AAIB Bulletin No: 10/94 Ref: EW/G94/07/31 Category: 3

Aircraft Type and Registration: Cameron A-120 Hot Air Balloon, G-SKYP

No & Type of Engines: None

Year of Manufacture: 1991

Date & Time (UTC): 23 July 1994 at 0700 hrs

Location: Castle Cary, Somerset

Type of Flight: Public Transport

Persons on Board: Crew - 1 Passengers - 5

Injuries: Crew - None Passengers - 1 Serious

2 Minor

Nature of Damage: None

Commander's Licence: Hot Air Balloon Class A and B

Commander's Age: 52 years

Commander's Flying Experience: 545 hours (of which 31 were on type)

Last 90 days - 6 hours Last 28 days - 3 hours

Information Source: Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot

The balloon took off at 0545 hrs with five passengers. The surface wind was light and forecast to remain so for the duration of the flight. However, after 45 minutes, the pilot observed that the surface wind had increased to 12 to 15 kt and decided to land as soon as a suitable landing site became available. At first, no suitable site could be seen, but after a few minutes, the pilot located two possible sites and descended to low level to make his landing approach. The first field proved to be unsuitable and the pilot continued to the second at about 50 feet agl. The landing area was constrained by power cables to the right and a barn at the far end of the field. The pilot rebriefed his passengers on the correct procedures for a fast landing. Just before touchdown, the pilot noticed that despite the fact that the parachute and turning vents were all sealed, the balloon envelope was deflating rapidly. He applied maximum heat and warned the passengers to 'hold tight' as the landing would be 'positive'. On touchdown, the basket turned over and two elderly passengers in the rear of the basket were thrown out sustaining minor injuries in the process. The reduction in weight caused the balloon to become airborne again. On the second landing, the son of one of the elderly passengers was no longer in the correct landing posture and suffered a fractured ankle.

The pilot attributed the injuries to a heavier than expected landing caused by rapid deflation of the balloon envelope in unexpected low level windshear and when the balloon was already in a fast cooling mode.