Postal History Symposium  
*How Postal Treaties Influenced Post Office Reforms*  
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**1836 Anglo-French Postal Convention (AF1836)**  
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Abstract

Most mail destined for France from overseas countries was carried by British ships. Britain wanted to collect postage fees for providing the shipping, so before AF1836 insisted that the letters were addressed to a British agent who would pay the incoming postage, and then the postal fees onward to France.

Under AF1836 Britain and France agreed to collect postage fees on behalf of each other. It became much easier to send a letter addressed directly to France, as a British forwarding agent was no longer needed. A postal clerk at an exchange office wrote the accountancy amount due in the top right corner. The colour of ink, red or black, was important as it indicated which country owed the money. There were different accountancy rates if the letter was carried by private ship or by packet, and there were different rates for the different packet services.

At the end of a month there was a reckoning, where clerks would determine the net amount owed by one country to the other.

For any given letter the number of French postal units was based on weight, while the number of British postal units usually depended on the number of pieces of paper. This meant that the accountancy amount due for each letter had to be individually assessed.

In later conventions both countries were using weight-based postal units, so the accountancy due for a group of letters was determined by the bulk weight.

This convention was in effect until 1843. It governed all types of mail exchanged between France and Britain, not only mail from overseas via Britain to France. AF1836 affected many of the subsequent postal reforms, including the following.

- The top right corner was selected as the position for writing the accountancy amount, as this was one of the few places where both Britain and France did not write postal markings. In 1840 the same position was reserved for affixing adhesive stamps.
- On 5 December 1839 Britain changed its definition of a postal unit to be weight-based. Accountancy in future international postal conventions was based on the bulk weight of a group of letters.
- The internal postage of each country depended on the distance carried. For one type of mail, AF1836 allowed Britain to charge France a fixed accountancy rate independent of the distance. Under the British postal reforms of 5 December 1839 internal postage rates became independent of the distance.
Before AF1836, the postage on many types of international maritime mail had to be paid one segment at a time. With AF1836 the sender of a letter between Britain and France had three options: pay the postage in full; send it unpaid; or pay the postage to the frontier.