

THE NIGERIAS.

The Travelling Post Offices.

by Colin McCaig.

The River Services.

The first Travelling Post Office was a postal service on the River Niger which appears to have been opened early in 1903. The Northern Nigeria Protectorate Government maintained an enclave at Burutu, a few miles from Forcados on the Delta, where they were represented by a Marine Officer and operated a regular service to Lokoja, about three hundred miles up river. It was on one of the Government vessels, G.S.W. Kampala, that Alan Workman travelled in May, 1910, and noted the postal arrangements:-

"The steamer had aboard a travelling African Postmaster whose duty it was to dispose of mail matter intended for the small trading stations at which no Post Office existed. He also carried a stock of postage stamps." (A Colonial Postmaster-General's Reminiscences.)

The journey usually took about six days up river and rather less back to the coast. The steamers, which were stern-wheelers, did not proceed at night and often grounded on sand or mud-banks.

In 1911/12 The Niger Company were advertising a weekly service of stern-wheel river steamers between Burutu (Forcados) on the Delta and Baro (Kano Railway Terminus) calling at Assay, Aboh, Onitsha, Idah, and Lokoja, but T.P.O. facilities were probably restricted to the Government vessels.

The Southern Nigerian Government Marine Department also maintained at that time the following river mail services:-

Between	Lagos and Sapele
"	Lagos and Porto Novo (Dahomey)
"	Forcados, Warri and Sapele
"	Bonny and Akassa

These were all operated weekly by launches and small paddle-steamers through the inland lagoons, creeks and channels. Although described as "mail" services it seems unlikely that they include full T.P.O. facilities.

Postmarks.

a. Cancellers for both ordinary and registered use inscribed NIGER TRAVELLING POST OFFICE (Types 1 and 2) have been recorded from February, 1903, to January, 1908, and covers for abroad were generally backstamped FORCADOS RIVER. The stamps normally used were those of Southern Nigeria. Cancellations on the issues of Niger Coast and Lagos are also found but the use of Northern Nigerian stamps was surprisingly rare. The strikes,

which are usually clear, sometimes show transposition and inversion of the control letters and date plugs, and occasionally manuscript insertions.

b.(i) In 1908 a new double circle type was introduced reading TRAVELLING POST OFFICE / SOUTHERN NIGERIA with Controls B or C (Type 3). Usually the Month precedes the Day; Control plugs are found inverted or sideways, and occasional transpositions and inversions of control and date plugs arise as in the earlier types. Control B is found with rounded or narrow lettering, and with Control C the cancellation has been noted in blue (1909).

(ii) A similar canceller (Type 3a) with slightly smaller circles using Controls A, B or D is recorded from 1913, and I have seen a cover with this mark dated JU 10 / 16 and strikes of PATANI, in the Delta area, JU 8 / 16, and FORCADOS, JU 11 / 16, which confirm river use.

(iii) A third canceller (Type 4) of the same form is more distinctive with taller lettering and less space between the ends of the upper and lower wording. The inner circle has a diameter of only 16mm., and this was in use from 1911 to 1918 with Controls B or D.

(iv) Also in 1908, a new oval canceller inscribed REGISTERED / TRAVELLING P.O. SOUTHERN NIGERIA (Type 5) replaced Type 2. Normally the Day is placed before the Month, but occasionally the latter is shown in figures, e.g. 29 4 10, and 13 5 13, and manuscript insertions have also been noted.

c. On 1st January, 1914, Southern and Northern Nigeria were combined under the name of Nigeria, which led to a new canceller being introduced with double circles as before but NIGERIA taking the place of SOUTHERN NIGERIA (Type 6). This has been noted with Controls A, C and D, and while the Month usually preceded the Day in 1915 and 1916 the reverse is normal for later years. The use of a separate oval date-stamp for registered mail was discontinued, and Type 5 was not replaced.

The above-mentioned double circle cancellers are all of a similar general description, and there seems little doubt that with the possible exception of Type 6 they were used on the River T.P.O. services. With regard to Type 6, however, I have seen covers with the following Railway markings:-

21/7/20 with Lagos 22/7/20 (Registered oval) and
manuscript "Down TPO North", and

21/6/22 with Ibadan double circle mark dated 22/6/22.

which show that this type was used on the Western Line in the nineteen-twenties, and raise the questions: When was the River T.P.O. discontinued? When were the Rail services commenced? Did these two services overlap?

Unfortunately, enquiries from the G.P.O. Lagos have proved fruitless in this respect as the old records have succumbed to

the ravages of the climate and local insect life. A former Postmaster General, Mr. G. Ivor Righton, who was transferred from The Gold Coast to Nigeria in February, 1917, recalls going into the question of T.P.Os and establishing the Lagos-Ibadan service, but this must have been running in experimental form before his arrival as the skeleton type canceller (Type 7) has been recorded with 1916 dates although it seems improbable that the Railway T.P.O. was functioning as such much before that time. However, I have a cover cancelled with Type 4, NO 10 / 11, and circular LATE FOR TO-DAY'S MAIL mark, backstamped LAGOS, NO 11 / 11, and Southampton, 29th November, 1911. Lagos is getting on for two hundred miles from Forcados which would indicate unusually speedy transport if the T.P.O. cancellation originated in the Delta area, but it is possible that it was applied on the Southern Nigerian Government Marine Department's services. Elucidation must await the discovery of further covers of this period.

The Railways.

The Lines with which we are concerned are:-

1. The Western Line.

The Lagos Government Railway was running between Iddo (for Lagos) and Ibadan in 1901, and was extended to Oshogbo (1906) Jebba (1909) and Minna (1911) where it joined up with the Baro-Kano Railway to form the Western Line; 705 miles from Iddo to Kano. Trains were ferried across the Niger at Jebba until bridges were completed in 1916. At first it was a weekly service but by the nineteen-thirties three trains a week were running in each direction, and the journey took two days.

T.P.O. facilities were provided on two sections:-

i LAGOS (IDDO) - IBADAN. This was described on registered covers as "TPO South" in manuscript with the direction "UP" or "DOWN".

ii IBADAN - JEBBA. This was the "TPO North".

The postal vans (railway carriages) attached to the trains had two compartments - one used for sorting and the other for the storage of closed mails, and the service provided limited postal facilities at stations where there were no Post Office or Postal Agencies. The following business was transacted as the train stopped at stations:-

Sale of stamps and postal orders.

Payment of postal orders.

Acceptance and delivery of ordinary and registered letters.

Acceptance and delivery of parcels.

As the trains stopped for only a few minutes at most of the stations along the route the amount of business transacted was small.

Postmarks.

- a. A skeleton type used for the T.P.O. North inscribed JEBBA IBADAN / DOWN / TPO or IBADAN JEBBA / UP / TPO (Types 7 and 7a). These were in use from 1916 to 1919. As there does not appear to have been a corresponding canceller for the T.P.O. South it is possible that Type 6 was used if a service was running at that time.
- b. Permanent cancellers for both sections (Type 8, 8a, 9 and 9a) used from 1919 to 1934. For the first few years it was usual to include the direction of travel, UP or DOWN, but this was later dropped. Registered covers show the service, North or South, in manuscript - sometimes using 'blank' registration labels.
- c. A skeleton type reading TPO IDDO IBADAN enclosing an unusual three-line date (Type 15). This must have had a very short life as only 1935 dates have been noted. Registered covers bear the manuscript "TPO South" on the standard 'blank' labels as before.
- d. Permanent double circle cancellers for both sections. That for IBADAN - JEBBA (Type 17) was first used in 1934, and so preceded the skeleton type for the T.P.O. South which was followed by the new type (Type 16) inscribed IDDO - IBADAN in 1935.

2. The Baro - Kano Railway.

Baro is the limit of normal navigation on the Niger, and the railway was completed via Minna and Zaria to Kano in 1911. T.P.O. facilities were introduced on the twice-weekly service in 1926 and were discontinued in 1931 - the MINNA - ZARIA section may have been dropped before then.

Postmarks.

- a. Skeleton type reading BARO MINNA ZARIA (Type 12) noted in 1926 and 1927.
- b. Permanent double circle type with similar wording (Type 13) noted with dates from 1927 to 1929, and 'blank' registration label with "TPO" in manuscript.
- c. Similar type but inscribed MINNA - BARO (Type 14). The only registration label noted has "TPO" in black and "BARO" in red ink.

3. The Eastern Line.

Commenced in 1914, this Line reached from Port Harcourt to Enugu (151 miles) by 1916 which enabled the coal from the Enugu mines to be used by the railways and relieved the difficult situation which had been created by the war. It was later extended northwards through Makurdi, where the Benue was bridged in 1932, to join the Western Line at Kaduna in 1926.

The T.P.O. van, which was introduced in 1921, did three services a week between Port Harcourt and Enugu and was withdrawn in 1930.

Postmarks.

- a. Skeleton type noted from 1921 (Type 10). The figure 1 appearing opposite the date line suggests that an additional service was contemplated.
- b. Permanent double circle type reading EASTERN.T.P.O. (Type 11). Registered covers are usually marked "ETPO" and a number in manuscript.

Posting Boxes.

Before the installation of Travelling Post Offices on the trains letters were handled by the railway staff with less formality. Following enquiries by R.B. Sanderson some time ago, the General Manager, Railway Department, Lagos, gave the following information obtained from a retired Guard who had been stationed at Iddo:-

"It was usual for letters to be handed to the Guards by postal clerks at stations. No signatures were given and letters were handed over to Station Masters at Destination Stations who, in turn, handed them to local Posts and Telegraph Dept. staff. The Guard had no recollection of ever having had a proper canceller, neither does he remember any such cancellers being issued to Station Masters, but it is thought that some Station Masters cancelled the stamps by using the Railway Telegraph Office dating stamp, whilst others drew lines in ink across the stamps to cancel them."

This procedure may account for the postal use of THE AFRICAN DIRECT TELEGRAPH Co. Ltd. canceller (Type RyO 3) and others connected with the railway including L.G.R. / IDDO (Type RyO 1) ABEOKUTA STATION (Type RyO 2) and the straight-line marks of IDDO and IBADAN (Types RyO 4 and 5). These have all been recorded on the first three issues of Southern Nigeria, and of later date I have noted NIGERIAN RAILWAY / RAHAMA (Type RyO 6), KAUGAMA RAILWAY P A (Type RyO 7), IWO STATION P A, OLD UMUAHIA HALT, and various TELEGRAPHS cancellations.

"POSTED ON TRAIN"

Following the withdrawal of the Travelling Post Offices (the service surviving on the Western Line was discontinued in 1939) Posting Boxes were attached to trains to give facilities at the small stations or halts where there was no Post Office or Postal Agency. They were emptied on the arrival of the train at its terminal, but their contents did not receive any special identifying marks until the 17th February, 1959. From that date such mail was marked with a rubber stamp reading "POSTED ON TRAIN" to indicate that the place of posting was not that shown by the datestamp.

These rubber stamps, which were identical, were held at the following nine Offices, each of which was a terminal of a

particular train service:-

Lagos	Kano	Minna
Ibadan	Jos	Enugu
Kaduna	Zaria	Port Harcourt

The contents of the Posting Boxes were dealt with at the Post Offices at these places where they were impressed with the rubber stamp, datestamped, and put into general mail circulation.

Examples of this cachet appear to be very scarce.

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CHECK LIST.

<u>Type</u>	<u>Form</u>	<u>Size in mm.</u>	<u>Wording</u>	<u>Dates noted</u>
1	Circle	24 $\frac{1}{2}$	NIGER TRAVELLING POST OFFICE with + at foot enclosing Control "A" over 2-line date	21/2/03 to 13/1/08
2	Oval	30 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 23	* REGISTERED + / NIGER TRAVELLING POST OFFICE enclosing Control "A" over 1-line date	2/10/03 to 22/5/07
3	Dbl.Circles	27 $\frac{1}{2}$ & 18	TRAVELLING POST OFFICE / SOUTHERN NIGERIA encl. Controls "B" or "C" over 2-line date	26/7/08 to 9/5/13
3a	Dbl.Circles	26 & 17	TRAVELLING POST OFFICE / SOUTHERN NIGERIA encl. Controls "A", "B", or "D" over 2-line date	24/8/13 to 10/6/16
4	Dbl.Circles	25 $\frac{1}{2}$ & 16	TRAVELLING POST OFFICE / SOUTHERN NIGERIA encl. Controls "B" or "D" over 2-line date	1/9/11 to 19/4/18
5	Oval	35 x 25	REGISTERED / TRAVELLING P.O.SOUTHERN NIGERIA encl. Control "C" over 1-line date	31/10/08 to 13/5/13
6	Dbl.Circles	28 $\frac{1}{2}$ & 20	TRAVELLING POST OFFICE /+NIGERIA+ enclosing Controls "A", "C", or "D" over 2-line date	25/6/15 to 21/6/22
7	Circle	28 $\frac{1}{2}$	JEBBA IBADAN / T P O enclosing 1-line date over DOWN	13/3/16 to 25/1/19
7a	Circle	28 $\frac{1}{2}$	IBADAN JEBBA / T P O enclosing 1-line date over UP	16/10/17
8	Circle	27 $\frac{1}{2}$	LAGOS-IBADAN.T.P.O. enclosing 2-line date over UP or DOWN	-/12/19 to 13/10/21
8a	Circle	27 $\frac{1}{2}$	LAGOS-IBADAN.T.P.O. enclosing 2-line date - without direction	12/5/22 to 4/2/30

<u>Type</u>	<u>Form</u>	<u>Size in mm.</u>	<u>Wording</u>	<u>Dates noted</u>
9	Circle	27½	IBADAN-JEBBA.T.P.O. enclosing 2-line date over UP or DOWN	16/3/23 to 25/3/27
9a	Circle	27½	IBADAN-JEBBA.T.P.O. enclosing 2-line date - without direction	13/6/23 to 2/3/34
10	Circle	30	T P O 1 / EASTERN encl. 1-line date	25/6/21 to 21/9/23
11	Dbl.Circles	26½ & 16½	EASTERN.T.P.O. / NIGERIA enclosing 2-line date	9/5/24 to 30/7/27
12	Circle	30	T P O / BARO MINNA ZARRIA encl.1-line date	18/9/26 to 9/8/27
13	Dbl.Circles	29 & 19	T.P.O./ BARO-MINNA- ZARIA encl.2-line date	1/11/27 to 23/5/29
14	Dbl.Circles	29 & 19	T.P.O./ MINNA-BARO enclosing 2-line date	16/1/30
15	Circle	30	IDDO IBADAN T P O enclosing 3-line date	25/4/35 to 6/8/35
16	Dbl.Circles	29 & 19	T.P.O./ IDDO-IBADAN enclosing 2-line date	17/9/35 to 20/12/38
17	Dbl.Circles	29 & 19	T.P.O./ IBADAN-JEBBA enclosing 2-line date	19/12/34 to 26/1/39



1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



7a.



8.



8a.



9



9a.



10.



11.



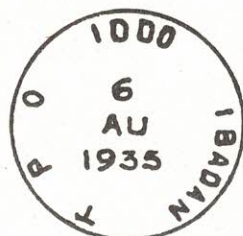
12.



13.



14.



15



16.



17.



Ryo. 3.



Ryo. 1.



Ryo. 2.



Ryo. 6

IDDO

Ryo. 4.

IBADAN

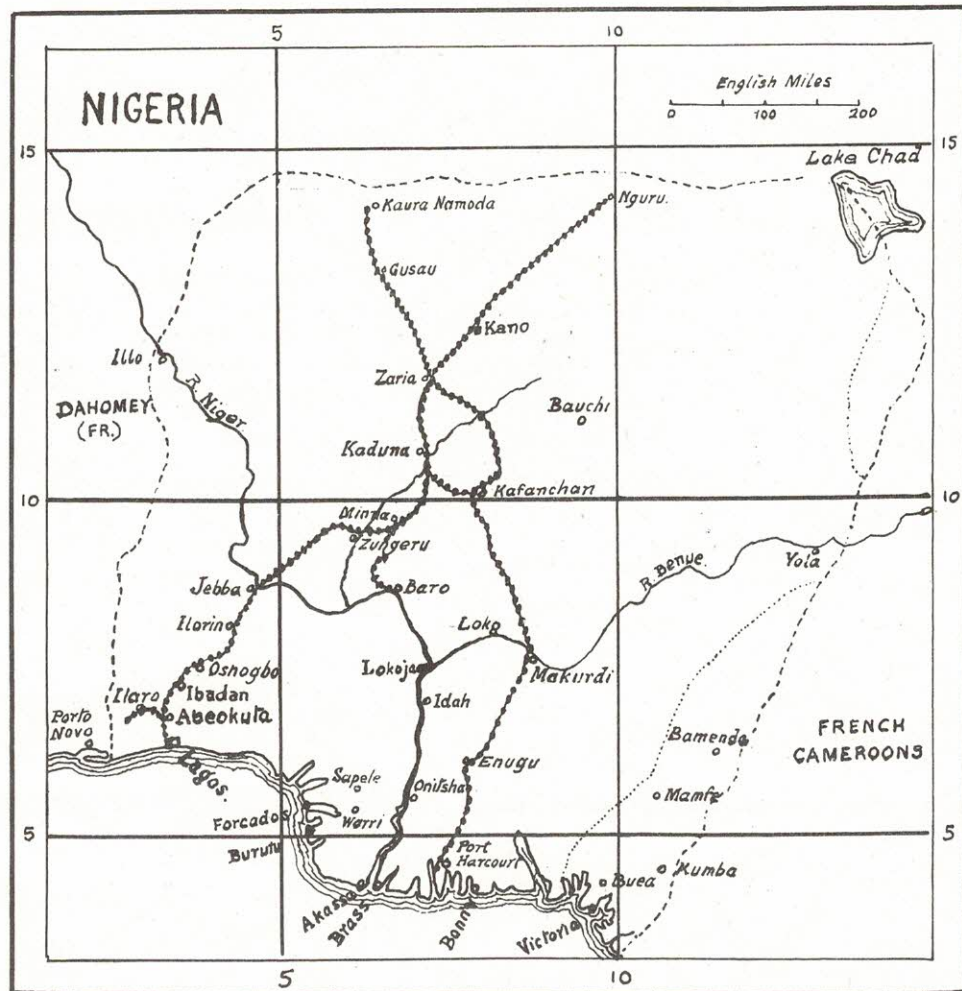
Ryo. 5.



Ryo. 7.

"POSTED ON TRAIN"

Ryo. 8.



THE RAILWAYS

- | | | |
|--------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| WESTERN LINE | - | Lagos to Minna and
Baro to Kano |
| | | Built 1896 - 1911 |
| EASTERN LINE | - | Port Harcourt to
Kaduna and Kano |
| | | Built 1914 - 1926 |

THE NIGERIAS

The Travelling Post Offices

Since writing my notes I have had the chance of seeing a remarkable collection of Nigeria formed by H.G. Porter, which now forms part of the reference collection of John Holt & Co.Ltd, the West African merchants.

This collection contained an example of a river postmark corresponding to the railway cancellations of the early twenties, Types 8 and 9, which so far as I know has not been recorded before. The canceller is a 27½mm. circle reading NIGER-RIVER T.P.O. enclosing JY 7 / 18 over DOWN. Porter has made a note that the service was discontinued in August 1919.

There were also examples of NIGERIAN RAILWAY postmarks of Type Ry0 6 for:-

AGEGE - in red
BUKURU
GERTI
GUDI
IDDO
JAGINDI
KAGORA - error for KAGORO
KUGUM RIVER
KAFANCHAN
MADAKIA
MANCHOK

In a sub-type with smaller lettering were examples of:-

BUKURU and RAHAMA

February 1963.

Colin McCaig.



18.