

Trevor I. Harris A.I.E.P.

THE ORIGINAL (THIN) COATED PAPER OR OCP

On the 24th March 1905, Sir T. "Andros" De La Rue, Chairman of De La Rue Ltd, applied to the Inland Revenue for permission to apply a chalk coating to the double fugitive stamps of Edward V11 to improve the general appearance of the stamps, and to make postmarks harder to remove.

On the 4th April 1905, Mr. G. G. Stoodley, Secretary to the Inland Revenue replied, granting permission for the chalk coating to be used. The main constituents of the chalk coating were fine chalk and lacterine, which was made by De La Rue themselves using a mixture of hydrochloric acid and milk, and acted as a binding agent.

There were also lesser amounts of ammonia, milk and developer. The cost was 2/5d for 6000 sheets (12 reams), using 36 gallons of mixture. The chalk coating was applied by De La Rue, using their own machinery.

Harrison & Sons did not plate-glaze their paper at first, which meant the ink was to some extent absorbed by the paper during printing, giving the stamps a slightly blotchy appearance. When the stamps were occasionally over-inked, the printing could become extremely blotchy.

De La Rue applied the chalk coating themselves. One of the interesting properties of the newly applied coating was that, if immersed in water, the entire chalk coating could be peeled off the front of the stamp on one piece, but with the passage of years, this property was lost and the coating now adheres firmly to the front of the stamp.

The original coating, applied to all ten chalky paper values ranging from 1½d to 2/6d, was almost immediately considered too thin, and about a year later was replaced with a much thicker coating.

A little later, the thickness of the chalk coating was increased even further. With experience the original (thin) chalky paper, or OCP, is relatively easy to detect, and forms an important addition to any collection.

1. Under a 30x magnifier, ordinary white paper is full of coloured or green flecks. OCP has some flecks, although not as many as ordinary paper, but normal thick chalky paper very few or none.
2. Ordinary white paper appears dull under long wave ultra-violet light, whilst normal chalky paper is much brighter. OCP looks bright when compared to ordinary paper, but dull against the usual thick chalky paper.
3. To the touch, OCP feels as thin as ordinary paper, but the stamp colours are similar to thick chalky paper and they respond to the silver test (on the margins of marginal examples only please- if the silver test is applied to the stamp it can be permanently damaged!). The back is virtually pure white (except for the 3d value).
4. On mint stamps, the coatings can be measured! Although we do not like using equipment not generally available to the collector, using a micrometer, ordinary paper has a thickness up to .0032 of an inch. OCPs have a thickness of approximately .0034 of an inch, whilst normal thick chalky paper varies between .0039 and .0042 of an inch.

OCP Printings	Left sheet	Right sheet	Date first issued
1½d 5th DLR printing	H2/D6	H3/D5	May/June 1905
2d 5th DLR printing	H3/D4	H1/D3	February 1906
3d 5th? DLR printing	Plate 1	Plate 2	March 1906
4d 5th DLR printing	H3/D8D6	H1/D7D5	January 1906
5d 5th DLR printing	H2/D4	H3/D3	Feb/March 1906
6d 2nd DLR printing	Plate 1a	Plate 5	January 1906
9d 4th DLR printing	H1/D(I)	H2/D(2)	June 1905
10d 5th DLR printing	H1/D(I)	H2/D(2)	(September 1905)
1/- 2nd DLR printing	H2/B4	H1/B2	September 1905
2/6d 2nd DLR printing	Plate 1	Plate 1	October 1905

The above dates show when the stamps were actually printed, however, with a few exceptions, stamps with a chalk coating were not generally distributed to post offices before the 6th September 1905. There are also reports that the printing of the 2d value commenced in October 1905.

Although the standard of printing of the GB Edwardian stamps was amongst the highest in the world, De La Rue were still not satisfied, and consequently they researched ways in which the appearance of the stamps could be enhanced.

We do not recommend the use of the silver test in proving whether a stamp is chalk surfaced, as it leaves an unsightly grey or silver line or mark on the stamp. The reason that the silver test works is that when silver is rubbed over the surface of the stamp, it reacts with the chlorine in the lacterine to produce silver chloride.

In order not to mark the stamp, some collectors use this test on marginal copies only, but this still leaves a mark on the margin. It is interesting to note that during World War 2 there was a shortage of milk, which meant that De La Rue were unable to make lacterine for those Commonwealth stamps which were still printed on chalk surfaced paper.

As a result, a different binding agent had to be used which does not respond to the silver test!

For the 10d value, the earliest recorded printing date was believed to be July 1906, but more and more used copies have appeared dated September to December 1905. It is now thought that the original printing date given of July 1906 is incorrect, and the correct date should be September 1905!

Perhaps the reason that for GB stamps the Original Coated Papers are so much scarcer than the thick chalk surfaced papers is that stamp collectors in 1905-1906 deferred buying the new stamps with a chalk surface as they thought they could always buy them at a later date.

When they did eventually decide to go ahead and buy them, stamps with thin chalk surfaced paper stamps were long gone and the stamps they bought had the thicker chalk surfacing.

Unusually, the opposite is true for British Commonwealth stamps. When in 1905 the new chalk surfaced stamps were announced, stamp dealers in Great Britain and around the world put in orders for them with the Crown agents, sometimes for extremely large quantities.

However, when the thick chalk surfaced papers arrived towards the end of 1906 the fact that the chalk surfacing had become thicker was not generally noticed and anyway most dealers already had large stocks of stamps with the thin chalk surfacing.

As a result, for British Commonwealth stamps only, stamps with the later thick chalk surface are much scarcer than those with the original thin chalk surfacing, and in fact some stamps with the thicker chalk surface are rare.