



The Afghan Bulletin

No. 16 September 2025



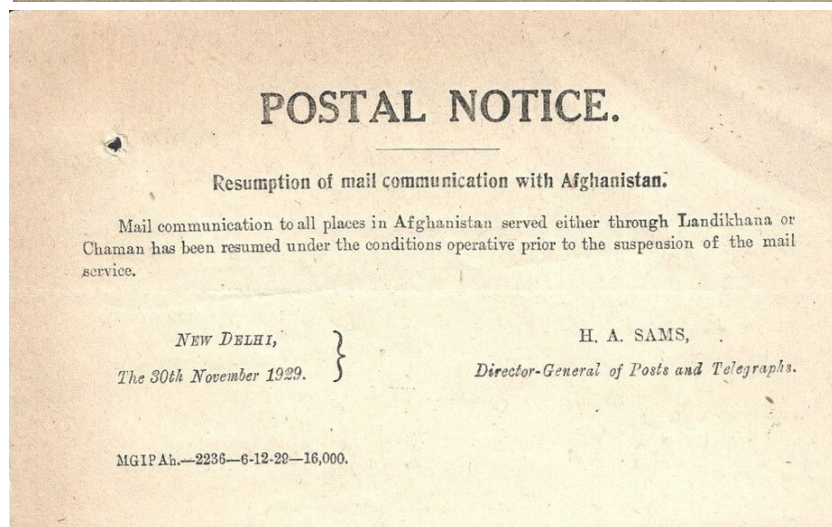
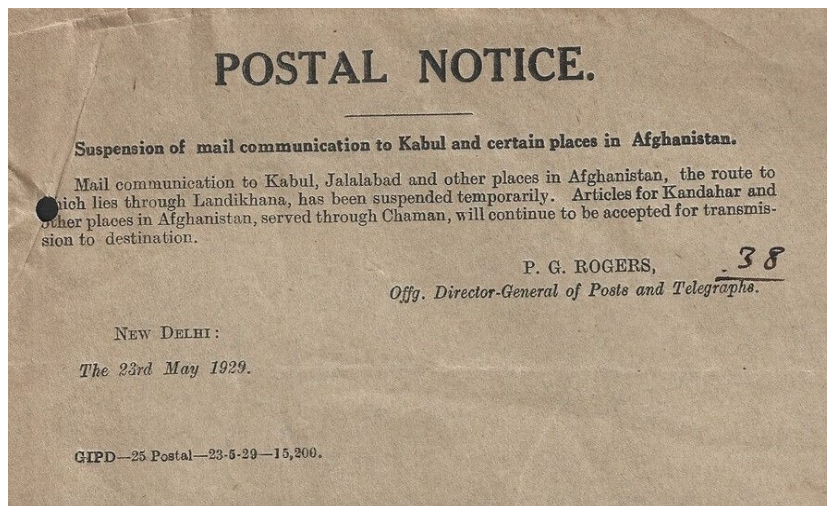
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Suspension/resumption of mail services from/to India due to the 1929 Afghan civil war

Illustrated below are two Indian postal notices sold online recently which detail the suspension and resumption of mail services between India and Kabul through Landikhana during the Afghan civil war in 1929.

The notice of suspension is dated 23rd May, and of resumption 30th November 1929.

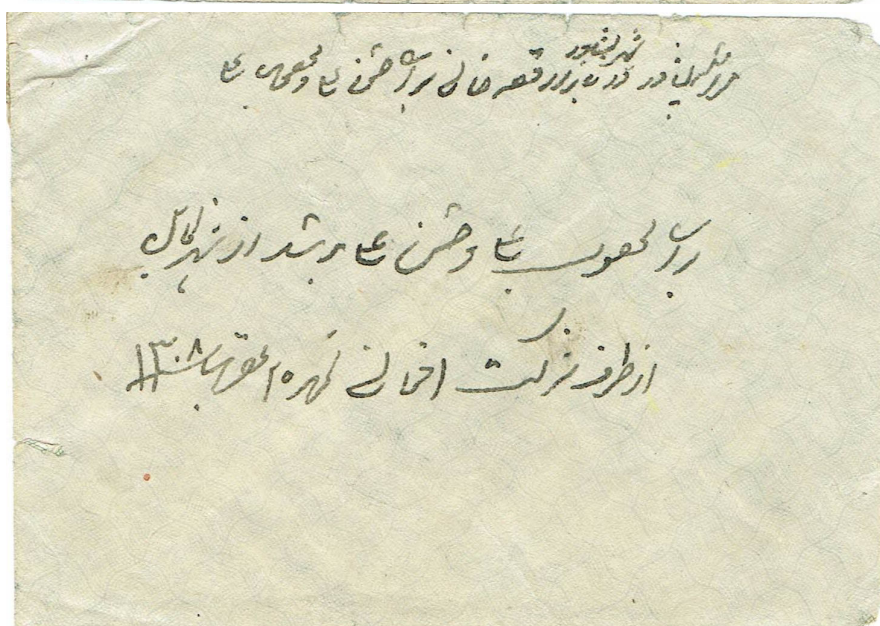


The Suspension Notice states that mail through Chaman (to Kandahar) is not affected, but it subsequently was suspended and the Resumption Notice refers to both routes. Mail in the opposite direction, from Kabul to India, seems to have resumed somewhat earlier than the date given in the Notice. Patterson states that:

‘Foreign mail service was resumed early in November, via Torkhum and Chaman.’

Patterson also states that the earliest use of the 1929 series is a 40 poul postmarked 14th November – and 40 poul was the foreign letter rate so the implication is that mail left Kabul for India through Landikhana at least as early as that date.

The illustration below is of a cover from Kabul via Landikhana to Peshawar. The stamp is cancelled with an oval Kabul censorship cancel whose date is frustratingly unclear, but the manuscript date on the front seems to be 25 'Aqrab 1308 which would equate with 16th November 1929. The Landikhana and Peshawar dates of 20th and 22nd November are both clear and well before the 30th November date given in the Notice for the resumption of mail going in the opposite direction.

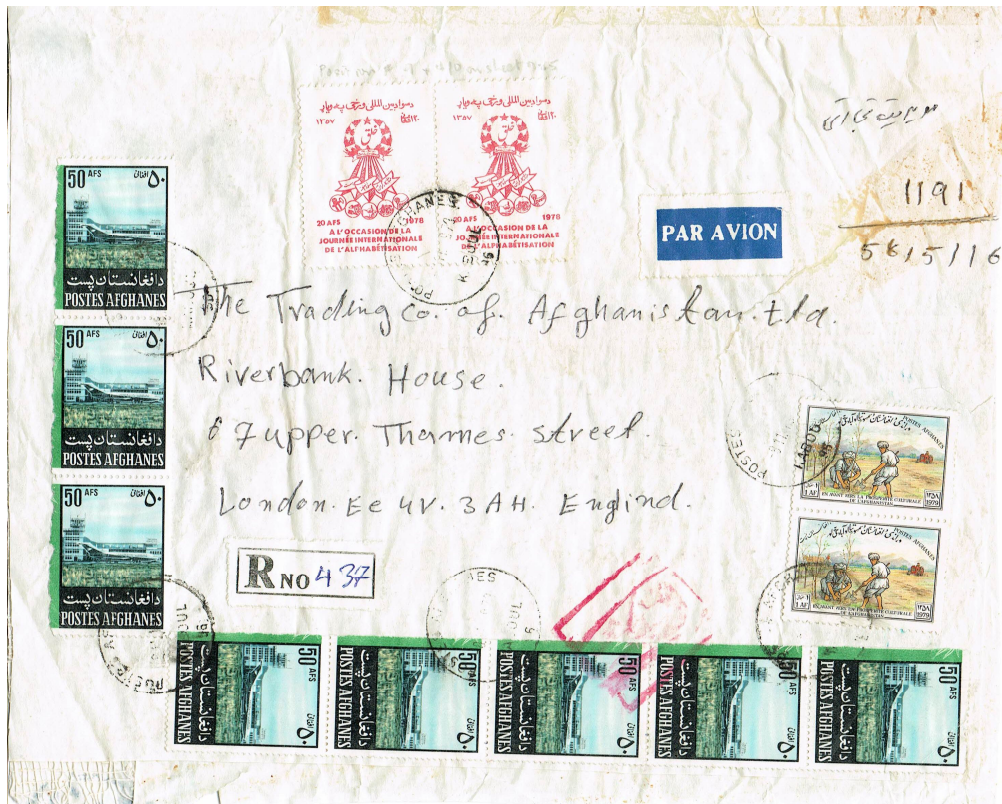


Usage of stamps with the King's head cut off

The 50 Afghani air stamp from 1971 and the 25 Afghani Independence Day stamp from 1972 were both used during the early republican period with the portrait of the King torn off – there were no other high value stamps available for use. They are most commonly found from 1978-80. The 50 Afghani value is the one that is most often seen, the 25 Afghani is quite a difficult item to find, so my thanks to Barry Feddema for allowing me to illustrate the spectacular cover below showing examples of both ‘torn-off’ values. Incidentally, this is the first time I have seen both values used together.



The largest franking of these cut-off stamps I have so far recorded is illustrated below and has 28 x 50 Afghani stamps, plus 2 x 20 and 2 x 1 Afghani stamps giving a total franking of 1,442 Afghani. It was sent on the 9th November 1979 from Kabul to the UK.



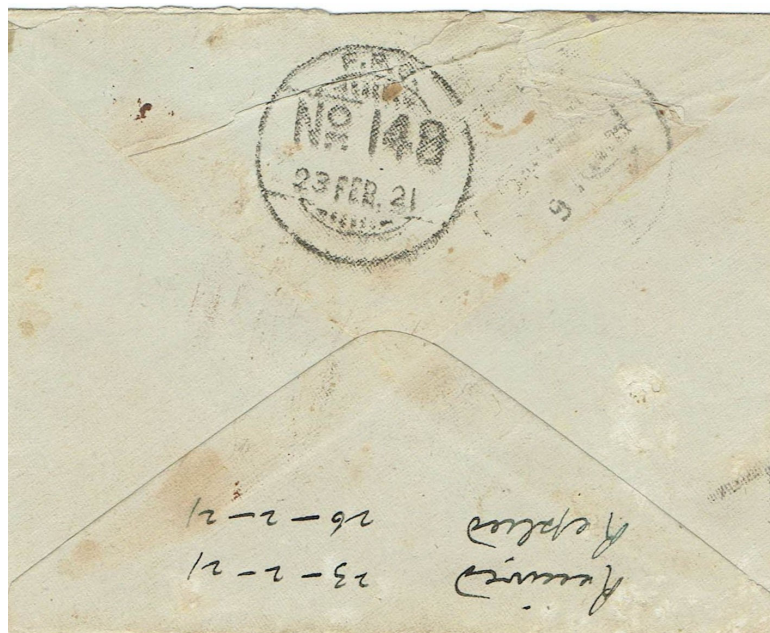
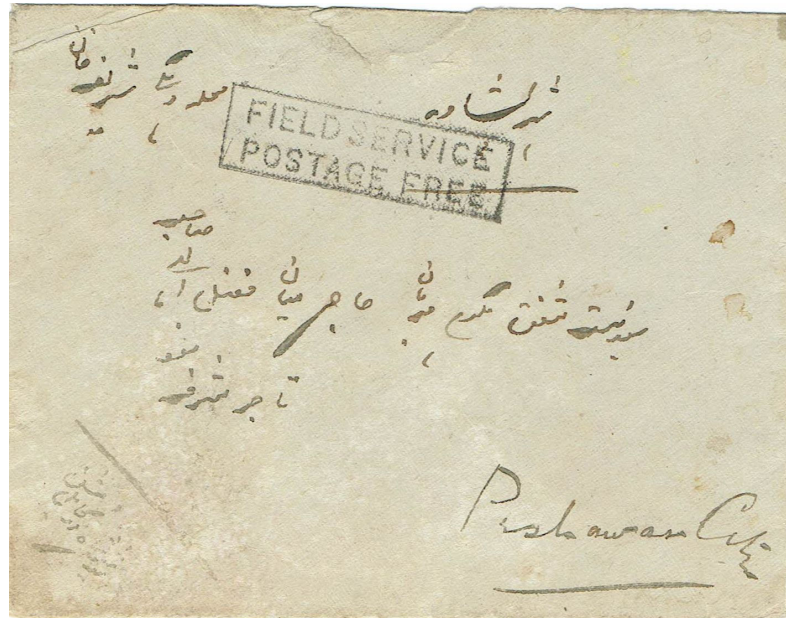
The British Mission to Kabul, 1921

Following the end of the 3rd Afghan War, the Afghan Government invited the Government of India to send a Mission to Kabul to negotiate a permanent basis for future relations between the two countries. Accordingly a Military Mission under Sir Henry Dobbs left for Kabul in January and stayed until November, 1921. Mail from the Mission was served by a field post office with the F.P.O. No. 148 and about a dozen covers are known, sent between the 21st February and 17th September, 1921. In addition to the FPO, all have a boxed rectangular marking reading:

FIELD SERVICE
POSTAGE FREE

As the land route between Kabul and Peshawar was still 'difficult', these FPO covers were sent by air through the RAF, which accounts for the remarkably quick delivery – all were received either the same or the next day after posting.

Cover from F.P.O. 148 dated 23rd February 1921. The Peshawar receiver is unclear but looks like '24' and '9am', although the manuscript notation on the cover says 'Received 23-2-21'.



A listing of ten known covers was given by Agha F. H. Zahid in *The Philatelist* for April 1971, an eleventh cover, sent by A.H. Narracott, Kabul Mission on the 21st February 1921 is known, and this cover is a twelfth.

The Mission to Kabul resulted in the signing of a treaty between the British and Afghan governments on the 22nd November 1921 (formally ratified on the 6th February 1922). Even then there were last minute difficulties and Amir Amanullah did not announce the conclusion of the treaty until the 1st December 1921 after which, its work done, the Mission left Afghanistan on the 4th December. Neither country was particularly happy with the final treaty – the originally intended ‘treaty of friendship’ being scaled down to one of ‘neighbourly relations’ – and at times during the negotiations even that had seemed beyond reach. It was to remain in effect for three years and then be terminable by either side on the giving of 12 months notice. In the event it remained in force until India achieved independence in 1947.

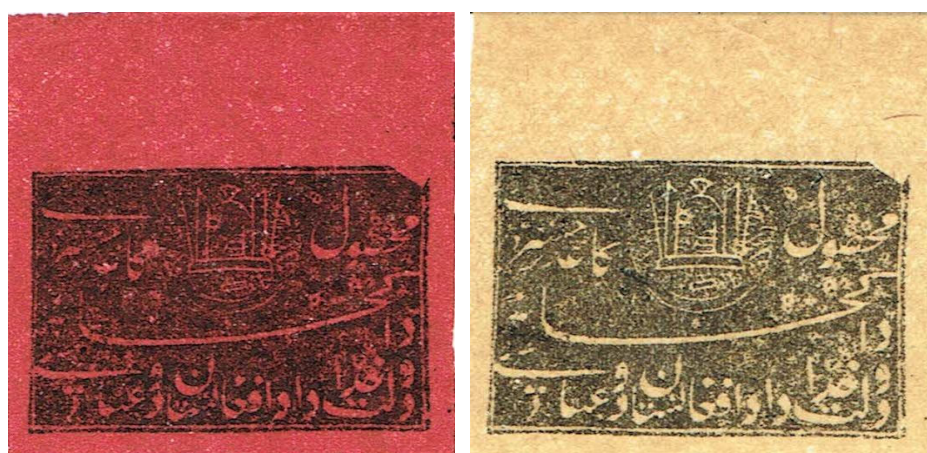
From a philatelic point of view, it is interesting to note that Article 10 of the Treaty provided (emphasis added) that:

*The two High Contracting Parties agree to afford facilities of every description for the exchange of postal matter between their two countries, **provided that neither shall be authorised to establish Post Offices within the territory of the other.** In order to give effect to this Article, a separate Postal Convention shall be concluded for the preparation of which such number of special officers as the Afghan Government may appoint shall meet the officers of the British Government and consult with them.*

Afghanistan already had at this time an extra-territorial post office at Peshawar which had been operating since 1871. This was however closed by the Indian authorities with effect from the 1st January 1925.

Plate Flaw on the 1898 Registration stamp

A plate flaw has been identified on the 1898 registration stamp. It takes the form of a badly damaged top right corner and is one of those nice plate flaws that doesn't need a magnifying glass! Enlarged images are shown below.

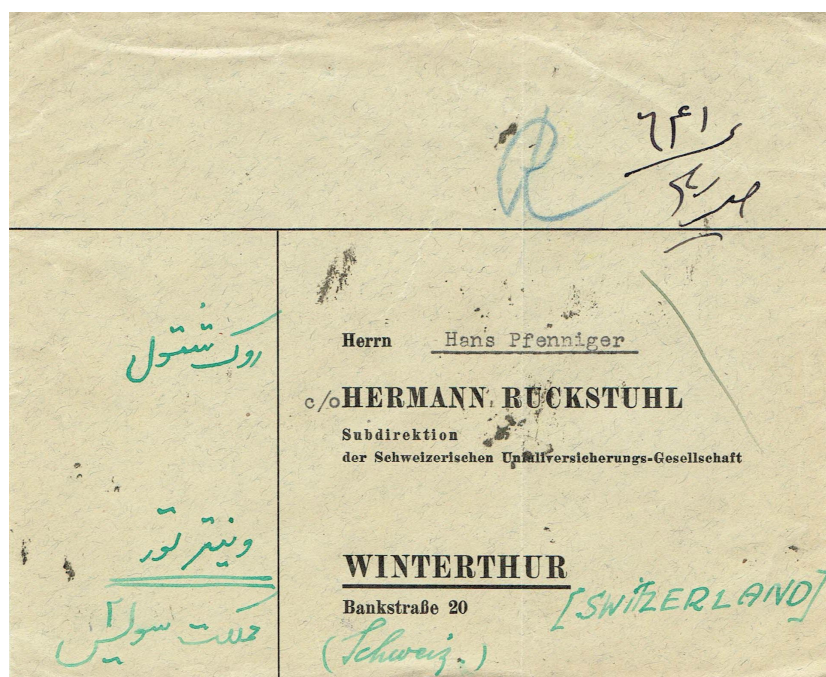


The flaw can be positioned to row 1/5 on the sheet of 56.

Stuck in Kabul during World War II

Sometimes the story attached to the sender or recipient of a cover is more interesting than the cover itself. The item illustrated below is a 'northern route' commercial cover sent from Kabul to Switzerland in 1941 – although it is a nice example of northern route mail there is nothing particularly special about it, but what elevates the cover in my view is the story of the sender, Mr Ferrario. But first . . . the cover itself.

As can be seen it is a normal rate registered cover sent from Jalalabad on the 15th February, transiting Kabul on the 16th and arriving in Switzerland on the 11th March, 1941. Although Jalalabad is close to the Indian border there is no Indian censorship and it was evidently sent north (via Kabul) through Russia. Perhaps that was perceived as a quicker route. Or maybe Mr Ferrario had reason not to want the British to read his letter . . .



Ferrario was one of a number of Swiss architects employed by the Afghan government. In 1942, a year after sending this letter, Mr Ferrario wanted to visit India with his wife and son. Their request for visas was declined on the basis that:

“the visit is of a casual nature and we do not encourage such visits during war time”.

But that was not the whole story. Quite extensive checks were done on all applicants for visas to enter India, and in Ferrario’s case this included contacting the British Legation in Kabul for their views. There were not that many Westerners in Afghanistan and the Legation made it its business to keep an eye on as many as possible. In a memorandum regarding his application it is noted that:

“Ferrario is in touch with the Watch Tower and Tract Society and in view of this Society’s anti-British and anti-war attitude, we would prefer not to have him in India during these days of war.”*

The reply to this news was:

“We’d better give the usual reply”

In a later memorandum (the transcript of a telegram from the British Legation in Kabul) it transpires that Mr Ferrario is trying for a visa again:

“Ferrario has been dismissed by the Afghan Government and requests visa for himself and wife for India where he hopes for employment. Suggest he be granted transit visa for one month and informed that prospects for employment are remote. In view of information available about him including connection Watch Tower and Tract Society his employment in India appears inadvisable.”

The telegram sent in reply reads:

“Prospects of employment in India nil. Provided he can produce a valid visa for another country and a ticket for travel there, transit visa for India valid for minimum time required to permit him to catch boat may be granted.”

Whilst a decision is being made the Swiss Consul General in India becomes involved. He receives a telegram from Mr Ferrario advising that he has made all necessary arrangements to return to Switzerland but is waiting for a visa and can he help? Meanwhile the British Legation in Kabul has kept investigating Mr Ferrario and now say:

Mr Ferrario is considered to be an Italian . . . who has taken Swiss nationality for convenience [and who has] extensive contact with the Italians and Germans in Kabul.”

Accordingly, in the light of:

“more recent information which the Director General, Intelligence, New Delhi has supplied His Majesty’s Minister considers to refuse the recent request for a visa . . . out of hand. This decision was about to be communicated to Mr Ferrario when the letter [from the Swiss Consul General in India] was received by the Legation. In consequence it has not yet been communicated to him and in view of the Swiss Consul General’s approach to the Government of India His Majesty’s Minister would be glad to know if his decision to refuse a visa has their approval.”

The response was short and final:

“Government of India agree that a visa for India may be withheld from Mr Ferrario.”

And a letter was sent to the Swiss Consul:

I am directed to refer to your letter . . . of the 17th November 1942, and to say that the Government of India in consultation with H.M’s Minister Kabul have decided that they are not, it is regretted, prepared to authorise the grant of a visa for India to Mr Ferrario.”

So Ferrario was stuck in Kabul without a job. And the war still had three years to run . . .

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* I.e. the Jehovah’s Witnesses.