



Pen and ink drawing of Reynolds playing bowls

*An uncertain  
beginning*

The smell of natural gas was unmistakable. It was a smell you could see. The vapours rose clearly in the sunlight and stank of rotten eggs. But to the explorer George Reynolds it was the best thing he had smelled in seven years. He instructed the men to keep drilling.

Back in England, William D'Arcy was close to despair. He had gambled his considerable fortune on oil, and now was on the verge of losing it all. It seemed that the geologists and experts who nodded their heads encouragingly at him since 1901 had been wrong about the oil beneath the sands of Persia.

Having never set foot in Persia himself, Mr D'Arcy didn't even have adventure travel stories to show for his investment.

What he had was letters and telegrams from his explorer, urging patience, almost begging to extend the search until every possibility had been exhausted.

But patience, like Mr D'Arcy's finances, had run out. Even the Burmah Oil Company, whose investment had saved the expedition in 1904, were tired of finding nothing.



Now Mr Reynolds would be on the receiving end of an insistent telegraph

*'Dear sir... We would like if possible to put the two wells at Masjid I Suleiman down to 1500 or 1600 feet and if no oil is found at this depth to abandon operations and close down...'*

Giving up was not a part of George Reynolds character, even if he might admit that this particular search had often seemed doomed.



It had taken 10 days just to get to Shradin, eight months to start drilling and six years of toiling to find nothing of any consequence.

Torrential rains had washed away four months of work on a link road to Masjid-I-Suleiman, where two weeks ago a drill had fallen off in one of two last chance wells and taken more than a week to fish out.

But vindication was in the air. By the early morning of 26 May 1908, the whole camp reeked of sulphur. At four o'clock the drill reached 1,180 feet and a fountain of oil spewed out into the dawn sky.

POST OFFICE TELEGRAMS.			
FOR INLAND, FOREIGN AND COLONIAL TELEGRAMS.			
BSM G	Number.	Words.	Time handed in.
BA SORAH 148 8 6/6 9 M			
Service Instructions.		Office Stamp.	
VBOSN =		Sent or Sent out at } To ..... By .....	
CALLIUNGAL LONDON = MOWATE 26508 GILT 1180 RISING GEOBRE +			
<i>Musjid a Suleiman 26/5/08 to 1 well Depth 1180 feet. Oil struck &amp; flow</i>			
N.B.—This form must accompany any inquiry made respecting this Telegram.			Charges to pay.
			£ s. d.

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The encoded telegram read:

*CALLIUNGLE LONDON = MOWATE 26508 GILT 1180 RISING  
GEOBRE*

Decoded it read:

*Head Office London, Masjid I Suleiman 26th May 1908 No. 1 Well  
Depth 1180 feet oil struck and flowing George B Reynolds*

From remote Persia, telegrams were slow. Mr D'Arcy got the good news five days later. He pronounced...

*"If it is true, all our troubles are over... I am telling no one about it until I  
have the news confirmed"*

Within a year the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which would one day become bp, was in business. The press talked up the vastness of the new company's potential to the point that on the day the Anglo-Persian stock opened for trading in London and Glasgow, people stood five deep in front of the cashiers at a Scottish bank, desperate to get in on the action.

And William Knox D'Arcy, who had nearly lost everything, was richer than he had ever been in his life.

If you want to delve deeper into the story behind the first oil why not check out this [25-minute film](#).

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