

Musings and observations from a lifetime in philately.

WHAT COLOUR IS MY STAMP ?

This is a basic question we've all asked, probably many times. If you're a novice, the easy solution might be to check the Stanley Gibbons catalogue or maybe compare your stamp with a colour chart. Both solutions can have anomalies - SG may describe a stamp as vermilion, while the Scott catalogue might say orange and another catalogue (say Michel) might say orange-vermilion. It's the same stamp but already has three different colour classifications.

Some time ago, I spent quite a while sifting through SG specialised catalogues looking for stamps in different shades of green - I stopped when I got to 60. The interesting thing was in this list. light green was different to pale green and there were strange things like greenish-blue, bluish-green and blue-green, again all different. From this you might be excused for thinking that colour identification is an exact science ... but you would be very wrong.

My next task was to assemble as many monochrome stamps as I could and put them on Hagners with all similar stamps together. This was to take me many months going through dealers' stocks, club books as well as my own stock. I ended up with thousands of stamps (all cheap ones) neatly arranged so I could compare things like pale ultramarine, ultramarine and deep ultramarine.

For some colours, I had 20 or more all with the same colour designation but, to my eyes anyway, very different. Where possible I added the actual example from an old SG colour chart and that was what prompted this article. I actually have two SG colour charts, one was priced at 2s6d and has 100 examples of actual stamps, the other is a more modern chart with 100 blocks in solid colour. Interestingly, there are many colour designations found in SG catalogues where an example does not appear in the colour chart.

Which brings me back to the title - What colour is my stamp ? Take a look at these colours and see if you agree with my colour descriptions.



If you agree with me then you really need to read on.

All five colours are the same - black.

To explain, the first is very tiny black dots, moving along the dots get bigger, at about mid-way the black dots are the same size as the white dots and then get bigger and finally we have very tiny white dots on a black surround. The answer therefore is 'you need a powerful magnifier to see the actual colour of the ink. Bear in mind that many stamp designs are made up of fine lines or tiny dots, you need to zoom in on a solid part of the design.

So the next time you're trying to establish the colour of a stamp, if it appears to be pink, you should check closely to see if it has fine red lines on white, or maybe your pale blue stamp could actually be deep blue and white.

Roger West (Avion Stamps)

(This latest musing by Roger no doubt echoes the frustrations and perhaps concerns of many, myself included. As with many issues in the philatelic world it is relatively timeless as will be seen when I return to this subject in another issue soon).