

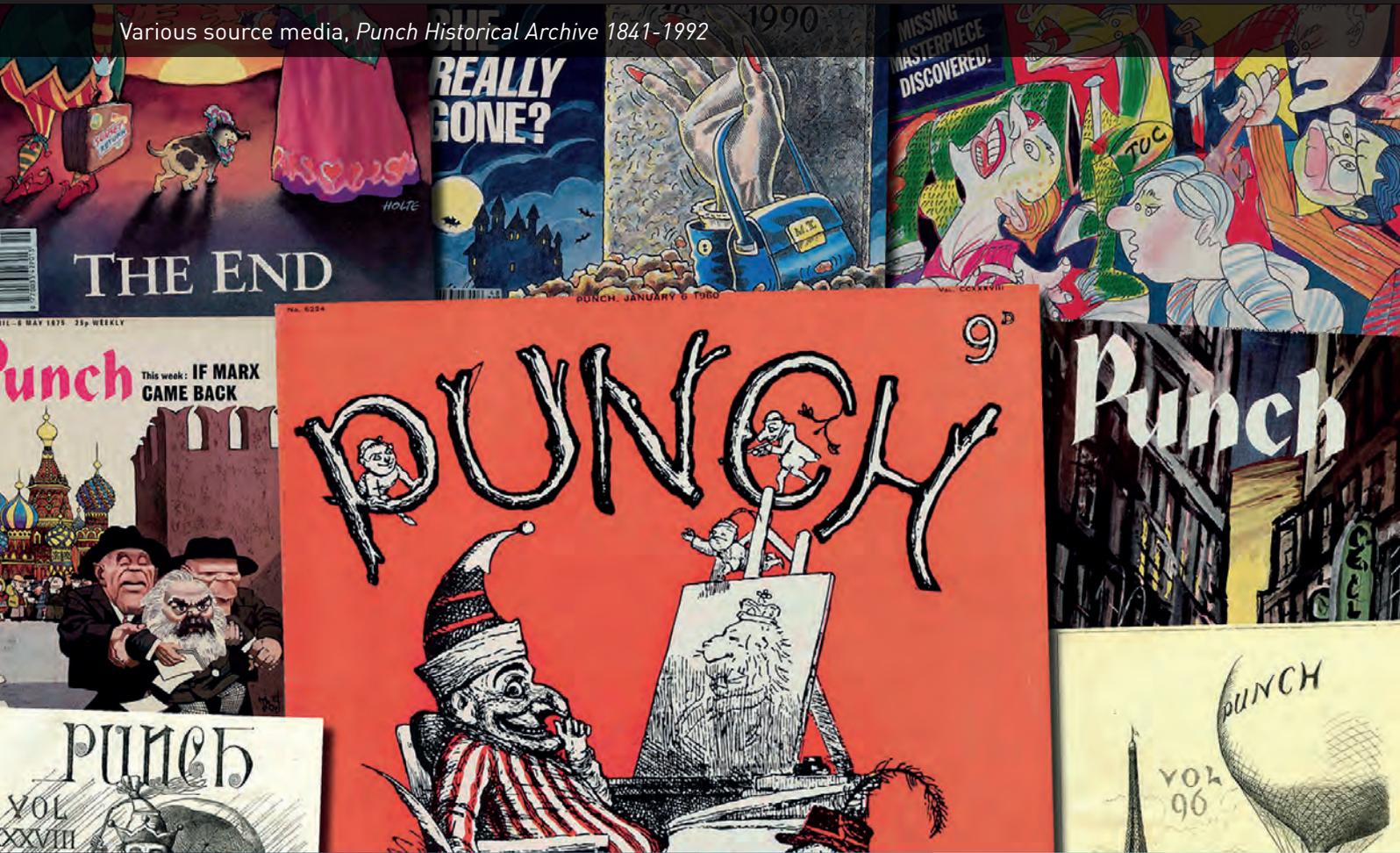
Gale Primary Sources

Start at the source.

Representations of Flight and Aviation

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Various source media, Punch Historical Archive 1841-1992



Introduction

For the whole of its publishing history, *Punch* was consistently fascinated with developments in flight and aviation (a significant part of the magazine's wider interest in science and technology) [1]. *Punch*'s first significant engagement with aeronautics occurs in 1843 (two years after the magazine's founding), in response to William Henson's proposed Aerial Steam Carriage. That Henson's steam carriage featured in a series of prints over exotic locations but was never built made it a tempting target for *Punch*'s unique brand of comic satire ('The Aerial Steam Carriage', 15 April 1843: 162). The balloon-or more precisely, the vulgar public appetite for ever more extravagant balloon ascents-was a favourite target of the magazine's distrust of scientific trifles.

Yet Victorian *Punch* is quick to celebrate heroic ballooning feats (such as Henry Coxwell and James Glaisher's record five-mile ascent in 1862) and instances where the balloon proved its utility (such as its use to overfly the Paris siege in 1870). The magazine's recurrent fascination with balloons in the nineteenth century is confirmed by the depiction of Mr. Punch undertaking a dangerous balloon stunt on the title page to Volume 76 (Prelim page to Volume 76 January-June 1879). Though bluntly dismissive of the possibility of aerial navigation for much of the nineteenth century, the *Punch* of the early twentieth century discusses the role of aircraft in two World Wars. The magazine later reports on inventions like Concorde (which made its first flight in 1969 and entered service in 1976). Covering nearly 150 years of developments in flight and aviation (as well as documenting changing attitudes to aeronautics),

the *Punch Historical Archive* offers an invaluable resource for military and aviation historians, historians of science and technology, literary critics, and aviation enthusiasts among others.

Suggested Search Terms

Perhaps unsurprisingly given *Punch*'s preoccupation with balloons (initially also known as aerostats) in the nineteenth century, one of the most productive search terms is 'balloon[s]', which returns 1,285 results in an entire text search. (Restricting the search to keywords may make the results more manageable, but it is advisable to begin with the widest possible search.) Related phrases like 'ballooning' and 'balloon ascent' return a number of results, mostly from the Victorian era (the *Punch Historical Archive*'s date limit function enables users to set chronological limits for their search). The words 'balloonist' and 'aeronaut' were widely used to describe those who piloted balloons and might facilitate research when used as search terms. The term 'aeroplane' generates 1,196 hits; combined with the option to limit results by cartoons only, the search term 'aeroplane' reveals a cartoon sketch which typifies *Punch*'s characteristic humorous emphasis on how the novelty of new inventions quickly wears off ('Excited Father. "Here, Quick, Quick, Mabel! Look An Aeroplane!!!"' 30 August 1911: 147)-in contrast to her 'Excited Father', the daughter is already decidedly 'Fed Up With Aeroplanes'. The phrase 'flying machine' returns a number of results.

The Classical and Renaissance connotations of the term were not lost on *Punch* staff - an illustration from 1944 depicts Leonardo da Vinci stating his intention to

design a pilotless flying machine (12 July 1944: 33). The phrase 'aerial carriage' locates contraptions like Henson's aerial steam carriage. The term 'dirigible' returns a number of results from the early twentieth century, though not as many as 'airship'. Given the longstanding quest for a steerable airship, it is not surprising 'aerial navigation' generates results. 'Helicopter' generates over 600 hits. Disciplinary and generic terms like 'aeronautics', 'aviation', 'flight' and 'aircraft' might help researchers forge connections between different decades and mechanisms. Word changes over time mean that many such terms are period specific; the term 'aviation' (coined in 1873), for example, only returns results from the twentieth century. The names of famous aircraft, including 'Zeppelin', 'Spitfire', 'Hurricane', 'Harrier Jump Jet' and 'Concorde', all return historically specific results.

Advanced Search Terms

The *Punch Historical Archive's* advanced search function enables users to explore *Punch's* representations of flight and aviation in response to major events and in the context of key themes and preoccupations. The combination of 'balloons' and 'war' returns a significant volume of results (the terms 'balloons' and 'warfare' return a more modest number of hits for military historians and others seeking to learn about early attempts to use aircraft in war). This combination of search terms reveals *Punch's* changing attitudes to the potential of balloons in warfare. An early article titled 'Balloons for Warfare' published on January 6 1855 mockingly dismisses the possibility of guiding balloons for warfare; yet by 1909, *Punch* was undertaking the patriotic duty of reassuring Londoners that foreign invaders would not prove competent enough to destroy

their city (5 May 1909: 324) [2]. The combination of 'aeroplane' and 'war' returns a number of hits, as does 'airship' and 'war'. Obviously, many researchers will seek to use the *Punch Historical Archive* to research *Punch* during the two World Wars. Restricting the date range to 1914-1918 and using the terms 'aeroplanes' and 'war' generates two pages of results, including 1915's 'How to End the War in No Time'. Entering the same terms and restricting the date range to 1939-1945 returns three pages of results. The results of such searches suggest further possible research terms, such as 'air raid' and 'bombing'; the latter locates the 15 September 1915 poem by *Punch's* editor Owen Seaman, 'To a Zeppelin', subtitled 'In the measure of Shelley's To a Skylark', which defies German attempts to cause panic through aerial bombardment.

Entering potentially humorous combinations like 'gas' and 'balloon' highlights the comedy *Punch* is able to find amidst the conflict of World War Two, as becomes apparent in its use of one newspaper headline from March 1940 (Barrage Balloons Beware! "Nazis Lay Mines by the Moon"- "Daily Mail" headline.) The magazine's adaption of this newspaper headline implies the literary tradition of balloon trips to the moon, humorously suggesting how the hydrogen-filled barrage balloon, wire tethered to create a hazard for enemy aircraft on bombing raids, might meet a volatile end in the event it loosens from its constraints.

Other search combinations reveal how *Punch* relates aeronautics to other technological innovations. Combining 'balloons' and 'aeroplanes' with 'invention'

results in a number of hits; so too does combining the names of types of aerial craft with 'science' and 'technology'. Searching for 'balloons' alongside 'railway' reveals how *Punch* connects the two technological innovations, such as in the 1845 article 'The Age of Air', which sardonically announces that proof it is now an age of air is provided by 'the innumerable railway bubbles that are being continually blown'. It is unsurprising that combining the notion of the 'future' with 'balloons' and other aerial mechanisms returns a number of hits. The combination of 'balloons' and 'politics' returns a number of results, but does not tell the whole story of how *Punch* uses aeronautical devices to satirise politicians. An excellent example of this is highlighted by inputting the phrase 'parliamentary' alongside 'flying machine'; *Punch*'s depiction of 'The Parliamentary Flying Machine' shows the machinery of government sustained by hot air. So researchers hoping to find links between aeronautics (or indeed any new technology) and politics should explore associated terms, since *Punch* often characterises politicians as full of 'hot air' or 'flighty'.

Distinctive Content

A distinctive feature of the *Punch Historical Archive* is the inclusion of the magazine's Special Issues and Almanacks, allowing users to understand its representation of flight and aviation in greater depth. An illustration from the Almanack of 1871 titled 'Aerial Navigation' epitomises the skepticism toward navigating the air that persisted in *Punch* (and elsewhere) for much of the nineteenth century. As well as depicting wildly improbable schemes like shaping balloons like birds and harnessing limitless pigeons, the magazine draws on Darwin's theory of natural

selection to mock the notion of aerial navigation, suggesting - somewhat sarcastically - that it is achievable only by waving one's hands gently up and down for a few generations ("Suggestions for Aerial Navigation" January 1 1871, n.p.).

Using *Punch* in the Seminar Room

Punch, or more specifically, the comic illustrations of Henson's aerial steam carriage, provide excellent context for teaching the famous passage of 'Locksley Hall' in which Tennyson refers to 'the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue'. Full access to the *Punch Historical Archive* will allow students to appreciate the enduring appeal of Tennyson's vision as a frame of reference for actual developments, as is apparent in a 1902 report of a flight of Alberto Santos-Dumont's airship titled 'Grappling in the Central Blue' (the satirical use *Punch* makes of Tennyson's poetry is evident elsewhere, as in the 1847 article, 'The Lotus-Eaters of Downing Street'). The representation of flight and aviation found in the *Punch Historical Archive* would be especially useful on a literature and science module. The satire of aeronautics in *Punch* would help students to appreciate that the respectability of now matter-of-fact science (and technology) was by no means assured in the nineteenth century. The insistence in *Punch* (and elsewhere) that aerial navigation could never be accomplished would allow students to explore the resistance that science was sometimes confronted with, and provide a context for understanding the role of popular fiction in promoting the vital necessity of aeronautics to the national interest (for example, George Griffith's *The Angel of the Revolution* (1893) and H.G. Wells's *The War in the Air* (1908)).

Recommendations for Further Research

Historians of science (and aviation) will find the *Punch Historical Archive* provides an additional dimension for their research into flight and aeronautics. For those investigating the First and Second World Wars, *Punch's* humorous take on events will help generate new perspectives, especially if used in conjunction with other Gale Historical Newspapers, which allows users to search *Punch* alongside other contemporary periodicals like the *London Illustrated News* and *The Times* (an important point of reference in *Punch*). So in researching terms like 'balloon' and 'aeroplane', users are able to conduct keyword and entire text searches of a broad range of publications, as well as restrict searches by date and place of publication.

NOTES

[1] For more on science and technology in *Punch*, see (for example) Richard Noakes's 'Science in Mid-Victorian *Punch*', *Endeavour* 26 (2002): 92-96.

[2] *The Airship Destroyer*, a silent short film released in the same years plays upon-and seeks to ultimately reassure- anxieties about attacks by dirigibles from an unnamed foreign power (Germany).

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