

Forgery - introduction

'An imitation of a stamp intended to deceive' - Philatelic Terms Illustrated. But the definition ought also to include fake overprints, cancellations, covers and bogus / fantasy material too. Then there is the overlap between 'replicas' and forgeries. "I'm simply making replicas for collectors unable to afford the real thing and it's not my fault if a re-seller then passes off my replica as the real thing".

Why study forgeries?

- To avoid buying forged material - though many forgeries are themselves valuable
- Forgeries are an interesting field of study in their own right - the history, the forgers themselves, forgery techniques - all enrich an understanding of philately

The forgers

An interesting range of characters, from genuine replica makers to out-and-out rogues. The cast includes:

- **Stanley Gibbons**, who ran off large numbers of Argentine stamps from illicitly purchased plates (but none from West Africa)
- **The Spiro brothers**, producers of 'replicas' by the million in the 1860s and 70s - including stamps from Sierra Leone
- **Francois Fournier**, a producer of 'dangerously good' replicas in the early 20th century, including Oil Rivers provisionals
- **Panelli / Oneglia** Oneglia operated from 1900 onwards: 'my imitations are copied from genuine postage stamps by the best artists with a rare perfection which is without equal'. Panelli was a bit later and more of a retailer of forgeries by other 'artists'
- **Jean de Sperati** master forger of the 1930s onwards, responsible for some of the most accurate forgeries out there
- **'Madame Joseph'** (if that was her name) specialised in forged or bogus postmarks to convert used stamps into more valuable 'used' copies
- **Robert George**, a more recent forger of postmarks, who traded as 'hootstein' on Ebay, and was jailed for forgery in 2000
- **The 419 boys**, a motley crew of mostly Nigerian fraudsters who produced vast quantities of photocopied stamps to send scam letters worldwide
- **Topnimarka**, a contemporary Russian company producing a large variety of well-printed bogus stamps.

Introduction continued

Motives for forgery

- To defraud the Post Office either via forged stamps or via forged cancellations suggesting acceptance of an under-paid item
- To defraud collectors:
 - via a completely forged cover or piece;
 - via a completely forged stamp;
 - via a forged overprint;
 - via a forged cancellation;
 - via a bogus (ie unauthorised) stamp;
- For fun (and / or profit): the fantasy stamps
- For profit: sort-of forgeries - 'official' (or not) provisionals: bisects, colour variants etc, especially on Oll Rivers and Niger Coast stamps
- And not least, CTO - a grey area... not forgeries because they are officially sanctioned but not a satisfying source of cancelled stamps.

Forgery methods

Forgery for gain has to strike a balance between the cost of making the forgery and the value of the product.

- **In pre-computer times** copying a design required skills in photography and printing, and often, skills in making dies, plates, cancellers etc. Forging convincing stamps required accurate design, right ink, correct paper, including watermark, and correct perforations. Very few forgeries got all these right. Of course, forging convincing overprints and / or cancels does not face the paper and perf problems.
- **The advent of the photocopier** made it easy to reproduce the design. However, output via inkjet printer leaves tell-tales, and the problems with paper, watermarks and perforations remain.
- **Scanning and image manipulation** scanners, suitable software and accurate printers make it easier to copy a genuine original (or a high resolution catalogue image) to produce a convincing facsimile: but paper and perf issues remain.

And thanks...

To all those who have published information on West African forgeries, from the 'Spud' papers of 1871, Earee's 'Album Weeds' (1906), the 1930s articles by Porter, and most particularly, Varro Tyler's articles and books: I have drawn heavily on his 'Philatelic Forgers' and 'Focus on Forgeries'. Cameo and fellow WASC members have been a steady source of information.

The Spiro brothers and Sierra Leone forgeries

The well-established Hamburg printing firm of Spiro Brothers used lithography in the production of a wide variety of printed items including visiting cards and labels for groceries and beer cans.

In 1864 they added facsimile postage stamps and over the next fifteen years expanded their range to include more than 400 different stamps covering a wide spread of countries, including Sierra Leone.

The deluge of the many millions of these counterfeit items eventually generated a backlash and the philatelic press launched a campaign in the philatelic journals (The Spud Papers) to aid their recognition. Spiro Brothers ceased manufacture of forgeries in 1880. Their products are still widely offered.

The Spiros forged the Sierra Leone sets issued in 1872-3 (SG7 to SG15), and the 1876 set (SG16 to 22), though because the forgeries were unwatermarked and perf 13 (instead of 12.5 or 14), and the colours were inexact, they don't correspond to a specific set.

Spiro forgeries exist of all 7 values: ½d, 1d, 1½d, 2d, 3d, 4d and 1s, 'mint' and 'used' with cancellations of their own devising, and issued as singles or sheets of 25. Here are some examples, (forgeries on the right of each pair).



Features of the forgery

- A general lack of definition
- Uneven perforations
- Lots of white on the forehead
- TA of POSTAGE joined at foot
- The corner ornaments are not all the same
- The chin is somewhat receding
- The cancel is a typical Spiro invention rather than the expected B31



NB Considerably cruder forgeries of these stamps also exist, made by others

A FOCUS ON FORGERY

Lagos - the packet fillers

Stamp collecting was a popular hobby in the nineteenth century, fuelling a thriving trade in stamps. Stanley Gibbons, established in 1856, was one of many dealerships. At the bottom end of the philatelic trade was (and still is) a demand for 'all world mixtures': packets of cheap stamps from a range of countries to help fill empty album pages. The supply of stamps did not always match demand, and forgery could fill the gap.

Packet filler stamps were aimed at inexperienced collectors, and less scrupulous dealers could get away with the inclusion of forgeries which bore only a superficial resemblance to the real thing, as the examples below show.

It is not known who made these particular forgeries, and differences in design details between examples suggest more than one 'author'. The value may be in sans-serif or serif font. Examples of the 1d exist in magenta, and there are probably other values too.



Stafford-Smith and Co

Henry Stafford Smith published 'The Illustrated Album and Catalogue of British, Colonial, and Foreign Postage Stamps' in around 1886, so was evidently a dealer of some note. The small envelope below contained '30 varieties. All warranted genuine', for a sum of 6d (around £3.10 in 2021). Let's hope the contents were more genuine than the stamp he chose to illustrate his wares!



Lagos: Oneglia, Panelli and Spiotti

Erasmus Oneglia was a prolific Italian forger and dealer in imitations based in Turin between c. 1890 and c. 1910. He was the first link in a long chain of Italian forgers: the young Sperati probably learned his craft with Oneglia.

Panelli and Spiotti, both forgers (or commissioners of forgeries) in their own rights, almost certainly obtained stock from Oneglia, and in the case of the Lagos forgeries, it's not possible to say for sure who actually made the original plates. I'll refer to them as OPS below.

The OPS forgeries are competent but unlikely to deceive if carefully compared to a genuine stamp. The forgeries imitate stamps from the first 3 Lagos QV sets (SG1 to SG29). Examples have been seen of 1d, 2d, 3d, 4d, 1s, 2/6d, 5s and 10s.

Printing was by lithography rather than typography but the detail of the plates used was convincing. Perforations are 13.5 - 14. The OPS forgeries include a faked watermark - Crown CC or Crown CA. The watermark was made either using grease or by imprinting the paper. Both methods were probably used.

As the examples below show, the inks used were a little less dense than on the genuine stamps, and the same is true for the 4d, 1s, 5s forgeries. However, the 2/6 forgery is orange instead of olive-black - a glaring difference.



Examples are arranged with the forgery on the right, genuine on the left. A detailed comparison of the 10s values follows on sheet 6.

Lagos: Oneglia, Panelli and Spiotti continued

The two images below are enlarged (X4) from sheet 5 to show differences between the OPS forgery on the right and the genuine stamp on the left.

- The forgery colour is just a bit too light
- The outline of the nose in the forgery is formed by a diagonal line. In the real stamp the outline is formed by the termination of the horizontal lines of the surround - there is no diagonal line.
- The Queen's mouth on the forgery gives her a slight smile absent from the genuine image
- The letters of LAGOS and POSTAGE are slightly distorted, particularly the letters S.
- The letters of the value are not quite right: the feet of the two Ls and the shape of the G in particular
- The perforations of the forgery are 14 on the right but 13 on the left. They should be 14 all round
- The two central images show the greasy look of the forgery's watermark (top stamp)



The stamp on the right is an oddity. The perforations and cancel give it away as a forgery, and it looks like an OPS production though not recorded for the stamp (SG33). The image to its right is a scan of the reverse. Was this a try-out using some waste paper the forger had to hand from other fakes?



Sperati - the best or the worst?

Jean de Sperati was responsible for some of the most dangerous forgeries around. The Gibbons catalogue section on Lagos rightly states 'we would warn collectors against clever forgeries of Nos 27 to 29 on genuinely watermarked paper'. Telling a genuine copy of Lagos SG29 (the 10/- value) from a Sperati forgery takes considerable expertise.

In 1943 French customs seized 18 stamps Sperati had mailed to a dealer in Portugal and arrested him for exporting capital in the form of rare stamps, worth 300,000 francs. Sperati protested that they were reproductions (the making of which was not illegal), but the prosecution produced several expert witnesses to swear that they were genuine - no reproduction could be that good. It took years for Sperati to escape the charges.

In 1953 Sperati, by then 70 years old, agreed to stop work and sell his stock, cliches and reference collections to the British Philatelic Association, for a sum which today would be over £100,000. Several books have been written since about Sperati and his forgeries, which included over 500 stamps from almost 100 countries.

In addition to the Lagos 2/6, 5/- and 10/- mentioned above, Sperati forged Southern Nigeria SG8 (QV 5/-), SG20 and SG32 (EVII £1 values).

What made Sperati's forgeries so convincing?

- He had considerable expertise in chemistry, paper and printing.
- He was meticulous in getting fine details right. Despite working in photo-lithography he retouched extensively to give an effective illusion of fine engraving work.
- He was very careful to get ink colours just right
- He developed ways to decolourise cheap stamps to provide blanks for printing which thus had genuine paper, perforations and watermarks.

Here are some examples, with the genuine stamp to the left of each pair. The stamp in the centre is a recent copy.



Sperati - p2

The three sections below show, first the genuine 10/-, second the Sperati copy, and third the modern scan/print copy. Comparison of the top two sections shows the quality of Sperati's work. Expertising relies upon tiny differences (described in the books on Sperati forgeries) and on very slight differences in appearance of the paper: the chemicals used to bleach out the original design coarsen the texture, and although Sperati then treated it to restore texture, the difference can usually be detected.

The magnification of the scan/print copy not only confirms the lack of density in solid colour but also shows the tiny spots of brown on white areas of the imitation which betray the use of an inkjet printer.



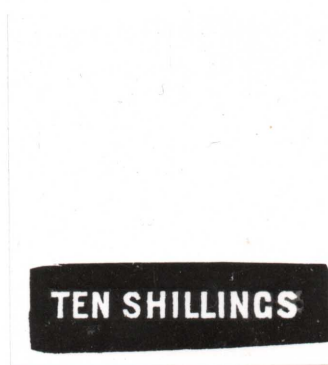
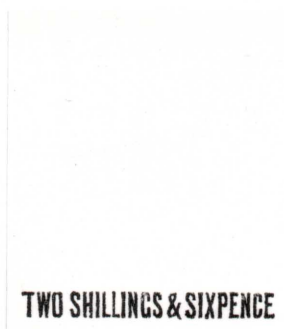
Sperati copy



Genuine copy



Scan/print copy



The enlarged photographs above were taken from Sperati's originals, showing that printing was a two-stage process. Fake cancels were added afterwards.

A FOCUS ON FORGERY

Sperati - p3

The photographs below, also taken from Sperati's originals, show that he was careful to ring the changes with the forged cancels he added to his copies, and to vary the weight of the printing to ensure copies were not absolutely identical.



Sperati forgeries of Southern Nigeria

The two proofs below show the only two Southern Nigeria stamps Sperati is definitely known to have forged, and no actual copies of the QV stamp have been reported. On the right the lower stamp is believed to be forged, the top one is genuine.



Although the colours of the genuine £1 do vary, the forgery is less crisp, and the solid colour of the frame lacks density

Other Lagos and Southern Nigeria forgeries

Four of top row of stamps are modern copies, and though crisp and superficially detailed, they lack the fine and continuous engraved lines needed for a convincing replica (especially on the queen's neck), as compared to the genuine stamp (second from the right). The colours are not right either. The far right copy is scan/inkjet, on the wrong paper, no watermark.



Sperati was not the only forger of high value Southern Nigeria stamps. Forgeries are known of the EVII 2/6d, 5/-, 10/- and £1, of quality varying from very good to poor. The £1 shown is at the poor end of the spectrum.



Changed value tablets

The half-penny value (SG54) of 1904/6 Lagos set has a very similar coloured frame and head to those of the high values. It proved possible to bleach out the green 'HALF PENNY' value tablet and replace it with, for example, a blue 'FIVE SHILLINGS'. However, as Ince and Sacher point out, the impression of 'HALF PENNY' is usually still evident. This forgery was worrying enough that "While Lagos stamps generally continued to be used by the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria until exhausted, the 1/2d value was withdrawn in 1908".

This example is from Sierra Leone, but gives the general idea. The original stamp is from another colony, and both value and country name have been bleached out prior to the rather crude addition of SIERRA LEONE and a new value.



Fantasy stamps and more imitations

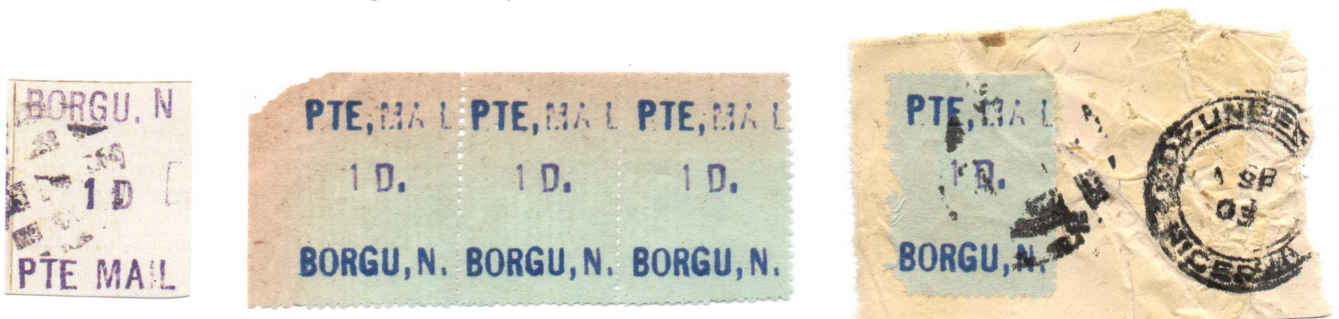
Most countries have suffered the attentions of those who produce stamps that were never sanctioned by the postal authorities. The activities of some Oil Rivers and Niger Coast post-masters in producing provisionals was questionable at the time, but not quite in the same category as the examples shown below. The first row shows fantasy overprints: were these produced to show off a bit of amateur printing, or to pad out all-world packets?



The three stamps below are more recent. The two on the left may just be the productions of someone showing off his IT skills. The designs come from the GV 1936 set, but the king's head is that used in the high values of the GVI set issued in 1938. The quality of the artwork does not effectively mimic the engraved designs on which the stamps are based, and the printing quality is pretty low, though the perforations must have taken a bit of trouble. The Sierra Leone stamp on the right is based on a genuine example of SG37 but the REVENUE has been added more recently. Gibbons do not mention the existence of that overprint...



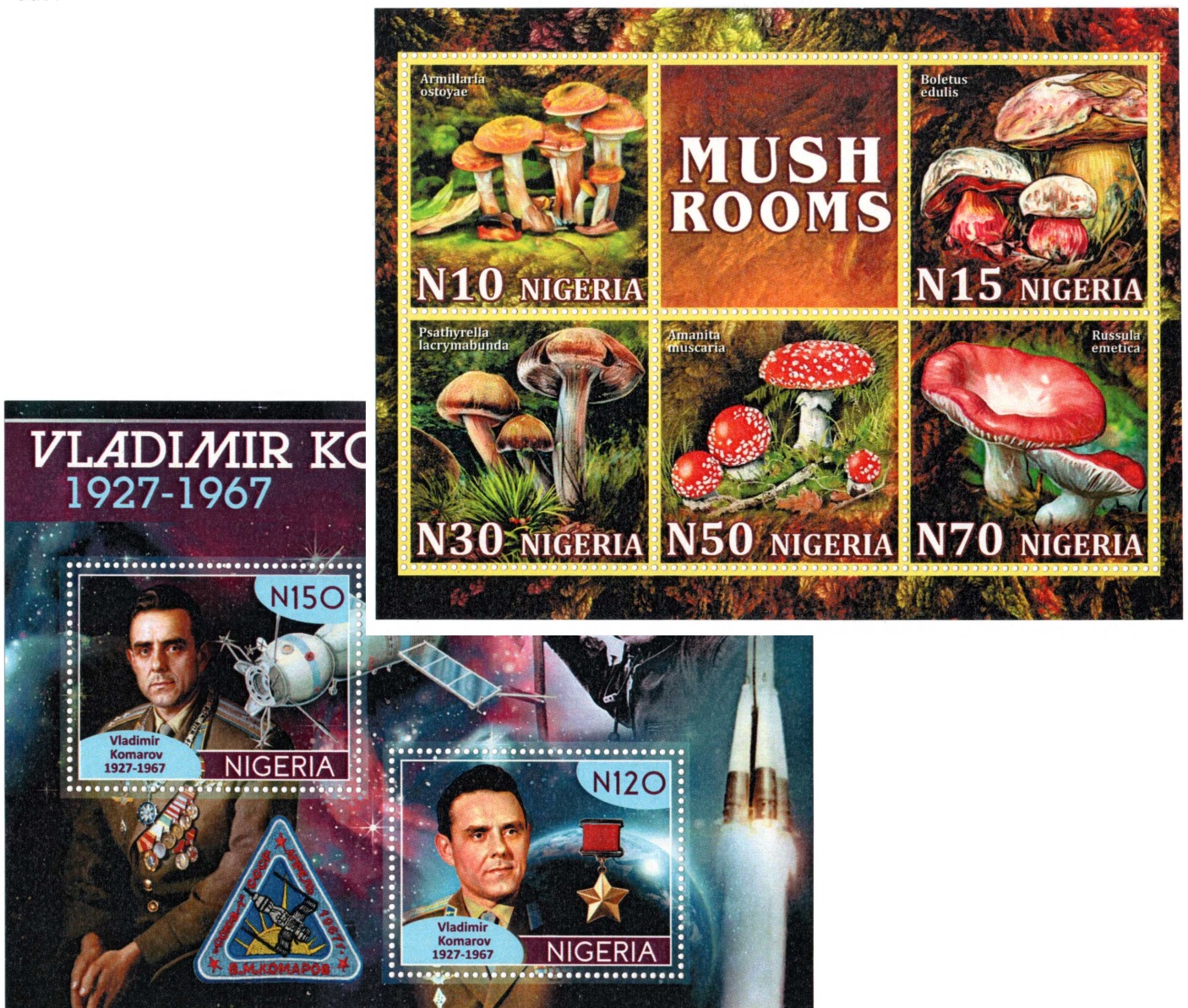
As described by Ray Harris in Cameo No 90, in about 1905 an unofficial and distinctly 'home made' 1d stamp / label and cork canceller were applied to mail from Borgu, in the north-west of Northern Nigeria, which was then routed via Zungeru. The stamps were variably worded and crude - ideal starting point for a forger. Here are some examples - the one sporting a Zungeru transit cancel is let down by the fact that the Zungeru cancel shown did not actually come into use until 1915. The example on the left is probably copied from one of the images in Ray's article.



Modern inventions

Many countries seem to publish new sets every month, often on subjects not remotely connected to the issuing nation. The aim is to make money from collectors - the stamps may not actually be on general sale in the country itself and are rarely seen postally used. Although they have been open recently to commercially sponsored issues, the postal authorities in Nigeria have generally resisted the temptation, leaving it to others to wallpaper the philatelic world with multiple issues commemorating, for example, that great son of Sierra Leone, Elvis Presley.

This has not prevented unscrupulous companies from issuing stamps very similar to the wallpaper issues purporting to come from Nigeria. The two examples below were never authorised by NIPOST, nor sold in Nigeria, but are available online. They come from a Russian company called Topnimarka, and are sufficiently well made for one to suspect a relationship to the companies which produce the official wallpaper issues. Or am I being cynical?



Forged overprints: The Oil Rivers

The first issue of Oil Rivers stamps comprised GB stamps overprinted with BRITISH PROTECTORATE at the top and OIL RIVERS towards the foot of the stamp. The overprint was quite widely forged, often very crudely, as the examples below show. Genuine stamps on top of each pair.



Enlargement emphasises the poor quality of the overprint. Not only is the impression blurred, but letters such as the A and the S are different. Although the genuine overprint's position can vary, it is always horizontal, and the top and bottom text in the same relation to each other vertically and horizontally, with the left edge of the B in line with the right hand end of the L below it. And the copies have GB postmarks which betray their origins...

While some of these forged overprints added value, their main importance is as a preliminary to preparing forged copies of the various Oil Rivers Provisionals, some of which are very valuable indeed. Provisionals are a specialised field in themselves, described in detail by John Sacher in an 80 page supplement to The London Philatelist published in 2009. They have been in high demand ever since the first ones were produced in 1893, and have been a target for forgers since then. Overprints are less difficult to forge than whole stamps, and are often variable in appearance so that accuracy is less essential.

Many of the forged provisionals are of no better quality than the overprints shown above, and like them, often clearly show GB postmarks to confirm their real identity. Here are some examples.

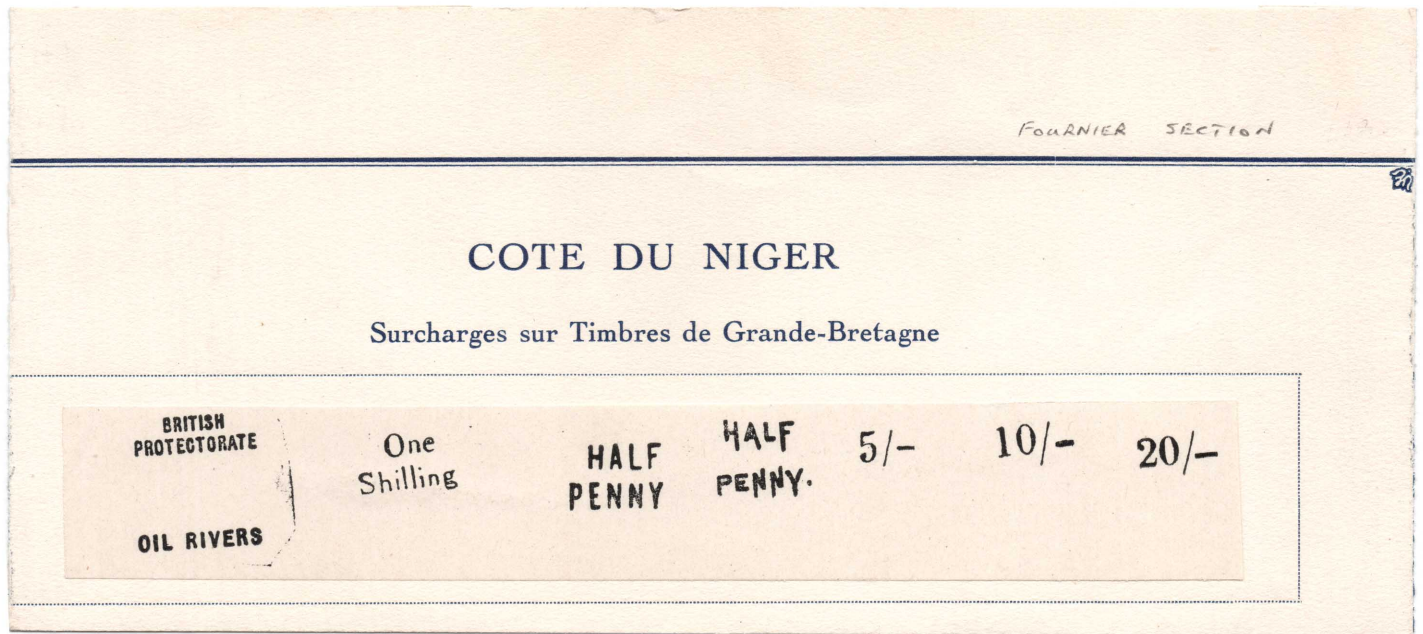


Oil Rivers provisionals: Fournier etc

Not all forgeries of Oil Rivers provisionals are poorly executed. Some are extremely competent, and correspondingly dangerous. Although Sperati did not turn his expert hand to these issues, the very capable Francois Fournier did.

Fournier was active in the early 1900s. Some idea of the scope of his business is shown by his 1914 price list, which offered 3,671 items in its 64 pages. On his death L'Union Philatelique de Geneve bought his stock and equipment, and published a reference showing all of his productions.

The proof copies below show the Oil Rivers overprints Fournier made, replicating not only some of the key surcharges, but the BRITISH PROTECTORATE overprint itself. Modern forgeries tend to use genuine Oil Rivers stamps for their fake surcharges. Although the surcharges shown are accurately made, all should have a horizontal bar underneath, but it is hard to imagine that Fournier would have omitted such an obvious feature when making the forgeries themselves



The stamp on the left is a convincing version of SG30, but probably forged, possibly by Fournier. The overprint in black has been repeated in blue (without underline). Black versions of the overprint are not known.

But if forged it is very well done, and genuine SG30s are known with Opobo cancel dated MY 22 94.

Oil Rivers provisionals: good but good enough?

The three high value provisionals below are all 'good' forgeries, convincing until examined under magnification. They are ambitious - the real stamps are valued at over £100K so a would be purchaser will look very closely indeed. Probably these were sold as space filling copies. In the top two examples the whole stamp is forged too. The 10/- example is on a real Oil Rivers stamp, but the overprint outlines are too diffuse and the white areas show minute speckles of red ink, typical of ink-jet printing.



True or false?

The two items below show the difficulty of deciding whether a stamp is genuine. Both involve bisects. Anyone can cut a stamp in half which is why Gibbons only prices simple bisects on cover. However, even overprinted items are awkward, especially if there's no tell-tale cancel, no give-away signs of ink-jet printing and no obvious faults of colour, font or spacing. The piece is almost certainly genuine: the cancel is right place and date, and Mr England is a known addressee but I'm not so sure about the mint 1/2d overprint.



Niger Coast - the SG65 overprint

The HALF PENNY overprint on the 2½d Niger Coast SG54 is an attractive stamp, with a relatively complicated overprint. The overprint was done locally, on a small handpress, one row of 8 stamps at a time. Each of the 8 positions of the overprint shows individual differences and the overprinting varies from heavy to light. This all makes for the sort of variety that forgers welcome. However, within each of the 8 printing positions variation is very slight, and a forgery which does not closely match a known position announces itself.

Shown here are examples of the 8 overprint positions, together with the OIE variant at position 8 caused by breakage of the letter N.



Position 1



Position 2



Position 3



Position 4



Position 5



Position 6



Position 7



← Position 8

Inspection shows that the differences between the 8 positions are almost entirely related to the shapes and positions of the four short bars at the sides, and to the lengths, relative positions and breaks in the two long bars at the foot. The size and position of the words ONE and HALF PENNY vary hardly at all, and their vertical separation does not vary significantly between positions.

Porter's original classification of the positions from the 1930s was reiterated in Ince and Sacher and in Sacher's RPSL monograph on the Oil Rivers and Niger Coast Provisionals. The would-be-forgery has a great deal to get right, but the efforts seen are generally dangerously good.

Niger Coast - the SG65 overprint part 2

Distinguishing genuine from forged relies upon three tests:

1. Is the stamp right?

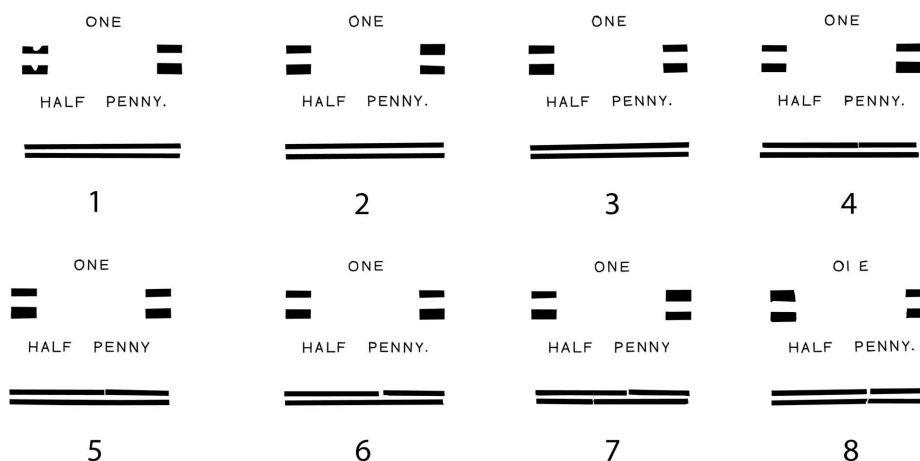
The overprinting was done on the unwatermarked SG54, which is blue in colour. Overprints on the pale blue SG54a are highly suspect. SG69 was the same design but is watermarked. SG54 comes in two slightly different sizes (measuring from top frame line to bottom frame line). The commonest is 27.7mm, but genuine overprints I have seen are all on the less common sort, which measures 27.2mm

2. Is the cancellation right?

The overprint was issued at Old Calabar, which is the commonest cancel found, and known used between 11.8.94 to 2.3.96. A few are known from Bonny (1.11.94 to 16.12.95) and from Opobo (2.1.95 to 26.12.96). Most examples seen are Old Calabar, in violet, dated AU 21 94.

3. Is the overprint right?

The overprint must correspond very closely to one of the known 8 positions, illustrated below:



The two stamps below look pretty good, but neither quite passes muster. The one on the left has a BPA certificate stating that it is forged. It measures 27.7mm top to bottom, and the 4 short bars are closest in appearance to position 2, but not close enough. The stamp on the right bears a Sapele cancel dated SP 2 97 - wrong office, date too late, 27.7mm tall. The overprint itself is extremely close to that for position 3.



Royal Visit 1956 forgery

Queen Elizabeth visited Nigeria between 28 January – 16 February 1956, and to commemorate the occasion a version of the 2d black and ochre definitive, SG72 was issued, overprinted ROYAL VISIT above 1956.

A few sheets were overprinted upside down, and the resulting stamps are valuable enough to attract the attention of forgers. The real overprint was done on a special printing of the bi-colour 2d, which was about to be replaced by the monochrome SG72c, so in theory forged examples based on a normal SG72 might be detectable by differences in the stamp itself, but in practice that is not possible.

However, in the known examples of the forged overprint the quality of the overprint is patchy, the shape of the letters not quite right, and the position on the stamp too high.

The forged example below has an RPSL certificate confirming its nature.



In the forgery (lower example, inverted for ease of comparison) the letters are less crisp: the tops of the V are not flat, the shape of the S not right. The distance from the top of the overprint to the stamp margin is too small in the forgery.

Forging covers

To forge a cover well is a challenging task. Stamps, cancels, markings, paper, address all have to be convincing. Highly skilled forgers such as Sperati could carry it off, but even they usually 'adjusted' existing covers - adding marks, stamps, cancels as required to an existing less valuable item.

There are few known Nigerian examples of effective forgeries involving entire covers, and these are adjustments rather than forgeries 'from scratch'. However, computers and inkjet printers have made it much easier to 'reproduce' covers, as the example below shows. The forged OFFA arrival cancel on the back (inset) allows us to claim it as Nigeria-related.

While the cover is not convincing: aged using tea and an electric iron perhaps, the use of real stamps and an address typed on with a manual typewriter show the sort of hybrid ingenuity mentioned above.



The cover shown on the **next page** is a complete fabrication based on an actual cover, one of a number from Lagos in 1873 to Jane Nuttall in Manchester. The original cover was in the Porter collection, and perhaps the forger took the image from an auction catalogue. That cover was offered for sale by Spanish auction house Soler Y Llach in 2020 (from where my image was taken). The forgery is not particularly convincing, but shows the opportunities which modern technology opens up to the 'amateur' forger.

The Nuttall cover: a modern forgery



A FOCUS ON FORGERY

Philately meets Philography

Forged signatures present a hazard to autograph collectors, and as the example below shows, that can overlap with philately. The cover is genuine, and Anthony Eden was Foreign Secretary in 1953, but the signature is actually nothing like Eden's as the letter shown beneath confirms.



Post-independence forgeries

Between 1972 (?) and 2000, Nigeria-based forgers produced copies of at least 18 different issues.

SG229	1972	2/6d	Kobs	SG655	1993	30N	Lion
SG344	1976	10k	Yankari Leopards	SG690	1995	10N	Mobile phone
SG501	1985	50k	OPEC World map	SG716	1996	30N	Fungi (Tricholoma)
SG523	1986	10k	Post office counter	SG717	1996	30N	Fungi (Pleurotus)
SG525b	1992	10N	Lekki Beach	SG721	1996	30N	Mass Literacy
SG525c	1990	20N	Kano ancient wall	SG739	1999	40+5N	FIFA logo
SG525d	1990	50N	Rock bridge	SG751	2000	40N	Map of Nigeria
SG615	1991	50k	Toothed catfish	SG757	2000	40N	Return to Democracy
SG654	1993	20N	Roan Antelope	SG768	2000	50N	Container ships

The earliest examples of these post-independence forgeries were produced by lithography, requiring some printing expertise, though colour registration was generally poor. However, the poor quality and variable colours of some genuine issues such as SG344 made them, in Michael Wright's words, 'a stamp asking to be forged'.

Although the Gibbons catalogue states that the commonest examples (SG525d and SG654) were produced by photocopying, and copies often show outlines of the perforations on the genuine sheets from which the copy was made, the poor colour registration is more consistent with litho printing, from separate colour plates which were themselves produced by photographing complete sheets of stamps.

A weak point in all these forgeries was perforation: genuine stamps show even, punched, perforations, mostly 14 per 2cm, while the forgeries, if perforated at all, are a coarser gauge at 11-12. Most of the later copies are either perforated using a sewing machine, and / or cut out with scissors. Two issues were rouletted.

The paper on which forgeries were printed is generally thin and flimsy, never water-marked.

Throughout the period in which these forgeries were used (1970s to 2000), examples may be found bearing genuine cancels, suggesting that they were used on letters which were accepted as mail by the post office. Most 1990s forgeries have forged cancels, consistent with their use in bulk mailings associated with 419 scam letters (see later).

Post-independence forgeries

SG229 - 2/6d Kobs

Printed by litho, and used on ordinary mail, the 2/6d Kobs is a reasonable forgery, passing muster until examined. Detail is less crisp than the genuine article, and solid colours overlap where registration is inaccurate. Perforations are properly punched but at gauge 11-12 instead of 13 X 13.5.



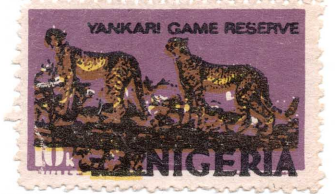
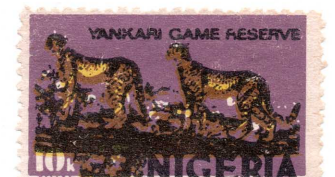
Genuine stamp



Forged (from Rob May)

SG344 - 10k Cheetahs, Yankari Game reserve

There were 3 issues of the design, and a considerable range of shades, as the genuine examples below show. Print quality declined considerably during the currency of the design. The forgery also comes in several shades. All are litho printed, with perf 11-12 instead of 14. Examples from 1983 have been reported, probably postally used and pre-dating the main 419 scam period.



Genuine, showing range of colours and quality

Forgery

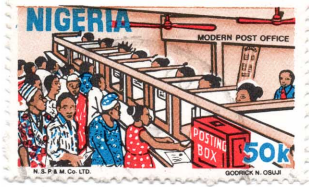
SG501 - 50k OPEC world map

Reported by Rudolph Lazar, but no examples of this forgery to hand. Printing was probably by lithography. Perforations of the forgery gauge 11 instead of 14.

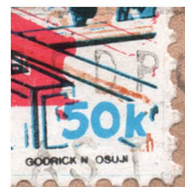
Post-independence forgeries

SG523 - 10k Post Office counter

Printed by lithography, but with significant colour displacement and coarsely perforated.



Genuine stamp



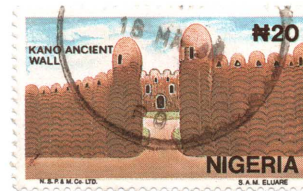
Forged

SG525b - 10N Lekki beach

Forgeries are mentioned in Gibbons, but I have no examples to hand

SG525c - 20N Kano ancient wall

Relatively uncommon. Photocopied? The colour is not bad and the perforations well made, though gauge 11 instead of 14. An outline of the perforations on the original show on the copy.

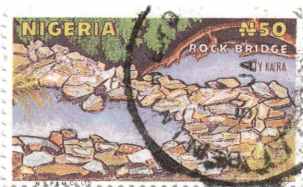
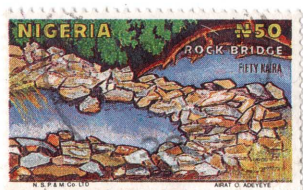


Genuine example on the left.



SG525d - 50N Rock bridge

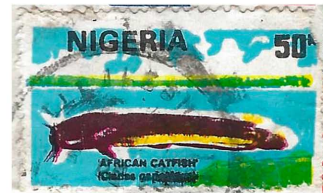
One of the most common forgeries, and widely used on 419 offer letters. The genuine stamp comes in several shades, and the forgeries range from reasonable to hardly recognisable. Perforations range from consistent (though coarse) to ones made using a sewing machine, to none at all. The two examples on the left are genuine, the rest are forged, including the cancels.



Post-independence forgeries

SG615 - 50k Toothed catfish

Printed by lithography, but with significant colour displacement. The forged example (from Rob May) appears to have a genuine cancel. Perforations are coarse, at: 11.5 instead of 14.



SG654 - 20N Roan antelope

After the Rock bridge example, the Roan antelope is the commonest of the modern forgeries. Examples vary from passable to very poor. Perforations are generally produced by the sewing-machine method, and cancellations usually forged, consistent with use in 419 fraud mail. The genuine stamps on the left show the range of colours of different printings.



SG655 and SG 690 - 30N Lion and 10N Mobile phone

Making a total value of 40N the piece on the right shows one of each forgery. Both are separated by roulettes rather than perforations. The genuine stamps on the left are both perf 14.



Post-independence forgeries

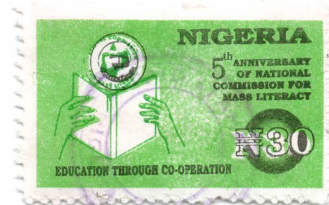
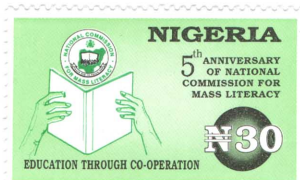
SG716 and SG717 (fungi) - 20N Tricholoma and 30N Pleurotus

Separated by rouletted slits. No example of the 30N available.



SG721 - 30N Mass literacy

Lithographed forgery with forged cancel, colour registration poor, perforations coarse - genuine is 14.



SG739 - 40 + 5 N FIFA logo

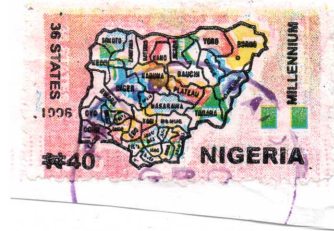
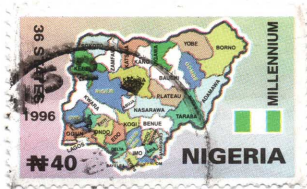
Another lithographed forgery with forged cancel. Sewing machine perforations cut with scissors. The genuine stamp on the left is somewhat poorly defined but the forgery is much worse!



Post-independence forgeries

SG751 - 40N Map of Nigeria

Perforations ragged and cancel forged.



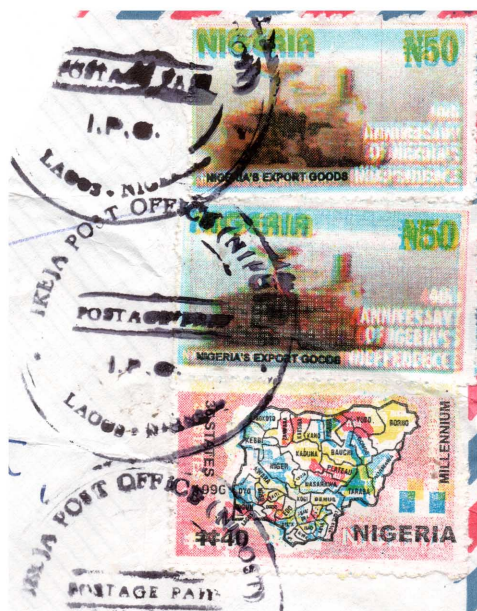
SG757 - 40N Return to democracy

Very poor registration of the colour plates.



SG768 - 50N Container ships

Genuine on left. Despite its official appearance, the cancel on the central piece is as phoney as the stamps. The example on the right shows very poor colour registration.



A FOCUS ON FORGERY

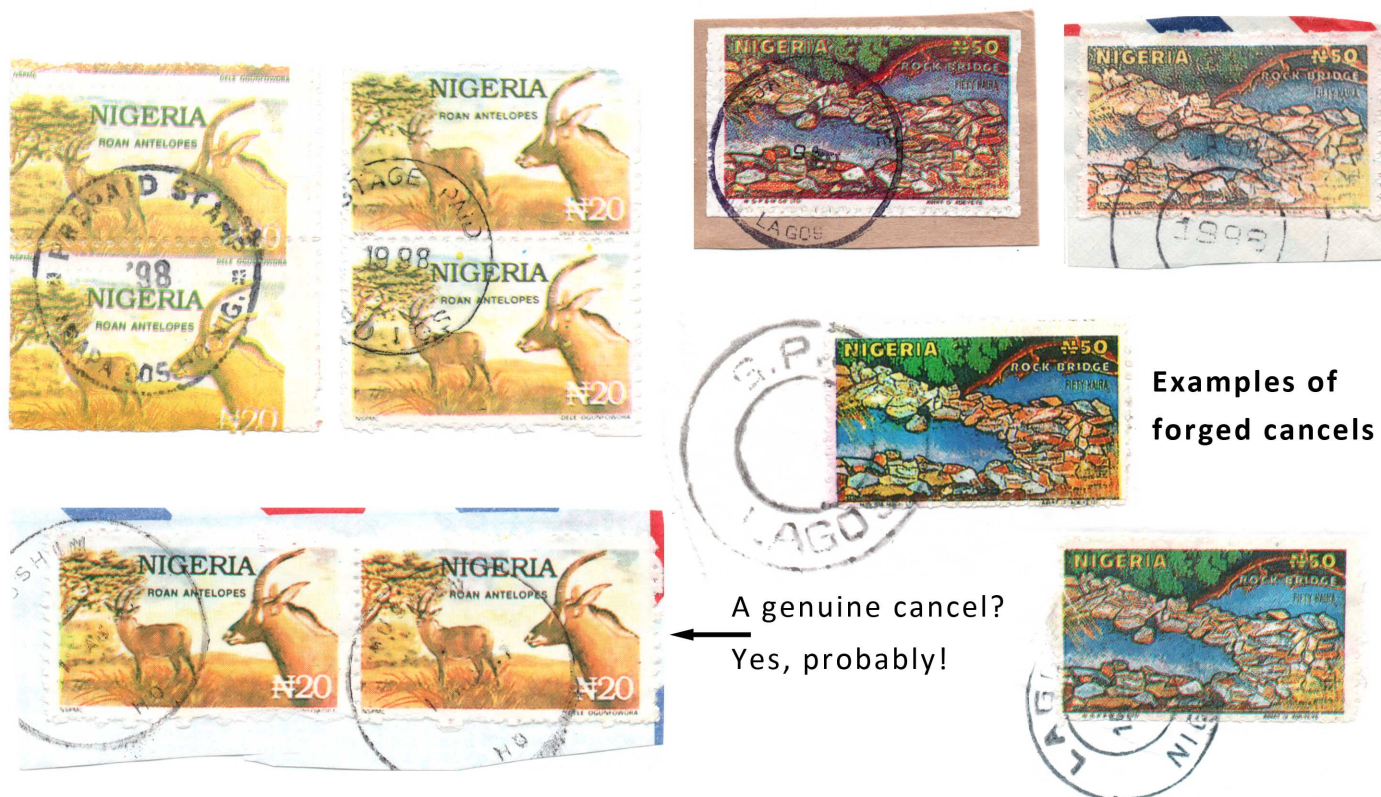
Forgeries and 419 scams

The great majority of Nigerian forgeries from around 1990 to 2000 were used on 419 scam mail. '419 scam' is short-hand for advance fee fraud which contravenes section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code. Its essence is the promise of a large gain which, somewhere along the line, requires a relatively small facilitation payment. The mug pays the fee and the gain never materialises.

Advance fee fraud has a lengthy history in Nigeria and around the world, but became a major 'industry' in Nigeria at the start of the 1990s. Many thousands of scam letters were sent to companies around the world, spinning tales of abandoned bank deposits, legacy payments, refunds, mislaid bank transfers etc. Apocryphally, hotels in Atlanta were denuded of their phone directories after the 1996 Olympics by competitors bringing them back as a source of addresses for the scam mail 'factories'.

Although FAX was used, and from about 2000 email took over, the 1990s 419 deluge was largely based on offers sent by post. This would not have been an economic proposition without the use of forged stamps bearing forged cancels on envelopes stuffed into mail-bags and put directly onto mail flights by corrupt officials, by-passing NIPOST altogether. At first the overseas receiving authorities accepted such mail and delivered it, but later on they began refusing suspect mail. A great many letters go through however.

Scammers also used forged postage meter marks, and later on, sent letters bearing genuine but small denomination stamps, well below the proper rate for overseas mail, cancelled with a forged postmark and presumably insinuated into an outbound mail-bag.

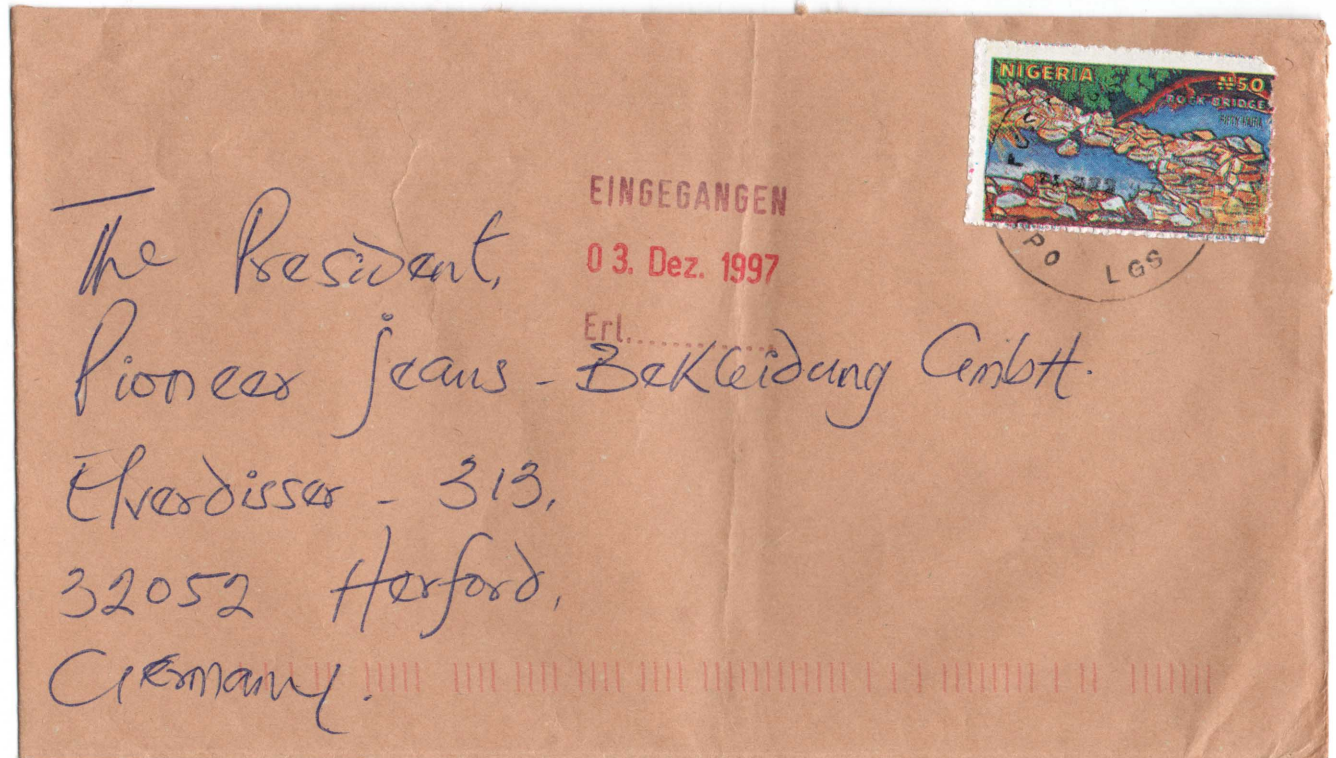




THE PRESIDENT
NICKERSON ZWAAN B.V.
Box 19,
2990 AA BARENDRECHT
HOLLAND

419 scam covers

The two covers shown on this page are typical examples.



419 scam - postage meter forgeries

The two covers on the next sheet show that the 419 men were using forged postage meter markings from fairly early on in the 'game' - the top cover is dated December 1994.

The letter shown below came in the top cover.

Forged meter marks vary from passable to illegible, and the date is often entirely missing. Forged meter marks are often (but not always) at an angle while genuine ones usually run parallel to the top of the letter.

MR. DONATUS AWELE
TEL/FAX: 234-1-4972967
LAGOS - NIGERIA.
10TH JANUARY, 1995.

REQUEST FOR URGENT BUSINESS TRANSACTION:
ASSISTANCE TO TRANSFER USD\$31.M INTO YOUR ACCOUNT.

Sir,

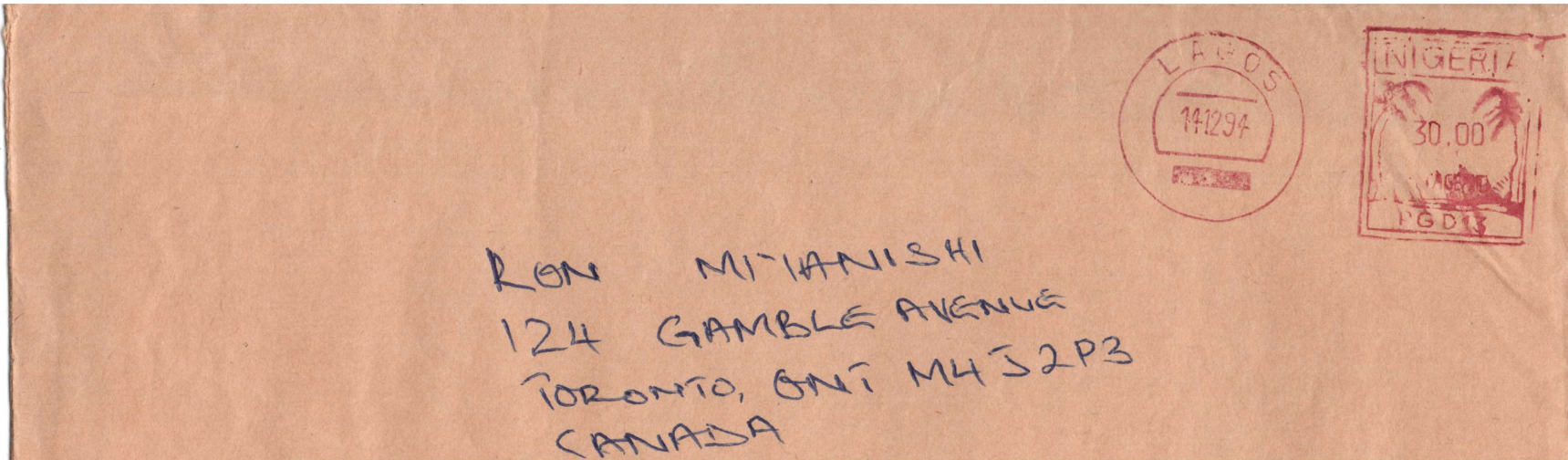
I got your contact address through the directory of companies supplied to my office by the Government of your Country.

However, I am a member of the "Contract Tender Committee" of the Federal Ministry of Civil Aviation Head Quarter Lagos, Nigeria. I have been mandated by the chairman Contract Tender Board of the Ministry to source for a trusted foreign account where the sum of \$31,000,000.00 U.S. Dollars will be transferred into.

The Thirty One Million U.S. Dollars is an accumulation of over-invoiced contracts which has already been executed and commissioned. This amount still lies in the ministry's suspense account with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and still appears in the fiscal year auditing as retention fee owed to a foreign company.

*To transfer this money to the Foreign Company's account, a fresh file has to be opened here in the foreign company's name. Therefore we request you to furnish us with your banking particulars thus: **NAME OF ACCOUNT; ACCOUNT NUMBER; NAME OF BANK; BRANCH OF BANK; YOUR BANKS' TELEPHONE/FAX NUMBERS; YOUR BANKS' TELEX NUMBER, THE SWIFT NUMBER OF YOUR ACCOUNT, COMPANY LETTER HEAD PAPER AND PROFORMA INVOICE STAMPED AND SIGNED UNDERNEATH.** These documents should be faxed to me immediately you indicate your interest in this project to enable us obtain all the necessary approvals from all the relevant government authorities. It has been agreed that you retain 30% of the \$31,000,000.00 U.S. Dollars, 10% has been set-aside to off-set any expenses that may occur, while we would take the remaining 60%.*

To confide in you sir, all logistics are in place and modalities have been worked out with some top officials of the Federal Ministry of Finance (FMF) and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to facilitate the smooth and easy remittance of the amount into your account within fourteen days of getting your positive response and confirmed consent.



Covers with forged meter marks



Forged cancellations - an introduction

Of all the challenges a forger might take on, adding a fake cancellation to a stamp or cover is perhaps the easiest. The addition can be incomplete, faint, or simply illegible, as many real cancellations are. However it must still be convincing.

A forged cancellation may have one or more of the following purposes.

- 1 To signify an unusual and valuable usage of a common stamp. For example a GB 1d lilac, SG197 is worth a few pounds if used in Britain. Bearing a Bonny Rivers postmark it is valued at £450.
- 2 To authenticate a forged overprint. Expert forgeries of pre-1914 provisionals come with a forged cancel from the correct office and usage period.
- 3 To produce a cancel which is valuable in its own right.
- 4 To convert a mint stamp into a more valuable 'used' copy. For example, the 5d Northern Nigeria SG5 is valued at £28 mint, but used is valued at £65.
- 5 To signify that an item has officially passed through the post office at a particular place. The 419 scam items described earlier bear forged cancels to persuade overseas postal services that they had been accepted by NIPOST.
- 6 To conceal an imperfection. It is said that Sperati positioned his forged cancels over features of the forged stamp which were a little less than perfect. Use of a forged cancel to conceal ink traces left after the removal of a fiscal cancel is also known.

To be convincing a forged cancellation needs to look right, by several criteria.

- Real cancels struck with a steel-die canceller are not entirely uniform. Rings are fainter in the centre, with ink pushed sideways, and often indent the stamp. A cancel which is completely uniform in the density of the impression is suspicious.
- Ink jet printed cancels leave tell-tale tiny ink dots outside the printed area, and the ink may penetrate the stamp more than is the case with a genuine strike.
- A cancel which is so partial one cannot make out any details is less satisfactory than a more complete strike. It may also signify a cancelled-to-order (CTO) item, which was 'cancelled' officially with one strike per block of 4 stamps, but did not actually pass through the mail.
- A cancel should be consistent with known good cancellations of the same type. It should look the same and be within known date range. Although CTO items were occasionally cancelled with a date which is out of range, cancel dates which are too early generally signify forgery.
- A perfect match with a handbook illustration may indicate that the forger has taken the cancel image straight from that source. This is not uncommon in the case of images in Proud's 'Postal History of Nigeria', though the wily forger will generally change the date shown. Proud's images are not all perfect in appearance or size, and mistakes perpetuated by the forger are a dead give-away.

Forged cancellations 1

To pretend uncommon usage for a common stamp

Parts of what would become Nigeria started postal services before they received their own postage stamps, and in the interim used ordinary GB stamps. Even after their own stamps came into use, unoverprinted GB stamps were accepted up to 1900. Unless on cover the only evidence of this use was the cancellation. GB stamps bearing Oil Rivers, Niger company or Northern Nigeria cancels are (mostly) valuable - the key incentive for the forger.

The stamp on piece at the left is a genuine example. Below is a scan of a 'selection' offered on Delcampe some while ago by a well-known auction house (Argyll-Etkin) and which sold for more than I was willing to pay. All the cancels are forged.



The forged cancels, presumably the work of the same person, are too uniform in colour and too uncertain in outline to be convincing.

The 'Agent General' cancel is very scarce, and is it just a coincidence that Ince and Sacher show an example on cover (p127) which is dated "-3 OCT. 94" - the forger has simply omitted the '94'. Gibbons comment that this cancel was applied to the cover, not to the stamp itself.



www.delcampe.net

argyllet

Forged cancellations 2

To authenticate a forged overprint

Most overprints from the pre-1914 period were in use for a short time from a limited range of offices. A used example with the right cancel inspires confidence, so skilled overprint forgers ensure that their work carries the correct cancel too. For instance, a used example of the Niger Coast 1/2d on 2 1/2d SG65 dated AU 21 94 from Old Calabar passes the date test, but an example postmarked Sapele and dated SP 2 97 is immediately suspect (see sheet 17).

Relying entirely on known dates isn't fool-proof however. CTO stamps from the Niger Coast are quite common, and may carry odd dates, set by the cancelling clerk rather than based on the actual date. All three stamps below show cancels which are earlier than the date of issue of the stamp they are on (July 1892 in the case of the Oil Rivers stamps, June 1898 for the Niger Coast 6d). There is no reason to suppose that the cancels have been forged - if forged they are extremely good! The middle block was seen on Ebay.



To produce a cancel that is valuable in its own right

Some cancels are very scarce, particularly those with more unusual code letters and ink colours from 1893 - 1900 period. Although there is a suspicion that some of the scarce combinations owe more to collector demand than postal need, they are still highly sought after, and thus ripe for the forger's attention, like the example below.

The magnified image shows the unconvincing cancel in more detail. It doesn't help that the stamp has full undisturbed gum. However, it is not obvious how the forged cancel has been produced.



Forged cancellations 3

To convert a mint stamp to a more valuable 'used' one

Most pre-1914 Nigeria stamps and many post-1914 ones are more valuable postally used than mint. Ever since the Spiro brothers, who added cancels of their own design to mint 'replicas' (see sheet 3), forgers have been adding fake cancels to mint stamps. This could be achieved during printing by using a suitable die (as Sperati is thought to have done), or by applying a specially made-up canceller. In more recent times computer-aided design and ink-jet printing have made the process easier, if not more convincing.

This section shows some general examples before focusing on the work of the forgers known as 'Madame Joseph', and 'hootstein'.



- 1 **An imaginary cancel type.** No Lagos canceller resembling this is known for 1893
- 2 **Imitation of a real cancel.** Superficially the cancel on these two 2/6d stamps is that shown in Proud as R8, but the fonts used for the code letter and the date are wrong
- 3 **Nice cancel but wrong date.** The earliest known use of this Southern Nigeria cancel type (IS6) is at Lagos on 2 January 1907
- 4 **Suspicious office, suspicious placement.** There's no known Nigerian post office name with the letters ..AINT... at that time, and the top corner cancel position is unlikely on a postally used high denomination stamp
- 5 **Just wrong** Although little can be seen of the cancel it doesn't correspond to a known one, and just feels 'wrong'

And finally, three oddities. The £1 value carries a cancel which looks like BATTICALOA, in (then) Ceylon, and there is a very similar cancel known for BATTICALOA, but how could a Nigerian £1 stamp end up cancelled in Ceylon? The cancel on the middle example is bogus - but the stamp is worth less used than mint. Finally, another forged Calabar cancel, applied to a Leeward Islands stamp. Why bother, unless it is a forger with a sense of fun teasing collectors like me!



Forged cancellations 4

The work of 'Madame Joseph'

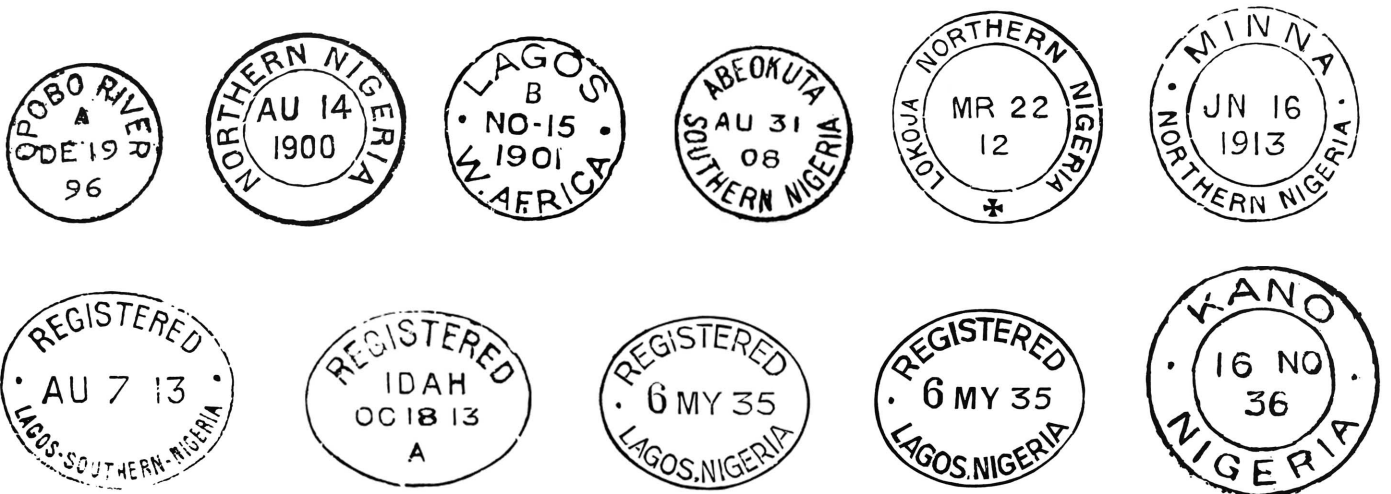
Working from London, Madame Joseph, her accomplices and her successors used fake handstamps, made from wood, zinc or copper to forge over 400 cancellations, including 11 from Nigeria.

She (her actual identity is unknown) started forging during World War 1. Although she died (it is thought) in the late 1940s, her cancellers continued in use for years afterwards. The quality of her counterfeiting work can be seen from the fact that her forgeries were still passing undetected in the 1960s.

The Northern Nigeria AU 14 1900 was accepted as genuine by Ince and Sacher, and is described on p278 of 'The Postal Services of the British Nigeria Region'. The Minna example makes an appearance illustrating a 1930s article by Porter on Northern Nigeria postmarks.

In the early 1990s Derek Worboys purchased the remaining tools and today the collection resides in the museum of the RPSL.

The images below come from Brian Cartwright's book "Madame Joseph Revisited" RPSL, 2005, and show the 11 Nigerian cancellers Madame Joseph is known to have used (warning - they are not exact reproductions).



The stamps below and right carry Madame Joseph postmarks.



Forged cancellations 5

The work of 'hootstein'

Ray Harris has provided the information below on Nigerian cancels forged by Robert George and sold by him under the name of 'hootstein' on ebay in 2008. George forged cancels on a range of commonwealth stamps, not least Nigeria (Lagos, North, South and post 1914). As an article by Charles Freeland in the BWISC Bulletin No. 217 – June 2008 p9, entitled 'Mme Joseph rides again...on ebay' describes, George copied cancels from the illustrations in Proud, often with a slight change to the date but otherwise 'as is', including idiosyncrasies in the Proud images. Hootstein images tend to be a dense even black, with none of the signs of uneven application, paler imprint left by the steel cancel edges etc. Freeland thought they were produced by laser printer.

Ray identified five examples of forged Nigerias cancels offered by 'hootstein' on Ebay in the first half of 2008. In addition to the tell-tales from Freeland's article Ray mentions (pers comm) that the ink used is denser and 'bleeds' more than found in real cancels.

George was caught and sent to prison for forgery in 2010. He got 18 months, a reflection of the scale of his fraud (£30,000 worth sold to one collector alone) and the fact that he had 8 previous convictions for similar offences.

Of the two stamps below the 2/6 definitely fits the description of hootstein's work. The front is a dense even black and as the reverse shows, the ink has bled through to the back. The cancel on the 5/- is forged, but is it hootstein's work? I'm not sure.



Using a forged cancel to conceal

The final example of this display shows a 5/- stamp 'converted' from fiscally to postally used. The cancel is forged, and the stamp still shows traces of the red ink from its original use.

