

Tables of French Postal Rates 1849 to 2011 (Fourth Edition)

by Derek Richardson, edited by Maurice Tyler and published by the France & Colonies Philatelic Society of Great Britain, 2011; ISBN 0 9519601 7 2; A5; iv + 100 pages; perfect bound with card cover; obtainable from the Society's Publications Officer by e-mail to stock@fcps.org.uk or in writing to Mr R N Broadhurst, PO Box 448, Teddington TW11 1AZ. Price £10 (members) £12 (non-members) postage extra.

Many members will be familiar with Derek's celebrated and highly useful book on French postal rates which first appeared nearly twenty years ago in 1992. The first edition contained only 54 pages of tables - this, the fourth edition, is almost twice the size. The publication has been brought totally up to date and, as the author explains in his preamble, since the third edition published in 2006 five general postal tariff changes have come into force in France. For those not familiar with the publication, the book covers the postal rates, charges and fees from 1849 (national) and from 1876 (international) to the present day.

The first part of the book on National Rates covers Letters, Printed matter, Newspapers and periodicals, Local letters (1849-1878), Postcards, Postage due on delivery, Simple Tax, Election literature, Economy services, Registration and insurance, Poste restante, Bulk mailings and pre-cancellation, Advice of delivery, Visiting cards, Express fee and tax d'urgence, Invoices and business papers, Late collection service, Stamp ordering fee, Charges for holding and forwarding mail, Postal services for the blind (céco-grammes), Debt collection (recouvrements), COD (contre-remboursements), Mandats and Postal Orders, Urgent postal packets and COLISSIMO, Domestic airmail supplements, French overseas destinations - "DOM-TOM", Paris pneumatic post and finally Merchants' samples (échantillons).

The second part of the book deals with the International Rates and covers Letters and postcards (including documents and merchandise from 2009), Registration and insurance, Printed matter, Samples and Business papers, Airmail supplements, Aerogrammes, Small packets and postal packets, Express, Advice of Delivery fees, Postage due on underfranked items from abroad, Cécogrammes, Newspapers and finally Books, Brochures, Printed Maps and Music Scores.

The rates are tabulated in an easily accessible fashion and are accompanied by background information, explanatory notes, links to other publications and aids to calculation. The latter are particularly useful for the understanding of, for example, the Surface Area Printed Matter Rates from 1849 to 1856 or the Postage Due tax fraction system applied to underfranked mail from abroad. Strange neologisms such as ECOPLI, COLIECO and POSTIMPACT are explained and a useful family tree is included showing the evolution of the "rapid" and "economy" internal postal services.

This is a book which is invaluable to general and specialist collectors alike with every section explained with absolute thoroughness and clarity. Those who are familiar with the title will note several changes, improvements and additions. One striking alteration is the categorisation of the rates as National and International thus replacing the former nomenclature of Internal and Foreign (which superseded earlier terms such as Domestic or Inland and Overseas).

This change is in keeping with the terminology employed by La Poste. Two sections which appeared in previous editions have disappeared, namely the Postal Stationery prices and the International Colis Postaux service of 2005. These have been dropped not only because of their limited philatelic value and interest but also to make way for the considerable amount of extra information this edition has had to absorb as a result of the rate increases over the past five years. The sections on Registration Fees and Insurance Fees have now been tabulated on separate pages and the Advice of Delivery fees reorganised to make easier reading.

Similarly the layout of the Express Fees has been improved and like so many sections it contains nuggets of useful information such as when the Exprès service was renamed Distribution par Porteur Spécial. The largest number of changes though can be found in the two sections devoted to Domestic Airmail Supplements and International Airmail Supplements. The Domestic Airmail section has been completely revised and includes details of the short-lived 1925 'extra tax' which for many years confounded collectors when attempting to reconcile the franking of covers, especially those to the Colonies. Similarly, the International Airmail section has been entirely re-written in the light of recent studies and has increased from 15 to 19 pages including a very helpful foreign and country name index to facilitate navigation around the tables.

Finally, the gremlin in the publishing programme that refused to accept the euro sign on some pages of the previous edition has now been eliminated. The abbreviation NF and E appear solely alongside the date of the currency change thereby keeping the tables uncluttered. This is an essential publication for every collector who has covers in his or her collection and this means the general collector as well as the specialist postal historian.

Whether you are interested only in the basic letter and postcard rates or require an in-depth analysis of the pre-cancellation rates and airmail fees, this book is for you. **And do not fall into the trap of believing that you do not need it because you already own a copy of an earlier edition.** There is so much revised and new material that it would be a folly not to have the latest edition. As a result you may find it necessary to rewrite a few of your pages in the light of new discoveries made by the author, but it is a small price to pay for being secure in the knowledge that your collection will now be accurate and up to date.

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