



The Afghan Bulletin



No. 8 June 2021

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A used 1973 Airletter

Bulletin 7 illustrated a used example of the ‘interim’ airletter which had a 25 poul stamp affixed to cover the portrait of the ousted King Zahir Shah. The coup took place on July 17th 1973 and the airletter itself had only just been issued the previous month. Mint copies of that 1973 airletter are fairly common, but used examples without the covered-over portrait are understandably scarce – in fact the example illustrated here is the only example I have seen.



Postmarked 14th July 1973 – just a few days before the coup – the rather tatty condition is explained in the message inside – a letter from a son to his parents started in Band-e-Amir on the 7th July and completed in Kabul on the 11th July:

“Sorry this letter has gotten so battered but the trip was a rather dusty and dirty one, camping outside etc”

The sender writes (on the 11th):

“I will probably be in Afghanistan about one week longer . . .”

I wonder if he got out before the coup six days later?

**“How do you go & how do you travel?”
Questions from a prospective tourist in 1896**

The cover below is unusual in being an inbound cover to Afghanistan from the 1890s. The number of Europeans in Afghanistan during the reign of Abdur Rahman was very small and consequently surviving mail is rare. This cover intriguingly retains its letter, which might raise a smile for the sender’s apparent naivety, although the recipient may have groaned when reading it! Whilst hardly considered ‘famous’ today, in their time both sender and recipient were well-known enough to have been caricatured in *Vanity Fair* magazine.



The Writer

The sender of the letter who signs himself “Breadalbane” was Gavin Campbell, 1st Marquess of Breadalbane KG PC JP DL (1851–1922). He was a Scottish nobleman and Liberal politician. In 1894 he had been appointed a Knight of the Garter. He was also a member of the Privy Council and served as Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1893, 1894 and 1895. He had been Lord Steward of the Household from 1892 to 21st June 1895 but the Liberals’ lost the 1895 General Election and so at the time of writing the letter he was, temporarily, out of office. He would later serve as Lord Lieutenant of Argyllshire from 1914 until 1922 and was the last holder of the office of Keeper of the Privy Seal of Scotland, which he held from 1907 until his death in 1922.

He was married to Lady Alma Imogen Carlotta Leonore Graham, the youngest daughter of the 4th Duke of Montrose.

The letter was sent from his London home, 19 Cavendish Square (also known as Harcourt House). The house has been described¹ as being “regarded as the gloomiest in London...” the “mansion was uniquely and universally condemned throughout its near two centuries of existence as ‘dull, heavy, drowsy-looking.’” It was a “strange symbol of aristocratic nuttiness.” It was demolished in 1906.



The Recipient



The letter was received by Sir Thomas Salter Pyne (1860 – 1921), a British engineer born in Broseley, Shropshire but by now based in Afghanistan. In 1883 he had gone out to India, where he worked under Thomas Martin for a few years in the firm of Martin and Co., Clive Street, Calcutta. In 1887, when Martin was appointed Agent by Abdur Rahman Khan, the Amir of Afghanistan, Pyne was sent by Martin to Kabul to be Chief Engineer of Afghanistan. There, as the first European to live in Afghanistan since the Second Anglo-Afghan War of 1879–81, he trained the local people to make guns, swords, ammunition, coins, soap, candles, etc. On behalf of Martin’s firm, he built an arsenal, a mint and various factories and workshops, employing in total some 4,000 workers. In 1893 he was sent to India by the Amir as a Special Ambassador, and at the conclusion of the negotiations was invested a Companion of the Order of the Star of India (CSI)

and knighted by the British government in recognition of his services. He was also a vital contact with the Durand Mission who were defining the borders of Afghanistan.

¹ David Pearce, *The Great Houses of London*.

In 1899 He left the Amir's service because of failing health and was replaced by Martin's younger brother Frank – known by Afghan collectors for the “Frank Martin covers”.

A transcript of the letter follows on the next page.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>With kind regards Yours truly Bread allame</p> | <p>Private June 20th / 90 9, Grosvenor St London Dear Payer I am going to India this winter with my wife & we are both most anxious to visit Afghanistan if at all possible to do so – Before however saying any thing about the matter I should like to have your opinion – Also if it would be</p> |
|---|---|

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>agreeable to His Majesty The Amir – How long would the trip take? Would it be cold? – I presume one should take a few presents to give if one went? – I may say I have always made it a rule never to write accounts of any trips I have made – Should one take a present for the Amir?</p> | <p>How do you go, & how do you travel? Is it found necessary & how do you get on? – I should be most glad of any information you can give me – Will you remember me to Miss Spemeter if she is still in the Country – I had the honor of being in Waiting at Herndon when His Majesty The Amir's Son visited The Queen –</p> |
|--|--|

Transcript:

Private

June 20th/96

Dear Pyne,

I am going to India this winter with my wife and we are both most anxious to visit Afghanistan – if at all possible. Before however saying any thing about the matter I should like to have your opinion – also if it would be agreeable to His Majesty the Ameer.

How long would the trip take? Would it be cold? I presume one should take a few presents to give if one went – I may say I have always made it a rule never to write any accounts of any trips I have made – Should we take a present for the Ameer? How do you go & how do you travel? Is a guard necessary & how do you get one?- – I should be most glad of any information you can give me. Will you remember me to Miss Hamilton if she is still in the country – I had the honour of being in waiting at Windsor when His Majesty the Ameer’s son visited the Queen –

With kind regards,

Yours Truly

Breadalbane

The cover seems to have travelled to Chaman – the Indian border crossing towards Kandahar which was the address on the cover, but as Afghanistan was not in the UPU the only route for inbound mail was via the Afghan postmaster in Peshawar. On arrival at Chaman it has therefore been re-addressed in red ink “Kabul via Peshawar” with Kabul and Peshawar also written in Dari for good measure. One presumes that Sir Thomas Salter Pyne would have had an account with the Afghan postmaster in Peshawar and that the letter did indeed reach its recipient as there are no Indian DLO or other markings to the contrary.

The Miss Hamilton referred to in the letter is the Amir’s doctor, Miss Lillias Hamilton, M.D.

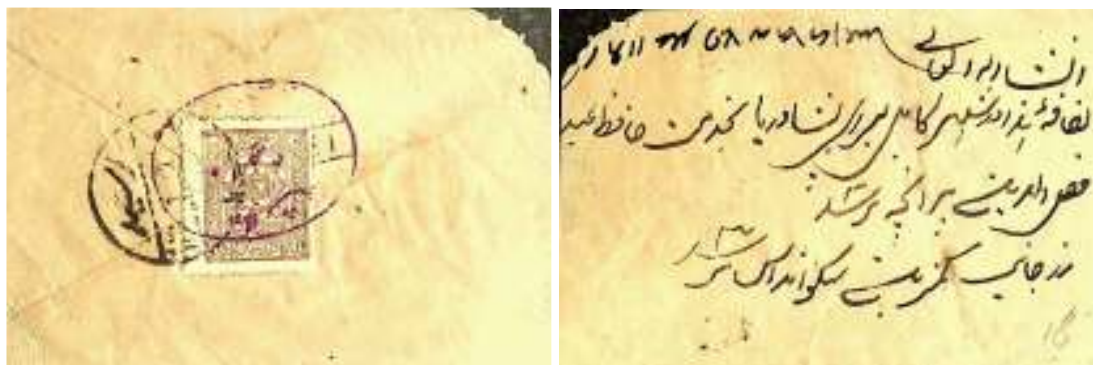
She had been invited by the Amir, Abdur Rahman, to spend six months in Kabul and, after she successfully treated him in October 1894, she became his personal physician for the next three years.

She is said to have had a significant impact on the health of the Afghan population, establishing a hospital in Kabul and introducing vaccination into the country, but she returned to Britain in 1897 because of the dangers for a European woman in Afghanistan.



1909 1 Abasi error of colour

An Abasi stamp printed in the colour of the Rupee has come to light, used on cover, probably from Peshawar to Kabul. It has been listed as 187e in the new *1901-1933 Catalogue*, 2nd Edn.



Contemporary usage of the 1951 Bamian Buddha stamp

This stamp was withdrawn shortly after issue and was scarce in any condition until c.2005 when mint copies began to come onto the market, the stamp being available to purchase from the Kabul post office. Used it is still uncommon, but copies used from the mid 1990s onwards are relatively easier to find than those from 1951. In a letter dated 22nd August 1952 to Winthrop Boggs, Frank Patterson wrote—

“Found the regular 20 poul value was recalled early in the year & almost impossible to find. Seems like Pakistan found fault with a Muslim country that would picture a Buddhist Idol on its stamps. Neighborly, what?”



The stamps were issued on the 21st March 1951.

This cover was sent from Kabul on the 12th May 1951, arriving in Erstfeld, Switzerland on the 21st May.

The first stamp in the block of 5 Afg airmail stamps on the reverse has a broken ‘H’ in Afghanistan, which is a constant plate flaw.

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