**How many post offices were there in Nigeria ?**

Nigeria is a big country, with over 180 million inhabitants in an area roughly 4 times that of the UK. Its postal history goes back over 200 years, and has been thoroughly researched and described by, amongst others, Ince and Sacher, Proud, and Jones. This article explores the changing number of post offices from pre-1900 to the most recent information available from NIPOST, the Nigerian Postal Service. As we shall see, there remain a substantial number of offices for which no cancel has yet been reported.

In this account I've not distinguished between the various services and administrative details which distinguish post offices from branch offices, sub offices and postal agencies (see http://www.nipost.gov.ng/Postoffice\_Structure.aspx) or attempted to describe the actual cancellers used, their use dates etc - the latest information I have on those is given on http://www.nigerian-post-offices.org.uk/lists.html. I have also put online (at http://www.nigerian-post-offices.org.uk/documents/July\_16\_offices\_lists/Nigeria%20Post%20Offices%20List%20July%2016.doc) a full list of the information about actual post offices which is the basis of the overview in the paragraphs below.

**By 1 January 1914, when the various constituent parts of Nigeria became one nation, 137 offices are recorded** (see Ince and Sacher and the online list at http://www.nigerian-post-offices.org.uk/documents/Oct\_15\_lists/Vol%2010%20Pre%201914%20Oct15.doc). Even by this early stage in Nigerian postal history, spelling variants (eg Saki / Shaki) and name change (for example Sombreiro River to Degema, Qua Iboe River to Eket) make for complications in deciding how many different offices were open before the unification into one Nigeria. As Ince and Sacher comment (p 334) '...conflicting published information and omissions make a definitive list of offices problematical'. . In addition, early records do not always make it clear whether a particular place functioned as a post office (eg selling stamps and cancelling mail) or was merely a staging post on a postal route (see discussion in Ince and Sacher p270).

The period from unification to independence (1 January 2014 to 1 October 1960) has been documented by Proud and also by Jones, whose information extends another 20 years, to 1980. These two major works take different approaches: as Jones comments "(Proud's work) could be regarded more in the nature of an encyclopaedia on the subject while my book is nearer to a catalogue". The first edition of Jones pre-dates Proud, and it is clear that Proud drew on Jones for some information about usage dates of specific cancellers. In turn Jones incorporated information from Proud into the second edition of his book. My online lists (http://www.nigerian-post-offices.org.uk/lists.html) attempt to cross reference the different descriptive approaches to cancellers taken in these essential reference works.

Proud contains much information about the opening dates, location and supervision of individual offices, the result of considerable research in the Nigerian Gazette reports. In the great majority of cases he also gives details of cancels and use dates, However, there are a number of offices described as 'NS' for which no cancel has been seen, though in several such cases an undated Post Office Impression Book image is shown, which suggests but does not prove that the canceller was issued and used.

Since Proud was published, cancels from several of the NS offices have turned up (eg Ado Odo Lagos), but no example has yet been reported for 32 of Proud's not-seen offices. Although the reporting of an office does not guarantee that it actually opened for business and used its own canceller, the majority of these NS offices probably did open and examples have simply not come to light.

The information in Proud also confirms that the pre-1914 office name complications continued: alternative spellings (eg Usoro, Uzoro refer to the same place, and post-1960 became Ozoro); major changes of name (eg Odo Oke Igbira became Aiyedun Ekiti); typos (eg Zana for Zaria), as well as variants caused by damage to skeleton cancellers. All these add to the interest of collecting Nigerian postmarks, and to the difficulty of counting actual offices. However the most significant complication arose in the late 1950s when it became common for cancellers used at smaller offices to include the name of the office followed by the name of the main office responsible for its oversight. Thus Okemessi, which was supervised from Ilesha, cancelled stamps with 'Okemessi Ilesha' from 1960 on. For some offices, the overseeing office changed several times and new cancellers were issued to reflect this (eg Uneah used Uneah Ubiaja then Uneah Uromi as the controlling office changed. All three names apply to the same post office). Of course many 'double barrelled' names had different origins and often reflected the name of the ethnic sub-group to which that community belongs (for example the many place names ending in Ekiti).

The final factors to consider in coming up with a figure for the number of offices in existence up to 1 October 1960 are whether to include travelling and mobile post offices, and what to do about offices in the part of the Cameroon Republic which were at one time under Nigerian/British control. Since this article focuses on physical office locations, I've not included the relatively small number of mobile and travelling post offices, the Cameroons offices pose a more awkward question. Post 1916 the German 'Kamerun' was partitioned between the British in the west and the French further east. The nature of the British administration and its basis in law changed several times thereafter until eventually in 1961, a plebiscite resulted in southern areas becoming part of the Cameroon Republic and northern ones joining Nigeria. I've taken the approach adopted by Jones of including in the lists offices which became part of Nigeria in 1961 and excluding those which didn't.

For collectors of postmarks this may cause some confusion since quite a few offices now in Cameroon Republic used cancellers pre-1961 which include the word 'Nigeria'. The offices concerned are: Victoria, Bafut, Bakebe, Bali, Bamenda, Buea, Kumba, Ossidinge / Mamfe, Manyemen, Mbengwi, Mbonge, Muyuka, Ndian, Ndop, Ndu, Nkambe, Nsaw, Nyasoso, Santa, Tiko, Tinto, Tombel, and Wum.

**Bearing all this in mind, my best estimate for the number of different offices up to independence is 1,463, of which 32 haven't been seen via cancels.**

The WASC library holds a list of offices open in 1946, containing 488 names, so growth in postal services was pretty rapid between the end of the second world war and independence. Two further documents from the WASC library list offices in 1963 and 1973, when the total number reported was respectively 1,507 and 1,677, a considerable slowing down of the development of the post office network. However, these figures conceal a significant number of closures of pre-independence offices, so the actual number of new offices opening was greater than the difference suggests.

Looking through the '63 and '73 lists shows 272 post-independence offices not mentioned in Jones. Adding in the 32 from Proud, and 1 mentioned to me by Simon Heap, makes 305 unseen offices up to the date of the 73 list. Of these 45 have been reported since and are included in my online lists, but that leaves 260 yet to be found. The names of these are given in the table at the end of this article.

The last detailed listing of offices, apart from the NIPOST data mentioned later, is in 1980, the end point of Jones' book. Going through it and working out how many separate offices are included in Jones gives a total of 1,950 offices. That figure excludes alternative spellings and cases where the office name has had the controlling office added to it.

To these must be added the 260 unseen-to-1973 offices, and an unknown number which opened between 1973 and 1980 but which have not been seen. I have examples of cancels from 58 offices not mentioned in Jones, and 13 of these are not mentioned in the 1973 list either. By extrapolation that suggests that there are additional 88 offices open but not seen between 1973 and 1980, making a grand total of 348. **Thus a final estimate for the number of offices open up to 1980 is 2,298.**

What about the 36 years to the present day? No-one has attempted to extend Jones' catalogue (and collectors of 1970s cancels will understand that this would be a major task: records are poor, stamp surfaces don't take canceller ink well, cancellers are often badly worn etc). However NIPOST have published an online database of post offices which gives a sighting shot, albeit at an unstated point in time. I have extracted an alphabetical list of offices (the NIPOST one is published state by state), which I have put online at http://www.nigerian-post-offices.org.uk/documents/July\_16\_offices\_lists/NIPOST%20Offices%20list%20alphabetical%20with%20states.docx. **It shows a total of 3,257 offices, which include 1,300 of the names in Jones and of course a great many new ones.**

How many of these are still open for business must be uncertain: Nigerians have taken enthusiastically to cheaper and faster electronic communications, and private companies have made major inroads into NIPOST's parcel service, not least because items are less likely to get 'lost in the post'. This will have affected large and small offices alike (see for example http://allafrica.com/stories/201508200943.html , http://www.nairaland.com/2001103/pathetic-state-post-office-lagos) and the number will certainly have fallen rather than continued to increase. **According to the UPU (http://www.upu.int/en.html) the number of post offices in Nigeria in 2010 was 2,605; in 2013: 3,259; and in 2014: 2,695.** That's quite a fluctuation!

A couple of cautions apply to the 'unseen offices' list below: almost certainly some of the entries are alternative or misspelt names of other offices for which cancels are known; and the appearance of a name on an official list does not guarantee that it actually cancelled stamps.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Nigerian post offices believed to have existed but for which no cancels are reported** | | | |
| Names in brown are pre-independence (1 October 1960), with post-independence offices in green. | | | |
|  | | | |
| Abiodun Wright Avenue | Abule Oja | Abutete | Adegoke St Surulere |
| Adejukolo | Adoru | Afo | Afor |
| Agba | Agbado Ekiti | Agbamu | Agbelekale Street Oshodi |
| Agege Motor Road Mushin | Agudama Epetiama | Aguleri Otu | Agulu Azigbo |
| Ajaokuta | Aje Street Yaba | Ajebandele | Ajose Street Mende |
| Akpet 1 | Akunnu | Alan Ejor | Alatishe St Abeokuta |
| Alhaji Otta | Alu | Amaeke Ibeku | Amandugba |
| Amiara | Aminyinta | Amuye Ijesha | Anchau |
| Apataganga | Apa Village | Aponmu | Arandun |
| Ariara | Arimogija | Asa | Atte |
| Awa | Awai | Awo Ekiti | Ayakoromo |
| Ayeye | Babanloma | Bacita | Bajulaiye Road, Bashua |
| Bakori | Bama Road Maiduguri | Bambam | Banjiram |
| Beli | Bello St Mushin | Big Warri | Birnin Kudu |
| Bode Market | Borrong | Buni Railway | Calcutta Crescent |
| Cemetery Street Ebute Metta | Dawakin Kudu | Dawakin Tofa | Dopemu |
| Ebba Station | Egbeda | Egbeda Ikwerre | Ekan Meje |
| Ekenwan | Eko Ende | Ekpedo | Ekusa |
| Elekuro | Elere | Emuju | Emuolu Emii / Umuolu Emii |
| Ewulu | Eziowelle | Fabur | Garingabbas |
| Gaya | Gerkawa | Girei | Gulak |
| Herbert Macaulay | Ibagwa | Idegun Anwain | Idera |
| Idogun | Ife Ijumu | Ife Odan | Ifira |
| Igangan | Iganna | Igbo Elerin | Igbojaiye |
| Igbore | Igieduma | Igogo | Igosun |
| Ihie Umuduru | Ihima / Oridu Ihima | Ijemo Abeokuta | Ijere Village |
| Ijesha Ishu | Ijesha Road Surulere | Iju Railway Station | Ikeji Ile |
| Ikoga Zebbe | Ikoneto Town | Ikoro Ekiti | Ikot Udo Abia |
| Ikpidiama | Ilare Ijesha | Ilasha Ekiti | Ilashe |
| Ile Igbo Station | Ilie | Iloffa Odoowa | Ilogbo Ale |
| Ilogbo Otta | Iluomoba Ekiti | Ilushi | Imala Market |
| Imesi Lasigidi | Ipapo | Ipara | Ipole Iloro |
| Iponda | Ira | Iro Town | Isale Ora |
| Ishokun Street Ilesha | Isigwu Omana | Isobendeghe | Isselegu |
| Itagunmodi | Ita Oshin | Itu Mbon Uso | Iwere Ile |
| Iwo Eto Imam | Iwukem | Iyeku | Iyessi Town |
| Iyora | Jama'are | Jeba | Jimeta |
| Kachia Camp | Kagara Town | Kajola | Kankon |
| Kari | Katsina Ala | Ke | Keba Stores Mokola |
| Khontan | Kolo | Komu | Korokorosei |
| Kucheri | Kudeti | Kuru Railway Station | Kweme |
| Kwueme | Kzekwe | Labinjo Lane Lagos | Lafia Lamurde |
| Leventis Stores Ibadan | Leventis Stores Port Harcourt | Madagali | Madangho |
| Mahintedo | Maigana | Makoko | Maroko Village |
| Mefoworade | Miango | Minya | Mkpor |
| Nasarawa Eggon | Nasarawa Gwom | Nathan Street | Ndieche |
| Ndiokpalaeze | Ndonwong Odot | New Benin | Nze |
| Oba Abeokuta | Obada Market | Obadiah Village Apapa | Oba Akure |
| Oba Omege | Odeda Town | Odeyinka | Odo Ape |
| Odoro | Ogheye | Ogriagbene | Ogudu |
| Ogunmakin Market | Ogwu Oba | Oju Woye | Oke Ako |
| Okuta | Olaniyi Street | Olla Igbomina | Olodo |
| Ologbonowon | Olorunda Otta | Omi Adio | Omifunfun |
| Onadeko Street Surulere | Oni | Onigbongbo | Onyedoga |
| Opoma | Orotedo Street | Ososa | Otan Ile |
| Oturu | Ovwian | Owode Market | Oyere Aborisade |
| Popo Aguda Lagos | Randle Avenue | Riga Chikun | Rijau |
| Sabo Lafenwa | Sabongari Gusau | Sabongari Nguru | Serti |
| Shabomi | Shasha Olumogo | Shinkafe | Simpson Street Ebute Metta |
| Song | St Finbarrs College Road | Tabang | Tambawal |
| Tanimo | Taura Station | Technical College Ibadan | Tede |
| Tudun Nupawa | Tudunwada Kaduna | Uburu Town | Ugomoson |
| Uguo | Ukwunzu | Umuori Uratta | Unguwar Shanu |
| Usen | Utesse | Utugwang | Uzea |
| Wannune Mbahor | Wudil | Yaka | Yelwa Ishar |

References:

The Postal Services of the British Nigeria Region by Jack Ince and John Sacher. Publ 1992 RPSL ISBN 0 900631 25 2.

The cancellations and postmarks of Nigeria 1914-80 by Neville Jones. 2nd Edition 1999 WASC ISBN 0- 9525687-7-2

The Postal History of Nigeria by Edward Proud. Publ 1995 Proud Bailey ISBN 1 872465 17 X

Online sources are given in the text, including http://www.nigerian-post-offices.org.uk/ which contains all the detailed lists of offices and cancellers referred to above. I would be delighted to hear of cancels from the unseen offices, and for any other information about post offices, cancellers and use dates which can extend current knowledge.