

BRITISH POSTAL AGENCIES IN PERSIA 20th CENTURY POSTMARKS

Because of its geographic proximity to India, British sailors and merchants had long traveled into the Persian Gulf to establish trade routes. As this area was relatively undeveloped economically, it was necessary to provide a reliable means of communications. As a result, there was a need for a postal service. The British selected the Indian Post Office as the appropriate vehicle for the establishment of a series of postal agencies, with the first on Persian (Iranian) territory being opened at Bushire in 1864. Ten more agencies were created subsequently, mostly in the period following the discovery of petroleum by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (today's BP) in the early years of the 20th Century.

This exhibit is designed to show the postal markings used at the British postal agencies in Persia during the period 1900 until 1923, when the offices were closed down under agreement with the Persian government. The order in which the material is shown follows that used in the handbook of *The Indian Postal Agencies in the Persian Gulf Area* by Alan Parsons, the primary reference source for this subject, being alphabetical from Abadan through Mohammerah, and then followed by covers from the special military post office used by the Seistan Arbitration Commission in 1905.



An unusual franking of a piece of a large cover with a block of 6 of the Indian 2 annas Queen Victoria stamps cancelled with the Mohammerah squared-circle postmark of 1903.

With the exception of a few locations in which there was a substantial degree of commercial activity, examples of mail from most of the agencies is elusive, with some being exceedingly so. As a result, what is shown here represents about two decades of searching and acquiring one piece at a time. (In fact, one cancel is not included; the marking of Mirjawa is known on a few pieces with the date of 1 July 1926. However, this follows the official closing of the British offices and is regarded by the exhibitor as a souvenir of the completion of the railway to this point rather than being postal.)

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Abadan Agency

Because of its close relationship to India, the British had a high interest in southern Persia going back for many years. As British commercial interests flourished, providing a reliable mail service was a priority. Abadan, near the outflow of the Shatt-al-Arab into the Persian Gulf, was important because of the refinery of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company located there. Thus, a postal agency was opened in 1917 to serve the oil workers. Under an agreement with the Persians, all of the British offices closed as of 31 March 1923.

Abadan
 24 July 1919
 17 June 1919



Three postmarks were used at Abadan, two for ordinary mail and one for money orders. The earliest had vertical bars above and below the date and was used from 22 February 1917 to 28 July 1920. A second version for ordinary letters had no bars and was used from 17 January 1918 to 20 December 1922.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Abadan Money Order Receipts

Abadan
23 March 1920
2 November 1921

No. 42 64 T
Received Rupees (in words) *Four hundred*
being amount of money order payable to (payee's name)
Date-stamp. *23 MAR 20*
Commission Rs. *4* As. *0* M. O. Clerk.

No. 2608 *Ad Rs 325/-*
Received Rupees (in words) *Three hundred and twenty five*
being amount of money order payable to (payee's name)
Date-stamp. *2 NOV 21*
Commission Rs. *6* As. *3* M. O. Clerk.

The oil workers were relatively prosperous and sent substantial amounts of money home to their families. These money order receipts are for 400 and 325 rupees, respectively. Business was so active that a special money order cancel was introduced, as shown on the lower receipt.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Ahwaz Agency

The city of Ahwaz is located on the Karun River, a branch of the Tigris, upstream about 90 miles from the Persian Gulf. Its office was open from 1915 to 1923.

Ahwaz
 12 July 1916
 17 January 1919
 24 June 1919



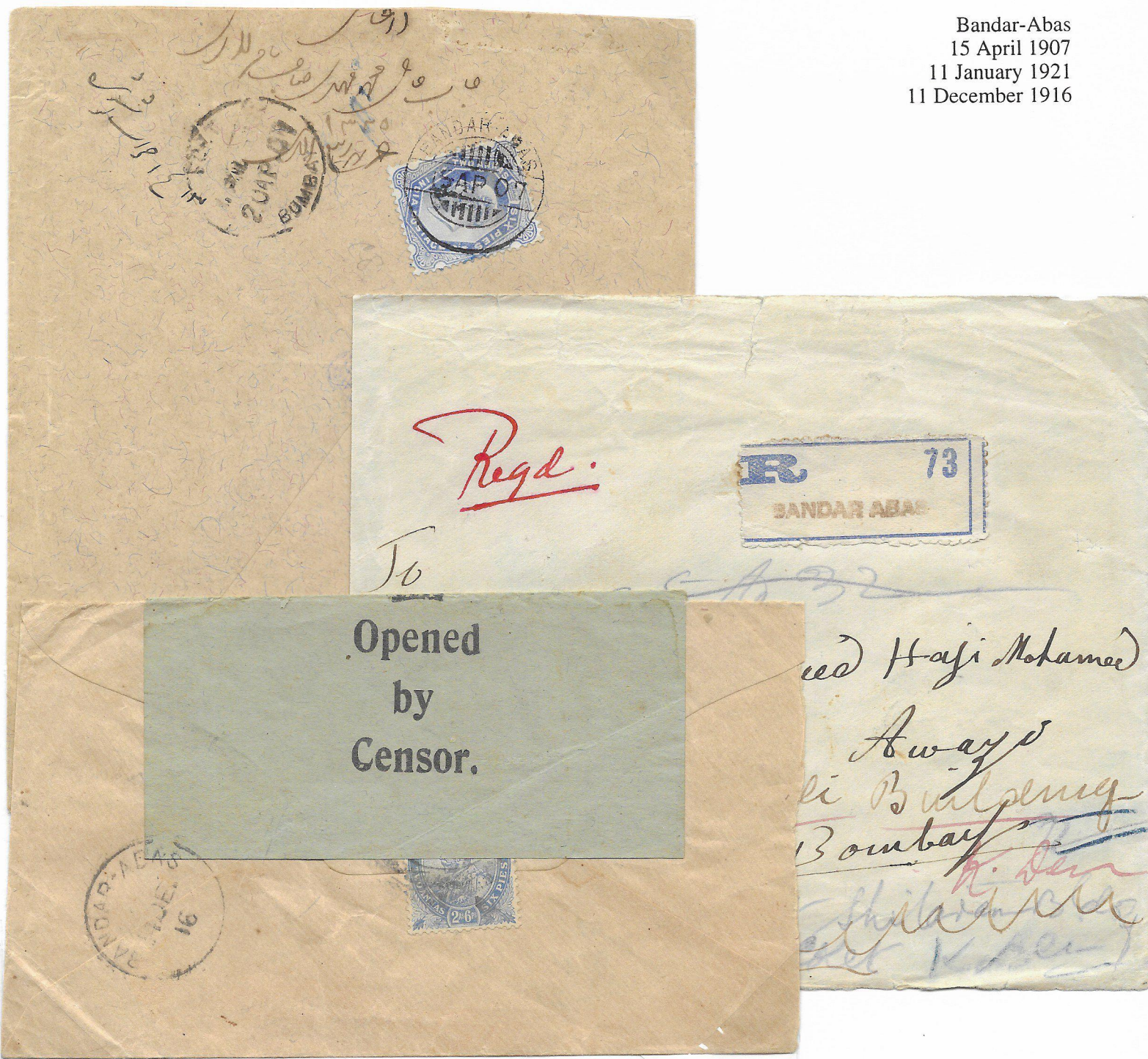
Bank of Canada,
 Ontario,
 317
 Canada

The Ahwaz postmark with "killer" in the circle, recorded from 27 June 1915 to 10 July 1920, is used here on a surface letter and a registered one. The postmark without killer was used from 10 April 1918 to 30 March 1923.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Bandar Abbas Agency

Another early Indian P. O. in Persia was established at Bandar Abbas, an important port near the entrance to the Persian Gulf, in 1868.

Bandar-Abas
 15 April 1907
 11 January 1921
 11 December 1916



The postmark of Bandar Abbas on the upper cover, recorded as used from 23 July 1906 to 11 January 1921, has only one "b" in "Abas." Middle cover shows LRD of the same cancel on the reverse, but the front is shown here to emphasize the highly elusive registry label. Single circle cancel (shown as a receiving mark on the lower inbound cover from Karachi) is recorded from 2 April 1905 to 30 March 1923.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Bushire Agency

The first Indian P. O. in Persia was established at Bushire, a major port located about midway up the Persian Gulf, in 1864. Under an agreement with the Persians, all of these offices closed as of 31 March 1923.

Bushire
 30 September 1906
 11 March 1900
 20 July 1902



Starting in 1894, a squared-circle postmark was in use for an extended period to 29 September 1914. At the same time, two other postmarks were in use, including a double-circle marking with vertical bars above and below the date, that was used briefly from 1 September 1899 to 28 April 1900 (shown above on registered cover to Belgium). Bushire also had a special postmark for registered mail used from 1892 to 14 December 1915.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Bushire Agency

Bushire
 17 May 1914
 27 October 1921

Bushire Camp
 4 June 1922



Public Street. Bushire.



Bushire also had a single-circle postmark without "Reg." at the top; it is recorded from 2 February 1909 to 2 July 1922 and shown above on a postcard to Belgium. The last postmark of Bushire was a large squared circle used from 2 February 1909 to 2 July 1922. However, in connection with troops comprising the South West Cordon Force deployed to stop gunrunning, the postmark of a special branch office called Bushire Camp is recorded as used from 7 February 1921 to 20 November 1922.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Chahbar Agency

This port is on the Gulf of Oman in eastern Persia. This office was opened in August 1913, and only a single postmark (inscribed "Persian Gulf Dt." for District) was used.

Chahbar
4 January 1917

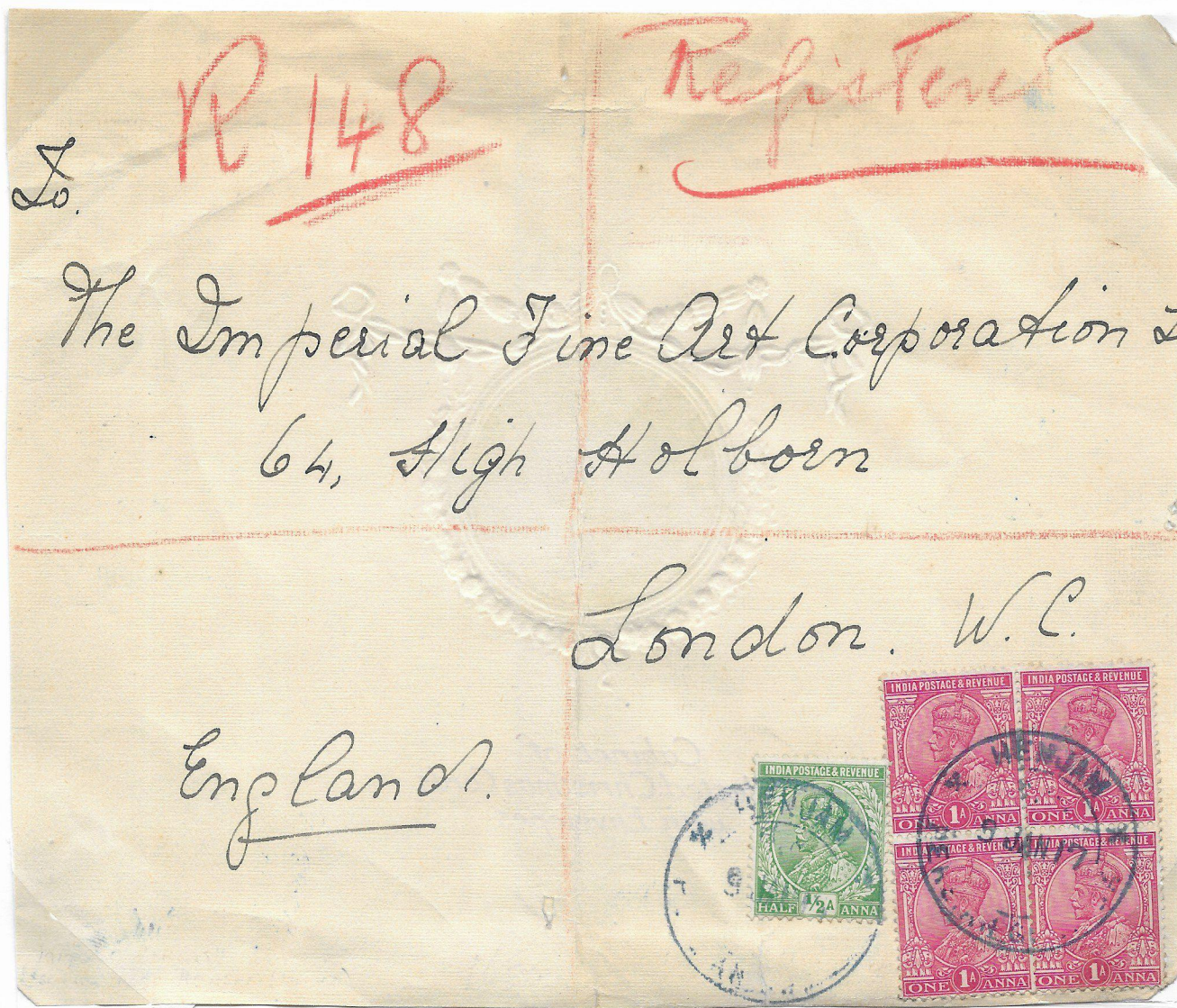


These examples in black and blue ink of the Chahbar cancel are used as a transit marking on a letter from Karachi to Panjgur and as a receiving mark on a letter forwarded from Sind. This marking is recorded as used from 18 April 1914 to 7 May 1921.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Henjam Agency

- This is a small island located just inside the entrance to the Persian Gulf. There was a cable station there, which probably accounts for why a postal agency was opened in 1913.

Henjam
5 January 1917



Only one postmark was used at Henjam, and it is recorded as used from 5 March 1915 to 12 November 1922. This example is shown on a registered cover front to London, with manuscript "Registered" and number written in red, presumably because the agent didn't have labels.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA

Jask Agency

The port of Jask is on the Gulf of Oman to the east of the entrance to the Persian Gulf. It was an active trading station, and the first postal agency opened in 1880.



Jask
6 July 1911
15 September 1920



The Jask squared-circle postmark was used from 1894 until 1 March 1912; this cover is unusual in that it shows the postmark of the Linga Agency used as a transit marking. Later, a large double-circle marking is recorded as used from 22 April 1915. It is inscribed "Jask/Persian Gulf Dt." with the latter abbreviation indicating that the location was in the P.G. District but not on the Gulf itself. The example above is the latest recorded date.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Linga Agency

The port of Linga is on the Persian Gulf about 100 miles west of Bandar Abbas. It was active commercially at an early date and its postal agency opened in 1867, remaining in operation until 1923.

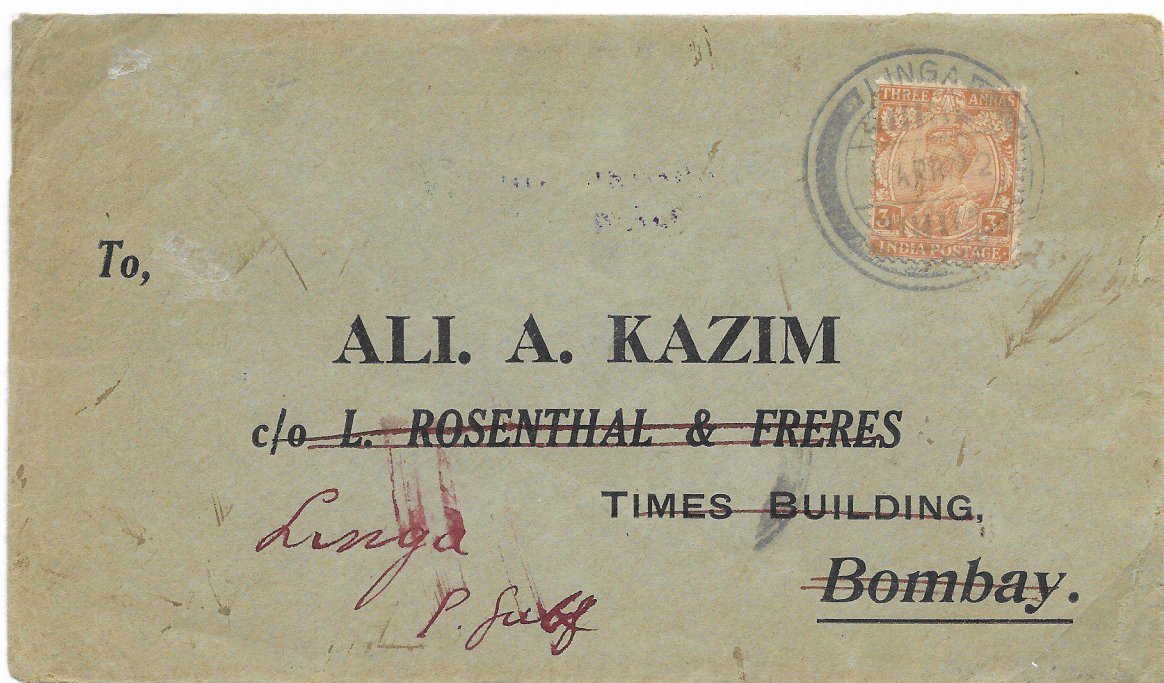
Linga
16 May 1900
21 November 1909



The squared circle postmark of Linga came into use in 1883 and has been recorded up to 29 September 1905. However, the primary 20th Century postmark was a double circle type with vertical lines above and below the date, recorded as used from 25 May 1905 to 9 January 1922.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Linga Agency

Linga
1 April 1922



The final postmark of Linga was a large double circle cancel with a black band between the rings that is recorded as used from 2 February 1920 to 10 February 1923.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Maidan-i-Naphtun Agency

This agency opened at the site of the original oil discovery some 60 miles northeast of Ahwaz, probably in 1917 along with Abadan, and it closed in 1923. Examples of its postmarks are extremely elusive.

Maidan-i-Naphtun
10 July 1917
4 December 1922

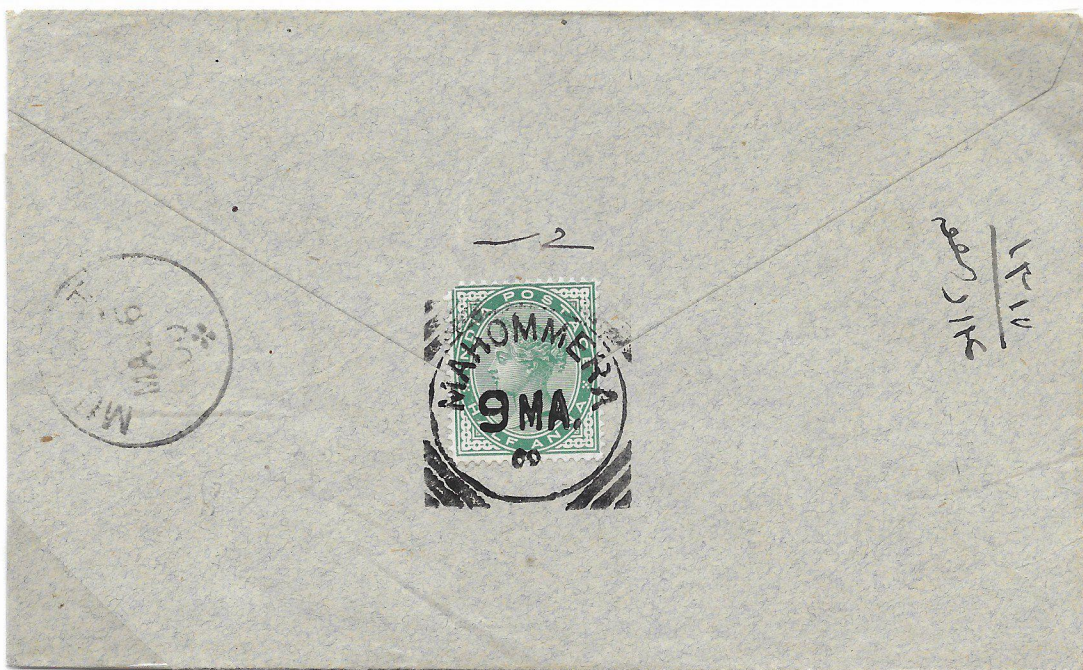


Fewer than ten examples of the markings of this agency have been recorded, with that on the piece above being the earliest by a considerable margin and the cover showing the latest. Other examples of this marking are known from 6 May 1920 to 24 April 1922. A similar "Reg." postmark for registered mail was used in 1922-1923.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Mohammerah Agency

This city (now known as Khorramshahr) is located at the confluence of the Shatt-al-Arab and the Karun River, near Abadan. It was active commercially at an early date and its postal agency opened in 1892.

Mahommera
 9 March 1900
 16 September 1904



As at other agencies, in the late Victorian era a squared-circle postmark is recorded as used at Mohammerah until 14 May 1905, shown here on Victorian and Edward VII stamps.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Mohammerah Agency

Mohammerah
January 1914
6 March 1915

ACKNOWLEDGMENT. (On Postal Service.)

Name of payee. *N. J. Thanoo Pillai*

Amount of order (in figures) Rs. *75* Is. *0*

Name and address of remitter. *N. S. Pillai*
Abadan Refinery
Mohammerah
Persian Gulf

TRIVANDRUM
M.O.
30 JA.
14

MOHAMMERA
PERSIAN GULF DISTRICT

Date-stamp of the office of payment

Name-stamp of the office of issue.

Received the sum specified above on *13/1/14*

N. J. Thanoo Pillai

Signature of the holder of the order.



The final postmark of Mohammerah was a small double circle with vertical bars above and below the date, and the location was spelled differently. It is recorded as used from 10 February 1906 to 20 January 1923. Note receipt for money order sending 75 rupees to India by an oil worker.

BRITISH OFFICES IN PERSIA
Seistan Arbitration Commission

In 1903, Britain agreed to arbitrate a long-standing boundary dispute in the Seistan district between Afghanistan and Persia. To carry out this task, Col. Henry McMahon was sent with an escort of 250 men to Bund-i-Seistan on the Helmond River, where the base camp of the Seistan Arbitration Commission was established. A satisfactory agreement was reached in 1905, after which the Commission was disbanded.



Camp P.O. No.4
 18 February 1905
 23 February 1905

Insignia with crown and
 "SAC," the initials of
 the Seistan Arbitration
 Commission, embossed
 on reverse of envelope.



Postal service was provided to the SAC using Camp Post Office 4 marking, with mail taking about a week to reach Quetta, some 600 miles away, and a month to London.