

THE GB KING EDWARD VII TINTED GUMS 1912-1913

by

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During the period that Edwardian stamps were being printed by De La Rue, the aim was to produce the highest possible standard of quality of printing, and De La Rue spared no expense in trying to achieve this objective.

In total contrast to this, however, were the early printings of both Somerset House and Harrison and Sons, which were made with an eye on keeping costs to a minimum. The result was that the great majority of stamps produced by these printers had an extremely coarse or even blotchy appearance.

Around April 1912, Somerset House began to "plate-glaze" or calender their stamps to improve their appearance, which was sometimes poor at best, using a calendaring machine with five rollers.

Calendering had the effect of closing pores in the paper, so that when ink was applied there would be less absorption "the blotting paper effect", resulting in a much finer printing quality.

The calendaring machine worked by employing sets of either five or seven rollers, of varying diameters, set to rotate at different speeds, which would both compress and polish the paper at the same time.

The friction generated by this process created enormous amounts of heat, which had to be cooled somehow. The answer was to dissipate the heat by running cold water through the rollers, which were hollow.

Calendering affected both sides of the paper, and meant that when Somerset House's very white gum was applied, it was much harder to see whether the stamps were gummed or not.

As a result, around August 1912, a trial commenced to add a greenish tint to the gum to see if this problem could be solved. The stamp selected for this trial was the 2/6 with golden brown fluorescence.

The greenish tint was generally uneven and slightly patchy. Around November 1912, further trials were made using greenish blue tinted gum, this time on the 1/-, 2/6, 5/- and 10/- values (other values may exist).

These trials proved to be so successful that, at the end of July 1913, all GB Edwardian postage stamps printed at Somerset House had a tint added to the gum, although now the tint was bluish.

The tint was essential, as by March 1913, Somerset House had increased the number of rollers in their calendaring machine from five to seven, which produced very thin plate-glazed paper, making the white gum even harder to see.

The bluish tint was applied to the 5d, 6d, 7d, 9d, 10d and 1/- and 2/6d values. These values were printed in numerous printing runs of relatively small quantities while they were waiting for the plates to arrive to print the stamps of George V.

De La Rue had been printing Edwardian stamps with official printing requisitions of perhaps 35,000 - 50,000 sheets. By contrast, Somerset House's printing runs were only around 3,000-5,000 sheets for each value.

Where only part of their printing run entered the tinted gum period, the number of sheets printed with tinted gum would be extremely small. Somerset House, however, were not at all happy printing Edwardian stamps three full years after the death of King Edward VII.

Their desire was to print only the stamps of George V stamps by this time, but they were unable to, as insufficient George V plates for the 5d value and upwards had been delivered.

Although Edwardian stamps were printed at Somerset House over a period of 27 months, the bluish tint was applied to the gum only over a period of around three or four weeks.

The bluish tint was not applied to the 1½d, or 2d values, as by this time the required number of George V plates had been delivered, and stamp printing for these values was now in full production.

For some values, such as the 9d, both Edward VII stamps and George V stamps were being printed simultaneously.

When measured with a micrometer, the difference between plate-glazed and thin plate-glazed is clear, as plate-glazed paper measures between .0033 and .0038 of an inch. and thin plate-glazed between .0027 and .0033 of an inch.

There were, however, one or two examples of the 2/6 value in the Blackish Purple shade measuring .0032 of an inch have been recorded, from either very late 1912 or early 1913.

One reason for the slightly thicker papers within these groups is that, if stored in slightly damp conditions, the paper can absorb moisture from the air, increasing its thickness. The bluish tint can be quite pale in some examples.

However, when compared to normal white or cream gum, the bluish tint is unmistakable.

What is surprising is that in the 100 plus years since the King Edward VII tinted gums first appeared I can find no article or record of the Edward VII tinted gums anywhere, whether in magazines from the time or later, catalogues or philatelic articles.

The tinted gums on the 2/6 value



Cream gum



Bluish green gum



Bluish gum

GREENISH GUM

With golden brown fluorescence
(around August 1912) Plate-glazed paper.

- M50- 2/6 Dull purple (GBF)
- M50- 2/6 Dark purple (GBF)

GREENISH BLUE TINTED GUM

(around November 1912-Feb 1913) Plate-glazed paper. Other values may exist.

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|-----|--------|---------------------------------------|
| 314 | M47(5) | 1/- Green and carmine (15 April 1912) |
| - | M50- | 2/6 Dull purple |
| - | M50(3) | 2/6 Dark purple |
| 317 | M50- | 2/6 Blackish purple (late 1912) |
| 318 | M52(2) | 5/- Carmine (1912) |
| 319 | M54(2) | 10/- Blue (1912) |

BLUE TINTED GUM

(July-August 1913) Thin plate-glazed paper.

- | | | |
|------|--------|--|
| - | M30- | 5d Deep plum and cobalt-blue (Nov 1912) |
| - | M33(6) | 6d Pale dull purple (June 1913) |
| - | M33(7) | 6d Pale reddish purple (June 13) |
| - | M38(3) | 7d Pale grey (May 1913) |
| 307a | M41(5) | 9d Deep plum and blue (July 1913) |
| - | M44(8) | 10d Dark plum and carmine (1913) |
| 314 | M47(5) | 1/- Green and carmine (15 April 1912) |
| - | M50(4) | 2/6 Pale dull reddish purple (18 Mar 1913) |

A single copy of the £1 value has been recorded with greenish blue tinted gum, and another with blue tinted gum. They will only be listed if others are reported and confirmed.

A full list of tinted gums can be found in Stanley Gibbon's Volume 2 specialised catalogue.

Used stamps can only be identified where remnants of gum still remain.