

The Airmail issue of 5th May and 12th November 1947

by A Taylor

A seemingly simple question on this issue has prompted further researches: “**What type of aircraft is depicted on each stamp?**”. This has been completely ignored to date; indeed the official descriptions are written as if all the stamps showed the same aeroplane! This article brings the available information together. Three main sources of information have been used: the Postverordnungsblatt; the accompanying “black-print text” (a fine example of purple prose!); and John Giblin’s translation as printed in Austria 37 of 1976 of Kosel’s 1948 publication on this issue. I have also pestered many of my philatelic friends.



Austria issued seven stamps in 1947 for use on air mails: they are catalogued as ANK 820-826 = Michel 822-828 = SG 1017-1023. The values and dates are:

| Face | Colour | Issued | ANK | Printed |
|------|--------------|-------------|-----|---------|
| 50 g | brown | 12 Nov 1947 | 820 | 755,000 |
| 1 S | red-brown | 12 Nov 1947 | 821 | 755,000 |
| 2 S | dark-green | 12 Nov 1947 | 822 | 755,000 |
| 3 S | purple-brown | 5 May 1947 | 823 | 720,000 |
| 4 S | green | 5 May 1947 | 824 | 735,000 |
| 5 S | ultramarine | 5 May 1947 | 825 | 740,000 |
| 10 S | dark-blue | 12 Nov 1947 | 826 | 755,000 |

The issue was announced in Post- and Telegraphenverordnungsblatt (henceforth PTVOB) Nr.10 dated 12 May 1947 which contained section 38 “Flugpostmarkenserie” dated B.M.Zl.15.331 of 15 April 1947 (“*BMZl.15.331*” is *Bundesministeriumzeile 15 331* and means “item 331 in section 15 of the Ministry’s filing system index for that year”!). It says:

The Air Mail Stamp series begins with the 3, 4 and 5 S values and is issued for the payment of the air mail surcharges. The stamps are line-engraved and printed on ordinary white stamp-paper in sheets of 50 by the Austrian Staatsdruckerei; their perforation is 13¾ x 14¼ per 2cm. The designs originate from the painter and graphic artist Heinrich Blechner; a detailed description is found in the attached essay [*moved to the details for each stamp, below.*].

The Air Mail Stamp series is only valid for the payment of the air mail surcharges; these can also be paid with ordinary stamps. The stamps become available, and acquire franking validity, at 13:00 hrs on 5th May 1947. The stamps will also be given to new-issue subscribers at the same time provided that they submitted their order by the 20th February 1947. Any stamps remaining from the first delivery, once these subscribers have had theirs, can be sold over the counter. Subscribers who applied after the 20th February will receive theirs later. In urgent cases such subscribers can be satisfied from the reserves of the post office; if these are insufficient the stamps are to be requisitioned immediately from the Wertzeichenlager of the Postzeugverwaltung [= *the central warehouse of the postal administration*]. For the Air Mail Stamps, special cancels are permitted.

The “attached essay” gave some further general details. The new series of air mail stamps featured landscapes from each federal state and showed “the best known types of commercial aircraft” (“bekanntesten Verkehrsflugzeugtypen”). Given the air mail rates, the sales price for the whole series would be rather high; hence the P&T had decided to issue the planned series in parts. The first values of this series would be the 3, 4, & 5 schilling stamps.

The designs for all the values originated from the painter, poster- and graphic-artist Heinrich Blechner (born & died in Vienna; 7.3.1895 - 21.3.1983), who also produced the designs for the commemorative issues on the occasion of the Vienna Spring Exhibition in 1947. The stamps were line-engraved in portrait format; the overall size 38.5 x 29.8 mm; the picture 34.5 x 25.8 mm. At the base is “Österreich” in white, while across the top is “Republik”. The value and currency abbreviation are in white on dark background, in the left lower corner.

The first-day covers, franked with the 3, 4 or 5 Schilling stamps after 1 p.m. on 5th May, were flown at the earliest on the next day and were cancelled with the

old pre-1938 airmail hand strikes when despatched from Vienna 1 or the provincial capitals. Actual transport by air only took place from Vienna; items posted in the provinces had first to be transported by road to Vienna.

From 5th May, the first day of issue, existing correspondence cards with an 8g stamp were used. The latter, however, were issued in advance to the larger bulk customers, before being sold over the official sales counter, and are partly found with the private overprint: "Retour a l'expediteur / First Day of Issue / Ersttag 5-5-47 / Per Flugpost / Par Avion / By Air Mail."

There is an inconsistency, in that many first-day covers exist for this issue, flown to various foreign countries, and franked solely with the new airmail stamps contrary to the PTVOB above. Perhaps the dealers complained that having to frank with airmail stamps for the airmail surcharge, but with ordinary stamps for the surface component, was tedious and the result inartistic! Further investigation by the Postgasse staff has revealed PTVOB Nr.12 dated 26 June 1947, section 45 of which (dated B.M.Zl.16.191 of 29 May) says that all charges for items sent by air (surface, air, registration, express...) can now be paid by airmail stamps, or ordinary stamps, or both, or indeed in cash.

PTVOB Nr.37 dated 23 December 1947 announced the remainder of the issue in section 161 "Flugpostmarkenserie" dated B.M.Zl.42.290 of 12 December 1947. This cited PTVOB No. 10/1947 and stated that the Air Mail Stamp series was continued with values 50 g, 1, 2 and 10 S, issued on and valid from 13:00 on 12th November 1947. A detailed description was attached. The stamp manufacturing process and the issue's high and artistic standards were to be as before; the designs again originated from Heinrich Blechner. The subscriber qualifying date was 15 August 1947; special cancels were again permitted.

First day cancellation took place from Vienna 1; partly with the airmail cancellation of 12th and partly with that of 13th November at 3 a.m. These first day covers were flown at the earliest from Vienna on 13th November.

Because of their longer postal validity the first three values were sold in much larger quantities. The remaining values were not used as much, in spite of the larger numbers issued, since they were only useable until the currency conversion of 10th December 1947. Genuinely used pieces of the four later values on airmail letters are to be regarded as decided rarities; at the most 1-2% of the total issue were used thus. Beware of cancelled-to-order on loose pieces. Trials and essays in black and other colours are known. All seven values of the air mail series were invalidated on 9th December 1947 in connection with the currency reform.

Detailed description of each stamp

(based on the Blackprint Texts)

50g brown:

The 50 g stamp was engraved by Herbert Toni Schimek and depicts an old windmill on the side of the Neusiedlersee at St. Andrä am Zicksee near Frauenkirchen in Burgenland, a characteristic sight of this area. A commercial machine passing through the cloudy heavens marks the stamp as Air Mail.

1S red-brown

Georg Wimmer's engraving of the 1 S stamp shows the Heidentor at Petronell, half way between Vienna and Bratislava. This is the site of the old Roman settlement of Carnuntum, founded by the Emperor Tiberius in 19 AD as the seat of the Governor of the Province of Pannonia. The ruin presented on the picture is one of the most important Roman building remains of our homeland. On its purpose and meaning, the research of the last decades has still not reached total enlightenment; also the name of its builder is not now known. Over that remnant of a bygone time surrounded by riddles and mysteries sails the airplane, one of the supreme technical achievements of our time, in proud flight.

2S dark-green

With the 2 S stamp, engraved by Rudolf Zenzinger, is represented the federal land of Carinthia. The picture shows us the Stadtturm (the tower of the town hall) of the small old town of Gmünd, which celebrated the 600th anniversary of its existence in the spring of 1946. The ancient town still retains its old wall and gates and is a centre for the Dolomites. It lies in the scenically attractive Maltatal whose further course leads to the ascent of the Hochalm Spitze (3355m) and the Ankogel (3263m), the most extensive ice-clad peaks of the eastern Hohe Tauern. To the left of the tower an airplane climbs steeply in a cloudy heaven.

3S purple-brown

The 3 shilling stamp was engraved by Rupert Franke. It shows the Schiederweiher near Hinterstoder in the Salzkammergut; Hinterstoder is a summer resort situated in a fine valley, overlooked on the west by the sombre cliffs of the Totes Gebirge; and is the starting point for the ascent of the Große

Priel (2514m), the Kleine Priel (2134m) and the Warscheneck (2389m), all in the Totes Gebirge.

In the foreground of the design we see the Schiederweiher, a high mountain lake, surrounded by deciduous trees which are reflected therein; behind it dark fir forest; to both sides the valley entrances step back, leading ones view forwards over softer mountain ridges up to the gullied slopes of the highest peaks, which emerge from eternal ice and snow. Over the mountain tops a commercial aeroplane slips through the cloudless heaven.

4S green

The 4 shilling stamp was engraved by Herbert Toni Schimek. It depicts the church and village of Prägraten in Osttirol, which is the starting point for the ascent of the Grossvenediger (3660m) from the south and the Dreierherrenspitze (3499m) in the Hohe Tauern. Not overly distant lies the Grossglockner, the supreme elevation of the Eastern Alps, and at the same time the highest mountain of Austria, with the famous Hochalpenstrasse. The Vienna Boys Choir spend the summer months in their own home in Prägraten.

The design shows in the foreground the Virgenbach, retained on the right bank by a wall, while on the left bank between slender trees we see a view of a mountain church; in the far background the ice-clad Central Alps. Over a cloud-bedecked heaven flies a commercial machine.

5S ultramarine

The 5 schilling stamp was engraved by Rupert Franke. It leads us once more into the high mountain world of the Alps, this time in the Tennengebirge in Salzburg. Illustrated is the Torsäule, almost 2600m high, on the path leading from Bischofshofen over the Arthurhaus to the Hochkönig (2938m). In the foreground we see an expansive snowfield, which rises slowly against the pyramid of the black-clad Torsäule. On the left of the summit the aeroplane slips past.

A plate error exists on the 5 schilling stamp; the 12th stamp in the sheet, which is known by the description of “filled in valley”. However, all the other small marks on other stamps are definitely associated with accidental plate marks, which perhaps occur on one or more sheets, but which are not on the whole issue or on the same part of it.

10S dark-blue

On the 10 S stamp, engraved by Rupert Franke, the artist has presented the baroque Karlskirche in Vienna. It was commissioned by Karl VI, and constructed after the plans of Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach and his son Josef Emanuel in the years 1716-1727, to give thanks to Saint Karl Borromäus for the extinguishing of the plague in Vienna in 1713.

We see in the foreground a temple-shaped columned portico, in whose pediment are found sculpted scenes from the plague era. The pediment is crowned with the statue of the church's patrons, faintly visible on the picture. The portico is flanked on each side by enormous columns adorned with reliefs from the life of St. Karl Borromäus; they are modelled on the Marcus Aurelius and Trajan columns in Rome, and one is left with an overall impression reminiscent of St Peter's in Rome. The columns, each 33.18m high, can be ascended through internal spiral staircases. Partially visible at the left and right of the church front are towers with passages, whose formation reminds one of ancient Roman triumphal arches.

The church is a richly articulated oval structure in the Baroque style, with a wide facade. In the background one discerns the mighty dome, crowned by a gigantic lantern on the roof of which is a cross. From the roof and the dome one enjoys a wonderful prospect over Vienna. On the left, a slender aeroplane sails past the dome.

So what are the planes?

What follows are the views of several aeronautically-minded colleagues including at least two pilots. There is no record in the Austrian archives, and everybody agrees that the artist was working from drawings or photographs, not from real life. So these identifications could be wrong...

50 g brown:

Sud Ouest S.O. Corse II. French airliner, built from 1947

1 S red-brown:

- (a) Lockheed "PAN AM Constellation L-049"; it had four engines and a triple fin tail. Pan American opened a New York-Gander-Shannon-London-Brussels-Prague-Vienna service in June 1946, which should

provide the context. First flight cachets are illustrated with the outline of a Constellation.

- (b) Could well be Miles Marathon [although someone else says he used to fly in them and the engines are the wrong size!]. First flight May 19, 1946. British airliner. Early aircraft had twin fins. Production aircraft had triple fins.
- (c) Junkers JU90-400?

2 S dark-green:

Bristol Beaufighter, RAF warplane

3 S purple-brown:

Cunliffe-Owen Concordia. British airliner, first flight 1947, only two built!

4 S green:

Many people agreed that this has the tail configuration and the high wing of the Airspeed AS57 Ambassador. This was probably a reference to BEA's London - Vienna service. BEA called this plane the Elizabethan in their service.

5 S ultramarine:

- (a) Lockheed Electra (the type in which Amelia Earhardt disappeared!);
- (b) Sud Ouest 308 Bretagne. Program started during WW2

10 S dark-blue:

It's a glider!