

## BALLOONING AT ALEXANDRA PALACE

### AERIAL PIONEERS

Alexandra Palace has a legacy of presenting spectacular entertainment and attracting the latest innovation. Combining the two were popular aeronautic displays amongst the programme of performances, circus, exhibits and sideshows. Professor Baldwin and Mr August Gaudron were early daredevils who took to the sky over Alexandra Palace.

Holding a trapeze bar, with a parachute attached to the side of a balloon they would ascend above the park, before jumping much to the delight of the audiences below. Less to the delight of Mrs Gaudron, who commented after an attempt gone wrong: "The people will not be satisfied with proper balloon ascents; they must have sensations, and people in our business must provide them. It is a pity the Government do not put a stop to this sort of thing altogether."

Celebrating technical prowess as much as spectacle, Prof. Baldwin was advertised his new invention in 1888 as:

**CLOUD LAND.**  
*At 6 o'clock,*  
**Professor BALDWIN'S 1,000 ft. drop from the Clouds.**  
The most graceful and daring act ever performed, and the greatest scientific sensation of the age. Professor BALDWIN has succeeded in making an Umbrella with sufficient surface resistance to land Passengers from an aerial-ship at any height. Aerial navigation is thus a certainty in the near future.  
Professor BALDWIN will prove the possibility of his Invention by **JUMPING OUT** of a Balloon 1,000 ft. from the ground, and will drop 800 ft. through the Clouds before opening his Umbrella.



Picking up the pioneering spirit after the turn of the century was Dr. Barton. In 1901 Barton was contracted by the War Office Ballooning Section to create an operational airship. From a purpose built hangar in the Park, Barton built a large balloon that used dangerous hydrogen to lift a bamboo frame. The balloon finally launched on 22 July 1905, flying successfully over the Palace. However, its maiden flight was also its last as it was damaged on landing.



## THE COWBOY AND THE WAITRESS

Showman Sam Cody brought his popular wild west show to Alexandra Palace, presenting The Klondike Nugget at the Alexandra Palace Theatre. A friend of Gaudron's, Cody was a keen inventor, experimenting with his self-designed kites. The two filled the former ballroom, the Blandford Hall in the Park, with aerial equipment.

Cody's kites were trialed in the Park, and the 1903 pantomime replaced Aladdin's flying carpet with a Cody Kite, which flew across the Theatre stage.



Dolly Shepherd was a waitress at Alexandra Palace. When Sam Cody grazed his wife's head during a rifle trick shot, she volunteered herself as a stand in. Undaunted by the dangerous activity she was drawn to aeronautics. After minimal training she mounted a trapeze and jumped from Gaudron's balloon over Alexandra Palace aged only 17. It launched her successful career as an aerial stuntwoman and popular attraction at the Palace.

During a tandem jump with another performer, Miss Louie May, in Staffordshire, Dolly had to rescue her partner when May's parachute failed to open. Both women fell with Dolly's parachute but miraculously survived. Dolly retained her daredevil spirit, going on to serve as an ambulance driver during the First World War and riding with the Red Devils at age 96!



Cecil Shadbolt took the earliest aerial photograph in the UK from Alexandra Palace in 1882, using a hinged camera attached to the balloon basket.