

# The Pneumatic Post of Paris

by

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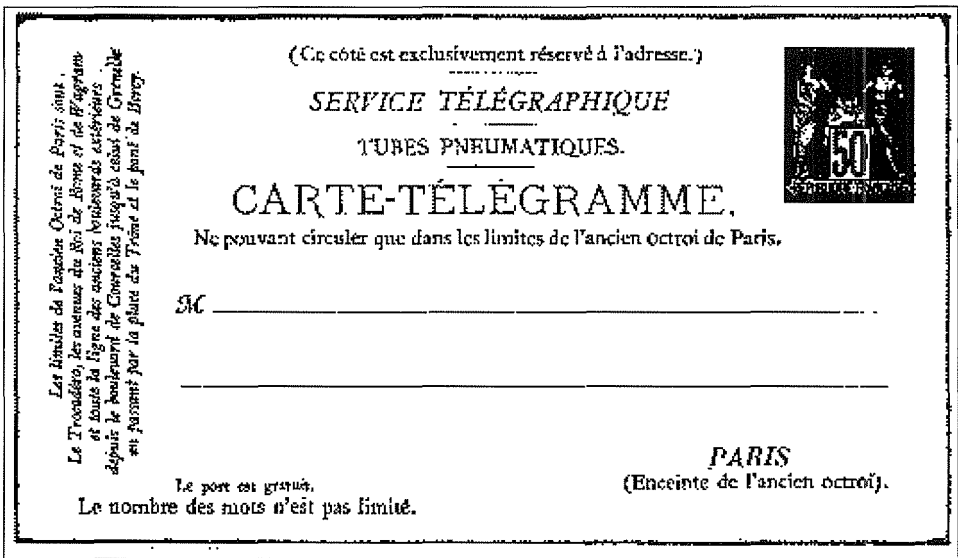
Philatelic Society of Great Britain.

*continued from April 2013 Edition*

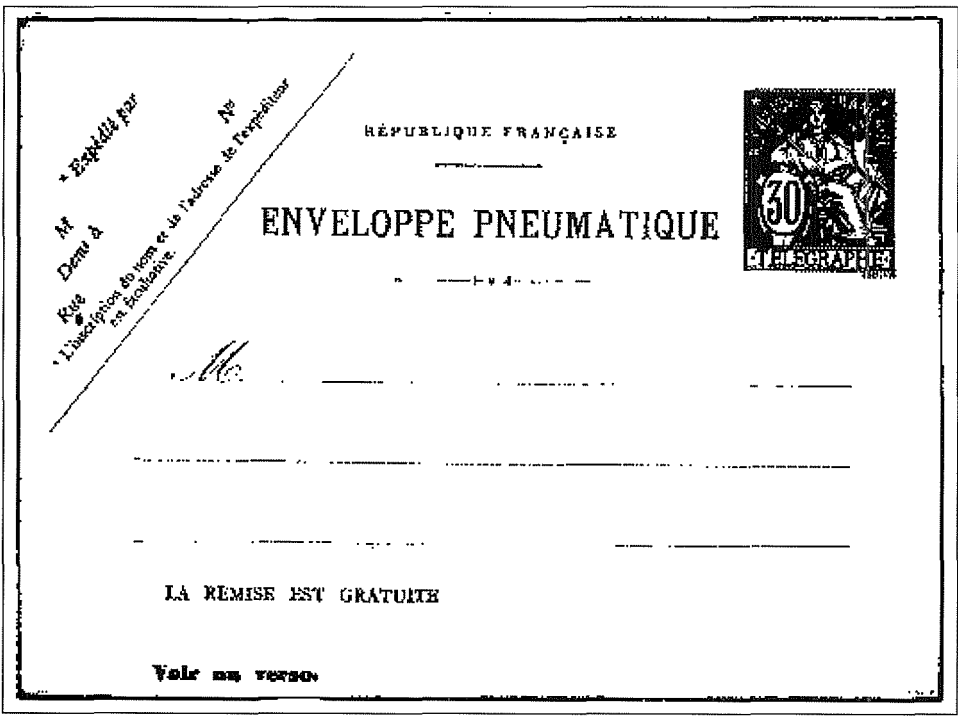
## The Postal Stationery of the Pneumatic Post

Until 1898 when private cards and envelopes were admitted, the use of the official postal stationery was obligatory for pneumatic mail. The decree which opened the tubes to the public was signed on 25 January 1879 by MacMahon in the last days of his presidency and came into effect on 1 May 1879. It prescribed two franked forms: one, open, at 50 centimes, and one, closed, at 75 centimes, in modern parlance respectively a card and a letter-card although the latter was on thin paper.

The intention had been that the imprinted stamp should be the *Chaplain* type which had been the runner-up in the 1875 competition for the design of a new adhesive postage stamp but the upheaval which followed the resignation of MacMahon reverberated throughout the French civil service and the dies of the *Chaplain* type were not available in time to have the imprinted postal stationery ready by 1 May. It was therefore decided to use temporarily the *Sage* design, which had won the competition and was on the current postage stamps, modified by the deletion of POSTES. Thus, on 1 May two forms were on sale bearing this modified *Sage* design: a cream card titled '*Carte Télégramme*' with a red imprinted stamp, and a blue letter-card titled '*Télégramme*' with a black imprinted stamp. These inscriptions reflect the insistence that the service was provided by the *Télégraphes* and that the missives were regarded as telegrams except that for a fixed fee there was no limit to the number of words that could be sent. The absence of a limit was quickly recognized by the public; a card dated 15 May 1879 includes the following passage 'We are taking advantage of the freedom which renders henceforth the postcard telegram no longer limited by sending you with our best wishes our friendly greetings' which, in French, took 27 words and, by itself, would have cost 75 centimes at the then current rate for telegrams. The letter-cards carried on the back a prohibition against the inclusion of any sheet of paper or of anything at all; if the weight exceeded that of the letter-card as sold it would be transferred to the post.

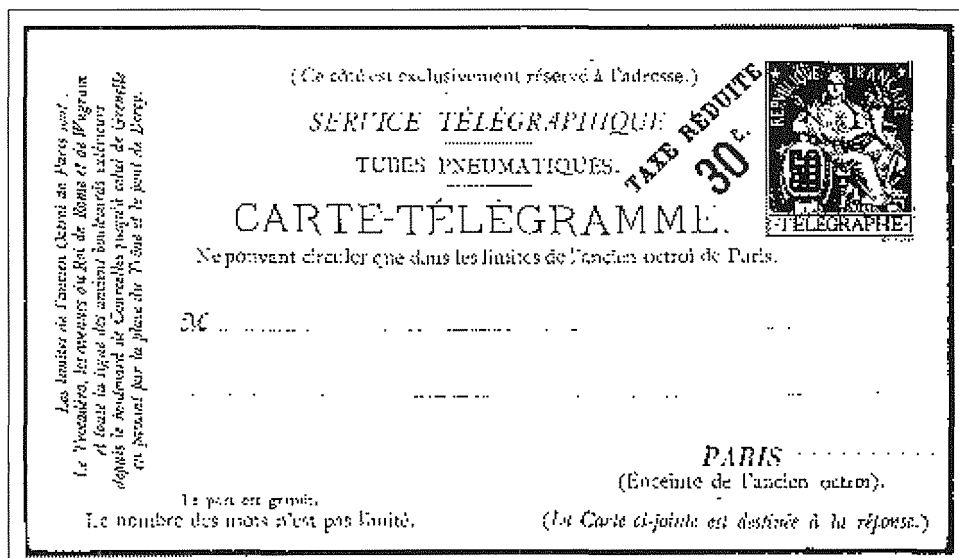


"Sage" design 50c card of 1879.

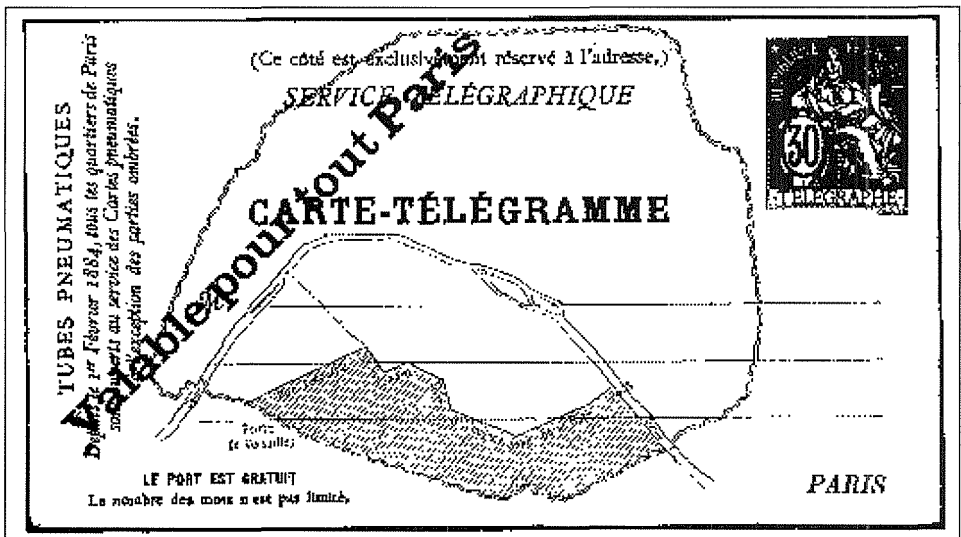


"Chaplain" design 30c envelope of 1902.

By the end of 1879 the *Chaplain* dies were completed and cards were put on sale with this design of imprinted stamp which embodied the work 'TELEGRAPHE'. The first card was a reply card, at 2 x 50 centimes, and was followed by a single card. The pneumatic post was an immediate and outstanding success, the volume of telegrams increasing by 80% and the revenue by 90%. So between 1 May 1879 and 30 April 1880. In accordance with a promise made in 1878 to try to bring down the price of a telegram the Minister of the *Postes et Télégraphes* made the proposal, approved by the President, Grévy, on 22 May 1880, to reduce the price of the pneumatic card to 30 centimes and that of the letter-card to 50 centimes. Existing stocks of the two 50 centimes cards, the reply card, and the letter-card were overprinted 'Taxe réduite' and the appropriate new value. At the end of the year new cards and a new letter-card appeared bearing the new rates. However, by this time, the decision had been taken to extend the tube network in the four stages that have been described above and three cards and three letter-cards (but not reply cards) were issued bearing coloured maps on the front to show the areas successively covered by these stages. On the cards the imprinted stamp was now in black. At the final stage, with the network covering the whole of Paris, the card and letter-card of the third stage, together with the reply card issued prior to the extensions being launched, were overprinted 'Valable pour tout Paris'. The cards of this series can claim to be the first regular coloured postcards of France.



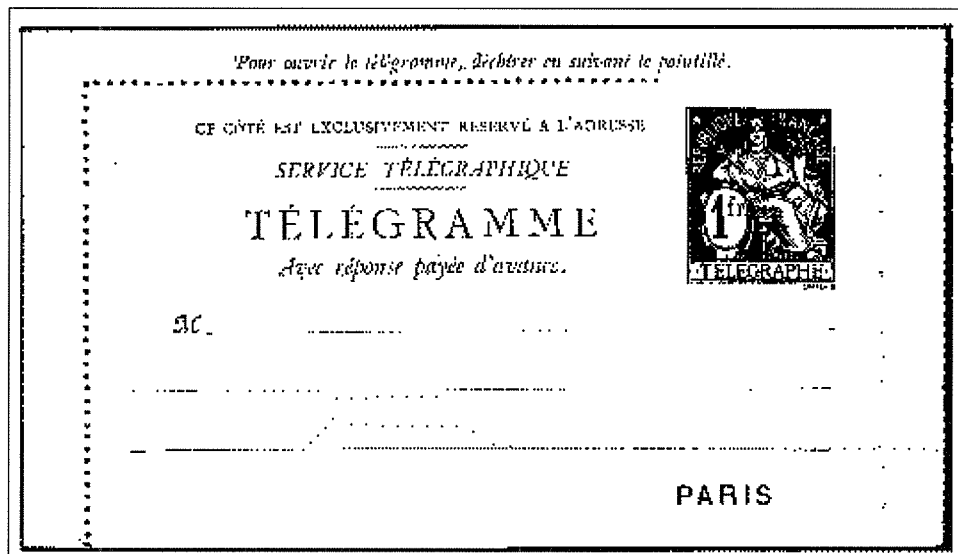
"Taxe réduite" 30c on 50c "Chaplain" card of 1880.



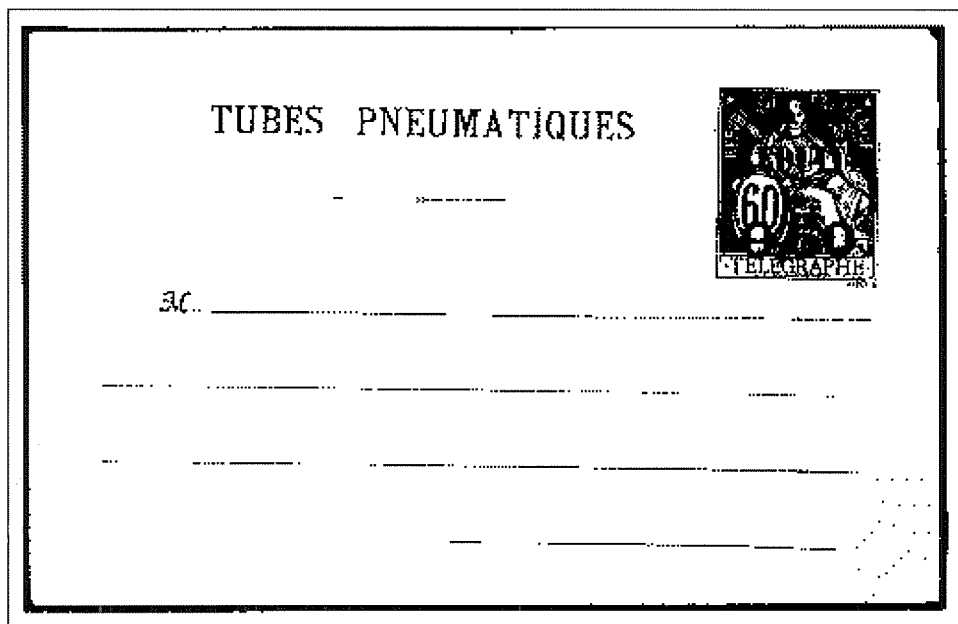
30c "Chaplain" card showing outline map of area and "Valable pour tout Paris" overprint of 1885.

New cards, single and reply, and a new letter-card were issued (in August 1885, February 1887, and August 1885 respectively) for use in this wider area and these remained unchanged until 1897 apart from minor variations such as, for the letter-cards, different patterns of perforation. During this period two new items of postal stationery appeared. In December 1884 a reply letter-card was put on sale at 1 franc; it consisted of an ordinary letter-card but printed in red with a black stamp (in two types: 1 fr and 1 F) with a small coupon joined, at first perforated and later imperforate, to be detached at the addressee's post office and exchanged for an ordinary letter-card which was delivered with the original letter-card. The second addition was an envelope, 115 x 75 mm, introduced in January 1885 and sold for 75 centimes which, within a weight limit of 7 grams, could contain anything that was not rigid. The envelope was violet with a pink stamp and was inscribed '*Tubes Pneumatiques*'. In November 1886, the price was reduced to 60 centimes and existing stocks were overprinted, the old value being cancelled by either 5 or 6 lines. The definitive envelope appeared in 1889 but in 1896 the price was again reduced, this time to 50 centimes, and again the existing stocks had to be overprinted. Coincident with this second reduction, the weight restriction was amended, envelopes up to 30 grams being thereafter accepted. Up to 7 grams the charge was 50 centimes, from 7 to 15 grams 1 franc, and from 15 to 30 grams 1.50 franc, postage stamps being added to make up the correct charge. These ranges of weights remained in force throughout all subsequent changes of tariff until 1971 when the basic rate applied up to 15 grams. The tariffs quoted thereafter are the

basic rates; in the higher weight ranges the charges were generally about twice and three times the basic rate.



1fr. reply-paid Telegram of 1885.



"Tubes Pneumatiques" envelope 50c on 60c "Taxe réduite" of 1896.

In 1896 it was decided to retitling the postal stationery of the pneumatic post, the 'carte telegraphed' becoming a 'carte pneumatique', the 'télégramme' a 'carte pneumatique fermée', and the envelope an 'enveloppe pneumatique'. New stationery bearing these inscriptions appeared from 1896 onwards, the cards and letter-cards retaining their previous formats but the envelopes were issued in two new different sizes: 145 x 85 mm and 125 x 95 mm. The same year saw the application of 'dates' to the postal stationery of the pneumatic service, other than envelopes which did not carry them until 1898; the first digit was the last digit of the year and was followed by two digits representing the week of the year. Thus: 703 denoted the 3rd week of 1897 (or 1907, or . . .) and identified the week in which the item was printed. The practice was discontinued for envelopes in 1900 but remained with letter-cards until 1939. From these dates it can be deduced that some items were sometimes reprinted at weekly intervals but at other times the periods between reprintings were considerable.

An alteration to the instructions on the back of the letter-cards was necessary after, in 1898, the use of privately printed cards, letter-cards and envelopes was permitted. The official but non-pneumatic postal stationery had, in fact, been admitted since 1886 with the difference in charge made up with postage stamps. Since additional but always flexible matter could now be enclosed in the official letter-cards, the three lines of the withdrawn prohibition were cancelled by six thin or thick bars. Reprinted letter-cards, single and reply, were issued in 1899.

After the admissibility of private stationery in 1898, many Parisian printers produced light weight envelopes inscribed 'Télégramme Pneumatique' or 'Service Pneumatique'. Their dimensions followed those of the official postal stationery which, after 1929, defined on the reverse the maximum as 148 x 115 mm. This was enlarged in 1942 to 155 x 125 mm and, again, in 1970, to 225 x 125 mm. Cards and envelopes exceeding these dimensions were transferred to the normal post. 1902 saw major changes: the card was abolished, the letter-card was now itself titled 'carte pneumatique' and its price and that of the envelope reduced to 30 centimes. The price of the reply letter-card became 60 centimes. Existing stocks were overprinted with the new charge either by hand or by machine and since they included both earlier and recent issues a large number of combinations resulted.

The definitive letter-cards and envelopes appeared in 1902, each introducing on its front top left hand corner a space for the sender, if he so wished, to insert his own name and address. The letter card was initially in grey-blue with a black stamp and then in a number of shades around light blue with a carmine stamp the same as the envelope. The reply letter-card was issued in 1903 and consisted of two parts joined vertically, with the reply portion a smaller version of the outward portion and enclosed within it. When the service was extended outside Paris in 1907 with

the aid of special messengers, information on the backs of the letter-cards, single and reply, was amended accordingly.

The stamps on these letter-cards and envelopes were those of the Chaplain design first introduced in 1880 and in continuous use until 1907 when it suffered the first of two displacements by the appearance of the Sower design in purple on the letter-cards and on the envelope. The Sower design surprisingly embodied the word 'POSTES' and the first issues with it continued the information about the service being available in 19 localities outside Paris, amended progressively to 20, 26, 42, and finally in 1916 to an indefinite number of localities, being most of the towns in the then department of the Seine together with three towns in Seine-et-Oise.

The war of 1914-18 saw a general increase of prices and by a decree of 30 December 1916 the charge of pneumatic mail went up on 1 January 1917 to 40 centimes.

However, it was not until 1919 that new stationery was issued and it brought back the *Chaplain* design, the stamp being in brick-red. During the two years before the new letter-cards and envelopes became available, the old ones continued in use with postage stamps affixed to cover the additional charge, a practice to be frequently repeated when there were later increases of tariff. It should be noted that, apart from those of 1 May 1879, the first day of issue of a pneu cannot be exactly identified with any certainty since no announcements are made either before or after a new one is put on sale. Thereafter, the charge rose steadily: to 60 centimes on 1 April 1920, to 75 centimes on 25 March 1924, to 1 franc on 16 July 1925, and to 1.50 franc on 1 May 1926. Letter-cards and envelopes in grey-blue with violet stamps were printed for each of these rates except that there was no envelope at 75 centimes. In 1929, when the 1.50 franc letter-card and envelope were reprinted, a new item of information was added on the reverse: cards were on sale with a reply coupon. No such card has ever been reported and is believed that the cards never existed even though the announcement continued to appear on all postal stationery for the following twenty years. The 1.50 franc rate was maintained until July 1937 but in 1930 the colour of the stamp was changed to brick-red and the letter-cards and envelopes tended to be in a much lighter shade than before. On 12 July 1937 the rate was raised to 2 francs and new letter-cards and envelopes were printed; this was to be the last envelope.

Since 1897 all the postal stationery had carried the inscription '*République Française*'. The Third Republic was replaced on 10 July 1940 by the French State and when the charge for pneumatic letter-cards was increased on 2 January 1942 to 3 francs the new letter-card was inscribed 'Etat Français' and the stamp was the *Bersier* type of Petain in which, around the Marshal's head, are the words 'POSTES FRANCAISES'. With the Liberation of 1944 there was a reversion to the *Chaplain* design still at 3 francs but the inscription '*République Française*' was not restored.

The *Chaplain* design, always accompanied by the word 'TELEGRAPHE' has been retained continuously since and so, between 1880 and 1974 it has been in use for 80 out of 94 years.

After 1944 the letter-card has kept much the same appearance in shades around grey-blue with the stamp in brick-red, but the charge has risen faster than ever before. It went up to 6 francs on 1 March 1945 and, before the new letter-card had been issued, to 10 francs on 1 January 1946. Consequently no 6 francs letter-card can be found used which does not bear postage stamps. The 10 francs rate had no definitive letter-card, nor did the next rate, 13.50 francs, applied from 1 April 1947. The rate went to 19 francs on 8 July 1947, 30 francs on 21 September 1948, 45 francs on 6 January 1949, 100 francs on 1 July 1957, and 125 francs on 1 January 1959. Furthermore, from 1 May 1947 there has been a charge for the letter-card itself. After the new franc was introduced in 1960 a letter-card at 1.25 franc was issued, raised to 1.50 franc on 1 June 1964 and to 1.60 franc on 15 January 1965. With the increase, on 3 January 1971, to 3 francs (to which had to be added a further 5 centimes for the letter-card itself), the rate from 1971 was the same as that in 1942-45 but in reality 100 times more because of the difference between the old and new francs. On 7 July 1973 there was a further increase to 3.90 francs.

*to be continued*

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