

PHILATELIC CLASSES PART VI: AEROPHILATELY

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According to [Wikipedia](#), the definition of “Aerophilately” is: “the branch of Philately that specializes in the study of airmail”. The [Miriam-Webster](#)

dictionary defines it as: “the collection and study of airmail stamps and flown covers”. It is very important to distinguish Aerophilately from the various related topics found in Thematic Philately, such as; aircraft, hot air balloons, Zeppelins etc., where the focus

on the theme of the postage stamps. In Aerophilately, the focus is on all the material related to the transport of mail by air. This includes; postage stamps, envelopes, postcards, airmail etiquette labels, postmarks, cancellations, airmail tariffs, air routes and even mail recovered from accidents, known as “crash covers”. In the context of Aerophilately, the term “airmail” should be defined as the system of transporting mail by aircraft, of any kind, to any destination, and all the materials related to this system.

Aerophilately is most popular when studying fixed-wing aircraft, but it is absolutely not limited to that. Basically, any kind of aircraft is considered valid and the unwritten rule is: if it has been in the air, then it’s of interest. On this basis, Aerophilately has been sub-divided into the following categories:

Balloon mail: mail delivered by hydrogen or helium filled balloons

Dirigible mail: mail delivered by airships and balloons with rigid frames. This category can be specific to...

Zeppelin mail: mail delivered specifically by the German Zeppelin airships

Missile and Rocket mail: as the name suggests, mail delivered by missiles and rockets. This category relates to surface to air projectiles and should not be confused with orbital rockets intended to journey into space. In this regard, Aerophilately has spawned an entirely separate philatelic Class called “Astrophilately” and that Class is discussed in another, separate article in this edition of the magazine.

According to [Merriam-Webster](#), the first known use of the term “Aerophilately” was in 1929, the word being a simple conjunction of “aero” and “philately”, but the term is not attributed to any named person. Aerophilately has its origins in February 1911 when the world's first official airmail flight took place between Allahabad and Naini in British India. The aircraft used was a Humber-Sommer biplane which made the journey in thirteen minutes. The picture on the right is the famous “Allahabad” cover and is the world’s first example of an airmail cover.



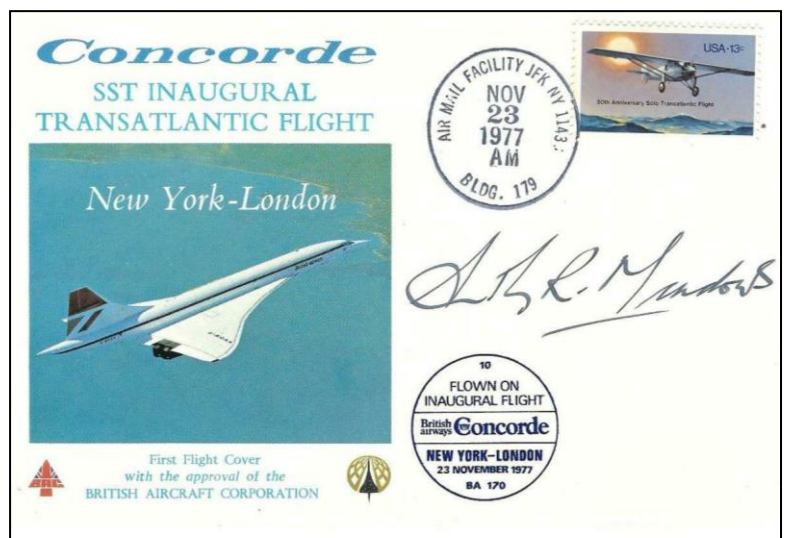


At the beginning of the 20th Century, air transport was considered extremely modern and glamorous and few people had the opportunity to enjoy such a luxury. Large numbers of philatelists were drawn to the exotic material associated with airmail and this branch of Philately quickly became a Class in its own right.

On the left is an exceptional specimen of a “Zeppelin mail” cover. This example is a cover sent from Dublin, Ireland, via

the Graf Zeppelin airmail service to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1933. On this cover we can see many elements of special interest to Aerophilatelists: The two red cancellations indicate that this cover was to be delivered on the 4th Graf Zeppelin flight from Berlin to South America. There are also three airmail etiquette labels, the green example in English and French, the dark blue example in French and Irish and the light blue/grey example in German. It is interesting the total face value of the three Irish postage stamps was only 2.5 pennies, where one old pound was 240 pennies. It seems like remarkably good value for money when compared to today’s postal rates.

First Flight Covers are specially prepared envelopes to commemorate the inauguration of new passenger air routes between two or more cities. These covers have been popular with Aerophilatelists since the 1920s and are still to be found in much later eras, especially in cases where the aircraft being deployed for the route is of special interest. The example below is an exceptional piece, commemorating the first scheduled flight of the now legendary supersonic airliner “Concorde”, on the new passenger route from New York to London on November 23, 1977. The example displayed has been signed by the Chief Pilot of the flight.



In formal philatelic exhibitions conducted under the auspices of the Fédération Internationale de Philatélie (FIP), the evaluation rules for judging are precisely codified by the [Aerophilately Commission](#) in the document “[Guidelines for Judging Aerophilatelic Exhibits](#)”. Aerophilatelists will need to study this five-page document very carefully to ensure they receive the highest results at competitions.

There exists a large number of extremely useful online resources for Aerophilatelists. These include; [The American Airmail Society](#), [The Postal History Website Aerophilately Resources Page](#), [The British Airmail Society](#) and [FISA: International Federation of Aero- and Astrophilatelic Societies](#).