Handbook Postcards 07 – Official Postal Cards

The use of New South Wales postal cards marked `O.S ‘, for `On Service’, was restricted to use by Government Departments. These cards are classified as:

(a) with stamps overprinted O.S.
(b) with stamps perforated GR or OSNSW
(c) with heading OHMS and unchanged stamps.

Prior to the introduction of OS adhesive stamps Government Departmental mail was stamped with the adhesive postage stamps at the appropriate postage rate, a system that commenced with the issue of the first New South Wales adhesive stamps in 1850. There were few exceptions, the major of which was that mail sent to and from the main GPO in Sydney to post offices throughout the Colony was free of any postal charge. Free mail of this kind applied throughout the period of use of all OS postal cards and was authorised by the UPU.

Postal Cards Overprinted O.S.

The Government Gazette of 15 December 1879 announced the introduction of stamps `…distinguished by the letters `OS.’ printed thereon in black’. Their use was to be strictly limited to Government Departments and when used on envelopes were required to add `O.H.M.S’ together with the name of the Department from which they were sent. The Gazette stressed that `…under no pretext whatsoever will these stamps be purchased by, or exchanged for, other Postage Stamps at the Post Office’. The Gazette did not give a date when the system was to commence and there was no specific mention of OS postal stationery items although the same restrictions applied. The full text of the Gazette announcement is reproduced in Hull (1911, p.315).

Hull (1911, p.316) reports that the first postage stamps overprinted O.S. were issued to Government Departments in late October 1879 and it likely that they came into use on 1 January 1880. The issue date of the first OS 1d postal card is less certain. Hull (2011, p.373) notes this as 1 January 1880 but, as described below, the first date given in the Printing Office records is in early 1881. The use of overprinted OS adhesive stamps and post stationery continued until 31 December 1894. An example of a 1d OS postal card sent by the Postmaster at Cooma and dated 25 March 1895 is known but the use of such cards after 1 January 1895 is rare.
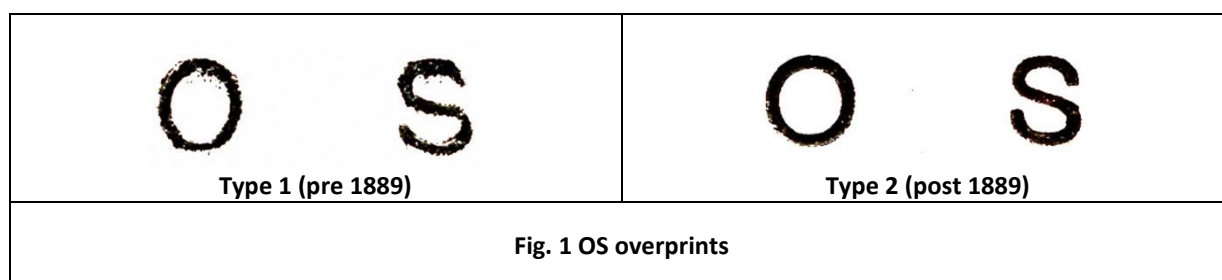
The OS Overprints
The OS overprints used on postal cards OP1 to OP4 are all in black and of similar size. There are however, significant differences in the form of the letter `O’ and `S’ and in the spacing between them. Type 1 (ragged appearance) was used prior to 1889 and Type 2 (smoother appearance) for the later official postal cards, (including reprints of the early issues) see Figure 1. Two sub-types of Type 1 have been identified, along with at least 4 sub-types of Type 2. These are considered beyond the scope of this listing, and more detailed studies of these overprints pose an especially challenging field which collectors may wish to pursue. Studies of the corresponding overprints on the adhesive postage stamps are even more complex.

The Overprinted Cards and Numbers Printed
The printing office records for the 1d postal cards and for those overprinted OS (OP1) for the period 1874-1887 are given in Table 1. During this period the 1d postal cards in use were PC2, PC3, PC3a and PC3b. These are described in detail in the Handbook Section 01, *De La Rue Postal & Reply Cards (PC1 -PC5)* and the accompanying Catalogue. These four cards all have the same impressed stamp

but there are variations in the size and thickness of the card and in the bamboo border design. It is thought that only the 1d card PC3b was overprinted OS (see Fig. 2)

O S	O S
Type 1 (pre 1889)	**Type 2 (post 1889)**

Fig. 1 OS overprints

Fig. 2. OP1 Mint and with Specimen overprint (Type B12)

Table 1 indicates that the OS cards were printed in much smaller numbers that the unoverprinted postal cards available for postage by the public. Prior to issue of the first 1d OS Waratah postal card (OP2) in 1887 the OS overprinted cards accounted for less than 2% of the total issued 1d cards.

Year	Printed	Issued	One Penny			Postcards	
			Spec	OS Spec	OS	Burnt	Balance
1875	181,336	144,000					
1876	138,208	96,250	500				
1877	92,160	111,000					
1878	92,096	120,000				3,404	
1879	221,184	160,000					
1880	92,160	156,000					
1881	185,364	181,044			4,560		
1882	218,400	205,200			4,920		
1883	230,400	260,040			2,040		
1884	322,560	276,000			18,000	2,160	
1885	356,480	336,000			1,800		
1886	410,112	328,800			5,400	699	
1887 (Jan-Oct)	276,480	348,000			9,000		
Total	**2,816,940**	**2,722,334**	**500**	**0**	**45,720**	**6,263**	**2,774,817**

Table 1. 1d Postal Cards Annual printing statistics 1875- 1887

The dates that the 1d O.S. cards were printed are known with some certainty from the Printing Office records but when they were first available for use by government departments is more problematic.

For the 1d O.S postal cards the dates of Issue in official documents are given as:
    OP1 - 1d Pink. Small size, without Waratah as 1 January 1880
    OP2 - 1d Pink. Large size, with Waratah as 31 March 1887.
    OP3 - 1d Purple. With arched inscription as 31 January 1889.
    OP4 - 1d Purple. With straight inscription as 31 January 1890.

Houison (1890, p. 110) gives the same date, 1 January 1880, for the first O.S. 1d card but omits dates for the later issues.

For new stamps designs it was the practice for the printer to first produce the adhesive postage stamps then to proceed to the issue of associated postal cards and finally to print the OS overprints onto postal stationery items. The dates of printing of these various items are given in the printing office records although the design of card that was used is not given. The delays between printing the OS stamps and the OS postal stationery items could often amount to several weeks. Once printed the O S cards were then forwarded to the main GPO Office for distribution to the appropriate government departments. This final process is thought to have only taken only a few days.

The major discrepancy and best documented in the records, between the dates of issue given above and the printing office records, concerns the first use of 1d OS postal cards. The date given above for 1 January 1880 may well be correct for the issue of the adhesive 1d OS stamps to the government departments but not for the 1d OS postal cards. The printing records in Table 1 list the first printing of 4,560 1d OS cards as in early 1881 which does not accord with the 1 January 1880 issue date. The resolution of the disagreement over the earlier dates for the O.S. depends on the availability of dated examples of the cards. Given the small numbers of cards issued and the poor rate of survival this is a difficult task. The total number of OP1 cards produced issued from 1881 to early 1887 was 45,720.

Fig. 3. OP2 Mint and with Specimen overprint (Type B12)

OP2 on the 1d Waratah postal card is illustrated in Figure 3. The first printing was probably on 5 March 1887 and this would accord with the official issue date of 31 March 1887. There were three printings with a total of 11,400 PC2 cards. The printing office records for 1888 do not list the printing or issue of any official postal cards during that year. Thus, the likely total number of OP2 cards produced was 11,400. They are undoubtedly the rarest of the 1d official postal cards.

The year of 1888 is associated with the issue of the 1d Centennial stamp. The Printing Office records note that the first 1d Centennial adhesive postage stamps were printed on 9 July 1988, followed on

17 July by the first 1d OS adhesive postage stamps and on 16 August by the first 1d postal cards impressed with a 1d Centennial stamp. The first printing of OP3 1d OS postal cards was not until 31 January 1889, after the Centennial year had ended! Prior to this date Government Departments would have been using existing stocks of the OP2 cards.
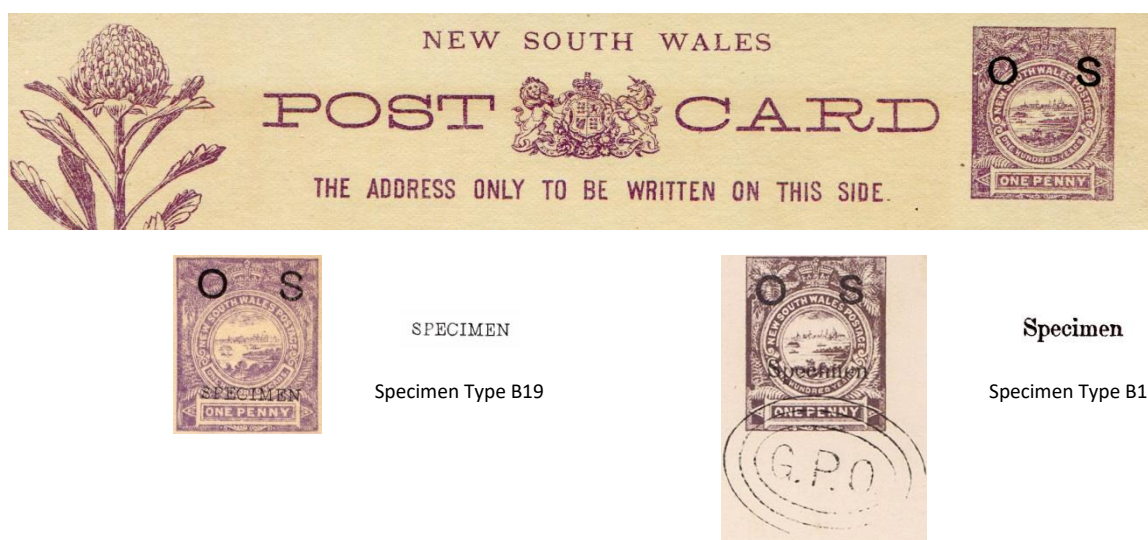

OP3 Oval "O" in "POST"

OP3a Round "O" in "POST"

Fig. 4. OP3 and OP3a Mint and with Specimen overprint (Type B12)

Specimen Type B19

Specimen Type B12

Fig. 5. OP4 Mint and with Specimen overprints (Type B19 and B12)

Postal cards with 1d Centennial stamps were issued as PC6, PC6a and PC9, those with OS overprints are listed as OP3, OP3a and OP4, see Figures 4 and 5. All of these with OS overprint Type 2. The Printing Office records do not specify the dates for the changes of design. However, 1d Centennial OS cards continued to be printed in very small numbers in comparison to the use of the publicly available 1d Centennial postal cards. The annual totals for the 1d OS cards from 1888-1894 are given in Table 2. With one exception, the annual issue of cards from the printer to the Post Office for distribution to government departments was small. The exception was the issue of 50,040 1d OS cards to the post office in August 1891, probably of OP4 cards, the reason for this is unknown. The

last OS postal cards were issued to the post office in June 1894. The demise of the OS overprints was announced in letter from the General Post Office dated 19 December 1894, reproduced in Hull (1911, p. 322). Their use ceased from 1 January 1895.

The annual numbers of OS cards issued from 1881 to 1894 are only a very small fraction of the corresponding 1d postal cards supplied to post offices for sale to the public which amounted to 2-3 million. The relative scarcity applies both to mint and used cards. The former because the cards were not available for sale, the only exception was for a brief period in 1895 when unused stocks of mint 1d OS cards were available for purchase by collectors, the details of such sales are outlined below in relation to the sale of OS stamps and postal stationery to collectors later in 1895. The OS postal cards were used by a very wide range of Government Departments often with a printed message in the reverse and sometimes also with a printed address. Overseas use of the 1d OS cards is rare and required the addition of OS overprinted postage stamps

Fig. 6. OP4 overprinted for use by the Cadet Corps and Medical Board

1888	1889	1890	1891	1892	1893	1894
0	16,400	15,600	62,340	22,800	6,000	16,200

Table 2. 1d OS Postal Cards Annual Numbers printed 1888 – 1894.

Specimen and Reprint Cards

The only official postal card known with a specimen overprint prior to the 1894 sale to collectors was for the 1d Centennial Card (OP4s1) illustrated in Figure 5. A total of 750 with specimen B19 were printed in October 1892. It is thought that these were printed for distribution to the UPU although to date there is no record to confirm this.

The New South Wales Post Office had on several previous occasions produced adhesive postage stamps overprinted `specimen' or `reprint' for presentation purposes or for sale to collectors. The only example that featured postal stationery were reprints of the 1838 Lettersheets.

The cessation of the use of 1d OS stamps and postal stationery left the Post Office and Government Departments with large quantities of unused material. Hull (pp. 322-324) describes how the O.S. items were made available to collectors who were anxious to obtain examples of material which had not previously been available for purchase by the public. To accommodate this demand the Gazette of 22 July 1895 announced that surplus stocks of O.S. stamps and the 1d O.S. postal cards would be available sale at face value `...on the understanding that they cannot be used for postage'. These were devoid of any additional marking. The surplus stocks at this time are thought to be of OP4.

Hull then describes how collectors requested additional OS items that had been produced at earlier dates. The Post office responded by reprinting the items that were no longer in stock. A total of 1,000 sets of OS stamps and postal stationery were prepared. The Gazette of 15 August 1895 announced that these would be available `… to stamp collectors and others, as complete sets of obliterated stamps and stationery, at the price of £2 per set'.

Fig.7. GPO and NSW 3-ring cancels

Stocks of OP1 and OP2 were exhausted and fresh printings of these cards were made, these may easily be distinguished from the original printings as the OS overprint used on the reprints were all Type 2. The face value of the sets was close to £6 and included the four types of 1d OS postal cards, OP1-OP4. A total of 1,000 sets were prepared, 900 of these cancelled with the NSW in three concentric ovals for sale to public and 100 cancelled with GPO in concentric ovals which were for `… gratis distribution to other postal administrations'.  In contrast to the procedure normally used for official `specimen' or `reprint' overprints, which were printed onto the stamps or stationery by the Government Printer prior to distribution, those for these sets were added using handstamps by Post Office staff. As a result there are variations in the positioning of the of the NSW and GPO cancellations on the reprinted cards. The overprinted sets caused a storm of protest from stamp collectors and the philatelic press which resulted on 18 March 1896 in an official notice from the Post Office that the sale of the £2 sets `…has been discontinued'. Hull notes that a total of 158 sets with the NSW cancel had been sold and 50 of the GPO cancelled sets distributed. Hull (p.324) states that the remaining sets for sale were officially burnt and the balance of the those with the GPO cancel additionally overprinted `specimen' again using handstamps.
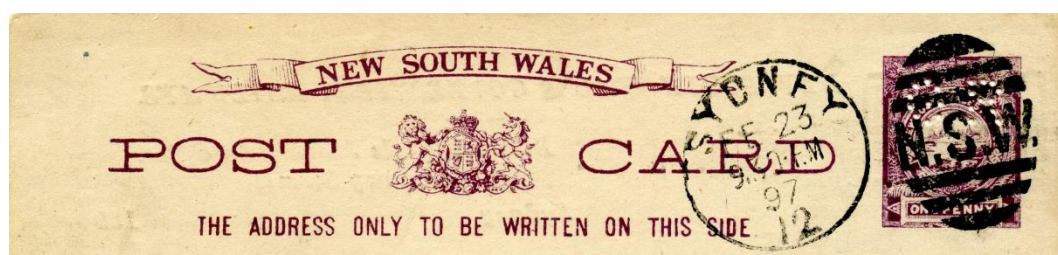
A further complication, not mentioned by Hull, was that at least some of the sets with the NSW cancel were also produced with an additional `specimen' handstamp. These were first described in Smith and Druce (1988) although their existence is noted in Butler (1967). Those that combine the concentric oval NSW cancels with overprints of specimen B19 are especially difficult to obtain. To date, several examples are known on OP3 (with the round `O') and a single example for OP2.

Hull concludes his description of these events as; `However much, as philatelists, we may, deplore the reprinting of these stamps, we have only our fellow hobbyists to blame, for had it not been for the demand of certain collectors, and their suggestions, the series would never have been prepared'.

Postal Cards Perforated GR or OSNSW

The Use of Perfins – the Background

The reasons for the abandonment of OS overprinted adhesive stamps and postal stationery are not known. From 1895 to 1908 NSW Government Railways often used postal cards perforated "GR". From 1902 onward cards perforated "OSNSW" were produced for use by various state government departments. Most of the perforated cards had a printed pro-forma message on the reverse.

Fig. 8. OP6 1897(?) GR perfin on PC17 1d Centennial Type 2. 140 x 90 mm.

The use of official perfins by Commonwealth and State government departments was first described in detail by Simpfendorfer et al (1966) and are also listed in Andersen (2007). After Federation the newly appointed Prime Minister of Australia announced in a letter to Commonwealth Departments nationwide that all correspondence was to use stamps perforated OS. This to take effect from 1 November 1902, the date that the Commonwealth Postal and Telegraph Act 1901 came into operation. New South Wales and Victoria quickly adopted a similar approach for all their State government departments. Stieg (2001) illustrates the corresponding postal cards for Victoria. The above regulations only mention `stamps' but it clear that the use of OS perfins also applied to items of postal stationery. It is pertinent to note that prior to January 1891 the use of perfins, either by private or government institutions, was not formally permitted by the New South Wales Postal Department as it was regarded as defacing the stamps. After use was allowed, the only restriction was that stamps that had been punctured to form perfins could not be exchanged at post offices. The use of perfins on postage stamp and postal stationery by government agencies was essentially a device to limit the use to official correspondence, ie. to avoid pilferage. The background to the issue of perfins in Australia is given in Mathews (2003).

Fig. 9. OP10 1902(?) OSNSW perfin on PC21 1d Jubilee Die 2. 140 x 90 mm.

After November 1902 the New South Wales Government Printer was part of the newly formed Commonwealth Post Office. As a result the printer not only added perfins to the postage stamps and items of postal stationery for State government departments but also added the perfins for the Commonwealth departments. Most of those for State departments used the style OS/NSW but perfins were also provided specifically for the Government Savings Bank (GSB) and Government Railways (GR). The Commonwealth perfins are all variations of a simple OS puncture. The only

perfins used on postal stationery were OSNSW Type B (see Figure 9), as well as the previously mentioned GR. The New South Printer continued to produce New South Wales postage stamps and postal stationery until early 1913. The last known date for usage of a perfin on a New South Wales postal card is for 1913.
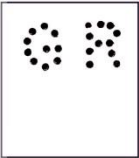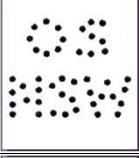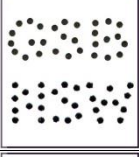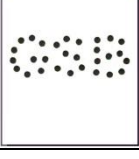
The majority of New South Wales postal cards with perfins for use by State departments are impressed with 1d stamps. This was the postal rate throughout their period of use for delivery within the State and to other locations in Australia. The back of such cards commonly, but not in all cases, have a pre-printed message acknowledging receipt of communications, bookings of various kinds and the like. Correspondence to overseas destinations was much less common. The overseas postal rate to UPU member nations throughout this period was 1½d and limited numbers of 1d official NSW perfinned postal cards with an additional ½d OS perfinned adhesive postage stamp are known. Use of the NSW government OS/NSW perfin on 1½d postal cards (PC 23 and PC32) is rarer. Usage on the 1d Fleet card (PC35) is particularly scarce with only a single used example known.

Hull (1911, p. 206-211) from accounts by a number of visitors to the Government Printing Office in the 1890s and early 1900s describes the perforating machines that were available. These include perforators to provide OS, OS/NSW, and GSB perfins. Examples of a number of these types, and also for the GR perfins, produced on plain paper are illustrated in an Appendix to Hull (1911). Many of the illustrations are from strips of five identical strikes taken from perforators designed for use to perfin sheets of stamps. A different process was used to perforate postal cards. Sinfield (2004) described how they were individually perforated by a machine designed to precisely position the perfin neatly into the upper right-hand corner of the cards over the stamp impression.
The NSW Printing Office records do not provide information on the numbers of postage stamps and postal stationery that were perfinned. It is likely that the demand for these from the State government departments would have been comparable to those for the OS overprinted items that were previously used. The average annual number issued of such OS overprinted postcards was about 20,000, which is only 1-2% of the number issued for the unoverprinted postal cards. The numbers and size of such Commonwealth offices located in New South Wales at this early stage of Federation would have been limited and the demand for OS perfins would likely have been small in comparison to the use by New South Wales government departments.

The classification of the perfin types in the figures below is that used by Simpfendorfer et al (1966). For examples on postal cards, it is easier to distinguish the type of perfin by viewing the message side of the card. The years of known use are given for each type although it is stressed that this is related to studies of the use of perfinned postage stamps and not from items of postal stationery.

The types of Perfin and their conditions of use are summarised in Figure 10, below.

	GR – used by NSW Government Railways In use in two slightly different forms from August 1895 to around 1908. Used for both adhesive stamps and stationery.
	OS (Type A) – used for Federal Government departments Distinguished from Type B by 10 holes in the "S"'. In use from November 1902 to February 1903. Adhesive stamps only.
	OS (Type B) – used for Federal Government departments Distinguished from Type A by 8 holes in the "S". In use from February 1903 onward. Adhesive stamps only.
	OSNSW (Type A) – used for NSW Government departments Distinguished from Type B by 10 holes in the "S"'. In use from December 1902 to February 1903. Used again from 1913 on Commonwealth Kangaroo issues. Adhesive stamps only.
	OSNSW (Type B) – used for NSW Government departments Distinguished from Type A by 8 holes in the "S". In use from February 1903 onward. Used on both adhesive stamps and stationery.
	GSBNSW – used by the Government Savings Bank Used from 5 January 1907 to 14 March 1907. Discontinued because large number of holes caused tearing of stamps. Adhesive stamps only.
	GSB – used by the Government Savings Bank Used from 14 March 1907 onward. Adhesive stamps only.
Fig. 10. Official NSW Perfin Types	

Only two of these types (GR and OSNSW Type B) are known on NSW stationery. It is possible that other types exist, but all examples seen to date have proven to be fakes (see the section below). Most genuine cards have an appropriate proforma message printed on the reverse.
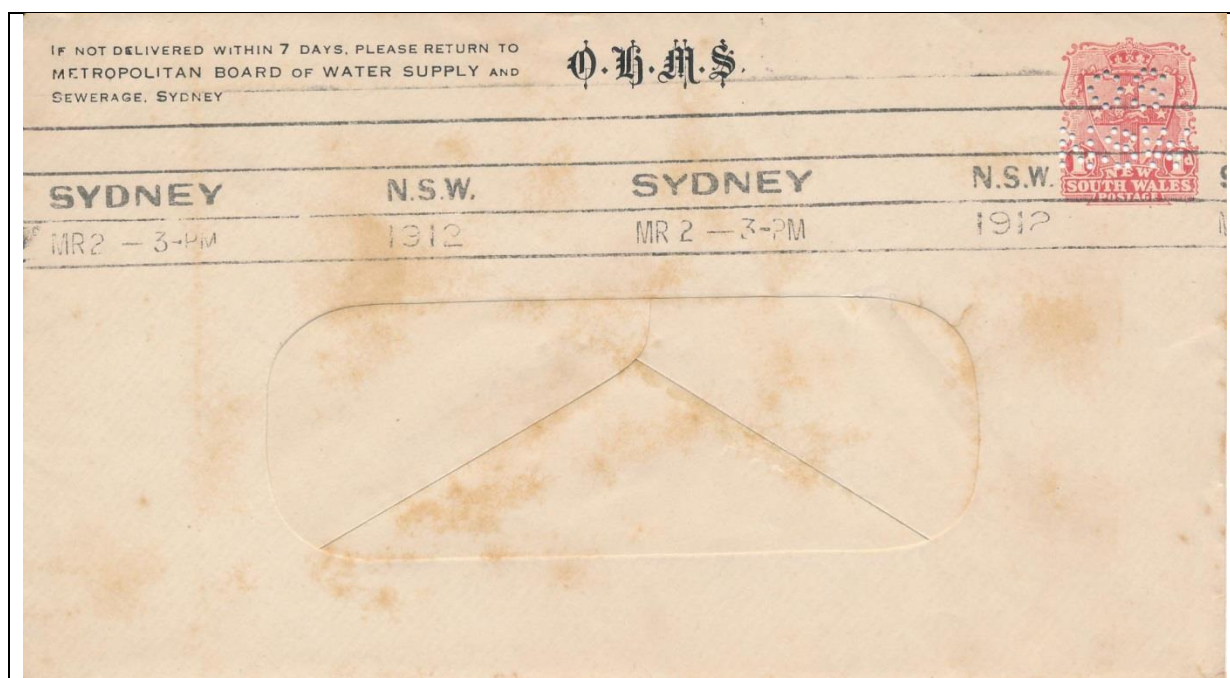
<u>Caution</u>

A significant number of faked perfins are known. Sinfield (2004) provides a detailed account of examples known on Commonwealth stationery at the date of his publication.

In considering whether an item is genuine or not, the following should be considered:
1. Holes should be cleanly punched. The machines used to produce perfins were modified perforating machines and produced holes of similar quality.
2. The holes should be similar placement and spacing to the examples shown in Fig. 10.
3. The perfin should have been produced within an appropriate time frame, for example OSNSW Type A should only appear on items that were current in 1902 – 1903.

Several examples of fake perfinned stationery (and one dubious) are shown below, along with reasons they are considered to be fakes.
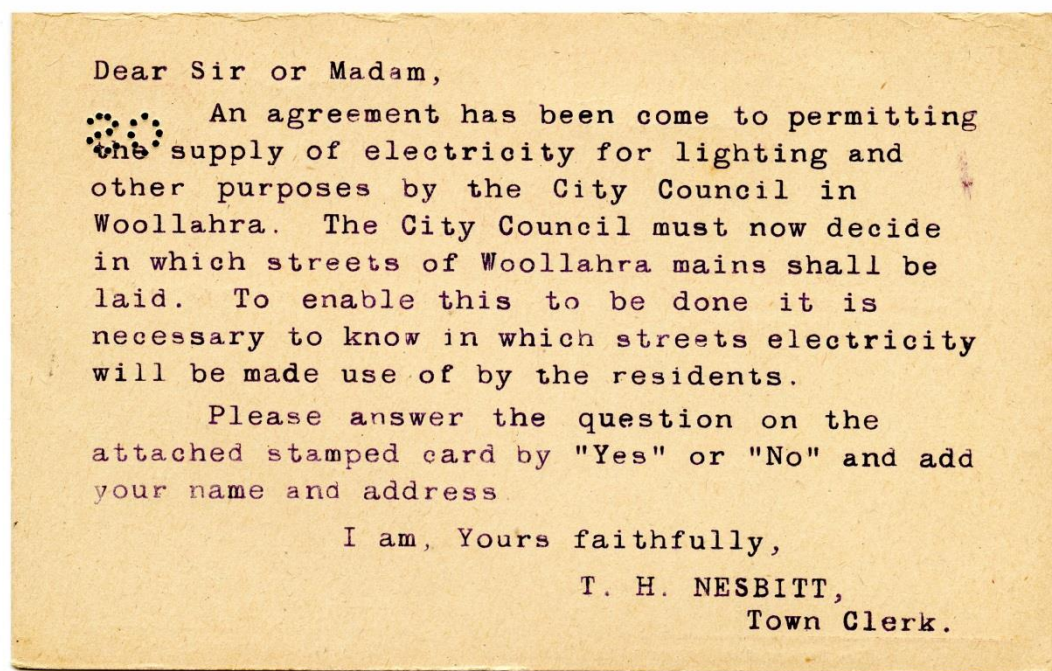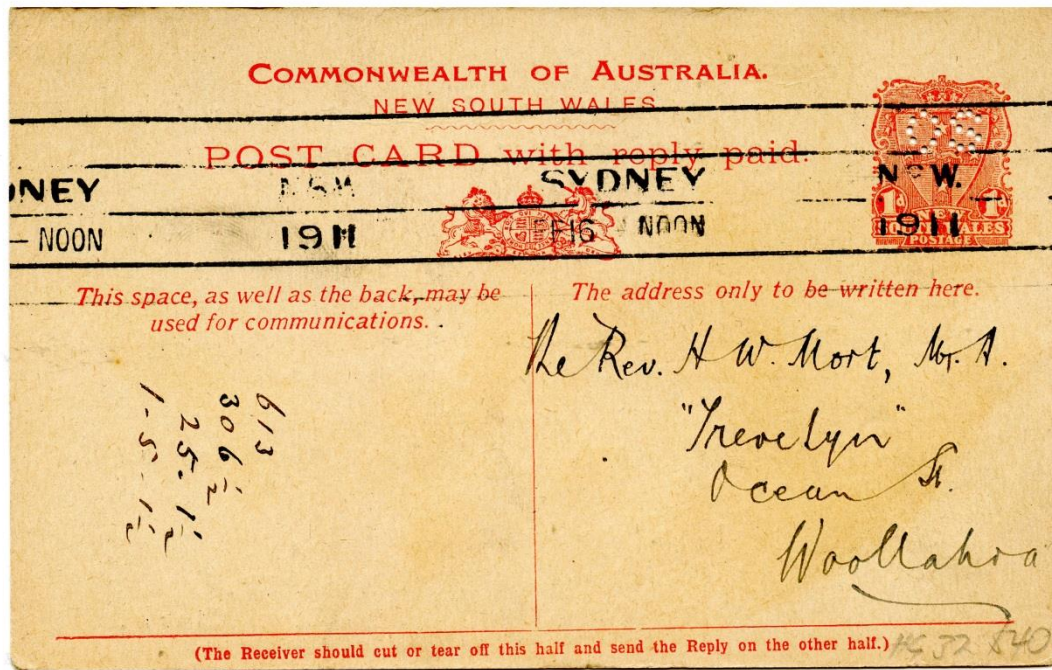

Example 1

Perfin **OSNSW (Type A) -** This perfin was only used from 1902 to 1903. These envelopes were issued after 1908.

Notes – Stationery headed OHMS (both postcards and envelopes) produced after 1908 feature unmodified 1d Shield Die 2 stamps. Examples of this envelopes are known without perfin.

Verdict: Fake, and a very scarce envelope ruined producing it.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.
NEW SOUTH WALES

POST CARD with reply paid.

SYDNEY N.S.W.

This space, as well as the back, may be used for communications.

The address only to be written here.

613
306?
25.1?
1-5-1?

The Rev. H. W. Mort, M.A.

"Trevelyn"
Ocean St.

Woollahra

(The Receiver should cut or tear off this half and send the Reply on the other half.)

Dear Sir or Madam,

An agreement has been come to permitting the supply of electricity for lighting and other purposes by the City Council in Woollahra. The City Council must now decide in which streets of Woollahra mains shall be laid. To enable this to be done it is necessary to know in which streets electricity will be made use of by the residents.

Please answer the question on the attached stamped card by "Yes" or "No" and add your name and address

I am, Yours faithfully,

T. H. NESBITT,
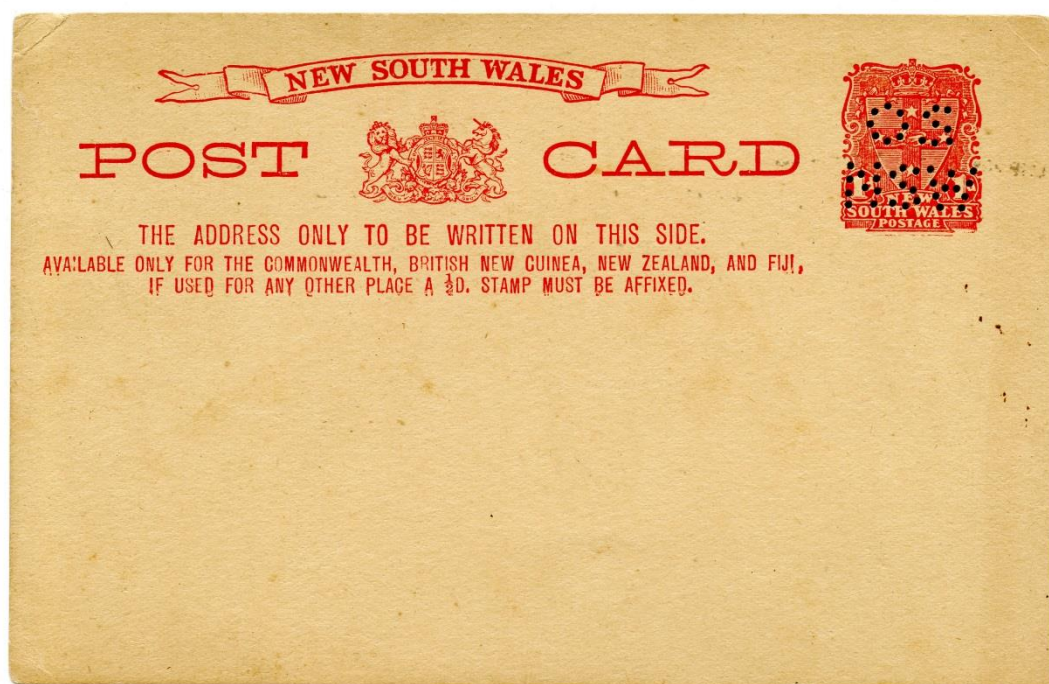Town Clerk.

Example 2

Perfin **OS (Type A)**
This perfin was only in use from 1902 to 1903. These reply cards (PC33) were issued about 1907, and this one was used in 1911. The attached reply half is mint and addressed to T.H.Nesbitt, Town Clerk, Town Hall, Sydney. No examples of the use of reply cards with perfins have been recorded.

Notes
OS overprints were produced for use by Federal Government Departments. The typewritten message clearly shows this card was used by local government.
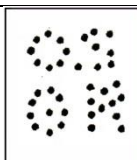
Verdict: Fake

Example 3

Perfin **OSNSW (Type B) -** Correct perfin type for this card.

Notes - The card unusually, has nothing printed on the reverse, and being unused, gives no indication of the potential user.

Verdict: Possibly genuine, although the lack of printed message makes this rather dubious.
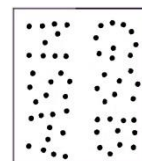

Example 4

Illustrated in Anderson (2007) p.85 as genuine. One example is on a NSW Government Railway view card.

Perfin **OSGR** – Most likely a complete contradictory fabrication. The OS perfin was used for Federal Government departments, and the GR for NSW Government Railways.
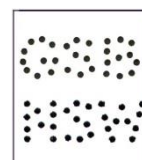
Notes – Normally, Government Railway View cards, of which this is an example, bore unchanged 1d Shield Die 2 stamps (see notes at introduction).

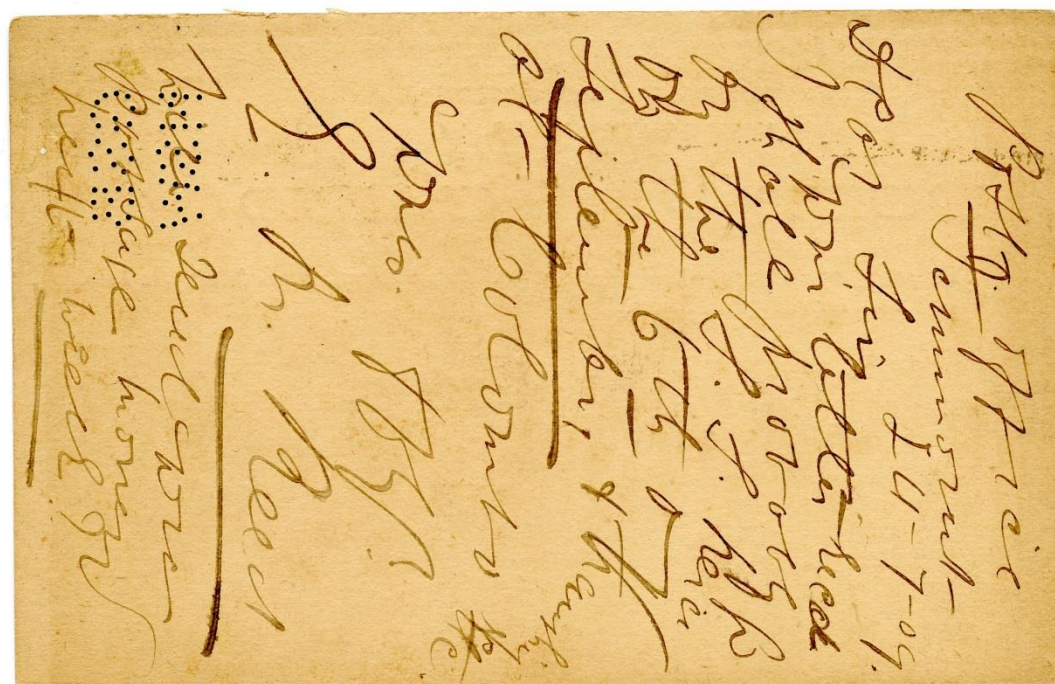Verdict: Fake, and a nice card ruined producing it.

Fake

Genuine

Example 5

Perfin **GSBNSW (Vertical)** – The perfin on the piece bears little resemblance to the actual perfin, differing in size of holes, overall size of the perfin and orientation. At least the spelling is correct. Moreover this perfin was only used briefly in 1907, and this card is dated 1909.

Notes – No printed message on the reverse, and the message appears to be discussing a forthcoming sea voyage. No bank is mentioned in the return address, and there is no indication of rank (manager, chief accountant etc) of the sender.

Verdict : Fake, and a fairly crude one

Postal Cards with OHMS heading

From about 1906 a range of postcards with the heading OHMS and unchanged 1d Shield Die 2 stamps, were produced for various government departments, examples for the Ordnance Department and Registrar-General are illustrated below in Figure 11. Since these seem to have been produced in numerous small batches with minor variations in size and form of the O.H.M.S heading, they are grouped together as a single catalogue entry. Three examples are shown below (at 50% actual size). Envelopes with OHMS heading and unchanged 1d Shield Die 2 stamps are also known.

In similar fashion another official issue, the NSW Government Railways View Cards (discussed in detail in a separate Handbook Section) all featured unchanged 1d Shield Die 2 stamps.

Fig. 11. OP20 Cards with OHMS heading and unchanged 1d Shield Die 2 stamps. Various sizes (139 – 152) x (83 – 89)mm

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