and approaching fast the River Fergus, I was obliged to relinquish my hold and had the mortification to see my chariot re-ascend without me.

Mr. Singleton, on whose ground I alighted, at ten minutes past six sent his men in search of me, but could not come up in time to give me assistance; they however conducted me to his house, where I experienced that hospitality which characterises the County of Clare. The balloon was as fortunate as myself, as it was taken up by Captain O'Brien at Ennis, for whose care and attention I shall ever consider myself under many obligations. The reception I met with from all ranks of the public on my return to Limerick has made the deepest impression on my heart, and will ever call forth the gratitude and thanks of their much obliged and devoted, humble servant, RICHARD CROSBIE.

I hope my kind friends will make an allowance for the imperfect manner in which the above account is written, as I was obliged to do it in a hurry, business and various other causes frequently interrupting me.

01/05/1786: At nine o'clock on Friday night, Mr. Crosbie made his appearance in Limerick, when he was surrounded by thousands of the inhabitants, who took the horses from his carriage, drew him in triumph through the city, and there were illuminations, bonfires and every demonstration of joy which a grateful people could show to their honoured and distinguished countryman.

*Hail gen'rous Crosbie, whose exploits
will crown
Thy native land with honour and
renown
Words cannot paint what Crosbie dares
to view
One vast expanse of universal blue;
Where yon bright orb, th' eternal source
is found
Of light and life to every world around;
The glorious prospect animates his soul
While clouds and vapours far beneath
him roll.
Ne'er will his countrymen forget his
name
While distant nations will resound his
fame.*

On Saturday at noon a great concourse of people again assembled at Mr. Crosbie's lodgings, when he condescended to permit them to chair him through the city, which was accordingly done with repeated and loud acclamations, such as we do not remember on any occasion. All the different trades in Limerick presented Mr. Crosbie with cockades, which were affixed to his hat, and the masters of ships were particularly assiduous to assist him and join in the general acclamation.

Several gentlemen who have seen Lunardi, Blanchard, Pilatre de Rosier and other aerial travellers agree that none of them ascended so well, or with so much eclat, as Mr. Crosbie did on Thursday last. When he was out of sight a subscription was opened in the committee room of the House of Industry by Sir Richard de Burgho Bart and Col. Smyth, when a handsome sum was collected.

It is a very pleasing circumstance that although there were sixty thousand people assembled to see Mr. Crosbie's ascent, not the least accident happened.

01/05/86: Mr. Crosbie, with the warmest gratitude, returns his sincere thanks to the gentlemen who composed the committee for conducting his experiment, for their great attention and readiness to undertake the trouble they must have experienced; also to those gentlemen who were kind enough to contribute their assistance in the disagreeable and laborious process of inflation, and assures them he will ever bear a grateful remembrance of their conduct. May 1, 1786.

04/05/1786: To gratify the number of persons who were disappointed of papers last post, we re-insert Mr. Crosbie's account of his late aerial excursion ...

94/05/1786: Last Thursday the 27th April, Richard Crosbie Esq. having previously given notice of his intended ascent from the North Strand, and having made an experiment on his apparatus, a signal drum was sent out and the process of inflation began at twelve o'clock. There was however a scarcity of vitriol, which, although it would have damped the ardour of any other man, yet it served to show Mr. Crosbie's great perseverance and skill in the art, and made him venture to try an

experiment which he conducted with the utmost caution and prudence, and successfully carried into execution. There were many foreigners of distinction present; Mr. Crosbie rose superior to every difficulty, he ascended at half an hour after four o'clock, and it was universally agreed that his ascent was a noble one, and the best ever made in Europe; it was also fortunate that no accident happened to the brave Irish aeronaut or to anyone of the immense crowd who remained astonished witnesses of the cool intrepidity of the man, and the great force of human genius.

*CROSBIE, all hail! whose strong,
enlightened mind,
with love of Science and with sense
refined,
Through realms of ether, who could
boldly soar,
Unbounded Earth to view, and Heaven
to explore.*

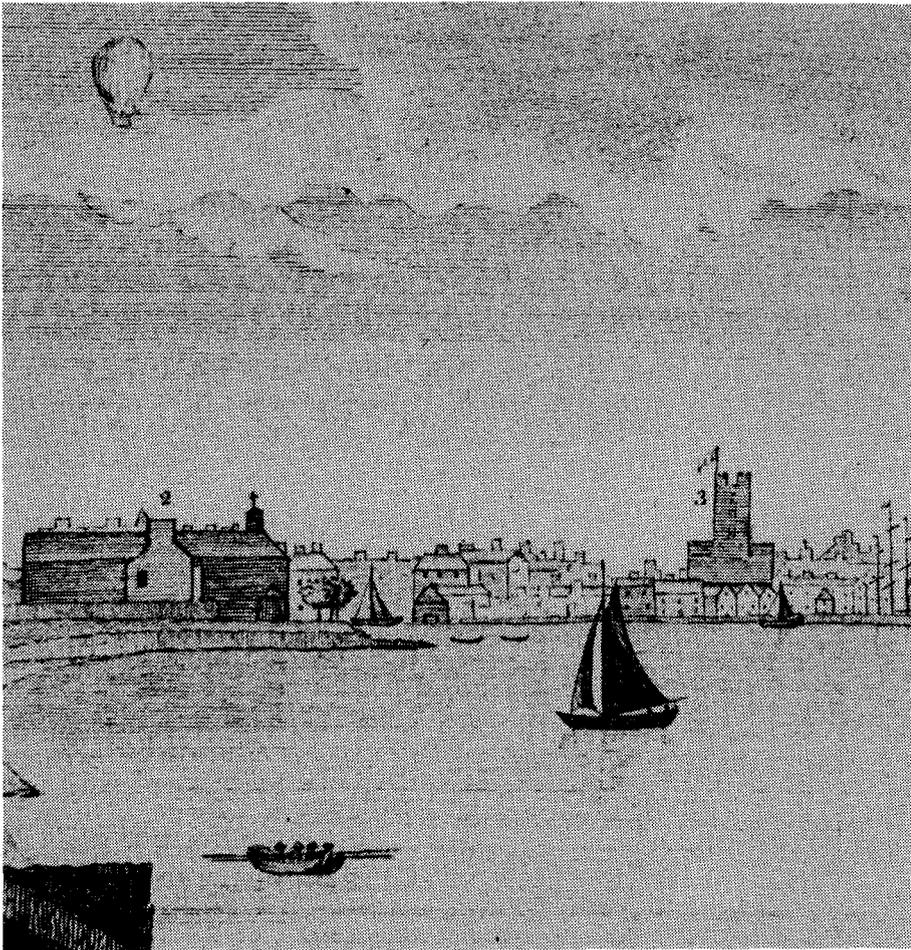
To lose sight of the terrestrial globe and to be wrapt up in the clouds must produce sensations which are beyond our conception; but to quaff the wine to his friends below when he was three miles above them, when he had clouds for his canopy – was a banquet which the Gods themselves must have smiled on with approbation. After gratifying us sublunary mortals with a sight so magnificent, awful and delightful, after travelling so far on the tender sighs of as many earthly goddesses as were ever seen in one group – it is no wonder that Mr. Crosbie should be received by the grateful people of Limerick with distinguished honours, and that the band of the 21st Regiment never played the "Conquering Hero" so well before. We honour Mr. Crosbie, but we are not able to reward him according to his great merit. However, though the subscriptions will not nearly defray his expense, and though a matter which gave so much pleasure to the public can only be attended with loss to a deserving individual, yet we have no doubt but the friends of genius and the lovers of science will, at some future period, erect an obelisk on the North Strand where he ascended, or in some other manner perpetuate his honour, whose laudable and disinterested conduct proves it to be the only emolument he is ambitious to receive.

*'Tho Cloud-capt towers shall moulder
into dust
And all the conquerors trophies turn to
rust
Yet Crosbie's name to future time shall
live
And to Hibernia lasting Honour give.*

Mr. Crosbie's balloon, which cost him upwards of £200, was so much lacerated in the rugged spot where it fell that it is rendered totally useless.

The Aeronaut, a poem, is received and shall appear in Monday's paper.

Mr. Crosbie takes the liberty of requesting a meeting of his committee



'The River Shannon with all its little islands formed a pleasing variety ...'

tomorrow at the Exchange at eleven o'clock, as he means to leave town before Monday next, he hopes the gentlemen will be particular in attending, as until then he can come to no settlement in his affairs, and has business of great importance to him to lay before them; would have appointed a meeting sooner but was unwilling to trespass too much on their goodness. NB. All those who have any accounts to settle with Mr. Crosbie are requested to give them in as soon as possible.

08/05/1786: Anxious to pay the earliest tribute to Mr. Crosbie's great merit and to give our readers the specimen of a poem shortly to be published on his ascent from this city, we beg leave to present them with the first lines of it.

The Aeronaut, A Poem

Super aethera notus

A lowly muse, whose feeble accents fail'd
While raptur'd crowds their brave
advent'rer hail'd,
Wou'd fain be heard as their acclaims
subside
And lend her stream to feed the ebbing tide!
If the poor current of her streamlet cou'd,
For ages swell that tributary flood;
Full, smooth and clear for ages shou'd it
flow
And CROSBIE's lasting fame no shipwreck
know.
Th' ancients, as impress'd with narrow
fears,
To be outdone by those of future years,

Told bugbear tales of the Athenian Wright,
Whose hapless son had perish'd in the flight;
And him that siez'd the chariot of his sire,
Whose fatal rashness set the world on fire!
Those legends mark'd the danger of the sky,
And none presum'd the vast expanse to try.
Man's boldest efforts only sought to guide
The awkward wherry thro' some settled tide:
His clumsy plan succeeding times improv'd
'Till o'er wide seas advent'rous navies
mov'd.

Here Genius paus'd - Here Science ceas'd to
soar,

And humbly trac'd those paths she trod
before.

'Twas little thought there ever shou'd arise
A HERO destin'd to invade the skies:
Or that a long-unnotic'd Isle shou'd boast
This HERO soar'd from her maternal coast.
Ev'n NEWTON's bold and penetrating
mind

To doubt and vain conjecture was confin'd.
Cou'd he have skimm'd those distant fields
of air

Or topp'd the clouds to view some doubtful
sphere,

He'd not have wanted tubes or varied
prisms

Nor Cartes have broach'd his philosophic
schisms.

He'd haste, uplifted by the rapid Globe,
T' examine his many-coloured robe,
Or give dull sceptics a convincing view

Of suns and systems which they deem'd
untrue.

But Heaven t'imperfect man doth rarely
give

A head to plan and courage to atchieve!

Those eyes that look'd thro' boundless space
so far
Wou'd swim and languish in th' Ariel Car.
The wild Ligurian, tending his lank kine
Beneath the stormy ridge of Appenine,
Feels less dismay'd when lightning flash
around
And bursting clouds the nether plains
astound,
Than Franklin wou'd - sage, philosophic
name,
That trac'd the sources of Electric flame.
Those rare endowments, restless,
uncontroll'd,
Kind nature mix'd in Crosbie's happy
mould.
Excentric, studious, enterprizing, wild,
Fair Science mark'd him for her fav'rite
child.
His trembling playmates wonder'd how he
stood,
On plank or wicker in the rolling flood!
His plans were miniatures of nicest art,
True Mechanism seen in ev'ry part,
Thus flash'd those dawning 'till he left his
school
To bear the curb of Academic rule.
The slave of method, here was doom'd to
pore,
O'er tasteless studies which he knew before.
Monastic strictures check'd his soaring
mind,
Quaint, common rules uncommon parts
confin'd.
At length, in slow succession came the hour,
For latent genius to display its pow'r.
The tracts of science open'd to his view,
Nor sage or student cou'd his steps pursue.
So bounds the courser whose indignant fire
Was long restrain'd in trammels or the gyre.
And so the eaglet, snatch'd by hardy swain
From th' unfledg'd airy to the peopled plain,
With full grown pinion cleaves the buoyant
air,
His captor left in wild surprize to stare.
This tow'ring youth no distant mears
could bound,
His mind took in the vast creation's round
Both seas and earth already known, the
skies
Were th' only field for future enterprize.
In that attempt was he resolv'd to fall,
Or soar a great, untaught Original!
His airy scheme the Fellows disapprove,
No new essays the silent Sister move.
This Swift and Goldsmith knew with many
more,
Who spurn'd the bonds of stiff, methodic
lore.
This Crosbie felt when rival names appear'd
To claim those laurels which his genius
rear'd.
Nor small their merit, whose joint efforts
wrought,
The noble plan of elevated thought.
A Royal Patron lent his ready aid,
Their trials furnish'd and their labours
paid.
Among the favour'd enterprizing band
De Rosier's tragic name shou'd foremost
stand.
Within the reach of love and fame arriv'd,
In one sad hour of life and love depriv'd!
Compatriot bards will eternize his fame;
And future times with sorrow read his
name.



Richard Crosbie's balloon flight in Dublin, on 19 July, 1785.

*For future times will candidly review
Departed merit and give each his due.
To their award doth injur'd worth appeal;
Their fearless stricture mould'ring
monarchs feel.*

*On their records fam'd Crosbie will appear,
The true Columbus of the trackless air.
Kings, viceroys and the pension'd things
they've made*

*Will crouch despis'd in blank oblivion's
shade,*

*When Crosbie's boundless philosophic rage
Shall shine in th' epic or historic page.*

11/05/1786: Yesterday Richard Crosbie Esq. set out for Dublin.

The sums not having been affixed in our last paper to the subscribers to Mr. Crosbie's ascent, he finds it necessary to republish the names, including those who subscribed after the ascent, according to the returns made by the committee:

Guineas:

L. Bishop Limerick	1	Colonel Lefroy	1
Sir R. de Burgho bt.	4	Major Lovell	1
Henry Baylee Esq	1	Rev. Thomas Lloyd	1
Sexton Baylee Esq	1	Rev. Thomas Locke	1
H. Browning Esq	1	George Leake Esq	1
John Brown Esq	1	James Langton Esq	1
Hugh Brady Esq	1	Mr. Denis Lyons	1
Mich. Bourke Esq	1	Mrs. Massy	1
Theo. Butler Esq	1	Arch. Maunsell	1
Mr. Mich. Barry	1	Dr. Wm. Maunsell	2
Mr. R. Bowerman	1	Rich. Maunsell Esq.	h.
Mr. Thomas Bennis	1	Eaton Maunsell Esq	2
Mrs. Coote	1	John Minchin Esq	1
Miss Crone	1	D. Mahony Esq	1h.
Hon Dean Crosbie	3	Lau. Marshall Esq	1
John Croker Esq	1	J.T. Monsell	1

Edward Croker Esq	1	Mr. J. Meade, John	1
Mr. Jo. Carpenter	1	Mr. John Millea	1
Anthony Dwyer Esq	1	Mr. Henry Madder	1
H. D'Esterre Esq	1	Mr. William Norris	1
James Darcy Esq	1	Rt. Hon. S. Oliver	2
Mr. Lau. Durak	1	Derby O'Grady Esq	1
Mrs. G. Fosbery	1	De C. O'Grady Esq	h.
Mrs. Fitzgerald	1	S. O'Donnell Esq	1
W. Fitzgerald Esq	2	Dr. O'Halloran	1
A. Fitzgerald Esq	2	Mr. John O'Brien	1
Henry Fosbery Esq	1	E. Henry Pery Esq	5
Ben. Frend Esq	1	Captain Petrie	1
Rev. T. Franklin	1	Mr. Paterson	1
Mrs. Grady	1	Mr. Mat. Plaince	1
Miss Grady	h.	Windham Quin Esq.	1
Miss Mary Grady	1	George Quin Esq	1
Miss Grace Trady	h.	Rev. John Quin	1
Miss Helen Grady	1	Mrs. Roe	1
Standish Grady Esq	4	Sir Boyle Roche Bt.	1
William Grady Esq	1	Mr. Stephen Roche	1
Thos. Gabbett Esq	1	Mr. P. Roche, John	3
Jo. Gubbins Esq	1	Mr. J. Phil Roche	2
Rev. John Graves	1	Mr. Paul Rochford	1
Mr. John Gabbett	1	Mr. Mich. Rochford	1
Mr. James Guthrie	1	Counsellor Rice	1
Mr. John Glasser	1	William Ryves Esq	1
Sir H. Hartstonge bt.	1	Mr. Roslewin	h.
Sir Vere Hunt bt.	10	Mr. Francis Russell	1
His own undetermined.		Mrs. Scott	1
Percival Harte Esq	2	Miss Frances Smyth	1
Richard Harte Esq	4	John P. Smyth Esq	8
William Harte Esq	1	Philip Smith Esq	1
Lancelot Hill Esq	1	George Smyth Esq	3
Rev. Mr. Hoare	1	Rev. B. Smith	1
Mr. John Howly	3	Char. Sargent Esq	2
Mr. Rich. Harrold	2	Dr. Shearer	3
Mr. David Hastings	1	Mr. Chris. Sullivan	1
Mr. G. Halloran	1	John Tuthill Esq	2
Mr. George Hinchy	1	Chris. Tuthill Esq	1
Mr. Wm. Hodges	1	Mr. Thomas Taylor	1
Thos. Jackson Esq	4	Mrs. Villiers	3
Rev. Jaques Ingram	1	Joseph Villiers Esq	1

Rev. William Jones	1	Sheriff Vincent	1
Mr. Ed. Jeffries	1	B. Vandeleur Esq	1
Sir Chris. Knight	2	Mess. Watson & Co.	3
Colonel Knight	2	Wm. Wilson Esq	1
Knight of Glin	2	R. Westropp Esq	1
Mrs. Lloyd	1	John Westropp Esq	1
Fred. Lloyd Esq	1	W. Widenham Esq	1

Total 184 guineas	213 17 0
Amount of single tickets sold at Mr. Watson's and at the House of Industry.	29 0 8
Loss to Mr. Crosbie	172 10 1
Total expense	£415 7 9

15/05/1786: Errata. In our last list of subscribers to Mr. Crosbie's ascent, for Col. Quin 1 guinea, read three.

No details of any further ascents by Crosbie are known, and after his Limerick flight the popularity of ballooning seems to have declined, as there are few records of any significant flights for the following 25 years. The date of his death is usually given as c.1800, but Maurice Lenihan's *History of Limerick, 1866*, records his death in 1824: *May 30th. - Died in Dublin, Richard E. Crosbie, Esq., aged 68 years; the first who ascended in a balloon at Dublin or any where else. He ascended from the rere of the House of Industry, on the North Strand, on the 27th of April, 1786, of which the Hibernian Magazine gives a lengthened account.*

Sources

Liam Byrne: History of Aviation in Ireland, Dublin, 1980.
Alfred Webb: A Compendium of Irish Biography, Dublin, 1878.
John Ferrar: History of Limerick, 1787.