

JAMES SADLER - Balloonist (bap. 1753, d. 1828)



James Sadler balloonist and chemist, was born in Oxford and baptized there on 27 February 1753. He was the elder son of James Sadler (1718–1791), and his wife, Elizabeth (1718–1802).

Sadler first released a 36 foot hydrogen balloon from Queen's College, Oxford, on 9 February 1784. On 4 October 1784 he made the first ascent by any English aeronaut with a 170 foot hot-air balloon he had constructed himself. He rose from Oxford to a height of 3600 feet, landing 6 miles away after a half-hour flight. The most remarkable aspect of Sadler's ballooning was that he was 'sole projector, architect, workman and chymist' in all his experiments (Cavallo, 176–7). In May 1785 he ascended with the statesman William Windham.

Although Sadler abandoned ballooning for some years after this, he continued with other experiments and about 1785 was one of the first to use coal gas as an illuminant. By 1786 he was experimenting with driving wheeled carriages by steam engine. From about 1788 to 1790 Sadler was technical operator in the chemical laboratory at Oxford University. In 1789 and 1790 he gave public performances 'of philosophical fire-works' in Oxford town hall. A contemporary called him 'a clever, practical, and experimental manipulator in chemistry and as such ... patronised ... by the few scientific men then at the University' (Cox, 3).

Sadler resumed aeronautics professionally in 1810 aged fifty-seven, soon using his balloon trademark to sell soda water. He was joined by his son John until 1814 and, from 1813, his youngest son, Windham. By 1815 Sadler had achieved his forty-seventh ascent. His ascents thereafter are impossible to distinguish from those of his youngest son. Sadler lived in the London Charterhouse from the second quarter of 1824 to the end of 1827. He was much affected by the death of his son Windham in a ballooning accident in September 1824.

Finally Sadler moved back to Oxford to live with his family. There he died on 26 March 1828, in George Lane. He was buried four days later at St Peter-in-the-East, Oxford, where he had been baptized.

Reference;

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37928>

