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The Great Britain Edward VII and George V Super-Calendered or Thin Plate-Glazed Paper Mystery solved at last!

Any serious collector of GB Edward V11 will be quite aware that some printings of the Somerset House 6d Pale Dull Purple and Pale Reddish Purple, SG M33 (6) and (7), and all the 2/6 Pale Dull Reddish Purple's, SG M50 (4), were printed on thin plate-glazed, or finely calendered paper. However, most have not questioned why, or enquired if there were any other values printed on thin plate-glazed paper.

The answer to the second question is quite simply yes, and the answer to the first is beautiful in its simplicity.

All De La Rue ordinary issues were printed on thin Plate-Glazed paper- after all, they were well paid for their work, and wanted to produce a superior product. When De La Rue lost the GB stamp contract in 1910 as a result of cost-cutting, the quality of the printing by both Harrison and Sons and Somerset House was at worst awful and at best poor.

This was exciting news for philatelists. If the quality of printing was perfect, they would have very little variety to collect. However, perfect it was not, and we can all be thankful for that.

But the decision makers in the Inland Revenue must have had enough. If Great Britain, at the head of the British Empire, could not issue stamps of the same high quality of those still being printed for the Commonwealth, then something was very wrong. We certainly didn't want the Germans laughing at us. The quality of British stamps had to be improved.

The easiest and by far the cheapest way to do this was to plate-glaze the paper. Plate-glazing was a process where the paper was fed between three rollers at pressure, one centre one moving at a slightly different speed to the others.

This had the result of both flattening the paper and partially closing its pores, so that it made the paper less absorbent. With most of the pores in the paper being closed, the amount of ink absorbed by the paper was greatly reduced, producing less blotchy stamps.

The ink would then stand proud after printing, leaving a sharper, crisper print after drying. It was still nowhere near as fine a print as stamps printed on chalk-surfaced paper, but it was a vast improvement on unglazed paper.

The first Somerset House plate-glazed papers appeared at the beginning of 1912, and those of Harrison and Sons a few months later. Plate-glazed paper can vary slightly in thickness, however, it was not until early in 1913 that Somerset House produced their very fine, thin plate-glazed paper.

It is thought that this extra thin calendered or plate-glazed paper was the result of an extra pair of rollers being added to the process, under even higher pressure. Therefore the five rollers generally used when plate-glazing paper was increased to seven.

But when was this decision taken? By examining the quality of stamps printed after King Edward V11's death, the decision was most likely taken in very late 1912 or early 1913. This means that any Edwardian stamps, or values, which were not printed after 1912 or the very beginning of 1913 were never printed on thin plate-glazed paper.

Consequently, any Edwardian stamps printed after the first month or so of 1913 were only printed on thin plate-glazed paper.

It is not easy to know exactly when Somerset House finished printing a value or requisition. What we do know is when the George V stamps began. Therefore, by a process of deduction and elimination, we can work out exactly which Edwardian stamps exist on plate-glazed paper, which on thin plate-glazed paper, and those which only exist on un-calendered paper.

One should also bear in mind that by early 1913 the Inland Revenue had a difficult juggling act to perform. They were fully aware that the plates for the higher value George V stamps, with values from 5d to £1, were being prepared, so they did not want to hold large stocks of Edwardian stamps of these values when the George V stamps of these values were finally released.

However, they also did not want to run out of any of Edwardian stamps of these values, as it would have greatly increased their costs if the public had to use two stamps instead of one to post an item, due to stocks of a particular value having being exhausted. With experience, it is not too difficult to distinguish thin plate-glazed paper.

1. The print quality is comparatively very fine.
2. The paper feels much smoother to the touch
3. On the back as well as the front, the paper appears much whiter, almost blue-white, compared to the cream of unglazed paper, or the white of glazed paper.
4. The paper feels extremely thin.
5. On the gummed side, thin plate-glazed stamps appear much whiter, often with a blue tinge, under a long wave u/v lamp.
6. The thickness can be measured. Thin plate-glazed paper normally measures between .0029 to .0031 of an inch, ordinary plate glazed paper between .0031 and .0033 of an inch, and unglazed paper between .0033 and .0035 of an inch, or more for the high values.

Below is a chart giving the earliest printing dates of each value for the stamps of George V. In the case of any George V value first printed on June 30th 1913 or later, the previous printing of that value would almost certainly have been Edwardian stamps printed on plate-glazed and possibly thin plate-glazed paper.

By the end of January 1913, all values to 4d were being printed using George V plates. This meant that no Edwardian stamps printed by Harrison & Sons Ltd. were printed on thin plate-glazed paper.

We can see from the table below that all values from 1½d upwards exist on plate-glazed paper.

However, the only Edward VII values we have seen on the true thin plate-glazed paper are the 5d, 6d, 7d, 9d, 10d, 1/-, 2/6d and 5/-. The 10/- and £1 values may also exist on thin plate-glazed paper but are thus far unrecorded.

Also from the table below, one can easily see which George V stamps might exist on plate-glazed paper.

The King George V 1911-1913 issues

Value	First GV date	Plate-glazed paper	Thin plate-glazed
½d	22nd June 1911	YES	YES (Downey Head issue only)
1d	22nd June 1911	YES	YES (Downey Head issue only)
1½d	15 th October 1912	YES	NO
2d	20 th August 1912	YES	NO
2½d	18 th October 1912	YES	NO
3d	9 th October 1912	YES	NO
4d	15 th January 1913	YES	NO
5d	30 th June 1913	YES	YES
6d	1 st August 1913	YES	YES
7d	1 st August 1913	YES	YES
9d	30 th June 1913	YES	YES
10d	1 st August 1913	YES	YES
1/-	1 st August 1913	YES	YES
2/6	30 th June 1913	YES	YES
5/-	30 th June 1913	YES	YES
10/-	1 st August 1913	YES	NO
£1	1 st August 1913	YES	NO

This chart also gives collectors of George V stamps much to think about and they now know that the early printings of several values would undoubtedly have been printed on both plain unglazed, lightly glazed paper and super-calendered paper.