

The 30th anniversary of Scottish aerogrammes The origin of pictorial aerogrammes, or air letter sheets as they were first called, goes back to 1963 when two 6d aerogrammes were produced mainly for the tourist market in London, with colour back flaps showing the Tower and Tower Bridge or the Houses of Parliament. Although this was not immediately followed up, it established a precedent for the aerogrammes the following year celebrating the quatercentenary of William Shakespeare. Again, there was no immediate follow-up, although two Christmas aerogrammes appeared in 1965 and this medium has been employed for seasonal greetings ever since.

The notion of creating pictorial aerogrammes with a regional flavour arose in August 1973 when Wales produced an air letter sheet highlighting Snowdonia, and inscribed in English and Welsh. Subsequent Welsh aerogrammes depicted a harp and a coracle (1974) or Penyarreg Dam (1976), but many years would then elapse before any further aerogrammes with a Welsh flavour were produced.

It was left to Scotland to take up this idea and develop it out of all recognition. The first Scottish aerogramme was issued on 15 May 1974 and showed three different scenes. On the address panel there appeared the Jacobite Monument at the head of Loch Shiel, while the vignette on the back panel showed the Ring of Brodgar at Stenness in Orkney. Across the inner flap was a panoramic view of Loch Maree, with Slioch (mountain) in the background. A novelty of this sheet was the use of Gaelic as well as English in the inscriptions.

The following January an aerogramme honoured the birthday of Robert Burns whose portrait appeared on the front with a harvest mouse (alluding to one of his nature poems) on the back, and a scene from his mock epic *Tam o' Shanter* on the flap. Two other aerogrammes that year were aimed at tourists, with scenes in Argyll and Edinburgh respectively.

In subsequent years a wide range of subjects was featured, concentrating mainly on tourist attractions and historic landmarks, such as Edinburgh Castle and the Wallace Monument, but folk festivals (1976), golf (1979), flora and fauna (1981) and highland dress (1982) were other popular subjects. In 1979-80 aerogrammes highlighted the Scottish regiments. In 1983 an aerogramme celebrated the centenary of the Boys Brigade (founded in Glasgow) and this set the trend for later issues which tended to focus on particular anniversaries. These ranged from the 50th anniversary of regular internal airmail flights (1984), Andrew Carnegie (1985) and J M Barrie (1987) to Robert Louis Stevenson (1994) and Alexander Graham Bell (1997). The adoption of the larger format air letter sheet also provided much greater scope for pictorial treatment and a better quality of paper also permitted the greater use of colour images.

The era of Scottish aerogrammes ended in May 1999 with the issue on the Scottish crafts of basket-weaving, shepherds' crooks and Orkney chairs – and even this was actually part of a series on crafts of Britain as a whole. Since then, Scotland has used national aerogrammes. In a way this is a pity, for these attractive items were a valuable adjunct to stamps and went a long way to satisfying a desire in Scotland for a separate philatelic identity.



FIRST FOLD HERE
A CHEUD FILLEADH AN SEO

Slioch and Loch Maree,
Wester Ross

An Slegheach agus Loch
Marubhe, Taobh Siar Rois



Ring of Brogar, Orkney
Chìrchan Bhogair, Sìobh na Chìobhe, Ancaibh

Sender's name and address
(please print)

By airmail-Aerogramme
Par avion-Aerogramme
Troimh'n phost-adhair/Litir-adhair



And
con
if it
surc
ordir

Desig
Gordc
FIAS F
SECON



Troimh'n phost-adhair/Litir-Adhair

BY AIR MAIL
AIR LETTER
PAR AVION AERGRAMME



Prince Charles Monument, Glavinfinn, Loch Shiel
Clùn-cathrinn a' Phrionnsa, Gleann Fhionghath, Loch Seil



TO OPEN, SLIT HERE

GUS AN LITIR FHOGLADH
GEARR AN SEO



Scottish aerogrammes: the first in the series (1974), and a commemorative issue to mark the 50th anniversary of the first regular British inland air mail service. Below: 60th anniversary commemorative postmark, 1994.