

The South West Africa Official Pictorial Stamps - 1931 to 1952

Description of the Exhibit

The issuing of the South West Africa Official Stamps was controlled by the Union of South Africa Postal Authority. How this came about is described in this exhibit. I will show how philatelic planning in the Union applied in parallel to South West Africa. The South West Africa Official stamp set is remarkable in that only 10 stamps were overprinted, 5 Union of SA stamps and 5 SWA stamps, and issued in 27 combinations over a period of 27 years. The overprints were done in both English and Afrikaans. The strength of this exhibit is that it shows all 27 stamps and most of their many varieties.

The purpose of issuing Official stamps was to prevent unauthorised use and theft. Initially Official stamps were not available to the general public. When, after 18 months, this rule was relaxed, the original purpose could no longer be achieved yet Official stamps continued to be issued until 1952.

Certain stamps shown are very rare: the proof stamps of 1931 and the 1947 2d inscriptional pair of which only two copies are known. The overprinting of this 2d stamp by a Windhoek firm is discussed. It is highly likely that only 2 sheets were overprinted resulting in only two possible inscription pairs. One is in this exhibit.

The 1938 issue of the single 1½d Mail train stamp had printing problems. The same problem reappeared in the overprinting of the 1½d in 1951. The possible causes are discussed.

The most recognisable recurring variation, that of the "I" for a broken "L" in the 1938 1½d stamp overprint, is shown and proof given that it appeared in only the B panel.

The 1951-52 set is interesting for the transpositions of English and Afrikaans overprinting. This exhibit shows how the different printings differed in the transposition sequences. All transpositions are shown.

The transposed overprint forgery debate is re-evaluated and the criteria for judging the forgeries are reconsidered. The limited evidence for a 3rd only printing is highlighted concluding that a transposed printing should not be excluded a priori. Supporting examples are shown.

Full panels and large blocks of stamps are generally scarce. A few full panels, mint and cancelled, are shown.

The Plan of this Exhibit:

The Underlying 5 SWA Pictorial Stamps and the Overprints - An overview of all the stamps

Overprint on SWA stamps - mint, used and varieties

| | |
|---------|---|
| 1931 | stamps mint and used with varieties set of imperf proof stamps covers franked with 1931 stamps |
| 1938 | stamps mint and used with varieties examination of printing issues covers franked with 1938 stamps |
| 1945/50 | stamps mint and used with varieties scarce 2d stamps and rare inscribed pair shown covers franked with 1945/50 stamps |
| 1951/52 | stamps mint and used with varieties special attention is given to the transpositions of all values the ½d stamp overprint transposed forgery debate |

Sources:

South African Colour Catalogue 2023/2025

Ralph F Putzel - The Comprehensive Handbook of the Postmarks of German South West Africa / South West Africa / Namibia (1991)

Natie Becker RDPSA - The Overprinted Stamps of South West Africa to 1930

South African Philatelist - 1926 to 1956

Interaction with fellow Dealers and Collectors - especially Glen Carpendale (1939-2019)

The Matheson Collection of Union Officials at Stanley Gibbons, Stanley Gibbons Website

Net Catalogue of the Stamps of South Africa & South West Africa - B Joseph and J von Varendorff July 1971

**Five SWA Pictorial Stamps
Four Issued on 5 March 1931 and the 1½d on 1 March 1937**



The Official Overprints Issued 1931 to 1952



The Pictorial Official Stamps of South West Africa - 5 March 1931

Postage stamps – Line engraved. Printed by Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co., New Malden, Surrey in sheets of 120 (two panes of 60), each pane consisting of ten horizontal rows of six stamps. English and Afrikaans stamps alternate. Watermarked multiple springbok's head. Perforated 14 x 13½. Margins are devoid of markings except for printer's imprint in bottom margins perforated through. Centre in second colour.

1/2d. bright green and grey black. – Gom Paauw.

1d. carmine and dull blue. – Cape Cross with Portuguese Coat of Arms and Portuguese Galleon.

2d. sepia and bluish purple. – The Bogenvels Rock 6d. sepia and blue. – View of Luderitz.

Official stamps. – 1/2d., 1d., 2d. and 6d. postage stamps overprinted alternately OFFICIAL and OFFISIEEL in small sans serif capitals in vermilion. (*South Africa Philatelist*, March 1931)

These four stamps were the first SWA pictorial stamps to be overprinted as Officials, previous Official overprints were on Union definitive stamps (1926 to 1929).

Imperf proofs of the 4 stamps overprinted OFFICIAL and OFFISIEEL

Proof stamps are scarce.



The four stamps overprinted in red - mint.



The announcement in the SA Philatelist indicates a combined delivery of the stamps and the overprints. That can only be true if the overprinting was also done by Bradbury, Wilkinson and Co Ltd. Previously the overprinting was done by the South African Government Printer.

The Four Stamps Used and Inscriptional Blocks



The 1931 2d Inscriptorials - Block of Four Used



1931 Issue of 1d - Block of 36 Stamps

The stamps have the gum retained therefore judged to be CTO. Large blocks of Official stamps are scarce.



Genuine Official Mail

Genuine Official Mail is very scarce.

This cover has all the appearances of a genuine official item; On His Majesty Service envelope, it is addressed to a government department in London and has an official cache.

Mail to England had to be stamped as free postage did not apply. This cover is stamped with the 2d 1931 issued stamp for seamaile. The cover was posted in Windhoek on 17 October 1933.

ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE.

IN DIENS VAN SY MAJESTEIT.

The Secretary,

The Royal Hospital,

Chelsea,

London, S.W.1.,

ENGLAND.



1931 2d Stamp on Commercial Mail

Genuine official mail stamped with official stamps is scarce, so is commercial mail as it had no need for official stamps. This cover was stamped 4d for large envelope overseas rate and 6d registration fee. The cover was posted in Windhoek in 1932 addressed to Bitterfeld, Germany. It is backstamped on receipt at Bitterfeld.

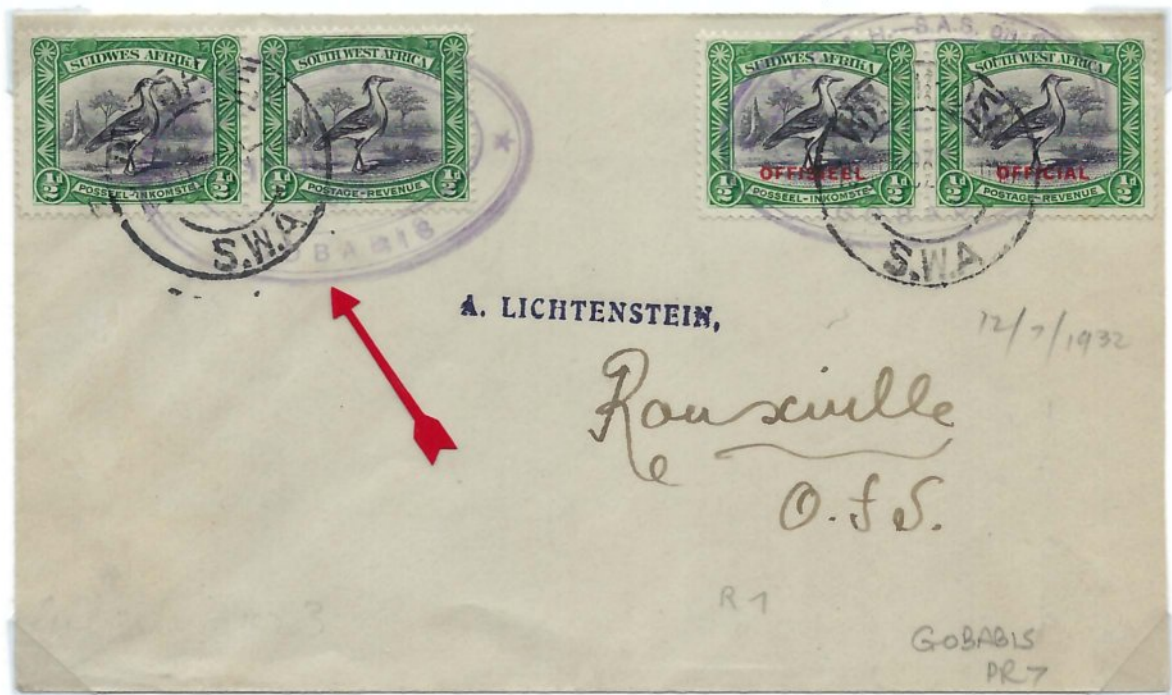
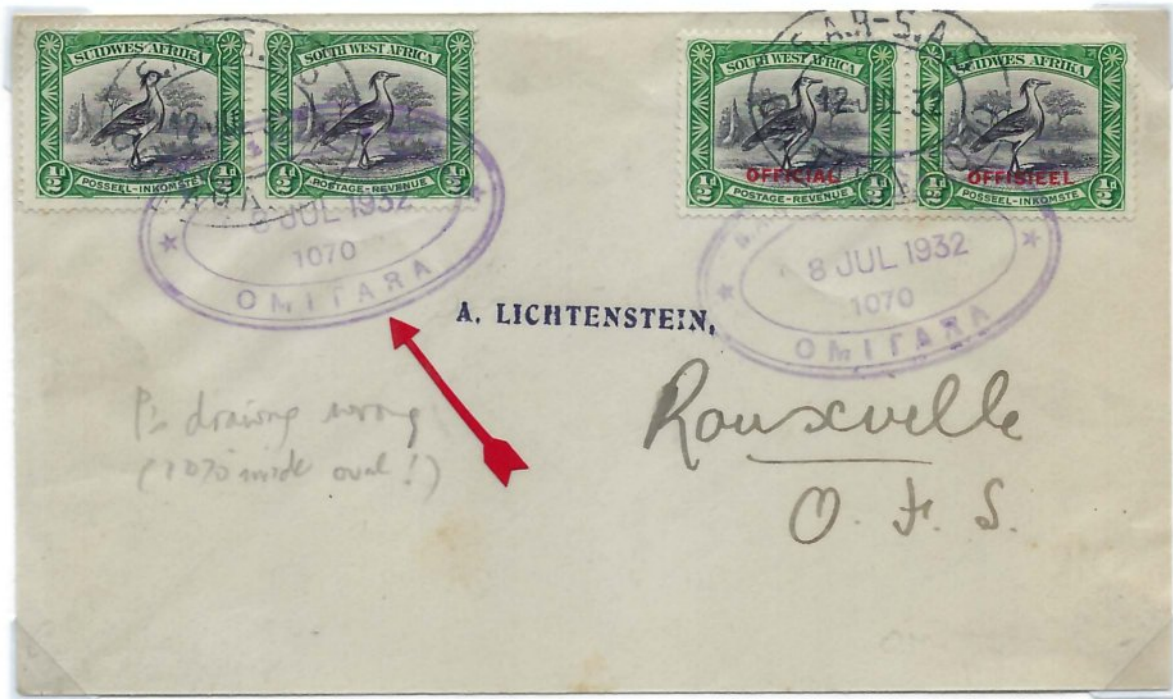


Official Stamps and SWA Railway Cancellations

Ralph F. Putzel in his monumental "The Comprehensive Handbook of the Postmarks of German South West Africa/ South West Africa/Namibia" comments on the importance of philatelic covers. On page 529 he writes "A premium must also apply to the very small stations....which a certain percentage of philatelic covers were made on request of dealers. At least, thus, we have a philatelic record which we might otherwise not have had." The addition of official stamps on cover improved the chance of survival.

Two very scarce Railway datestamps are preserved on the following two covers, enhanced by official stamps;

Omitara 8 July 1932 and Gobabis 12 July 1932.



Two Very Scarce Railway Cancellations

These two philatelic covers, as per Ralphy Putzel, helped to record very scarce railway cancellations. The addition of official stamps on both covers made preservation more likely.

The first cover has the **S.A.R - S.A.S. station cancellation for Omitara**, dated 19 July 1932 addressed to Edlinger in Windhoek.



The second cover has the **Station Master's Office cancellation for Outjo**, dated 26 May 1934, addressed to Edlinger in Windhoek.



A New Official Stamp - Overprint on 1½d Pictorial Issued in 1937

The following note, dated 22.4.38, has been received from the Director of Posts and Telegraphs, Windhoek: It is desired to inform you that this Administration contemplates the issue of an additional "Official" stamp as from 1st July, 1938. The new denomination will be the current 1 1/2d. postage stamp overprinted in red alternatively "Official" and "Offisiel." (South African Philatelist, May 1938)

The underlying stamp for the new 1½d Official overprint is the 1½d stamp, issued on 1 March, 1937 illustrating postal service by ship, by aeroplane and by SAR mail steam train. The overprinting font changed from Sans-serif on the 1931 set to a very slender Serif font on this 1½d stamp. The overprinting was done by the South African Government Printer as per Natie Becker.

Overprinted stamps are shown, on the left a mint stamp and on the right a used stamp followed by two blocks of 6 stamps, mint and used.



The Panel B Full Page of the 1½d Overprinted Official Stamp
Numerous Varieties are indicated - Full Pages are scarce



A Broken Slug Variety of the 1½d Official Stamp

The Westminster Stamp Co. report that in the second stamp from the left in the bottom row of the sheets there is what seems to be a constant minor error in the overprint, viz., the foot of the "L" in "OFFICIAL" being completely missing. (South Africa Philatelist, September 1938)

Three blocks of stamps are shown here with the "L" as "I" in the overprint "OFFICIAL". It is a constant recurring error as shown in all three instances. Because this error was clearly visible to the naked eye it became the most reported and collected variety.



This variant of "I" for "L" only appeared in the B Panel of the sheet of stamps. Panel A shows a normal "L" while Panel B below shows the "I" error.

Panel A



BRADBURY, WILKINSON & CO. LD., NEW MALDEN, SURREY, ENGLAND.

Panel B



BRADBURY, WILKINSON & CO. LD., NEW MALDEN, SURREY, ENGLAND.

The 1938 Official Overprint on the 1½d Stamp - a Printing Problem

Letterpress inks differ quite a bit in thickness, viscosity, and tack (stickiness), and those differences matter enormously in how they behave on press. They affect how the ink transfers, how it prints, how it dries, and how it interacts with different papers and presses. Printers often talk about ink as if it has a personality, because small variations can change everything from coverage to crispness of impression. Printers routinely modify ink on the slab, but sometimes the only correction is to switch to a different ink.

The overprinting of the 1½d stamp of 1938 had inking problems. The problem appears to be with the ink and the surface on which it was printed. Different stamps in this printing showed different results; the overprint lettering broke up badly, ink did not adhere to the stamp's previously printed surface and the ink dried too quickly shedding small particles. At times a person gets the impression that the the OFFICIAL OFFISIEEL lettering is under the stamp's printed image. These problems applied to many sheets but not all. The problem may have been addressed during the printing process.

Blobs of Ink (On sheet r⁶c⁶)



The letters "F" and "O" breaking up



The printing is badly placed on the stamp



First Day Cover for the 1½d "OFFICIALS."

The following note, dated 22.4.38, has been received from the Director of Posts and Telegraphs, Windhoek: First day covers will be attended to at a charge of 5s per hundred, but such orders, accompanied by remittances, must reach this office no later than the 15th June, 1938. (*South Africa Philatelist - May 1938*)

A charge of 5s per 100 suggests that the envisioned market was philatelic dealers. The applicant had to supply addressed envelopes. The cover was franked with a block of four 1½d stamps and returned by registered post. Regular postage was 2d and the registration fee was 4d. This was a first for the SWA Post Office and met with a very positive response.

The first cover shown below was requested by J.W. McLoughthen in Pretoria. Two purple cache were applied, FIRST DAY COVER and WINDHOEK SO. There is no record of what the SO indicated, perhaps "Stamp Order" or "Special Order". A number was added to the cache, in this case 10, perhaps relating to the specific order. The cover was franked with a block of four 1½d stamps to cover registration and postage.



The second cover was requested by H E Searle in Windhoek. His block of four stamps was an inscriptional block. It was also stamped FIRST DAY COVER and pencil marked SO111. Both covers were backstamped with a Director's purple oval cache.



SWA Mail Franked with Official Stamps

If internal (within SWA or to an address in the Union), on official business, no stamps were needed. This applied for airmail as well as surface conveyance.

From 1935 this also applied to surface mail to addresses with the African Postal Union - which included the Rhodesias, Nyasaland, Bechuanaland, Swaziland and Basutoland; for airmail prepayment of the full amount with postage stamps was required until 1948, after which this too did not require prepayment (amendment to the APU Convention of 1935).

There were exceptions: When the Post Office fulfilled an order from a collector for stamps, the postage was payable - it was not on official business, but the private business of the collector. So one occasionally finds blue Post Office registered envelopes addressed within SWA or to the Union with stamps paying postage and the 4d registration fee. As often as not the PO used official stamps for this purpose. **(Information by private communication from Hugh Amoore RDPSA FRPSL)**

The cover below is exactly as that described by Hugh Amoore. The cover is addressed to R Matticks in East London. The cover was posted in Windhoek on 13 September 1938.



Airmail Covers with SWA Official Stamps

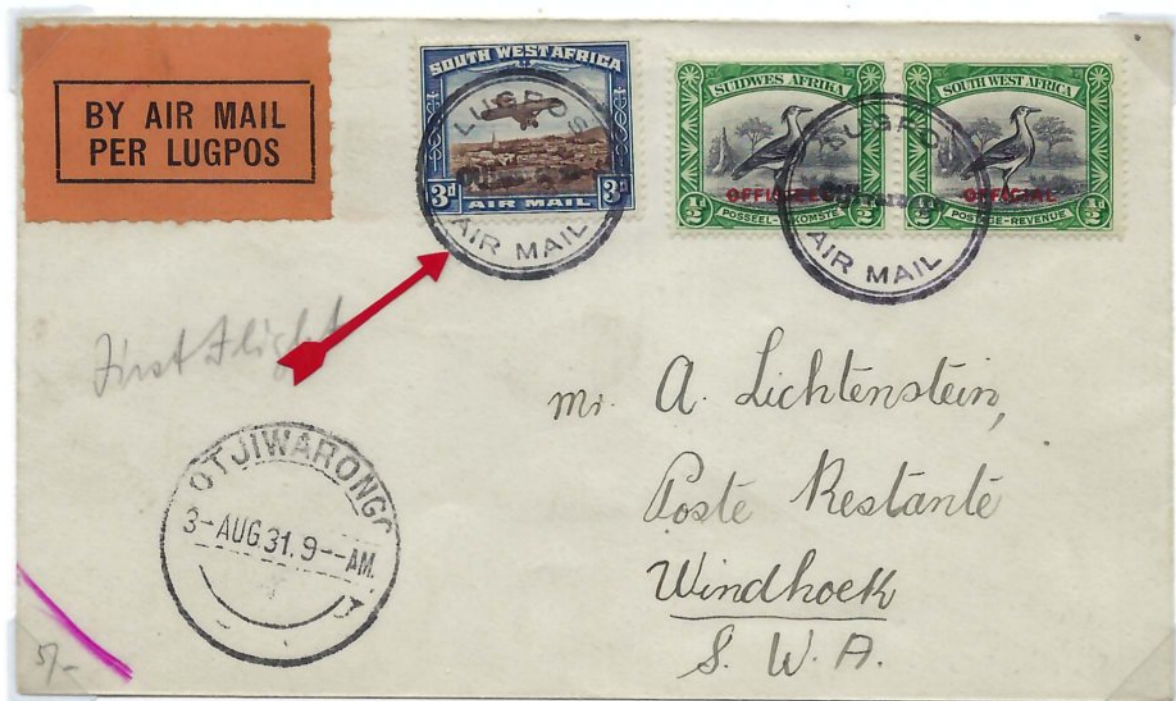
Collecting Airmail covers has always been a very popular philatelic activity. Franking such covers with additional official stamps added value to the cover. Philatelic dealers regarded this as a boon.

The two covers below have special LUGPOS/AIRMAIL caches.

The first cover has a **Windhoek Airmail cache** cancelled in Windhoek and an arrival cancellation in Walvis Bay.



The second cover is cancelled with the **Otjiwarongo Airmail cache** and with an Otjiwarongo date cancellation on cover.



1945 - The Changed Overprint on the SWA Pictorials

S.W.A. OFFICIAL

Mr J. Robertson of the Robertson Stamp Co. (Pty.) Ltd., has shown us new issues of the ½d and 6d S.W.A. official stamps. The present pictorial issue is used as before but the overprints are larger than before and the letters are now serif instead of sans-serif. (*South Africa Philatelist* - May 1945)

This issue can be distinguished from subsequent issues in that the first "O" is more oval than round. After the disastrous 1938 issue of the 1½d stamp with the slender Serif font, all fonts from now are much bolder. The ½d, 1½d and 6d stamps are available in a normal and a dark print. This could be because there was a second printing or the ink density setting on the printer was changed during the printing. The 2d stamp was not included in this printing.

Mint and Used stamps shown



Used Inscriptional Blocks



Double overprints

The letterpress printing process does not lend itself to an error which would produce a double overprint. A double overprint has to involve human intervention. The sheet has to be reinserted into the printer by hand. The reason for this intervention is unknown and why and how the stamp reached the philatelic market also remains unknown. Yet they appear on the market regularly at different times and in different countries. The number of double overprinted stamps is mostly very small and therefore rare.

Two SWA Official overprints are shown. The 1938 1½d stamps and the 1945 1d stamp.



The 1945-1950 Officials overprinting was made in two shades, light and dark. The dark mode is shown below.



The "D" and other Variations

S.W.A. "Officials"

Mr W.E. de Groot, Jr., writing from Pennsylvania, U.S.A., reports the following variety in the current 1/2d., 1 1/2d., and 6d. official stamps:

The first stamp in the second row has overprint OFFISIEEL with a flat-sided O on the left letter, causing it to resemble a letter D. This must be constant as it is the same on all three denominations.

(South Africa Philatelist - April 1947)

Instances of the "D" Variations on all four values are shown



Other Variations in the set



The Printing Problem of 1938 Recurs in 1945

The inking problem of 1938 recurs now in 1945 but the worse problem is the registration of the overprinting on the stamps. A Printroom Overseer of the 1960's comments:

"The stock to be overprinted was 8 years old. It was originally printed in 1937 and now retrieved for overprinting in 1945. Some paper, especially when gummed, when it gets older curle and becomes very difficult to handle in a letterpress. As the platen closes the paper moves causing severe registration problems."

It should also be remembered that when stamps are overprinted the printer has to account for every sheet received from the Post Office. This applies to all sheets overprinted whether good or poorly done. This display proves the enormity of the printers problem with the 1937 SWA 1½d pictorial stamp.



1947 - The Rare South West Africa Pictorial 2d Stamp

The 2d stamp was overprinted in 1947.

Its printing history is unique as it was the only SWA official stamp overprinted in Windhoek. It is also one of the most rare SWA Official stamps. Only two copies of the inscriptional pair are known. The corner pair is also counts as super rare. No official or commercially used covers are recorded.

In 1971 Benje Joseph and J von Varendorff reported as follows:

No records exist as to the numbers issued of No.021 (the 2d stamp.) This issue was overprinted by John Meinert in Windhoek, and was available to collectors and dealers from the philatelic counter in Windhoek. Philatelically used copies exist, but no copies have yet been found on official mail. (Net Catalogue of the Stamps of South Africa and South West Africa. July 1971)

John Meinert Printing (Pty) Ltd was a publishing house in South West Africa, named after its founder John Meinert, businessman and later mayor of Windhoek. It owned the country's only large printing works. The publishing house was founded as *Windhuker Druckerei* in German South West Africa. John Meinert entered as managing director in 1913 and bought the business in 1917. John Meinert Printing owned the publishing house *Deutscher Verlag*, the publisher of the German-language daily *Allgemeine Zeitung*. It also ran South West Africa's only large printing works. All major South West African newspapers were printed at John Meinert. It operated the necessary printing equipment, including Linotype typesetters, to overprint stamps. The slugs used for overprinting were of the same font and style as Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co used for overprinting the other values.

The great rarity of the 2d Official stamps is probably due to the very small local print run. It is thought to have been a trial print which was did not go to a full print run. It's printing history also explains why its single ink colour does not match the ink colours of the other value overprints done by Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co.

Five pairs are shown here

Two normal pairs, one used pair, the rare corner pair and the very rare inscriptional pair

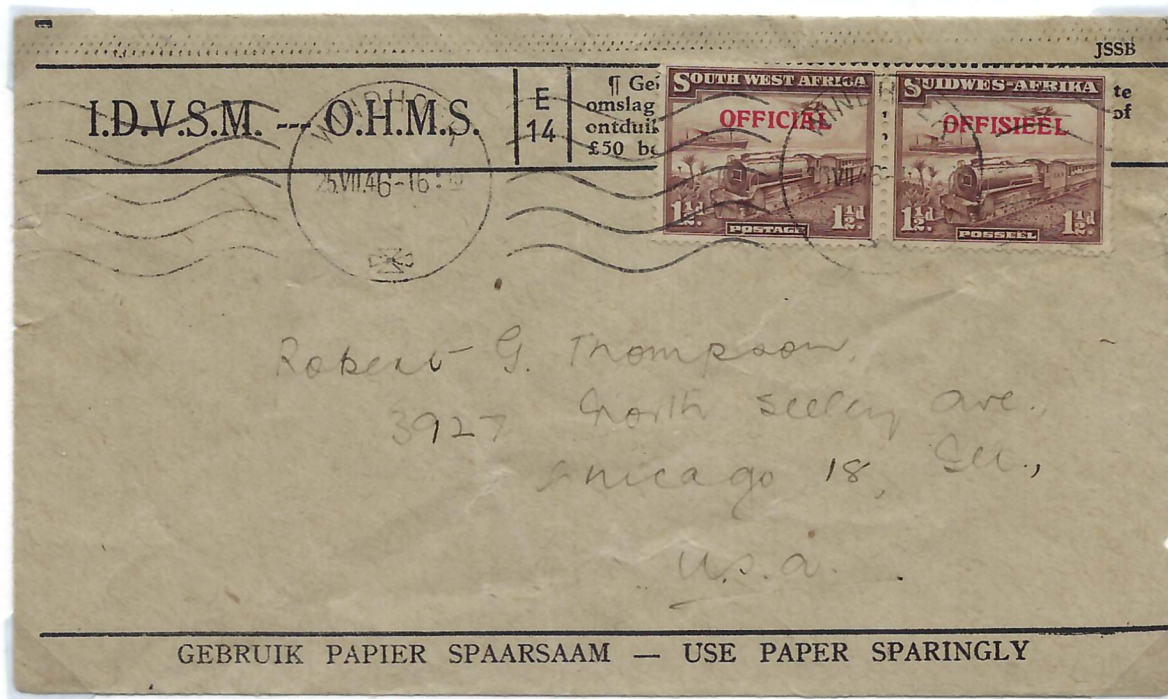


SWA Official Stamps on Official Letters

Official mail from South West Africa to the United States of America did not qualify for free mail. Letters had to be franked. Official mail franked with official stamps is very scarce. The requirement that official stamps be used on official mail had long not been enforced.

Two covers are shown below. Both covers were posted from Windhoek, the first on 25 August 1946 and the other on 26 February 1948. Both were stamped with Official 1½d stamps issued in 1945.

An official cover addressed to Chicago, Illinois, USA



An official cover addressed to Scotia, New York, USA



16 Nov 1951/52 - South West Africa Pictorial Stamps Overprinted

Mr. J. Robertson of Johannesburg has drawn our attention to the use of a new fount on the South West Africa "Officials". The letters are a larger and heavier type, and the "O's" round instead of the oval shape in the previous issue: OFFICIAL and OFFISIEEL are consequently about 2 millimetres longer in length. The values overprinted are the 1d., 1 1/2d., 2d. and 6d. (*South Africa Philatelist* - June 1952)

This set was issued overprinted in bright red ink and in a darker red ink. Both sets and used set are shown.

Bright Red

Used

Dark Red



A later report, important for the forgery discussion:

..... Mr. J. Robertson now informs us that the 1/2d. was definitely not overprinted with the 1st or 2nd setting of the current type of overprint, only with the latest (3rd) setting. (*South African Philatelist*, October 1952)



16 Nov 1951/52 - Overprinting Transposed

Transposition of Overprints on S.W.A. "Officials"

This month we can report another issue of the 1 1/2d. and 6d. S.W.A. "Officials" which Mr J. Robertson of Johannesburg has noted bears the same larger fount as that described last month, but with the entirely new feature that the overprints are transposed on one horizontal pair in each block of four copies. Thus, though the stamps are correctly inscribed alternately in English and Afrikaans – both horizontally and vertically – the overprints alternate horizontally only and in consequence, we have all the OFFICIAL's set one above the other in one column and the OFFISIEEL's arranged in a similar manner in the adjoining column with the unusual result (of transposition.) (South Africa Philatelist - July 1952)

The 1st printing had errors in the A panel. The 2nd printing had errors in both A and B panels but it was a very small print run.

Here shown are two inscriptional blocks of 1st Printing Panel A and two inscriptional blocks of the 2nd printing.



1st
A E
E A

2nd
E A
E A

16 Nov 1951/52 - A Full Pane with Transpositions - Panel A 1st Printing



1951/52 Part Panel of 1½d Official Stamp with Transpositions



A part of Panel A of the 1st printing, all 10 rows of column 1 and 2. The printer doubled the slugs in rows 5 and 6 causing this multi faceted panel.

All Correct

Top Correct
Bottom
Transposed

All Transposed

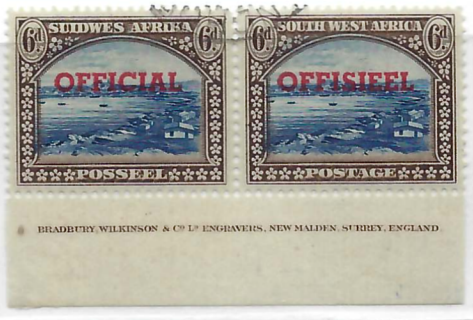
16 Nov 1951/52 - South West Africa Pictorial Stamps Overprinted

These blocks 4 stamps of 1d and 1½d and block of 6 stamps of the 6d can only be placed in the 1st printing panel A



Used transposed stamps are very scarce

Used 1d, 1½d, 2d, 6d pairs and a 6d inscriptional pair are shown below



Transpositions of the 2nd Printing

.... the following is the position at date regarding the transposition:

First printing: This occurs on the 1d., 1 1/2d., 2d. and 6d. values and the right hand panes are all correctly overprinted. In the case of the left hand panes of all values the top five rows are correctly overprinted, but on the lower five rows the overprint is transposed. This is because the fifth and sixth horizontal rows both commence with an English overprint. Thus, block from the fifth and sixth horizontal rows each contain a correctly overprinted horizontal pair and a pair with transposed overprint, while blocks taken from any position in the lower half of the sheet (rows 6-10) shew every stamp with transposed overprint.

Second printing: On the 1 1/2d. and 6d. values, left and right hand panes are both identical and any block will shew a horizontal pair normal overprint and a horizontal pair transposed overprint. (South African Philatelist, August 1952)

The 3 examples shown here can only be placed in the 2nd printing



In a letter to us the Director of Posts, Windhoek, states that his second printing comprised only a small portion of an order and the error of setting of the overprint will not be repeated on the balance of the order, the printer's attention having been called to his error. (South African Philatelist, August 1952)



In connection with the transposed overprints and the note in our August issue Mr. J. Robertson now informs us that the 1/2d. was definitely not overprinted with the 1st or 2nd setting of the current type of overprint, only with the latest (3rd) setting. (South African Philatelist, October 1952)

16 Nov 1951/52 - Official Overprinted Stamps - 3rd Printing

If it is accepted that the 1½d was only overprinted in the 3rd printing they have to be placed here.



The 1d, the 1½d and the 2d stamps shown below can only be placed in the 1st printing B panel or in the 3rd printing.



1951/52 - The ½d Stamp - Transposed Overprint Forgery Debate

In a letter to us the Director of Posts, Windhoek, states that his second printing comprised only a small portion of an order and the error of setting of the overprint will not be repeated on the balance of the order, the printer's attention having been called to his error. This third printing is expected to be delivered by the printers about the end of July and, unless a new type font is used, will be identical with the right hand panes of the first printing. (South African Philatelist, August 1952)

In connection with the transposed overprints and the note in our August issue Mr. J. Robertson now informs us that the 1/2d. was definitely not overprinted with the 1st or 2nd setting of the current type of overprint, only with the latest (3rd) setting. (South African Philatelist, October 1952)

The 1/2d Stamp Transposed Overprint Forgery

The existence of a ½d stamp overprinted transposed has been the centre of an extensive debate on its authenticity. Mike Tonking in the S.A. Philatelist of June 2013 gave a detailed account of its history and showed that those items that had been auctioned were forgeries in spite of certificates having been issued. The certificates were subsequently withdrawn. Stanley Gibbons no longer lists it in its catalogue.

Can a Final Word on the Forgery be Spoken?

Mike Tonking uses as his first criterion for testing a forgery as *"The overprint applied to the issue 6 1952 printing was placed in line with the bird's shoulder. ..whereas in the case of the forged overprint it is raised to lie across the bird's head."* This criterion is not valid.

His second criterion is that *"...the letters (are) slightly thinner as well as being too light in colour."* This criteria also is not valid.

Many of the normal overprinted stamps show exactly these same characteristics, the placing on the stamp and the quality of the lettering, density and colour. The examples below show both printing varieties.



This does not question the existence of forgeries. It only suggests that the existence of forgeries does not mean, logically, that there are no genuine items. The other matter of concern is that the testimony that the stamp was overprinted only in the 3rd printing, when no transpositions were recorded, apparently depends on one person, Mr J Robertson. Corroborating evidence would help to set the argument on a stronger footing.

The 2015 edition of the South African Stamp Colour Catalogue is once again a useful catalogue for both the general and to an extent the specialised collector of Southern Africa. It is noted that the SWA Official ½d with transposed overprint is still listed as SACC 23a used only, despite the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, no genuine example has ever been seen (The SA Philatelist, June 2013).

In view of this Stanley Gibbons withdrew the listing of SG 023a in 2014. Although the SACC notes that it should have a certificate it is most unlikely that this will ever be possible based on our knowledge to date. MJH Tonking (The SA Philatelist, August 2015).

Perchance the editor of The SA Philatelist considered all the evidence available to him and did not find it compelling.

The philatelic world has seen more than one surprise.

16 Nov 1951/52 - South West Africa Pictorial Stamps Overprinted

Use of same forme for different stamp values

This illustrated slug defect, damaged "A", shows up on all four different value stamps, 1d, 1½d, 2d and 6d, indicating that the same slug set was used for overprinting the different stamp values. The four stamps shown would have occupied the same row and column position on their pane. Scarce as a set of four.



5 Inscriptional blocks of 4

All these blocks were correctly overprinted, English on English and Afrikaans on Afrikaans stamps

