

Is it green? Is it blue? Is it grey?

A CLOSER LOOK AT POLYMER VARIETIES

by JUDY SHAW



Over the last ten years there have been several colour variations in our polymer notes. These variations have not been confined to a complete colour change, but also to specific areas of the note e.g. serial numbers.

The most frequently asked questions in what possibly has been the most confusing areas for Collectors relate to both the \$5 Fraser Cole (light green serials) and the \$10 Fraser Evans (blue and grey Dobell).

The Green Serial \$5 Fraser Cole

Firstly, we will look at the Fraser Cole \$5 pale green serials. To start with, the serials are all printed in green ink. The intention was obviously to be very dark green, however, it almost looks black.

Shortly after their release, I noticed an article in which a Collector stated that he had found a Fraser Cole \$5 with light green serial numbers. At the time I took little notice as there had been many weird and wonderful things done to the polymers since their inception in 1988.

It began with the 1988 Bicentennial \$10. These notes were continually being played around with and defaced; especially when it was discovered that the unprotected OVD could be scratched off the first notes issued. Then there were rumours of chemicals being used to change the colour of the \$5. There occurred also attempts to rub off areas of the ink in notes of any denominations at all, creating what looked like misprint notes! (I hasten to say however, that although one has to be prudent when purchasing misprints, such alterations are usually fairly crude and easy to detect.) At the time, and with the benefit of this knowledge, the possibility of "natural" pale green serial numbers seemed fairly unlikely.

A year or two later I went to security to retrieve some of the Fraser Cole \$5 notes, stored since their purchase from

recalled the article I had read earlier and so decided to look into it further.

Since then, and following comparisons from a very large number of notes, I have discovered that when they are exposed to natural light whether it be from direct sunlight, or just in the light of a window or door, nearly all of the serial numbers on the Fraser Cole \$5 appeared to be green—at times a shade of iridescent green.

The most effective way to check a green serial is after sundown under an electric light, then if the serials are a pale apple green (lighter than a 'granny smith' apple) you have the light green variety.

It has been extremely difficult replacing stocks of the light green serials. Nearly all of the notes I have seen have not been the true light green variety—they are certainly proving to be quite elusive.

The pale green serials have also been sighted on a couple of the 1993 Fraser Evans \$5 (old colour), and the AA94 Fraser Evans \$5 (folder note). There is good reason to believe the serials on the Fraser Evans \$10 from the FDI Folder have been printed with the same green ink as there have been colours varying to a light green shade in these as well!

Any input from Collectors who have noticed other variations would be most welcome.

Now to the Blue and Grey Dobell variety.

These notes have caused a massive amount of interest, and rightly so. Right through our coin and banknote catalogues all changes to notes have been recorded and priced separately. As this was a deliberate change by Note Printing to improve the quality of the \$10 note, it would be remiss of me not to document this change accordingly. For the benefit of new Collectors the explanation will start from the beginning.

As is often the case, it is only because of dedicated collectors spotting differences and then bringing them to the attention of others, that we have such accurate records of these changes. The colour change was first brought to my attention when I was referred to a newspaper article. The article concerned members of the public who believed they had been given forgeries after noticing different colours in their \$10 notes. On checking, it was easy to see the difference. My first step was to contact Note Printing. I rang and asked about the different colours and what was the cause behind them. The reply was to the effect that "the ink used for printing the 1993 notes was subject to this colour change when *abraded*". I accepted this at the time but I had reservations—I felt that there had to be more to it; so I pressed on.

Shortly afterwards, upon opening a new bundle of the 1993 \$10 notes, I noticed that the ink from the last note had transferred onto the next, causing extensive smudging and self inking on both sides of each note. After checking through some used notes it became obvious that when the notes had been in circulation for some time they invariably went a very dirty dark blue; this of course would have been compounded by the heavy self inking.

These notes simply did not meet Note Printing's rigorous standards of quality control. Consequently, the variation



1992 Fraser-Cole \$5. Light green and dark green serials.

the Reserve Bank in Melbourne in 1992. It was then that I noticed a distinct difference in the colour of the serials. In fact it was startling. The bundle contained the usual dark green serial notes however, following every couple of notes in this consecutively numbered bundle, there was a note with a very pale apple green serial. It was then I



1993 Fraser Evans \$10 in uncirculated condition
—with problematic self-inking

was as a result of an attempt to rectify the self inking problem which had shown up after the initial issue of the 1993 \$10 polymer notes. Later the change was confirmed but, sadly, I was informed also that no official records were kept. As the colour changes occurred randomly, and there is no specific numbering or sequence to differentiate between blue Dobell and grey Dobell notes, no one can be certain as to when the testing started, or in fact how many test runs were made. However, from the notes I have viewed and, by cross-checking the range of serial numbers, it is apparent that there was certainly more than one test run. In fact there are likely to have been quite a few. This would almost certainly be confirmed by the number of different shades of blue throughout the 1993 notes.

The blue Dobell notes were confined to the years 1993 and 1994. Having sighted a pair of 1993 circulation \$10 notes with the grey features, I believe it possible that at the end of 1993 the grey Dobell note had one small test run. Unfortunately no quantities of these notes have been located to date. With the exception of this pair, every other 1993 note I have seen—both from circulation and from all specialist issues—have been in varying shades of blue. The final changeover to grey occurred around mid-1994.

One of the questions asked most frequently by collectors is: “how do I distinguish the blue from the grey?” The grey, of course, being the more difficult to discern when compared with one of the lighter blue notes.

For collectors who do not know what to look for, “Dobell” refers to the painting of an elderly Mary Gilmore by the noted painter, William Dobell. This appears to the left of the young portrait of this same lady.

The first (and easiest way) is to compare your 1993 or 1994 note with any \$10 following those dates. There were no circulation notes for 1995 or for Fraser Evans in 1996. However, a 1995 special issue or any note thereafter can be used. In fact ANDA (The Australian Numismatic Dealers’ Association) released last year a ‘Blue and Grey Tenners’ Folder which illustrates perfectly the different notes. The folder allows a comparison between a twin pair (consecutive Prefix pair) of 1993 blue Dobell \$10 with a twin pair of 1998 grey Dobell notes, (for further interest all four notes have the same serial number!).

Secondly, apart from the lessening degree of blue pigment in the overall note and the portraits of Banjo Patterson

and young Mary Gilmore retaining only a very pale shade of blue, the most significant difference in the grey Dobell can be seen in the number ‘10’ (on both sides of the note), and Dobell’s standing portrait of an elderly Dame Gilmore and the bullock team are all steel grey—not blue.

The other distinguishing feature is: when comparing your 1993 or 1994 note and a later \$10 note, look at the word “Australia” written vertically on the left hand side of the note. It is in (what seems to be) black ink on the grey Dobell note, rather than blue ink on the blue Dobell note. When looking at the word “Australia” through an eye glass you will see that the dots are more clearly defined on the grey Dobell. Of course there will only be a difference if the 1993 or 1994 notes that you are comparing are blue.

My research to date indicates that in the 1993 year there have been (possibly) up to five different shades of blue—from quite light blue up to the very dark blue—the darker the blue pigment on the notes the more severe the self-inking. The grey Dobell is most definitely the rarest note.

Indications are that in the 1994 year the first prefix AA94 in the grey Dobell has been the scarcest. This may be due to the fact that in the blue Dobell there is also a low numbered AA94 from the Annual dated folder which could be nestling in collectors’ collections. The purists, however, will accept only an annually-dated note (taken from a folder) when there were no notes printed for circulation for a given year.

The DF94 has proven to be a very scarce last signature prefix in its own right. As to availability; in the past the blue has appeared to be the hardest to find but lately both have been equally difficult.

Since the change of colours there has been no sign of self inking on our \$10 notes. It should be considered that adjustments to our notes probably take place from time to time. Note Printing Australia maintains an ongoing effort to improve the designs, security features and lifespan of our notes. It is probable also that many or most of the adjustments have been so small so as not to be visible to the naked eye. Of course, there will always be occasions when something interesting will turn up so keep your eyes peeled, and be sure to let us know!!



1994 Fraser Evans \$10 Blue and Grey Dobell
(numbers only 100 apart). A fabulous example of the Blue and Grey Dobell paintings during changeover.