

HRADČANY PRIVATE PERFORATIONS

by Johan Sevenhuijsen

It is well known among collectors that the first stamps that were issued in Czechoslovakia were largely imperforate. This was due to the fact that in the new country there was no printing company with any experience in producing large quantities of stamps. The Graphic Union printing company in Prague had to make do with its available facilities and it was only in the course of 1919 that perforating machines were purchased and only in 1920 was their capacity such that the issue of imperforate stamps was no longer necessary.

Based on the stamps issued, it is quite possible to reconstruct how this expansion of perforating capacity took shape step by step. This will be the subject of a later article. This article is aimed at charting what was done in those days of scarce facilities to have the convenience of easily separable stamps. After all, since 1860 in the Czech lands and also in Slovakia stamps with perforation were available. After almost 60 years people had to start using scissors again. No wonder different ways were used to get around that inconvenience.

An important part of the inconvenience was for the staff at the counter in the post offices, who were, after all, busy throughout the working day with franking of shipments. This also applied to those who worked in the mail rooms of large companies. It is therefore no wonder that post offices and large companies took the initiative to provide serration in imperforate stamps.

Three different options were used:

--- The perforation capacity at the stamp printing company, the Graphic Union itself. We can conclude that a series of post offices used stamps that were normally provided imperforate, with the line perforation $11\frac{1}{2}$ which is identical to that of the (only) perforating device that was available at the Graphic Union at the time (early 1919). Apparently, those post offices have somehow paid the printing works for perforating sheets supplied to them.

--- Other offices have apparently used equipment at other printers to have their sheets perforated or pierced. The results look professional, but does not match what we know from the Graphic Union.

--- In addition, more amateurish methods have been used to better separate the stamps. The result then looks messier, not neatly rectangular around the stamps, irregular distance between the holes. You can imagine that sewing machines and piercing wheels are used for this purpose, perhaps on the spot at post offices and companies,



Figure 1: Different private perforations: $11\frac{1}{2}$ (Praha 1); 15.3 (Tetschen a/d Elbe); machine pierced (Bystre u Poličky); hand pierced (Morvaszentjáj)

At the time (as far as I know) there was no documentation of this entire state of affairs. Everything we know comes from later analysis of stocks of stamps and postal items. In summary, the literature (see the list at the end of this article) produces the following picture:

--- Novotný provides a list of the offices where privately perforated stamps¹ are used, with an indication of the denominations found and the method of serration (pierced or perforated, with an indication of perforation number). Bayer's article has the same structure and lists a number of other offices.

--- In the "blue book" from 1988 we find a more extensive list of offices where stamps with private perforation have been used, but unfortunately not distinguished by type of perforation or by the denominations found. The book states that "it is estimated that more than a third of the country's 1,761 offices" have made use of private perforation on some scale, but that there is little further clarity.

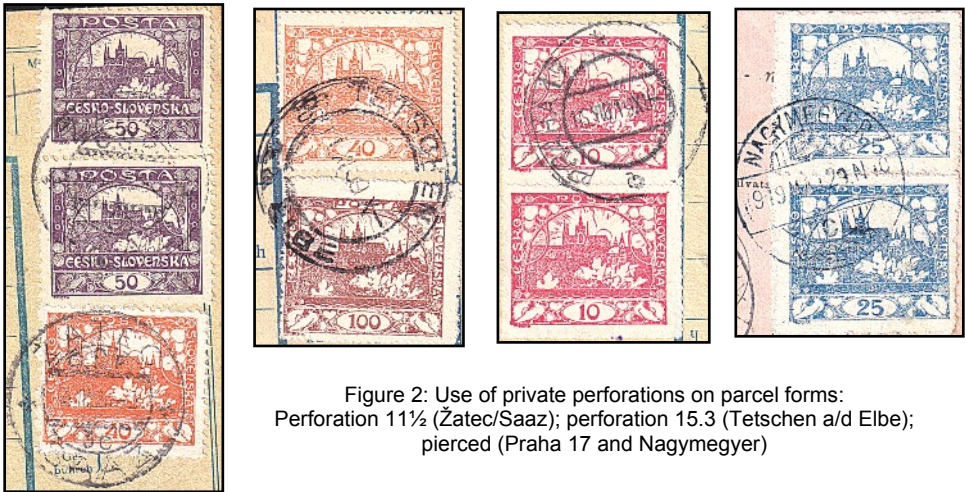


Figure 2: Use of private perforations on parcel forms:
Perforation 11½ (Žatec/Saaz); perforation 15.3 (Tetschen a/d Elbe);
pierced (Praha 17 and Nagymegyér)

In the following I will base myself on what I myself have concluded from the study of the approximately 100,000 (used) Hradčany stamps in my own stock. I have selected all the stamps with a private perforation. Altogether there are around 1,250. If I assume that I have a random sample from the total, it means that somewhat more than 1% of the issued Hradčany stamps have been privately perforated. Of the total number of Hradčany stamps issued, approximately 48% were issued with official perforation. That gives an impression of the number of privately perforated stamps that you can expect to encounter in a random accumulation. That finding also means that if private perforations were used at a third of the post offices, in most cases it must have been incidental use, not all of the imperforate stamps were perforated there.

This is also apparent when you look at the cancels on the privately perforated stamps: you will find a large number of different post offices, but there is a relatively limited list of offices of which you will find a larger number of copies, and where apparently a larger percentage of the sheets was perforated.

When further sorting the stamps that I found, a number of things stand out:



Figure 3:
Suspicious
perforations

--- A first distinction can be made between perforated stamps on the one hand and pierced stamps on the other². The first group is smaller than the last (38 and 62% in my stock).

--- With the group of perforated stamps you can initially determine which stamps have a perforation that also occurs in officially perforated stamps. You can determine this best with the guide that is on the inside cover of the POFIS catalog and on which the perforations used are exactly depicted. Roughly in 40% of the cases you will then find that the private perforation corresponds to the official $11\frac{1}{2}$ perforation and that it was therefore apparently made at the Graphic Union. A very small number of stamps has one of the other official line perforations ($13\frac{1}{4}$ or $10\frac{1}{2}$)³.

--- The rest of the group of perforated stamps is therefore apparently perforated elsewhere. That group deserves further study. First of all you have to look at which perforation number belongs to each of the sides. But in many cases (more than half of this residual group) you will notice something else: the perforation actually looks strange, for example the stamp is not torn off along the perforation (which is visible by the paper fibers showing on the teeth), but those teeth have a straight cutting edge. This may mean that the stamps are cut off along the perforation (why ??) or that the perforation holes are made with a punch along the edge of an Imperforate stamp to give it a higher value for collectors. The perforation is often very close to the stamp image on all four sides. You also see stamps where the perforation holes are so close together that no tooth remains between them; the sheet would already have fallen apart at the perforation. I call those cases "suspicious" and keep those stamps separate.

--- The group that then remains shows a particularly large variety of perforation numbers, which you can only separate with an accurate perforation gauge, such as, for example, the Stanley Gibbons perforation gauge which makes it possible to accurately determine the perforation number to 0.1 point.

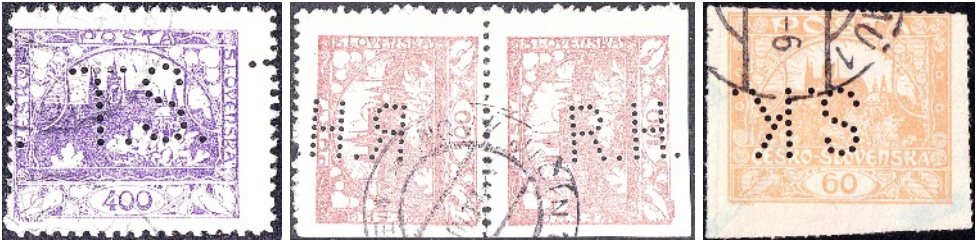


Figure 4: Stamps with private perforations and perfin TS, RH, and SK⁴

--- A closer study of the pierced (or rouletted) stamps group shows that the variety in methods of piercing stamp sheets is much greater. The number of different versions is too large to describe systematically, other than that neatly rectangular piercing lines (which indicates machine processing) can be distinguished from stamps with sloping sides and irregular patterns (which indicates handicraft on a small scale).

--- Further sorting of the stamps by office of use is also enlightening. Of course it is not possible to determine that office in all cases, but with some searching in the lists with office names you can be successful in many cases.

--- In the table below I indicate from which offices I have encountered a relatively large number of stamps. Then you also see that stamps of different denominations are provided with a private perforation at those offices.

<u>Town</u>	<u>N stamps</u>	<u>N denominations</u>
<u>Perforation 11½</u>		
Liberec/Reichenberg 1	22	8
Praha 1	20	8
<u>Other perforation</u>		
Tetschen a/d Elbe (perf. 15.3)	35	11
<u>Pierced/rouletted</u>		
Praha 17	97	15
Praha 1	30	10
Liberec/Reichenberg 2	27	10
Aussig/Ustí nad Labem 1	19	8
Roudnice	17	10
Železný Brod	17	7

--- A nice find is a number of stamps with firm perforation (perfin) that also have a private perforation. They might well originate from companies that have had private perforations made for their mail room. Two companies have the 11½ perforation, which indicates that the Graphic Union also provided services for private companies and for the third, the piercing is a typical example of local domestic work with a sewing machine (or another device).

I would like to hear your experiences with private perforations: do your experiences match those of mine or do you have additions or corrections? Please let me know (johan7h@gmail.com)!

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- Bayer, Richard, *Soukromé zoubkování známek emise Hradčany*, Filatelie, 1988, p.752
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FOOTNOTES:

¹ Unless otherwise stated, “private perforation” means: showing not officially issued perforation or with any form of piercing/roulette.

² The difference is in the technique: with perforation, small circles are punched out of the paper, resulting in clear round holes; when piercing, only holes are pierced or lines are cut, so no paper is removed from the sheet.

³ Stamps with these perforations which were also officially used in other denominations are not fundamentally different from the so-called ‘Minister perforations’, which can be found in the catalogue and which represent stamps with those perforations which were never officially issued, but which came on the market via the Prague philatelic club. I regard unused copies as “ministerial perforations” and used copies as “privately perforated” stamps.

⁴ TS: Tuchhaus Silesia Geiringer & Reitler, Krnov/Jägerndorf; RH: Rudolf Hosch & Schleif, printers in Nový Jičín; SK: Schlenker & Kienzle, clockmakers in Chomutov/Komutau.