

Great Britain: Decimal Registered Air Mail Letter Rates to Zone B 1971 February 15th to 1991 September 15th

Time Period: The period covered by the exhibit starts with the introduction of decimal currency on 1971 February 15th, and ends on 1991 September 15th, the day before Air Mail Zones A and B was formally amalgamated into a new Zone 1. This time period covers 17 sets of rates for registered air mail letters to Zone B. One or two examples from each of the seventeen sets of rates are shown chronologically by rate period in one frame. The rate chart, from page 2 of the exhibit, shows which rates are included in the exhibit by underlining.

Air Mail Letter: “Air mail letters” in the parlance of the British *Post Office Guide* exclude air letter forms (initially called “aerogrammes”, later “aerograms”), air mail printed paper and air mail small packets. The content of the exhibit is restricted to Registered Air Mail Letters to Zone B, excluding any extra services.

Zone B: Between 1947 January 17th and 1991 September 15th, the (British) General Post Office used three zones for air mail rates to destinations outside the United Kingdom and Europe: Zone A (North Africa, and the Middle East); Zone B is described in summary (in stamp booklets, for example) as including the Americas, Africa (excl. N. Africa), India and SE Asia; and Zone C including the Far East and Australasia. Hong Kong was included in Zone B, due its shipping and trade ties to Great Britain, despite its location close to China, which is certainly “Far East” and in Zone C. One example to Hong Kong is shown. Other destinations, apart from the expected Canada and USA, are: Bangladesh, Pakistan, Trinidad, Uruguay, the Falkland Islands and South Africa. These destinations are mentioned in bold italic in the rate descriptions.

Stationery: “Registered Letter” postal stationery, up-rated for air mail rates with stamps, have been deliberately included as well as non-stationery covers with stamps. The “Overseas Registered Letter” shown on page three is an example of the only separate “Overseas Registered Letter” stationery during the time covered by the exhibit. By the end of the period covered by this exhibit, Non-Value Indicated registered envelopes were available. These envelopes prepaid the minimum first class inland postage and minimum registration. Extra was needed to pay for Zone B air mail rates. The applicable inland rates are described to demonstrate that the make-up postage pays a correct rate.

Challenges: A number of the rate periods are quite short. The first one, from 1971 February 15th to 1971 June 30th, was shortened by a postal strike that lasted until mid-March, leaving only 3½ months from which to find this rate. The overseas registered rate in this period was 15 p, whereas the inland rate was 20 p. The correctly-rated covers for that period were the last rate period found for this exhibit. Many examples can be seen of 20p paid for overseas registration. Other short rate periods are from 1975 March 17th to 1975 September 28th, and from 1979 August 20th to 1980 February 4th. Finding registered usage to more obscure destinations is also a challenge. A further challenge for a one-frame exhibit is to find smaller covers that fit in the space available.

Opening and Closing Items: One pre-decimal cover is provided as an introduction to show that these rates were unchanged at decimalization. With decimalization, £1 of 20 shillings, of 12 pence (d) each, became 100 new pence (p). Thus, one shilling became 5p. The 1s 6d (1/6) air mail letter rate to Zone B per ½ ounce became 7½p. The registration fee of 3 s became 15p.

The exhibit closes with an inside booklet cover that demonstrates the end of Zone B with the amalgamation of Zone A and Zone B into Zone 1.

References:

GPO, *Post Office Guides* (British), various editions.

Michael Furfie, *British Civilian Postage Rates of the 20th Century*, 1st Edition, 2000 May. (Most Accurate)

Robert Johnson & Gordon Peet, *British Postal Rates 1937 to 2000 Dulac, Wilding and Machin Issues*, May 2000.