



Avis de Reception

Various interpretations of Avis de Reception have appeared in our Postal Rates tables which may have led to some confusion. David Handelman, who specialises in this service, has kindly written the following.

AR

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AR stands for the UPU term, *avis de réception*, a postal service available on registered and (sometimes) on insured mail. In Canada, it is often referred to as *acknowledgment of receipt* [*acknowledgment* is often spelled with an e after the g; this varies temporally and geographically], in UK, Australia, NZ, and some others, the term is *advice of delivery* (occasionally, *advice of receipt*), in the Indian subcontinent, *acknowledgment due* is used, and in some Caribbean countries, *return receipt* is sometimes used.

Except for India (among countries of the Commonwealth & Empire), *AR* is a fairly obscure service, and it is difficult to find examples, especially within a narrow time frame.

When a registered (or less frequently, an insured) item is mailed with *AR*, a card or form is attached to it, with the address of the sender; the card or form is to be signed by the recipient (or the local postmaster) and sent back to the sender at no additional charge. This provides evidence that the item was duly

received, and this service was frequently used by members of the legal profession. This summary only gives a rough outline—for example, until about 1921 or 1922, the form was returned to the post office of origin, for subsequent delivery to the sender; there are also additional services, such as after-the-fact (or subsequent or delayed) AR service, about which more will be said.

History

Austria began its *Retour Recepisse* (no accents) service, available for a fee, on registered and insured matter in 1806, and other countries followed suit, e.g., German states (ca 1830) under the name *Rückschein*, Denmark (ca 1840) *Modtagelsesbevis*, France (1859) *avis de réception*, Italy (1861) *ricevuta di ritorno*, US (1863) *return receipt*. Initially, only domestic services were offered, but bilateral and multilateral postal treaties allowed international AR service to take place. In 1875, the UPU required the initial members to offer AR service on registered letters among themselves, and in 1879, this was modified to require its availability among all members of the UPU as they joined.

Initially, a form was prepared when the item was mailed (except during the Treaty of Vienna period), and mailed either attached to or separately, and either as a folded letter sheet or to be returned under cover. The AR fee (if one applied—a few countries did not charge for the service) could be paid either on the form or on the cover—this was up to the individual postal entity, and also varied in time. In late 1921–1922, the forms were mostly replaced by AR cards, in the form of post cards. Some countries continued to use forms (e.g., UK domestically, some South American countries) well into the 1960s.

One can also expect forms to be in use well after 1922 at poorly supplied offices, for example, colonial outposts, where they used everything they had, and forms could linger for decades. There are some examples of former French colonies using AR forms in the 1950s that were printed in 1920, and we can expect the same thing to happen with British colonies.

Rates

For most British colonies, dominions, and whatever (and many other entities), between the world wars, the AR fee (on international mail) equalled the registration fee (for this reason, AR is sometimes referred

to as *double registration*, which is the translation of the Greek and Chinese terms for AR). These can be found in contemporary US postal guides, for which the incoming rates are listed in order to calculate postage due(!). However, if possible, the listed rates should be checked against other sources, as the postal guides tend to be out of date by at least six months. Nonetheless, they provide a valuable source for general trends.

From the 1931 US postal guide, we find that ar = registration fee (internationally) for the following. [The default rate is 25 Swiss centimes (ctm), otherwise the amount indicated, rounded to the nearest 5 ctm.]

Antigua (30 ctm), Ascension, Australia, Bermuda (30 ctm), Canada (35 ctm), Cyprus (35 ctm), Dominica (30 ctm), Falkland Islands (30 ctm), Fiji, Gambia, Gilbert & Ellice, Gibraltar (35 ctm), Gold Coast & Togo (30 ctm), Grenada & Grenadines (30 ctm), Hong Kong, India, Jamaica (20 ctm), Kenya, Malta (30 ctm), Mauritius (35 ctm), Montserrat (30 ctm), BPO Tangiers (30 ctm), Nevis & Anguilla (30 ctm), Newfoundland, Southern Nigeria (30 ctm), Nyasaland (35 ctm), Papua & New Guinea (20 ctm), Palestine, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands & Nauru, British Somaliland, St Christopher & St Kitts (30 ctm), St Helena, St Lucia (30 ctm), St Vincent (30 ctm), Tanganyika (30 ctm), Trinidad & Tobago (30 ctm), Uganda, UK (30 ctm), British Virgin Islands, and Zanzibar.

The following four all have AR fee exceeding the registration fee.

Bahamas, Barbados, Cayman Islands, Turks Island (R = 2d, AR = 2.5d = 25ctm, in all these cases)

The following have AR fee less than the registration fee.

Brunei (R = 15¢ = 25ctm, AR = 12¢), British Guiana (R = 4¢, AR = 5¢ = 25ctm), Malay States—Federated and non-federated, also including Sarawak, Straits Settlements, & Labuan (R = 15¢, AR = 12¢ = 25ctm), New Zealand including Western Samoa and Cook Islands (R = 3d = 25ctm, AR = 2.5d), Northern Rhodesia (R = 4d, AR = 2.5d = 25ctm), Southern Rhodesia (R = 4d, AR = 3d = 30 ctm), Tonga (R = 3d = 20 ctm, AR = 2.5d), South Africa including all affiliated states (R = 4d = 40 ctm, AR = 3d).

I would have compiled this from a postal guide dated closer to 1935 if I had had one. A few places did change their rates by 1935 (e.g., Bahamas raised its registration fee to 3d, and Hong Kong lowered its

AR fee to half the registration fee, putting both of those in different lists) although most did not. Finding AR material from some of those places is not easy.

Until 1892 and after 1899, payment of the AR fee could be on the AR form/card, or on the registered letter, and typically this was a fixed policy of the administration, that is, each entity's policy was consistent. For example, all the British colonial jurisdictions in the Indian subcontinent (and including Malaya and all the neighbouring states, as well as Ceylon and Burma) required the AR fee be paid on the registered cover, not the card. On the other hand, practically everyone else in the Commonwealth and Empire required the AR fee to be paid on the card, although I note Cyprus is an exception.

AR covers

Figure 1 shows a typical ar cover from the Federated Malaya States. Despite dealers' self-serving pleadings, this is a quite common source of AR material, particularly addressed to south India. As is usual for British colonies near and in the Indian subcontinent, the AR fee was paid on the cover.



Figure 1 . Malaya (States) to Southern India (1935). Part of the very extensive money lender correspondence. Postage of 39c, made up of 15c registration and 12c for each of AR (paid on cover) and UPU rates.

Figure 2 illustrates an ar cover from India, with the general use ar handstamp.



Figure 2. India-German (1936) With typical Indian AR handstamp. The typescript and manuscript *AD* refer to *acknowledgment due*, an Indian expression. Postage made up of 3.5 Annas UPU rate and 3Annas for each of registration and AR (here paid on the cover).

Figure 3 shows an ar cover from Palestine. In this case, the AR fee was paid on the card, not the cover. Formula envelopes with AR seem to be very difficult to find. A Canadian AR cover to Yugoslavia appears in Figure 4.

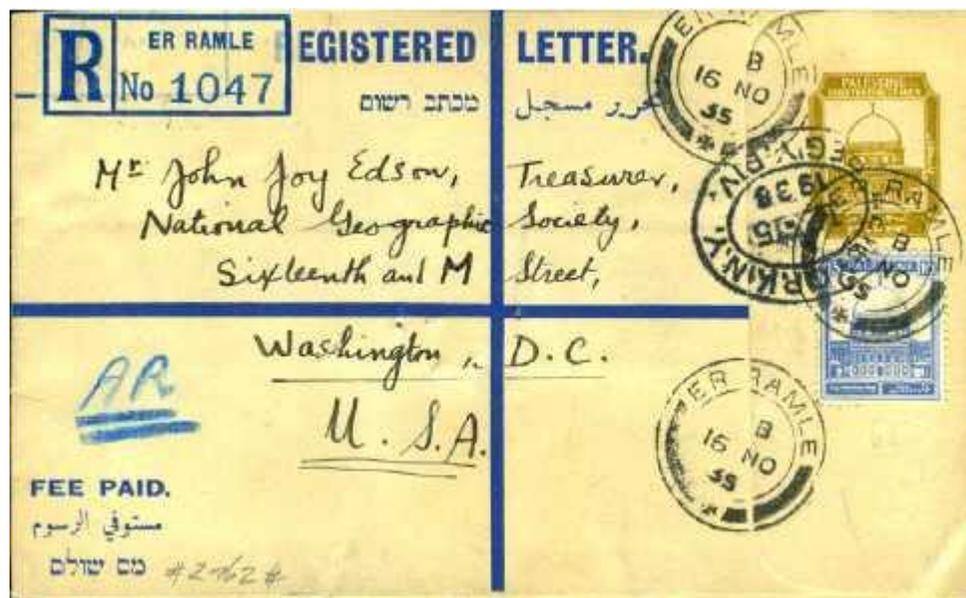


Figure 3. Palestine-US (1935). With ms AR. Formula registered envelopes with AR seem to be more difficult to find. Postage made up of 15mil UPU rate and 13mil registration fee; the 13mil AR fee would have been applied to the accompanying AR card.



Figure 4. CanadaJugoslavia (1938). With typical Canadian handstamp AR in circle. Forwarded within Jugoslavia. Postage made up of 10 registration fee and 5upu rate; the 10ar fee would have been applied to the accompanying ar card.

Figure 5 illustrates a larger size formula registration envelope sent from Barbados to Canada in 1936. AR material from Barbados and other British possessions in the Caribbean and South America is generally quite difficult to find.

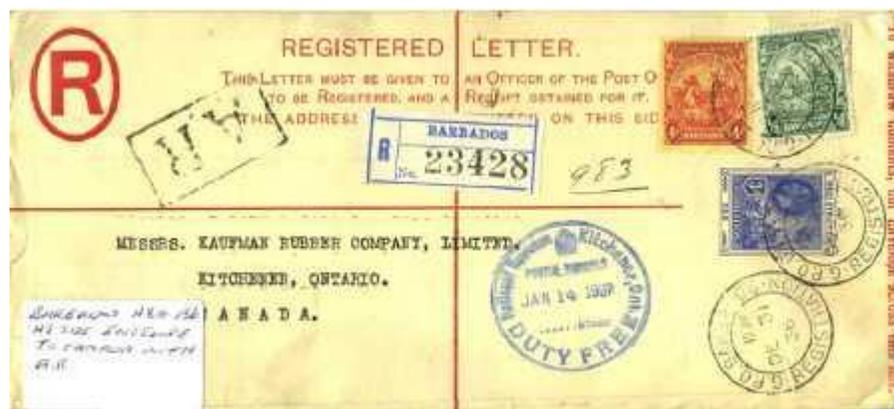


Figure 5. Barbados to Canada (1937). Boxed AR; Barbados is a dif.cult origin for ar, especially on a formula envelope. Postage made up of quadruple Empire rate (first ounce 1.5d, remainder at 1d each) and 3d registration; the AR fee would have been applied to the accompanying AR card. Unusually clear strike of Canadian national revenue customs stamp, applied at a somewhat unusual place, Kitchener.

AR cards

The first international AR card illustrated here, Figure 6, Federated Malay States, is typical of all the AR cards from British possessions in or near the Indian subcontinent: somewhat larger than regular postcards, AR fee paid on the cover, not the card, and shades of pink varying to dark maroon. By the late 1940s, the size had shrunk and the colours had become less intense.



Figure 6. Malayan AR card, to south India (1936). Large pink card (some in this region tend to purple and maroon) from Ipoh. AR fee would have been paid on the registered cover.

Figure 7 shows a UK AR card for a registered letter to India; for some reason, Britain continued to use yellowish cards (leftovers from the 1920s) as well as pink ones. British AR material is surprisingly scarce. This particular card refers to extra indemnity (valeur d'clare), which with AR is an unusual combination. The next card, Figure 8, is from Cyprus, addressed to the commander of a ship, the HMS Keith. Figure 9 shows an AR card from Canada, returned from Poland.

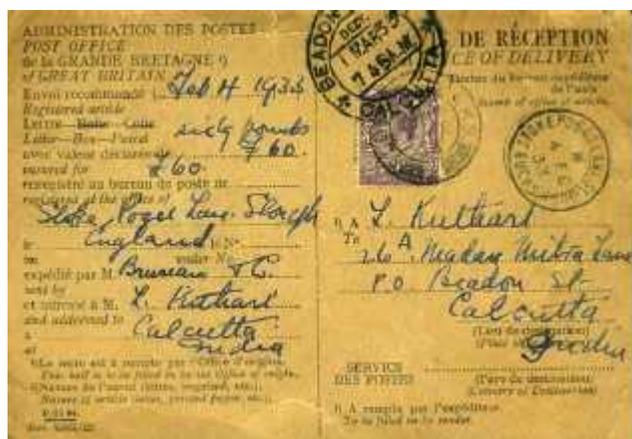


Figure 7. UK AR card returned from India (1933). Yellowed card with 3d AR fee paid by stamp. The registered letter was also sent with extra indemnity (up to £60), which would have been paid as part of the registration fee on the cover.



Figure 8. AR card, Cyprus to CO of HMS Keith (1936). Routed via Gibraltar on the return trip to Famagusta. AR fee would have been applied to the cover.



Figure 9. Canada-Poland AR card (1936). With AR fee (10c); recipient has made his x marks.

Domestic vs international

Some countries, such as Canada, treated AR identically whether it was domestic or international: this means the rates were the same and the same type of card was used. Others, such as UK, usually had different rates (domestic AR was typically a half-penny cheaper) and different forms (for the UK, domestic AR forms were folded letter sheets, whereas for international AR, cards were used). Australia had an AR card which was half English only (for domestic use) and half bilingual (English-French) for international use. I don't know of a useful way of finding domestic AR fees, other than examining individual countries postal guides.

Figure 10 presents both sides of the domestic UK AR form, a folded letter sheet (quite different from the standard card as shown in Figure 7 above). The extra spaces are for use as an enquiry form (on the fate of a registered letter, very similar to after-the-fact AR service, see below).

The next figure, 11, shows the sesquilingual Australian AR card, used domestically. The upper half is English and intended for domestic use, the bottom half is bilingual and intended for

international use.

Figure 12 shows a returned to sender domestic Canadian AR cover. The red typescript at left (placed by the sender) is a request for an elaboration of AR (restricted delivery) that was available in the US (for an extra fee) but not in Canada.

The image shows two pages of a 1933 UK AR form. The left page is the 'On His Majesty's Service' cover, featuring large 'AR' letters and a red typescript request for 'restricted delivery'. The right page is the 'Advice of Delivery of an INLAND REGISTERED Letter' form, filled out with recipient details: 'MR JOHN HOBSON, OLD SHAMPOOT, BERTON MIDHURST, SUSSEX'. It includes a purple postage stamp, a date stamp '29/6/33', and a signature 'M. Hobson'.

Figure 10. Domestic UK AR form (1933). Folded letter sheet; for registered letter within Midhurst, Sussex. Delivered and signed for same day.



Figure 11. Australian AR card used domestically (1939). Top half in English only for domestic use, bottom half bilingual. AR fee of 3d paid on card.



Figure 12. Canadian domestic AR cover (1936). Fancy Winnipeg A.R. handstamp (in use for decades); eventually returned to sender. The typescript at left is a request for a service available in the US (personal delivery/restricted delivery), but not in Canada. Postage 10c registration and 3c domestic; AR fee would have been paid on the card.

Other services

After-the-fact (also known as *delayed* or *subsequent*) AR occurs when AR service is requested after the registered item has been mailed. In the 1930s, this service was typically charged double the normal AR fee. Aside from the higher fee, evidence of after-the-fact service is to be found in the dates on the AR card - the date of mailing the registered item should be earlier than the earliest postmark from the originating office.

Figure 13 illustrates an after-the-fact (erroneously marked DUPLICATE - see below) domestically used Canadian AR card. These are scarce (for Canada) but not rare, particularly

during the Depression when lawyers were sending notices to farmers on the drought-stricken Prairies.

Duplicate AR cards can arise when an attached AR card is lost or damaged, or the AR card has not been returned to sender. In the former case, the postmaster at the destination office is required to prepare a card (of the destination country) and have it signed (if the registered item were delivered) and returned to the sender of the item. In at least one case, a duplicate card has been seen that was prepared by the country of origin, when the original card had not been returned. Duplicate cards are also rare.

Figure 14 shows a really rare pair of AR cards. The first card, with its 20c postage (hence after-the-fact) was mailed in 1935 but refers to a registered letter mailed two and a half years earlier. It was returned unsigned. The second card, sent out about a month later, refers to the same registered letter, but without any fees. I regard this as a duplicate (the first having been unsigned), as no additional fee was charged. It too was returned unsigned. This is the only example I've seen of this combination.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT
ADMINISTRATION DES POSTES
CANADA

This slide to be filled in by office of origin
Le volet est à remplir par le bureau d'origine

REGISTERED ARTICLE
Envoi recommandé

ENTERED AT THE OFFICE OF
Enregistré au bureau de poste de
Gravelbourg 818

DATE Oct 31 1935 LINDSAY No. 818

ADDRESSED TO
Address à
Archibald H.
Sinclair, Moose Jaw
Sask.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
AVIS

To be filled in
À remplir par
Gravel & Gurniton,
Barristers,
Gravelbourg, Sask.

STREET AND NUMBER
Rue et numéro

PLACE OF DESTINATION
Lieu de destination

IN PRINTED CHARACTERS
En gros caractères

CANADA



WAS ONLY DELIVERED ON THE
A été déposé le 12

Date stamp of office of destination
Timbre de bureau destination

SIGNATURE OF THE ADDRESSEE
Signature du destinataire

OF ADDRESSEE'S REPRESENTATIVE
Du représentant du destinataire

OF THE POSTMASTER OF THE
De l'agent du bureau de destination

Duplicate

20.00 Paid, 20 Cents (2011)-1-11-34

CERTIFICATE OF P. O. REGISTRATION No. 818 DATE STAMP

FEE 0.00 (if more than 10c)

Archibald H. Sinclair
Moose Jaw
Sask
A.P.M.




Figure 13. Domestic Canada after-the-fact (delayed) AR (1935). With 20c (ordinary AR fee was 10c). Registered item mailed 31 October 1935, and delivered on 2 November; this card sent out 15 June 1936, and signed the next day in Moose Jaw. The sender, a legal firm, has erroneously typed in DUPLICATE, but a duplicate card would only result when the original was lost or damaged and there would have been no additional fee.



Figure 14. Domestic Canada after-the-fact (delayed) AR with duplicate (1935). With 20c payment on the first one. Both cards refer to the same registered item mailed in 1932! The first card is an after-the-fact card with proper payment, sent out 29 July 1935; it was returned unsigned; a month later, a second attempt was made this time at no additional charge (essentially as a duplicate), and again it was returned unsigned.

What else?

It is possible, but not likely, that a few entities in the Commonwealth were still using AR forms (rather than cards) in the mid-1930s. I haven't seen any. But more surprising is the UK AR covering envelope used to return a US AR form - in Figure 15. The US had switched to AR cards in 1922, but a few small offices may still have had AR forms (all US AR forms required

covering envelopes for their return). For more on UK covering envelopes, see [h2].

Some countries offered an extra service wherein the card could be returned by air, if the outgoing airmail fee were applied to the card when the registered item was sent. I doubt than any countries offered this as early as 1935, but it is something to look out for.

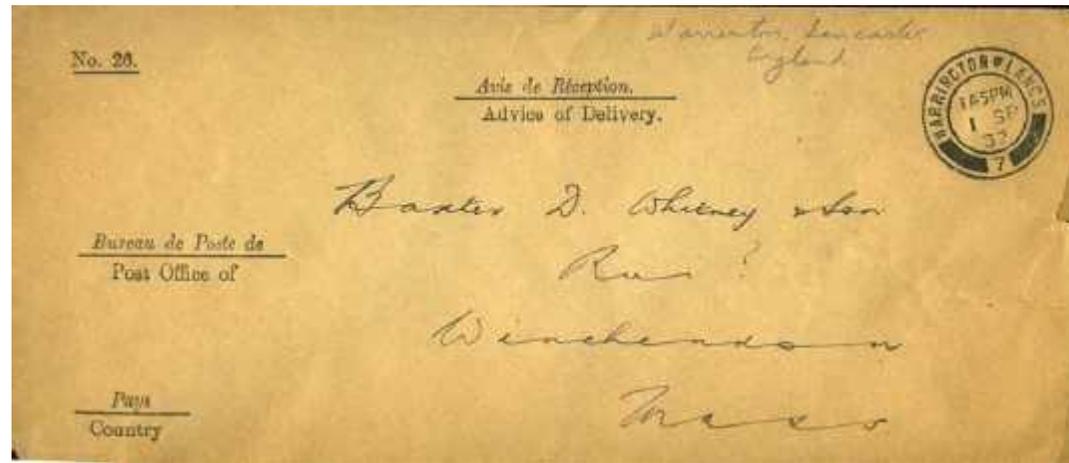


Figure 15. UK covering envelope for returning AR form to US (1932). Returned to Massachusetts.

References

[H] David Handelman, *AR - avis de rception*, Postal History Society of Canada, Ottawa, 2002.

[H2] *ibid*, *AR in the British Isles*, London Philatelist, June 2007.

Comments on this article are solicited. My e-mail address is rochelle2@sympatico.ca

A first draft of David's exhibit, "International AR in the British Empire", is downloadable from: <http://www.rfrajola.com/mercury/mercury.htm> and he invites comments.

DH - July 2009

This Hong Kong cover does not form part of David's article since he suspects it is philatelic. (It being overpaid by 3c).

It's appearance here is perhaps justified by the scarcity of Jubilee AR material.

The image comes by kind permission of the seller who recently sold it on eBay for £99.99.

A last minute acquisition is this similar Hong Kong O.H.M.S. example - this time with two strikes of the AR handstamp and addressed to Southern Rhodesia with Bulawayo backstamp for 19 Oct 1935.

AJA - July 2009

