Friday, 18 February 2022 1 1 Yes, it is, yes. Α. 2 (10.00 am) 2 Q. Can you confirm that that statement is true to the 3 3 best of your knowledge and belief? SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Good morning. 4 MR BLAKE: This morning we have Mrs O'Dell as our first 4 A. Yes. 5 5 Q. Can I start by asking you some questions about your witness. 6 6 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Very good. background? 7 JENNIFER O'DELL (sworn) 7 Α. Of course. 8 Questioned by MR BLAKE 8 Q. What area do you live in? 9 MR BLAKE: Can you state your full name, please? 9 I live in a small village in Cambridgeshire. A. 10 A. Mrs Jennifer O'Dell. 10 How long have you lived there for? 11 Q. As you know, I'm Julian Blake and I'm asking questions 11 Well, at the moment, 32 years but I moved up from 12 today on behalf of the Chair. The Chair appears on 12 London 50 years ago to the village, but then I moved 13 the screen in front of you. 13 away from the village for eight years and then moved 14 A. Good morning. 14 back because I remarried. So I've been there for 15 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Good morning, Mrs O'Dell. I hope the 15 another 32 years, yes. weather isn't too bad in your part of the country. 16 16 Q. Can you describe that village for us? Well, I say small. I haven't really got anything to 17 A. So do I, thank you. 17 18 MR BLAKE: Do you have in front of you a witness 18 compare it with. 19 statement? 19 20 A. I do, yes. 20 21 Q. Is that witness statement dated 22 January of this 21 MR BLAKE: Sorry about that. 22 22 year? A. That's all right. 23 A. Yes, it is, yes. 23 Q. 24 24 Q. If I can ask you to turn to the final page, page 19, A.

A. Yes. Well, yes, it used to be very friendly when 1 2 I first moved there 50 years ago but, of course, there 3 aren't any shops in there now and people are working 4 away from the home, so it's not so much friendly as it 5 used to be. But it's fine.

is that your signature at the bottom?

6 Q. Can you tell us a little bit about your family? 7 A. My family. I've been married to my husband for

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8 32 years. He has lived in our home since he was two 9 and he's now 76, so our home is very important to us. 10 We have six children between us, eight grandchildren

11 between us, some live as far away as Australia, and

12 some are in Bridgend in South Wales. So they're 13 dotted around all over the world, yes.

14 Q. What did you do for a living before becoming

15 a subpostmistress?

16 A. I was in a call centre, Housing Association call 17 centre. Previous to that, I was a civil servant and 18 then I also worked for local government, again in 19 a sort of call centre.

20 Can you give us a little bit of detail about that at 21 all?

22 A. Yes, I was in Cambridgeshire police headquarters. 23 I was a civilian. I was taking 999 calls and acting

24 upon those calls with other -- well, with other

25 civilians and police people.

A.

MR BLAKE: Sorry, there's a fire alarm. (Fire alarm test: pause) You were saying about your village. Yes. I suppose it's a medium-sized village. 25 Is it a friendly place? 1 What about your other Civil Service role? What was 2 that? 3 A. I was a civilian clerical staff in the Prison Service. 4 Q. For those jobs, presumably you had some level of 5 vetting or some sort of enquiries before you were 6 employed? 7 A. Absolutely, yes. Yes, I did. 8 Q. During your career as a subpostmistress, I think you 9 were also involved in local politics; is that right? 10 A. Yes, I was, yes. 11 What did you do? 12 A. I had been chosen, just before what had happened, to 13 be the PPC, which is something --14 Parliamentary candidate? That's the one, Provisional Parliamentary Candidate 15 16 for the general election of that time. But when this 17 all happened, I stood down because I didn't want to 18 bring the party that I was being for into disrepute. 19 But you were selected by --Q. 20 21 -- the local party --Q. 22 A. Yes, I was. 23 -- to become their Parliamentary candidate? Q. 24 Yes. Α. 25 Q. How did you decide to become a subpostmistress?

- 1 There's always been a Post Office in -- well, when 2 I say "always been", there's been a Post Office in the 3 village for a long time and it was going to close, and 4 my brother-in-law, who used to live next door to us, 5 jokingly said one day "Well, why don't you become the 6 subpostmistress", and we laughed it off. But he'd sown the seeds and we happened to have a spare room in 7 8 our home, as you do, and we realised some money and 9 I put in to become the subpostmistress, went for the 10 interview and I was accepted, and we refurbished the 11 room, completely gutted it out, refurbished it all and 12 everything else, and became the subpostmistress. 13 Q. So the Post Office was actually in your home, was it?
- 14 **A.** Yes, it was a room in my home, yes.
- 15 Q. Did you have to pay for the Post Office or pay for the 16 refurbishment?
- 17 **A.** Oh, yes. I mean, we put about £35,000/40,000 because 18 we completely -- sorry, the room that we used was in 19 a very old part of our home. So when you took the 20 floor up, there was the bare earth. That's how old it 21 was. So we had to dig some out, put proper footings 22 in. So, yes, it did cost an awful lot of money to 23 refurbish it all.
- 24 **Q.** Alongside the Post Office, did you have a retail 25 business of some sort?

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1 Well, I did of sorts. There was a garage in our 2

village who sold groceries and I didn't really want to

3 go down that route. So I just used to sell greeting

4 cards and some jewellery and some handbags, but I sold 5 those that people from the village they actually made.

- 6 So I tried to --
 - Q. Local crafts?

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- 8 Absolutely, yes. Α.
 - Q. Who worked with you?
- 10 Towards the end, my son had turned 18 and he was home
- 11 sometimes from college, so he -- towards the end, he
- 12 worked as a counter assistant but there was a woman in
- 13 the village who used to work at the old Post Office so 14 she was fully trained. So, at the beginning, she used
- 15 to stand in for me if I wanted time off.
- 16 Q. At that stage, do you think your son wanted to join 17 you in the business?
- 18 I don't really know, to tell you the truth. It would Α. 19 have been handy. It would have been good. I think my
- 20 husband wanted him to do so but ...
- 21 Q. In terms of training, did you receive training on 22
- 23 A. Yes. It is rather vague. I think I was supposed to
- 24 have had two-day training and I went to a hotel in Bedfordshire, arrived there about 10.00, we stopped 25

- and had coffee to start with, then he showed me the screen and that we pressed things, you know, for wanting to sell stamps or books of stamps what to press. Then it was lunchtime so it was an elongated lunch, because there was only myself at the training.
- We got back and he was adamant in telling me how to rem out the cheques because it was rather convoluted how to do it. So he -- we went through that for ages and then we had a cup of tea and then he said, "Well, might as well go home". So in all, it was about two hours/two and a half hours actual training on it and that was it.
- 13 **Q.** At the time that you had that training, was Horizon 14 installed in your Post Office?
- 15 No. I can't remember exactly how many months it was 16 but it was some months after the training that it was 17 installed.
- 18 **Q.** What advice were you given at that training in terms 19 of shortfalls or perhaps when you had more money 20 showing up on screen?
- 21 A. Not that I can remember, none at all.
- 22 Q. I'm going to ask you about the helpline that was 23 provided by the Post Office. I'm going to take you to 24 specific transactions shortly, so we don't need to 25 talk about specific transactions, but how often did

- 1 you call the helpline?
- 2 A. It could have been approximately once a month. Mainly
- 3 we used to be sent every week a booklet, that's the
- 4 only way I can describe it, and it used to update us
- 5 on how to carry out things on the Horizon system. So
- 6 we would have to kind of update certain things on it
- 7 and 99.9 per cent of the time those instructions were
- 8 wrong, so you'd have to ring up the "helpline" -- and
- 9 I say that because it wasn't -- saying, "Well, we
- 10 received this and it's wrong" and they said, "Yes, we
- 11 know, we're going to correct it in next week's
- 12 booklet". So it could have been at least once
- 13 a fortnight.
- 14 You described them like that, in speech marks. Why
- 15 have you described them in that way?
- 16 A. Well, they weren't helpful whatsoever.
- 17 Q. In broad terms, why not?
- 18 Well, when I had my shortfall they didn't want to
 - know. They just kept telling me to pay the money
- 20 back. You know, they were shouting at me. I was
- 21 saying to them that the Horizon system is wrong. They
- 22 just didn't want to know. It was pay the money back.
- Q. 23 Moving on to problems that you had with Horizon --
- 24 A.

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25 Q. -- do you remember what year your first significant

- 1 discrepancies were showing?
- 2 A. It was the beginning of June 2009. I was doing my May 3
- 4 **Q.** So let's go through that chronologically, if we can.
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- 6 **Q.** So starting for the balance for May 2009, what did you 7
- 8 A. It was approximately £1,000 shortfall.
- 9 **Q.** What did you do about that?
- 10 A. Looked for it everywhere. The way my office was laid 11 out I had the counter here, down there was my safe, 12 there was my cash drawer, and there was a bit of a gap 13 and then there was my post bag there. So, in the 14 safe, I used to keep bundles of 20s in £1,000 bundles 15 and £10 notes in £1,000 bundles and my £5 notes in 16 £500 bundles.

Well, after looking through all the paperwork and recounting my stock, recounting all my cash, I thought, well, had I taken out a bundle of 1,000 and, instead of putting it in my cash drawer, I'd put it in the post bag, or had I taken it down into the kitchen and put it in the freezer. You know, like you do, you put it down somewhere and turn round and then when you go back it's not there.

So after several hours of scratching my head and

1 looking everywhere for it, I put on the system that 2 I had the cash that the Horizon system said I had, so 3 that I could then open the next morning, because if 4 you didn't do that, then you couldn't open the next 5 morning and work.

6 Q. What happened to the shortfall over the following 7 months?

8 The next month when I balanced, it was another £1,000, 9 give or take. As I said earlier, my son used to help 10 out when he was home and he was home on the day of the 11 balance, and I called him in -- and I told him what 12 had happened and I said, "Look, you know, if you have 13 taken this, tell me now but, if you have, I'm the one 14 that's responsible and I will be the one that's taken 15 away and sent to prison. So tell me, we'll fix it, 16 we'll sort it somehow, but you've got to tell me now". 17 And he said, "Mum, I haven't taken it" and he said 18 "Well, if I haven't taken it, have you?" and of course 19

Q. So at that stage, how was your relationship with your son?

I hadn't taken it.

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anything.

22 I believed him. It's awful to have to say but it was Α. 23 a little bit strained, which is awful to say because 24 I believed him but there was still a nagging doubt, 25 you know.

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- Q. Did you call the helpline as those months went by?
- A. I then told my husband because I hadn't told him.
- 3 I went to the bank and I could raise £750 cash from
- 4 the bank, and I put that into my till. I hadn't
- 5 called the helpline by then because I just thought 6 it's somewhere, it's got to be somewhere. So when
- 7 I balanced the following month, having put in the £750
- 8 cash, there was £3,000 gone. So I then realised that
- 9 there was something going on. So that's when I rang
- 10 the people.
- 11 Q. So the 3,000 shortfall, I think that was July 2009 or 12 thereabouts?
- 13 **A.** Yes, roughly, yes.
- 14 Q. You said you called the helpline. What was their 15
- 16 A. "Pay the money back". That's all. And I said to them 17 "No, money has not gone missing. There's a fault, 18 there's something going on on Horizon". "Pay the 19 money back", that's all I got and she was shouting at 20 me down the phone. So, in the end, I just hung up.

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And I kept saying to my husband it felt as though there was somebody in the depths of an office block, the lights were dimmed and they were at a Horizon terminal and they were manipulating figures. It -- I couldn't prove it but that's just how it felt

and I couldn't check up on it. But that's how it 1 2 felt. But the help -- well, the people just wasn't 3

Q. The people on the helpline, were you aware of whether they could see what was on your screen or not?

No, I wasn't aware of that at all. And then the following month, and again another £1,000, and I rang them up again. You see, having worked in a call centre, you have your basic call handlers and then you 10 have supervisors, and I thought, well, surely 11 a supervisor will pick up that I've called a second 12 time and that this is ongoing and I will get a call 13 from them to say "Right, got a bit of a problem, let's 14 see if we can sort it out". But there wasn't

> So the second time I called them, the woman said to me, "Have you been having problems with the PIN, pad?" And I said "Well, not really, a couple of times it won't accept the PIN number and on the screen it says I have to swipe" -- there was -- by the keyboard there was a swiping -- swipe it and on the screen it was how much you wanted to withdraw. So I put in and then it would say put the card back in the PIN pad ...

So I explained that to her. So she said "Well, I'll get an engineer to ring you back but you've got

1		to pay the money back". So an engineer did ring me
2		back and he told me to press this button and that
3		button, which I did, and he was going to send me
4		a cleaning pad for the PIN pad, which he did, and I've
5		still got it, but it didn't make any difference. But
6		I thought: that's a bit strange that she's asked me
7		that, where's that coming from?
8		But anyway, so then by November I'd just about
9		had enough because nobody had rung me, so I rang them
10		up again.
11	Q.	I think by November 2009, the shortfall had reached
12		£7,000, is that right
13	A.	Yes.
14	Q.	or thereabouts?
15	A.	Yes.
16	Q.	You said you phoned the helpline again.
17	A.	Yes.
18	Q.	What happened?
19	A.	Well, again, it was just "Pay the money back", but
20		this time I'm afraid I shouted at them and they said,
21		"Well, do you want me to escalate it to tier two?" and
22		I said "Well, why hasn't this been offered to me
23		before?" Well, of course, they couldn't answer me.
24		And I said, "Well, yes, of course I do. If this is
25		going to sort the problem out, well, yes".
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So Ms Muddeman, tier two, rang me the following day, told her what had been happening, but I expected her to know all about it but it seemed as though she didn't and all she said was -- when I said to her it was the Horizon, there's a problem, all she said was "Well, prove it". That was it. Nothing. Q. At that time, did you think that other people were having problems with Horizon? No. I wasn't told at all. Nothing. By, I think, 16 December it had reached around £8,500? Something like that. I can't remember, yes. But then did it go down? Right, my son worked -- I think -- I can't remember whether it's a Thursday or a Friday. He worked that day and my husband and I went out shopping but I always made certain I was back to help with the balance -- sorry, not the balancing, the end of day balancing, sort of thing, and I was in the kitchen and my son came down and he said "Worries are over, I've got roughly 8" -- no, I can't remember the exact amount but "I've got more than I should have". I said "How come?" And I went down there and the cash declaration -- for some reason, instead of

I said "How come?" And I went down there and the cash declaration -- for some reason, instead of using cash declaration 1, he had used cash declaration 2 and I said "Oh, don't worry about that,

I did that at the beginning of when the Horizon was installed". I said "Don't worry about that, it will sort itself out", and we left it. And I thought "Oh, well, if it's" — so when I went back on the Monday and it showed a plus sign, I thought "Going to have a good Christmas, I haven't got to worry about it anymore".

And then 6 January two people from Post Office walked in.

10 Q. That was the audit?

- A. That was -- well, I beg to differ. It wasn't
 an audit. They weren't auditors. I refuse to call
 them auditors.
- **Q.** Why do you refuse to call them auditors?
- **A.** Because they didn't audit.
- **Q.** What did they do?

A. They walked in. I was so pleased to see them because
I genuinely thought that they -- I mean, I said to
them "Ah, I'm really pleased to see you, we are going
to sort this problem out. You're going to find what
on earth is going on". So they walked round into the
counter and Lesley Frost --

And I'd like to digress a little bit. When I was opening, I didn't go away for training, I had two employees come in to train me on the job and the 15

first woman was Lesley Frost. She came in on Monday morning at 9 o'clock and it was manual. It wasn't the Horizon system. And on the Wednesday afternoon she brought the big blue balance sheet and she showed me how to balance and we were a few pounds over. Her exact words were, "You will never balance to the penny, so we're going to take that money out and we're going to put it into a plastic bag and we're going to put it in the safe, so next week you might be down, so you can take that money out and you can then balance".

I thought: well, she's an employee, she's been sent here to train me. So I took her word for it.

But, of course, looking back, that was legally false accounting. So when these two people walked in, she was one of them, which I found quite ironic.

I had logged into the Horizon system at about 8.55 that morning but she logged me out and I was no longer able to access the Horizon system, and she put a laptop on my counter. So she took the figure, the Horizon system figure of what it had said I should have on her laptop.

She counted the cash, Mr Skelton counted the stamps and he said to me "Why didn't you declare your stamps at the end of December", and I went up to him and I said "I did declare them". And he mumbled

- 1 something and I didn't hear what he had said and 2 I said "Pardon", you know "What did you say?" and he'd 3 gone "Oh, nothing, nothing, nothing". And they kind 4 of inputted into this laptop ...

- 6 Q. It's okay. Take your time. We can have a break if 7 you'd like.
- 8 They alleged I'd stolen £9,616.66, and I broke down.
- 9 And they then asked me -- they told me I was
- 10 suspended. They asked me if I would keep -- I would
- 11 let somebody come in to work the Post Office, and
- 12 I said "Of course I do, the village needs it". Well,
- 13 they couldn't get anybody and they asked me if I could
- 14 get somebody but I couldn't. So the Post Office, it
- 15
- 16 Q. So having been suspended, you were asked whether you 17 could provide somebody to take over your role?
- 18 A. Yes.
- 19 Q. Moving on to the investigation, the audit was on
- 20 6 January.
- 21 A. Yes.

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- 22 **Q.** When did you meet the investigators?
- 23 A. Oh dear, it was Jon Longman, wasn't it? I can't 24 remember.
- 25 Q. Same day or soon after --

- 1 No, no, no, no. I went for an interview before I met 2 with the investigators.
- 3 Where was the interview? Q.
- 4 That was in Cambridge city in the Crown Post Office
- 5 with two union people, Tim and Jim, who had been to my
- 6 house previously and sat in my kitchen and had coffee
 - and I told them what had happened and they sat in with
- 9 But before the interview, we were early and we
- 10 had a cup of coffee and, as we got up to go to the
- 11 interview, my husband looked these two people in the
- 12 eye and he said "Well, is this happening to anybody
- 13 Q.

Yes.

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- 15 A. "No, no, you're the only ones".
- 16 Those are the union people that said that?
- 17 This is the NFSP people. One was on the National
- 18 Executive Committee and one was a subpostmaster.
- 19 Were you legally represented at the interview?
- 20 No. I didn't see the need for it because I hadn't
- 21 done anything wrong.
- 22 Who was the interview with? Was that auditors or 23
 - investigators?
- 24 A. No, as far as I know, it was just a Post Office
- 25 employee. I can't remember her name.

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- 1 **Q.** What was the role of the union representatives there, 2 as far as you understood it?
- 3 Well, it was a bit peculiar, really, because they 4 didn't do anything or say anything. There was a tiny 5 bit towards the end where I got a little bit upset and 6 one of them turned round and said "Calm down". But 7 apart from that --

What I did find a little bit off-putting at the end, I walked out and my husband was outside, but the union rep on the NEC, he stayed in there and the door was open and he was talking to them and I thought, that's -- I don't know. I just felt that was bit uncomfortable for them to do that. Surely they should have been with me rather than talking to the Post Office? I just found that really quite strange.

- 16 Q. You have said that your husband was there. Was your 17 son also there?
- 18 **A.** No, he wasn't at that. He was at college on that day. 19 They then rang me up and said I'd been unsuccessful 20 with that interview but I could appeal. I had to go 21 to Peterborough for that appeal and, again, I didn't 22 see the need for any legal representation because 23 I hadn't done anything wrong. But both of those 24
- interviews, it was just like a kangaroo court. You 25 know, I walked in, the body language from them was

- 1 "Oh, she's guilty, that's it", and I had to go through 2 it all again.
- 3 **Q.** Who accompanied you to your second interview?
- 4 A. Well, my husband stayed outside but nobody else.
- 5 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mrs O'Dell, can I just interrupt for 6 a second. These interviews that you are now
- 7 describing --
- 8 A. Yes.
- 9 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: -- I'm getting the impression that they
- were interviews which were to do with whether or not 10 11 your suspension should remain in place?
- 12 A. That's right, yes.
- 13 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** I've got that right, did I?
- 14 Yes, sorry. I didn't make that very clear. Yes.
- MR BLAKE: Were there any other interviews carried out? 15
- A. Yes, it was with the investigation -- Jon Longman, the 16 17 investigation chap.
- 18 Q. Where was? Don't worry --
- 19 A. I seem to think that was at Cambridge as well.
- 20 I think that was at Cambridge and my son and my
- 21 husband went to that.
- 22 **Q.** How was that experience?
- 23 A. Again, I was guilty. At the end, towards the end,
- 24 Mr Longman showed me a computer printout. Now, this
- 25 was roughly -- and I want to say April or May but

I can't remember exactly when it was and he showed me this printout and he pointed to the date and it was November 2009. So it was a good six months beforehand.

And he pointed to an amount and he said to me "Was that the amount that was in your safe?" and I said to him, "Well, is that the cash declaration I made on that day?" and he said "Yes". And I said "So that's what I inputted at that time on that day in my Post Office of what cash I had in my safe?" and he said "Yes".

So I said "Well, I can't remember what cash I've got in my purse, which I only looked at this morning, so I cannot remember how much was in my safe six months ago but it can't be my cash declaration because you've got the time and the time is something like 5 or 6 o'clock", and I said "And I make my cash declaration -- I close at 3 o'clock, so I couldn't have done it at that time". And he said "Oh daylight -- you know, British Summer Time, winter time", pluh, pluh, pluh, pluh, and put it away.

That was really my first inclination that there really was something going on with the Horizon system.

- **Q.** At that interview, were you legally represented?
- **A.** No.

A. Yes. When the interview finished, I came out and
there was a woman with Mr Longman and I can't remember
her name. He called my son into the room. Now, my
son was -- how old was he? 18? 19? I can't
remember. I was a little bit concerned because he was
suffering a bit from anxiety, because of all of this,

and I made certain that the door was left open.

You said your son was with you, I think?

And when my son came out, I said "You all right?" and he said, "He asked me if I loved you".

Mr Longman said to my son "Do you love your mother?" and he said "Yes, of course I do", and he said "Well, do you think she took the money?", and he said "No, she didn't take the money and I didn't either".

- **Q.** Did your son take any further steps at that point?
- A. No, he didn't, but he did have an idea of what could
 possibly have gone wrong and he did write to
 Mr Longman to make the suggestion but that was just
 thrown out of the window.
- 20 Q. Were you aware of a response to that?
- A. Yes. I can't remember whether I rang Mr Longman or he rang me. They wanted me to sign something to see that I had taken the money but I can't remember whether
 I rang him or whatever and I said "Well, my son made a suggestion, we haven't heard anything". "Oh, yes

- I did talk to the others about that but we all said,
 no, that couldn't possibly have happened". He said
 "Are you going to sign it?" and I said "No".
 - Q. Now, you are one of the subpostmistress who wasn't prosecuted?
- 6 A. That's right.
- 7 Q. Were you told why you weren't prosecuted?
 - A. No. Every morning ... I'd wake up expecting a letter.
 You know, you wake up and you think "Hooray, today's
 Monday, today's Tuesday, I'm going to do this, that";
 you woke up and thought: is there going to be
 a special delivery letter with a summons to court.

No, I never told -- I had letters demanding the money and if I hadn't replied -- given the money back -- no, sorry, if I hadn't paid the money back within seven days they would do this, or if I didn't pay the money back within a certain time they would do that. And I always wrote back saying "I'm not going to give you the money because the money hasn't gone missing". So no.

Q. I want to move on to your meeting with the
Post Office. You met with Ms van den Bogerd. We have
a whole phase of this Inquiry looking at mediation, so
we don't need to address the specifics of exactly what
happened.

A. Okay, yes.

Q. Can you tell us, do you think that you were taken seriously at that meeting?

A. Well, can I backtrack a little bit because before the mediation, the Post Office wanted to have meetings with our MPs and my MP, who had been told about -- I had been in contact with him all the way through, contacted me saying that the Post Office wanted a meeting with him, would I allow that? So I emailed him back and I said "Yes, I want to be there and I want certain provisions at that meeting. I want to know who will be present and in what capacity. I don't want any recording of it and I'd like to know beforehand exactly what they are going to say".

Most of the criteria was met, so I went to London and we met in the building next to the Houses of Parliament. I can't remember what it's called.

Q. Portcullis House, perhaps?

A. Yes, that's the one, and Angela van den Bogerd was there, she sat next to me, and Patrick somebody or other — I've forgotten his name — he sat opposite me and I really don't know what capacity, I think he was a legal chap, but I wouldn't swear to it, and my MP.

And the previous night, somehow I had a printout, a Horizon computer printout, and I looked

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1 at it and the very last piece input was Wednesday, 2 6 January 2010 and it was approximately 11 o'clock and 3 it had my detail -- my password -- not my password 4 my -- sorry, what is when you log in to something, you 5 have a sign in. 6 Q. Username? 7 A. Username, that's the word. Had my username to it and 8 then some numbers and I thought: well, I couldn't have 9 because they'd logged me out and blocked me on the 10 Horizon system at 9 o'clock, so how could I have 11 logged in at 11 o'clock and what were those numbers? 12 So at this meeting with my MP, with 13 Angela van den Bogerd, I mentioned this and I showed 14 it to her, and I said "That couldn't possibly have 15 happened, I hadn't got -- I couldn't use the Horizon 16 system and at that time the two employees were there, 17 so they would have stopped me but I don't know what 18 that is". So she said "Well, I don't, but at the 19 mediation beforehand tell them that you want to know 20 what this is and we'll find out and we'll let you know 21 at the mediation". 22 So Howe & Co represented me at the mediation and 23 I went to their offices and a few weeks before that 24 I'd had ... 25 I'd had a cancer scare and I'd had a little

1 operation, so I wasn't at my best. So we went into 2 the mediation and Angela van den Bogerd was there with 3 a solicitor and I had to go through it all again, what 4 had happened. And I mentioned this Horizon printout, 5 and she said "Oh, yes, well, that was postal orders". 6 So I said "Well, I couldn't have made that entry and 7 I went through it all again". I said, "And we didn't 8 count the postal orders because they didn't have 9 monetary value at that time". They did when you --10 when somebody came in to buy a postal order you would 11 put it in the printer and it would print out a postal 12 order with the amount that the people wanted it for. 13 So there was no monetary value, we never counted the 14 postal orders and I couldn't access the Horizon system 15 at that time. 16 And, again, she bluffed her way out of it and

then she became extremely intimidating, extremely bullying towards me, demanding that I ... I sign a piece of paper that I had stolen the money and if

1 just one discrete issue that I'd like to take up with 2 the witness, if I may.

3 Would you look, please, at your witness 4 statement, Mrs O'Dell?

5 A. Yes.

6 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: It's page 10 and it's paragraphs 64 and 7 65, all right?

8 A. Yes.

9 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: In those paragraphs, you talk about 10 Mr Longman who, as I understand it, was one of the 11 people who interviewed you under caution.

12 A. The investigator, yes.

13 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: He was sending you something by post to 14 sign --

15 A. The caution.

16 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** -- which you describe as a caution.

17 A. Yes.

18 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I just want to understand what that 19 document was because I'm familiar with the police 20 sometimes offering a caution to people who are 21 suspected of crime, as opposed to prosecuting them, 22 and is this what was being offered to you, Mrs O'Dell, 23 or can't you remember now?

24 A. I remember the piece of paper and I remember it had 25 caution on it. 27

15 16 17 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right, okay. 18

> 19 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That's fine. Thank you very much, 20 Mrs O'Dell. Sorry for interrupting.

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22 MR BLAKE: Not at all. Financial impact.

23 A. Yes.

24 **Q.** The Post Office was in your home.

25 A. Yes.

20 I didn't they were going to take my home away -- they would take me to court, take my home away. 22 I'm going to ask you about the impact on you 23 generally. First financial and then personal. 24 In terms of financial --25 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Before you do that, Mr Blake, there's 26 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right. Anyway, if you can't remember, it doesn't matter, but if there are any details about

3 it that you could help me with I'd be grateful.

A. I'm so sorry. It was a caution and I remember the terminology. I said to him on the telephone, when he said -- that's right, he phoned me and asked me about signing the caution.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes. And does this jog your memory as to why you wouldn't sign it? Because the police will only administer a caution to someone if they actually

11 admit that they've done something wrong. Does that 12 ring any bell?

13 A. It does. I'm wracking my brain.

14 Q. I said to him -- I said to him "Do you think I came down with the fairies? I am not going to sign anything because I didn't take the money".

A. And that's why I wouldn't sign it.

Α. No, no.

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- 1 Q. What happened to the premises?
- 2 A. Well, when I realised that they weren't going to open 3 reopen the Post Office, I -- we converted it back into 4 living accommodation.
- 5 Q. Did that cost money?
- 6 A. Well, yes. I sold the screen for a pittance, I sold 7 bits and pieces. I had a problem with the Post Office 8 taking the safe away as well.
- 9 **Q.** What happened there?

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So when they shut me -- when I was first suspended on 6 January there was some cash and stock, so they put it in the safe, they took my keys away, so I couldn't access it, and they said that they would get the van to come round on the following Wednesday to collect it all, that they would let me know, and they didn't.

> It took a few weeks before the van was coming round and the chap from the Post Office said "I'll get there at 9 o'clock in the morning and the van will come and I'll take all the money and the cash -- you know, all the bits from the safe". I said okay.

So he came at 9 o'clock and we stood there. By 12 o'clock the van still hadn't arrived. So he rang up whoever it was in the Post Office and they said "Oh, we don't know anything about it, but we'll tell them to come and collect". And I said to him "Well,

we've stood here for three hours, if they're not here by 12.30, that's it, I'm not spending any more time". Well, they weren't. So we had to put it all back into the safe, take the keys away.

It was reconvened for another date. So at 9 o'clock he came back, the van came, he took the keys, and I said to him, I am turning off the electricity because I hate waste. I drive my husband mad turning lights off over the house. I said "I'm turning the electricity off with the alarm, so that's

So a few weeks later I got a letter from the Post Office on the Wednesday night saying that they were coming on the Thursday to take the safe away. So I rang up the chap, Steve Smith, his name was, and I said "No, you're not". I said, "You're not coming, you want to enter my property you make a proper appointment, you don't just write to me saying your coming the next day".

So then he wrote, made a proper appointment, they came and they couldn't get into the safe because the electricity was turned off, which I'd informed them. So they had to go away.

So I decided that I would invoice them for keeping the safe, storage. So I invoiced the

Post Office, sent an invoice.

So then one day I was out shopping with my son in town and I got a phone call. Oh "Mrs O'Dell, this is the Post Office, we're outside your property, we've come to collect the safe". So I said "Right". "Well, nobody's in". I said "No, I'm out". "Well, can you come home so that we can get into the safe and take the safe away". So I said "No". I said "You make a proper appointment".

So they had to go away. They made a proper appointment, came, still couldn't take the safe away, so I'm still invoicing for storage. So, eventually, a chap came and he had to drill through into the safe and it took about -- well, it took all day for him to do that. Then he went away.

I'm still invoicing the Post Office. Anyway, to cut a long story short, they eventually came. I think it was about six/eight months later, they came and they actually took the safe away and they didn't pay the invoices. So I took out a County Court summons and I got a letter on a Saturday morning from the outside solicitors that were -- is it Womble & Dickinson that they used to use -- saying that I can't do that, I can't possibly do that, I can't take them to County Court. So I ignored the

letter.

I couldn't take them to County Court, ring us. So I ignored the letter.

They then sent another letter but it was a Special Delivery, so they had a signature, "Ring us, you cannot do that, you know you can't take us to County Court". So I ignored that letter, and they rang me and they'd used a Latin phrase, so I looked it up on Google, and it was they had loaned me the safe to carry out their business but because I hadn't carried out their business they had closed me down since January, yes, that Latin phrase didn't mean anything. So I was storing their safe.

- Were you successful in the dispute?
- 15 A. Yes. They settled the night before it was due.
- 16 Q. What about the retail business that you had on the 17 premises?
- 18 A. Well, as I say, it was just a few greeting cards but 19 I also ran another business. I used to breed pedigree 20 cats and, of course, when all of this happened I lost interest with it all and finished.
- 22 Q. Presumably you weren't being paid by the Post Office 23
- 24 A. No. I must say, I was a pensioner by then because I'm 25 in my 70s now, so when it all happened I did have

- a pension. My husband was a self-employed
 electrician, so he had to carry on working as well.
- 3 **Q.** Moving on to the personal impact, how were you treated by your local community?
- A. My very good friends were fantastic but, living in
 a village, the gossip was -- well, the most that the
 gossipmongers were saying was that I had stolen

£250,000. That was the most I heard.

9 Q. How did people in the village know about it?

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- 10 A. Well, because a villager had written to the
 11 Post Office asking why the Post Office was shut and
 12 the Post Office had written back to him saying I had
 13 resigned, and he had printed it, that letter, in the
 14 village magazine. So everyone thought I had resigned
 15 and, of course, then the gossip had started. People
 16 would cross -- well, I didn't go out much. When I did
- try and go for a walk, people would cross the otherside of the road. People I'd known a long time.
- 19 Q. What happened to being a Parliamentary candidate?
- A. I stepped down. I didn't want to bring it intodisrepute.
- 22 Q. You mentioned it was in the village newspaper or --
- 23 A. Yes, the Life magazine.
- 24 Q. Was it publicised anywhere else?
- 25 $\,$ **A.** It was in the local newspaper. I'm sorry.

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- Q. That's okay. Would you like a moment? (Pause)
- A. I feel so weak. I was innocent and they did that tome.
- 4 Q. Would you like a moment?
- 5 **A.** No, I'm okay.
- 6 Q. Okay.
- SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mrs O'Dell, can I say that I can tell
 from the line of questioning that Mr Blake is now
 adopting that he probably hasn't got that much longer
 with you.
- 11 **A.** Okay.

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- SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So it probably is, I guess, but it's
 a matter for you, but I would guess better if you
 completed now.
- 15 A. Yes, absolutely. Yes.
- 16 **MR BLAKE:** Was it in a Post Office publication?
- 17 **A.** No, no, it wasn't. No, I don't think so. I never saw18 anything, no.
- 19 Q. What was the effect on you psychologically?
- 20 A. Went to some very dark places, extremely dark places.
- 21 I even worked out how to commit suicide. I had to
- 22 have antidepressants. I had to have sleeping pills.
- 23 I had night terrors when my husband had to wake me up,
- 24 and it wasn't just once every so often. It was two or
- 25 three times a week. I had high blood pressure as

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- well. I had to have counselling to try and help me with it. After the court case, in a December I
- $3\,$ suffered from PTSD and had to have counselling. That
- was awful. I hadn't been at war, I hadn't lost
 a limb; they caused that.
- 6 **Q.** That was after the Group Litigation that you were part of?
- 8 A. Yes, yes.
- 9 Q. Did you receive a payment as a result of that?
- 10 A. I received something, yes. I received a little bit. 11 I didn't receive anything else, while those 12 executives, who had been given millions of pounds to 13 persecute us, who could walk out with pensions out the 14 back door and go into fantastically paid jobs, the MPs 15 that had after they name Postal Affairs Minister, the 16 people who lived in grand mansions and big houses. Do 17 you know what I have to do, at the moment? I have to
- you know what I have to do, at the moment? I have to 18 prune trees in my garden, I have to cut logs to warm
- my house.
- 20 Q. What would you like from the Post Office?
- A. What would I like? I want those people brought to justice. I want them to be persecuted, and that's not at all like me. I want them to say "Yes, we did it, we didn't tell the truth on oath". I want them to say sorry.

у.

It's been over two years since that court case -- two years and people are still being prosecuted. The Post Office could do it within a few months, of sending those poor people to prosecute them, convict them and send them to prison. It's been over two years that Judge Fraser handed down what he said about the Horizon system. Over two years that one of the executives sat in that seat and didn't tell the whole truth.

Has anything happened? No. She's sitting on two boards of directors with a healthy pension. How do you think my psychological feeling has been? One of them had an honour. She was given an honour. What a slap in the face to us. Alan Bates from the JFSA hadn't been recognised at all. He's worked tirelessly and effortlessly for us. He got us to that court case where it was said that we were innocent. He should be given the honour, not her. I'm sorry, I'm extremely angry about this.

- 20 **Q.** That's okay. Is there anything that you would like to add at all?
- A. I just want them brought to account. Not blame each
 other, and that's what's going to happen. I want them
 brought to account and I want to be able to afford my
 electricity bills, and everything else. I want to

1		spoil my grandchildren.	1	Mr Stein will be reading a statement from
2	Q.	Thank you.	2	Mr Vinall but perhaps we will take a ten-minute break
3		Chair, do you have any questions at all?	3	first.
4	SIR	WYN WILLIAMS: No, thank you, Mr Blake.	4	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Certainly.
5		You will have seen, Mrs O'Dell, that those few	5	MR BLAKE: Then after that we will hear from Ms Little and
6		questions that I did want to ask I've already asked	6	Ms Powell as well.
7		you. So all that remains for me to do is to thank you	7	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That fine, thank you, Mr Blake.
8		very, very much for coming to answer all those	8	MR BLAKE: So perhaps 11.10.
9		questions in detail. I appreciate how difficult all	9	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right.
10		this is for both you and the other witnesses who come	10	(10.58 am)
11		before me, and I can only say how grateful I am to you	11	(A short break)
12		all that you're telling your stories in this brave	12	(11.12 am)
13		fashion. Thank you.	13	MR BLAKE: Mr Vinall is unable to attend today due to his
14	A.	I'd like to thank you and everybody else. I want to	14	health and you, sir, have given permission for
15		be able to be alive, Sir Wyn, to see that happen	15	Mr Stein to read a summary of his evidence and he will
16		because, as I say, I'm in my 70s now and it's been	16	do so now.
17		13 years. I don't want any more night terrors,	17	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Before we do that, Mr Stein, I think
18		please. I really don't.	18	the lady, I presume it's Mrs Little, who is due to
19	SIR	WYN WILLIAMS: All right. Well, I think that I've	19	give evidence remotely, I can see and hear her and I'd
20		made many public statements saying how important it is	20	be grateful if she could mute her machine, if she
21		that I complete my work as quickly as I reasonably can	21	hasn't done it, so that we won't get an unintended
22		and everything you've said reinforces me in my view	22	interruption, so to speak.
23		that I should try and do just that.	23	It's all right, Mrs Little. The fact I can see
24	A.	Thank you.	24	you doesn't matter but if you could just put yourself
25	MR	BLAKE: Thank you, sir. 37	25	on mute while Mr Stein is reading something out that 38
1		would help all right?	1	felt that he was totally thrown in at the deen end

would help, all right?
 MR BLAKE: Thank you.
 GUY VINALL (sum

GUY VINALL (summary of witness statement read)

MR STEIN: Chair, you have Mr Vinall's statement before you and you have kindly agreed that I can read this summary of that statement into the record. This is important so that Mr Vinall can be heard.

Mr Vinall was the subpostmaster of the Funtington, Chichester, Post Office in West Sussex from 2004 to 2009. He had worked at the branch from 1999 and taken over from his father as subpostmaster in 2004.

Mr Vinall's father had run the Post Office for the previous 20 years. In his statement, Mr Vinall highlighted what a vital part his family's Post Office and shop played in the village and for the surrounding villages.

There were no other Post Offices or shops nearby. As such, his Post Office was the hub and the heart of the village and the area.

Mr Vinall received two days of training at a hotel on the Horizon system and a further two days' training in the branch, where a Post Office representative simply observed his work. Mr Vinall describes the training as "wholly inadequate" and he

felt that he was totally thrown in at the deep end, despite having worked in the branch for five years prior to this.

Mr Vinall rang the helpline almost every time he experienced a shortfall, which was on numerous occasions. He describes the knowledge of the staff on the helpline as being "fundamentally flawed".

Mr Vinall's Horizon terminal in the branch was replaced by the Post Office as they said it was broken. Shortly after the replacement of the equipment, Mr Vinall began experiencing very significant shortfalls. Mr Vinall was threatened with prosecution by the Post Office, due to a £28,000 unexplained shortfall.

Guy Vinall's contract was terminated by the Post Office by letter dated 5 January 2010, as a result of alleged shortfalls and other alleged breaches. Mr Vinall and his elderly father both had to take out loans to pay the shortfalls demanded by the Post Office to stop him from being prosecuted.

Mr Vinall maintains that the treatment that the Post Office subjected him to caused him to have a mental breakdown. He turned to alcohol and sank into depression. Mr Vinall attempted suicide on several occasions and was admitted to a mental health

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1 institution twice. His marriage broke down as his 2 wife was no longer able to cope with his depression. 3 Mr Vinall's life got so bad that even his dog, 4 called Dylan, was taken away from him. Mr Vinall says 5 that this was a "killer blow". 6 Guy Vinall feels that he cannot ever be fully 7 compensated for what the Post Office has done. He 8 says that they have "literally ripped the life out of 9 me" 10 It is Mr Vinall's hope that the Inquiry will 11 recognise the harm that has been done to decent people 12 like himself and direct that full compensation be paid 13 for the financial losses and for the emotional stress 14 and for the loss of a life he and other subpostmasters 15 loved and lost. If he had been able to attend today, 16 Mr Vinall had wished to read a few words from his 17 daughter to you in his closing statements. He has 18 provided his solicitors, Howe & Co, with the words his 19 daughter wrote yesterday, which he feels sums up the 20 experiences and the impact these events have had on 21 him and his family. 22 I now read his daughter's words: 23 "My Dad has not been able to have inner peace 24 since this happened. He needs peace to come from this Inquiry. We have tried every way, every type of help, 25 1 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Stein, for reading it. 2 MS KENNEDY: We're now going to call the next witness, 3 which is Mrs Linda Little. 4

medication, everything, to improve his mental state. These may provide a temporary plaster for a period of time but without the true inner peace and closure of this ordeal, my Dad will never truly be able to improve his mental state. It is an illness in itself. He is paranoid and struggles to form or maintain normal relationships with people now. He either wants to hide away or feel he has to overcompensate to prove his worth to people. "My Dad's relationship with new colleagues after

the Post Office was hard. His relationships with all of us, his kids, have been more difficult at times, and his mental well-being has undoubtedly meant that he has seen grandchildren, friends and people he loves dearly far less.

"Each day is still a challenge to try and survive for him. His suicidal thoughts are still very real and the reality we all still deal with daily, all of these years later. He is not living his life or thriving. He is simply struggling to survive.

"The life this Post Office scandal has created for my Dad is so hard to face that he still often feels not being here is a better alternative."

Sir Wyn, thank you very much for allowing us to read that statement on his behalf.

LINDA LITTLE (affirmed)

Questioned by MS KENNEDY

- 6 MS KENNEDY: I think you know my name is Ruth Kennedy and 7 I ask questions on behalf of the Chair. Could you 8 just confirm your full name please.
- 9 A. Linda Carol Little.
- 10 Q. Have you got a copy of your witness statement there 11 with you?
- 12 A. Yes.

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- 13 Q. I think it should be dated 21 January 2022?
- 14 Α.
- 15 **Q.** Is that your signature on page 12?
- 16 A. Yes.
- **Q.** Have you read this statement through recently? 17
- 18 A. Yes.
- 19 Q. Is it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
- 20 Α.
- 21 Q. So I'm going to start by just asking a couple of
- 22 questions about you. How old are you now?
- 23 A. I'm 63 now.
- 24 Q. Where did you grow up?
- 25 A. Worcester.

- 1 How many children do you have?
- 2 A.
- 3 Q. Who do you live with at the moment?
- 4 A. My nephew.
- 5 Q. Could you just tell the Chair how long you worked in a
- 6 Post Office for?
- 7 A. I started as soon as I left school when I was 16.
- 8 Where was the first Post Office that you worked in?
- 9 A. St John's in Worcester.
- 10 Q. What job did you have then?
- 11 A. I started as an accounts clerk and then at the age
- 12 of 21 I was made officer in charge, and I was the
- 13 youngest within that group that had been made into
- 14 officer in charge.
- 15 Q. Then I think you moved to another Post Office. Which 16 one was that?
- 17 A. I then went to Henwick --
- 18 **Q.** I think you also -- I'm sorry. I think you also
- 19 worked in another Post Office on the weekends at that 20 time as well; is that right?
- 21 A. Yes. Sometimes I used to help the gentleman out at 22 Wickfield's Post Office.
- 23 Q. Why did you leave the Henwick Post Office?
- 24 The Post Office closed it down.
- 25 Q. I think that was in 2004. What happened then in your

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- 1 life?
- 2 A. My husband passed away in the July of that year.
- 3 Q. After that, where did you work next, which
- 4 Post Office?
- 5 A. Dines Green.
- 6 Q. You say in your statement you then went on to become
- 7 the subpostmistress of Dines Green. For a while, you
- 8 worked as an employee; is that right?
- 9 A. That's right, yes.
- 10 Q. Why did the previous subpostmaster leave?
- 11 **A.** He was suspended, unfortunately.
- 12 Q. Do you know why that was?
- 13 A. There was a shortfall.
- 14 Q. When you took over as subpostmistress in 2013, you
- 15 also trained Louisa Powell, who I think we've already
- seen on screen today; is that right?
- 17 **A.** That's right, yes.
- 18 **Q.** How did you feel about working for the Post Office
- 19 when you took over as subpostmistress?
- 20 **A.** I loved the job. I absolutely loved it. I mean, it
- 21 was a dream come true, really.
- 22 $\,$ Q. Is that why you bought the Post Office at that time,
- 23 having worked there for quite a long period of time?
- 24 **A.** Yes, yes.
- 25 Q. How long did you intend to run that Post Office that

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- 1 you bought for?
- 2 A. Well, I intended to run it until I retired and then
- 3 pass it on to my daughter and my nephew.
- 4 Q. I'm just going to ask you a few questions about the
- training you received. What training were you provided with when you joined the Post Office?
- 7 A. When I first, joined? Crikey.
 - Q. If you can remember.
 - A. You're going back a bit now! Well, they trained me
- 10 up -- it was a hands-on kind of training. You didn't
- 11 get -- we didn't go anywhere for training.
- 12 Q. How adequate did you feel that training was, if you
- 13 can remember?
- 14 **A.** Well, it was fine, yeah. It was fine.
- 15 **Q.** What training did you receive then when you took over
- 16 the Dines Green Post Office?
- 17 **A.** Well, I had the training previously at Henwick for the
- 18 Horizon system.
- 19 Q. What did that involve?
- 20 **A.** I did a week training.
- Q. Where was that?A. I think it was at Bank House Hotel.
- 23 Q. How did you feel about that training that you received
- 24 then?

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25 A. Well, the counter training wasn't too bad but the

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- 1 balancing side wasn't very good. They only, sort of,
- 2 skipped over that really. So it was a case of find
- 3 out yourself, kind of thing.
- 4 $\,$ Q. When did you notice the alleged shortfalls starting on
- 5 Horizon?
- 6 A. Not long, really, after I'd taken over.
- 7 Q. I think you say in your statement September 2014.
- 8 Would that be about right?
- 9 A. Yes, yes.
- 10 Q. What had happened then with your Post Office? I think
- 11 you say in your statement you moved into a temporary
- 12 cabin?
- 13 A. Yes, we were put into a Portakabin because the council
- 14 were knocking down all the buildings and rebuilding
- them and it was just awful, from start to finish.
- 16 $\,$ **Q.** When you noticed the alleged shortfalls on Horizon,
- 17 did you call the helpline?
- 18 **A.** Yes.
- 19 **Q.** You're laughing. Why are you laughing? What help did20 you receive from them?
- 21 A. Absolutely none whatsoever. They didn't -- as far as
- 22 shortfalls were concerned, it was my fault and that
- 23 was it, and they -- there was no help from them
- 24 whatsoever. They just got you in a bigger pickle than
- 25 you started it.
- re was no help from the

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- 1 Q. I think in your statement you give an example of
- 2 a cheque being entered incorrectly. Can you just tell
- 3 the Chair a little bit about that?
- 4 A. Well, I reversed it, which it did that okay, to put it
 - into the right place. But then it just -- you
- 6 couldn't get rid of the cheque. It just stayed there.
- 7 And then I spoke to the helpline and whatever they
- 8 told me to do, it was doubling, and doubling, and
- 9 doubling. So how many times I actually paid for that
- 10 cheque, I don't know.
- 11 **Q.** What did the helpline advisers tell you that you had
- to do to remove the alleged shortfalls?
- 13 A. Put the money in.
- 14 Q. What support did you feel that you had from the
- 15 Post Office at that time?
- 16 **A.** Absolutely none.
- 17 Q. I think you said in your statement you tried various
- 18 steps to understand why these alleged shortfalls took
- 19 place, you and Louisa. Can you just explain some of
- 20 the things you tried, to try and understand what was
- 21 causing the shortfalls?
- A. Well, at that time, my grandson was diagnosed with retinoblastoma, which is a cancer of the eye. So, at
- 24 that time, we were going through the fact that he was
- going to have to have his eye removed and I kind of --

- 1 I blamed myself. I thought: I'm not concentrating
- 2 properly, I'm doing something wrong. But obviously
- 3 not.
- 4 Q. I think you say --
- 5 A. It was a terrible, terrible time, because there was
- 6 all that going on, as well as my grandson. It was 7 awful.
- 8 Q. I think you say in your statement that you used to
- 9 take two weeks on -- you used to share it with Louisa;
- 10 is that right? You would try two weeks just one of
- 11 you, and then two weeks the other?
- 12 A. Yes, we tried that, to see if it would show anything,
- 13 show it was either one of us but, no, it was the same
- 14 for both of us.
- 15 Q. You also say in your statement that often the system
- 16 would crash. How often would that happen?
- 17 A. Once an hour, sometimes. It was -- they couldn't
- 18 get -- because of the Portakabin, they couldn't get
- 19 the signal for the system, so it kept crashing and,
- 20 every time it crashed, you were left with a huge
- 21 shortfall. But they said that was nothing to do with 22
- 23 Q. How much money do you think you paid into the
- 24 Post Office to make good the shortfalls over the
- 25 vears?

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- Well, I definitely lost my 65,000 that was left from
- 2 my husband's pensions and I think, to be perfectly
- 3 honest, it's in excess of probably 90,000.
- 4 Q. I think you mention that they deducted some of the
- 5 alleged shortfalls from your salary; is that right?
- 6 A. Yes, they used to do that. If you settled centrally, 7
 - you only had up until the next balancing period to
- 8 make it right, so they used to take the money out the
- 9 wages for that.
- 10 I think you say in your statement that there were
- 11 three audits when you were a subpostmistress. I think
- 12 the first, you say, was in September 2014. What
- 13 shortfalls did they find, or alleged shortfalls did
- 14 they find, at that time?
- 15 A. None.
- 16 Q. Why was that?
- 17 Because I'd put the money in and made it straight.
- 18 Then the second was in August 2015 and, again, what
- 19 alleged shortfalls did they find then?
- 20 A. None because I'd put that right too. 21 Q. So then the third audit was on 27 September 2017.
- 22 What were you initially told by the auditors about
- 23 an alleged shortfall in relation to stamps?
- 24 For some reason, they came up with a figure of nearly
- 25 £3,000 short in the postage stamps.

- Q. What did you do when they said that? 1
- 2 A. Well, me and Louisa went through the stamp book again
- 3 and said "No, look, this is what it is", and it just
- 4 went on, and on, and on. They just couldn't get it
- 5 right.
- 6 Q. What figure did they come back with? Do you remember?
- 7 A. No, I don't.
- 8 Q. Do you remember if it was a different figure?
- 9 A. Yes, yes. They kept coming up with different figures.
- 10 Q. When the audit was completed, what were you told was 11 the alleged shortfall then?
- 12 A. I think it was 62.
- 13 Q. Yes, in your statement you say 62,000. That's about
- 14 right, is it?
- 15 A. Yes, yes.
- 16 Q. What information did they give you as to how that
- 17 figure was arrived at?
- 18 A. Well, I knew because I had to -- we had to inflate the
- 19 figures anyway, to be able to continue opening.
- 20 What steps, if any, did you take to challenge that 21 figure, the audit?
- 22 A. Well, you couldn't challenge it really. They just 23 suspended me straight away.
- 24 So you were suspended following the audit, immediately 25 afterwards; is that right?

- 1 No, I was suspended during the audit.
 - What did the Post Office say about the alleged
- 3 shortfall that they found? What did you have to do?
- 4 A. Well, I said I wanted a full investigation into it
- 5 because it wasn't right and the system wasn't right
- 6 but never heard any more about it, really.
- 7 Q. Who did you go to --
- 8 Α. Apart from --
- 9 Q. Sorry, go on?
- 10 A. Sorry.

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- 11 Q. No, you go.
- 12 A. Apart from when I had the interview under caution at
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- 14 Q. Who did you go to for advice?
- A. I went to Freeths. Luckily, they'd -- I'd signed up 15
 - about two weeks prior.
- 17 Q. I think you also mention you went to the NFSP. Did
- 18 you speak to them at the time?
- 19 No, because I'd read that they weren't being very
- 20 helpful to subpostmasters and they were more linked
- 21 with Post Office, so I didn't bother with the NFSP.
- 22 Q. How did you feel you were treated by the Post Office 23 representatives at that time?
- 24 Absolutely awful, awful. They've got no feelings,
- 25 they've got no morals, they've got no nothing.

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- Q. I'm going to ask you some questions now about the
 financial impact that this has had. We touched on
 this already but are there any other financial costs
 that you suffered as a result of this?
- 5 A. I've lost everything. I've lost everything. I really
 6 have. We used to take out loans with Provident and,
 7 you know, big companies like that, but the interest
 8 rate is so incredible that it just got worse and
 9 worse. So I'm still owing them the money I borrowed
 10 to cover the shortfalls.
- 11 **Q.** You mentioned some loans. Who else did you borrow12 from? Did you borrow from anyone else in your life?
- 13 A. Yes, I borrowed from my daughter.
- 14 Q. What impact did that have on your relationship?
- 15 A. She was -- she was fine, bless her, yes. Yes, yes.
 16 She was very understanding.
- 17 Q. I'm going to ask you some questions about the impact
 18 this has had on your health. What impact did this
 19 have on your mental health?
- A. Well, I'm convinced it sent me crazy, and I'm still
 crazy. I went to the doctor because I didn't want to
 get out of bed in the morning. I just wanted to go to
 sleep.
- 24 **Q.** I think that --

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25 **A.** Let me just turn my phone off. (Pause)

- away the pain, if you know what I mean, which is what
 we were doing it for.
 Q. You say in your statement, and I think you also said
- this a moment ago, you said that you don't feel like yourself even now. Could you just explain what you mean by that to the Chair?
- 7 **A.** I used to hide myself if I went out of the house.
 - I didn't want to go out the house. I still don't want
- to go out of the house. I don't want people
- questioning me, I don't want people to see me.
 I don't want to do anything, I'm not interested in
- 12 anything, I can't get motivated with anything. It's
- just -- it's always there in your mind. It doesn't goaway.
- Q. You just mentioned a moment ago about not wanting to
 go out of the house. How do you feel this impacted on
 your reputation in the community?
- 18 A. Well, I've seen a couple of customers when I have been out, and they've been really nice and understanding and, as more has come out of the Post Office,
- 21 I suppose, they've seen more about it but, some of 22 them, I'm sure that they thought we'd taken the money.
- 23 You know my daughter was questioned about it, my
- 24 sister was questioned about it, and even my grandson

25 at school was questioned about it. So it was 55

1 Right, sorry. Where was I?

- Q. You were just describing the impact, I think, on your sleep.
- A. I didn't sleep. We didn't sleep. We -- we used to,
 spend hours, and hours, and hours, going through
 paperwork, trying to find something but, because you
- hadn't got anything to check back on, there's no paper
 trail of anything really anymore. You can't really
- 8 trail of anything really anymore. You can't really9 check. You've got to accept what the computer says.
- 10 **Q.** What medication did you take to help with your mental health?
- 12 A. The doctor prescribed me sertraline, and I started on
- 50 milligrams, and I'm now on 200 milligrams and
 I also take the amitriptyline. I've been taking that
- 15 since 1996 when I was involved in a Post Office raid.
- 16 **Q.** This is to help with your depression?
- 17 **A.** Yes
- 18 Q. Did you use any substances to deal with the
- 19 difficulties?
- 20 A. Yes.

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- 21 Q. What substances did you use?
- 22 A. Alcohol.
- 23 Q. How much did you drink?
- 24 $\,$ A. Far too much, far too much. But it -- I don't know.
- 25 It didn't really have the effect to, sort of, take

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- 1 horrible. It was horrible.
 - Q. How do you feel like all of that impacted on your relationship with your family?
- relationship with your family?
 A. They -- my family have been totally supportive, they
 really have. Without them, I don't know what I would
- have done. They tried to talk to me about it, tried to get me to open up about it but, of course, I didn't
- 8 want to, really, because you feel such a -- you feel
- 9 such a failure. You feel like you -- it's just you,
 10 it's just you who's done it, you know.
 - Q. What would you like from the Post Office now?
- 12 A. Where shall I start? If I go through my conclusion,13 and then I've written something as well.

The Post Office literally took everything from me. They ended my career that I'd built from the age of 16 and I absolutely loved my job, I really did.

They took away my retirement plans and my daughter's and nephew's, future because they were going to take over the business from me. They took -- they had every single penny spare that I had and I'm in debt. I don't even go into a Post Office anymore. I'd rather use Hermes, or somewhere like that.

I would like an apology but I would like it to be meant, not just "sorry".

Also, I've written here: who knew and why was it

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1 just allowed to carry on? They carry on with their 2 lives. When are they going to be questioned and held 3 accountable for this largest miscarriage of justice in 4 this country? How has Paula Vennells been allowed to 5 just say "sorry", as she was the one who authorised 6 all these poor subpostmasters to be convicted? 7 I would like to be fairly compensated for 8 everything they have put me through, and my family and 9 friends. I want to treat all of them for their 10 unwavering support because, without them, I really 11 don't think I would be here today. 12 At the end of the day, they have totally 13 destroyed all of us. 14 Q. Is there anything else you would like to say to the 15 Chair? 16 A. No, I don't think so. Thank you. 17 Q. I'm now going to turn to the Chair and see if he has any questions? 18 19 A. Okav. 20 Questions from SIR WYN WILLIAMS 21 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Just one or two, if I may, please. You 22 mentioned just a moment or so ago that your relatives, 23 your sister, your daughter, and even your grandson, 24 were questioned about this. Did you mean by that that they were questioned by representatives of the 25 1 loans that you took out? 2 A. Yes. 3 Q. Could you just describe the nature of the loans and 4 how long term they were, what the interest rates were 5 like? 6 A. Well, they sort of started at, sort of, £500 but 7 I think the last one was about 3,000. The interest 8 was astronomical. It was purely to cover shortages. 9 Q. Thank you. 10 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. Well, thanks again, and 11 sorry there was a little bit of confusion about which 12 one of you was going to go first, but we've sorted it

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Fine, right. Thanks, I've got that clear Then when you'd been interviewed under caution --A. Yes SIR WYN WILLIAMS: -- obviously, at that stage, you didn't know whether or not any further action was going to be taken against you. No, no I didn't, no. SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Did the Post Office ever tell you what they were going to do after that interview under caution? For example, did you get a letter saying they would be no further action or anything like that? A. No, no, nothing. **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** So between 2017 and even now, they've never said what their intentions were? No. not at all. Nothing. SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. Thank you. A. Thank you. SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, thanks very much for giving evidence. MS KENNEDY: Just one moment. (Pause) Can I just ask one further question about the Α. I have, yes.

Post Office or by other members of the public?

A. No, by members of the public.

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- 2 Q. I think it should be dated 21 January 2022?
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- 4 Q. Is that your signature on page 15 of the statement?
- 5 Α. Yes, it is.
- 6 Have you read through this statement recently?
- 7 Α. I have, yes.
- 8 Is it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
- 9 A.
- 10 **Q.** I'm just going to start with a few introductory
- 11 questions about you. How old are you now?
- 12 A. I'm 43.
- 13 Q. When did you move to Dines Green?
- 14 When I was 17.
- Q. Who did you move there with? 15
- A. My husband. I'd met him in 1996, had a daughter and 16
- 17 then I moved in with him.
- 18 **Q.** What kind of jobs did you do before you started
- 19 working at the Post Office?
- 20 Nothing really, apart from like the odd helping my
- 21 Grandad with the milk, because I got pregnant and
- I wanted to spend all my time with my daughter. 22
- 23 Q. How did you meet Linda Little, who we just saw
- 24 a moment ago?
- 25 Well, my husband was friends with the subpostmaster,

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Q. Have you got a copy of your witness statement there

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A. Hi.

all out now.

MS KENNEDY: Yes, please.

A. It's Louisa Claire Powell.

with you?

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thanks very much.

A. Thank you. Thank you. Do you want Louisa now?

and I ask questions on behalf of the Chair.

Q. Could you confirm your full name please?

LOUISA POWELL (affirmed)

MS KENNEDY: Hello. As you know, my name is Ruth Kennedy

A. That's all right.

(15) Pages 57 - 60

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- 1 who originally had it before Linda did, and he'd asked 2 my husband if I'd like to go and work in the retail 3 section. My twins had just started nursery then and 4 it was a great time because I used to love being with 5 my children and I missed them terribly so it got me 6 out the house and I loved it. I loved it. 7 Q. I think -- so there's the retail side of the
- 8 Post Office. When did you start working then? Do you 9 remember broadly the year you started working at 10 Dines Green?

No? Don't worry?

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- 12 A. At the Post Office, do you mean?
- 13 Q. I think that you started work in the retail side and 14 were working --
- 15 **A.** Right yeah, sorry, sorry. So it would have been 2008.
- 16 Q. Then Linda Little took over as subpostmistress in 2013 17 and you started working quite closely together; is 18 that right?
- 19 A. Yeah. Well. I met her in the retail when I was 20 working in the retail and she was in the Post Office 21 and we became really, really good friends, and she 22 started to train me up in Post Office.
- 23 **Q.** Why did you want to work for the Post Office?
- 24 A. Well, I loved the retail side. It was brilliant.
- 25 Postmaster had got bad, and I was like opening up in

the mornings, doing all the papers, closing up at night, cashing up, and I loved it. I loved speaking to people, I absolutely adored it.

So being part of the Post Office was going to be great too. I'd be able to do everything. It would be -- it was fantastic. It was a dream come true.

- Q. How long did you think you would work for the 8 Post Office?
- 9 A. Oh, forever. I don't think, like -- if I'd hit 10 retirement age, I think I would have just carried on 11 because that was -- I loved being out and I loved 12 being with people and talking to people and meeting 13 people. It was great, brilliant.
- 14 You mentioned that Linda trained you in the 15 Post Office. What training did you receive from the 16 Post Office itself?
- 17 A. None.

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- 18 Q. I'm now going to ask you some questions about the 19 alleged shortfalls and I think you mention a couple of 20 alleged shortfalls in your statement that you noticed 21 while you were working there. Can you just tell the 22 Chair about some of those?
- 23 A. Okay. Do you want to cover the MoneyGram one?
- 24 Yes, whatever one you would like to use --
- 25 Well, a customer who came in and wanted to send some

money but there was a problem with the MoneyGram, not our side, of their side of sending it. So they needed a refund. They paid for it on card. Now, I refunded it back onto card. On the nighttime, we were around that figure -- I think one was for 3,000 and one was 2, I can't remember the exact amounts -- and we were that amount short in cash.

So I phoned the helpline and Linda did because we were in a right mess and I said "We're short about this amount and I've refunded a MoneyGram", and they said "You must have refunded it by giving the person cash". I said "No, I did not, I refunded it back to their original payment", which, as I'm supposed to, I'm not allowed to do that. And they was adamant I'd done that.

And Linda had spoke to them as well, doing -trying to find it on paper trail, it was non-existent. There was no refund on a MoneyGram whatsoever. It was just horrendous, atrocious.

Luckily, I knew the person and their phone number was on the MoneyGram and I rang them and I said, because it would take 24 to 48 hours for it to get back into their bank, and I said "Could you tell me please how many times" -- because they were messing about on the system, as well, they were telling me to

do this, do that. And, well, I was just getting more and more worried, and so I phoned up and they came in and saw me and they said "Yes, it's been done". And she came back with a statement to show me that it had only been -- it had been processed once and once only.

But they was adamant that I'd given cash, and they said we would have to pay it back, even though the customer was happy they'd got their money, the proof was there. Nobody would listen. Not one person would listen, and it went into the suspense account but in the end, we had no choice, had to pay it back.

- 12 When you say "they" is that the helpline you were 13 speaking to were saying that?
- 14 A. Yes, yes.
- 15 Q. How helpful did you find the helpline?
- 16 Awful, terrible, to the point where I -- they just did 17 not know what was going on. They were useless. They 18 had no idea. They didn't know what to do. They 19 didn't know how to help you. They got you into 20 a worse mess by telling you you had to reverse this, 21 do this. It was just horrendous.

So you don't bother in the end because what starts off as one figure of 5,000, you're suddenly paying back double, because it -- I can't even explain it. They just -- they didn't know. They obviously

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1 didn't know how an Horizon system worked. I think 2 I don't know how an Horizon system work. It just 3 worked by itself when it wanted to.

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- Q. I think Linda mentioned something that you tried, to work out why these alleged shortfalls were coming up and it was working separately -- is that right -- for periods of time?
- 8 Yes, I had the idea. I said to Lin, I said "Let's do 9 two weeks each", and then on the big balance, because 10 that occurred like every month, it was about four or 11 five weeks, like, you done a big balance, as we called 12 it. So in that time I said to Lin, I said "Okay, I'll 13 work in the Post Office, you stay away, don't have 14 anything to do with it whatsoever, don't come in, 15 don't even come into the retail section", and I showed 16 shortfalls. I was devastated because I just thought: 17 right, it's me, so it's me who's lost the money.

When it was Linda's turn, I done the same, stayed away and, in a way, when I came and saw Linda and she said that she was showing shortfalls, it was such a relief because then I knew it just wasn't me. We knew we had a serious, serious problem. But nobody would help.

Q. I think you mention in your statement that you paid money in to make good some of the alleged shortfalls?

- 1 Yes, that's right. A.
 - How much money did you pay the Post Office?
- 3 It was around £20,000 from loans from Shopacheck, 4 Provident, that is, like, including the interest,
- 5 because the interest was very, very high. My husband 6 would take out payday loans -- Wonga I think one of
- 7 them was. I borrowed money off my Mum, my Nan and my
- 8 Grandad, who's not here today unfortunately. So, 9 yeah, it was a case of just trying to get money where
- 10 you could get money.
- Q. What impact did that have on your relationship with 12 your family?
- 13 A. Terrible, terrible. I was at work so much, I used to 14 just try and find out -- it was awful and it had 15 a very big impact on my family too. They were 16 stressed because I was stressed. I mean, I'd cry and 17 my poor children -- my three girls and my grandson --18 and it was such a shame for them because I regret 19 those horrible years and what they had to see me 20 through, because obviously I turned into an alcoholic. 21 Have I gone ahead of myself on questioning?
- 22 No, you haven't but, if I could ask the question then 23 about balance day, which you describe in your 24 statement, and you describe your drinking on balance

day, which I think you were just about to talk about.

1 Do you want to tell the Chair about that?

A. Yeah. Me and Lin, it wasn't just on balance days, me and Lin -- it was just after she got the audit took place and suspended, we used to start going through the evidence. We used to start drinking a bottle of Bacardi, and that -- we'd get the evidence ready for Freeths and everything, and we did have a lot of evidence, but nobody ever wanted to see that.

And, as it -- over the time, because of everything what was happening, losing -- the retail shop was just going down, there was no stock, we couldn't refill and, basically, I turned into an alcoholic, and my doctor was absolutely fantastic. I got antidepressants, zopiclone, diazepam, pregabalin. And then my husband decided to take me out for the day with my children to the seaside and then I broke my knee and crushed my leg 7 to 8 cms down and I was told I might not be able to walk again. Luckily, thankfully, I have.

Being in hospital that time, the medication I was receiving stopped me from drinking, so that was a good thing.

- Q. How much were you drinking when you were drinking at your most?
- A. Easily, a bottle of Bacardi, four cans of cider.

I would just drink into oblivion. I didn't go home at night. I stayed at Lin's. There was one occasion I woke up, I had wet Lin's bed, from being so drunk, which is thoroughly embarrassing, but it happened. It was just -- it was a way to block it out.

But my daughter also she got very bad anxiety, wouldn't go over the shop. She still don't go over the shop to this day. She had to see mental health team, and that, and I think it was the way that --I mean, people would question her at school, like, "Oh saw the Post Office closed, what's happened, did your Mum nick the money?"

I had people coming knocking on my door because I only just live just up the alley and it's a minute's walk, not even that, to the Post Office and people used to come and knock on my door and say "Why are you closed?" And I just didn't want to see anybody. It was the most ... it was horrible. It was horrible and Post Office did not want to listen in any way, shape or form. They would not listen. They were horrible, horrible people, horrible.

Sorry.

Just on that last point, just coming back to the audit that was carried out in 2017, how did you feel the auditors treated you and Linda then?

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A. Terrible, absolutely terrible. There was two but the one he said to -- like, he said to me, "Who are you?" and I said, "I'm the manager" I said "with Lin".

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And there was a problem over the stamp book and I was absolutely furious over the stamps. I counted them and counted them with him, every time there was different figures, and we were there until about 8.00 on the nighttime and he couldn't make head or tail of what was going on either. And when we locked up, we all right went together and outside I said to him, I said, "You've got to be honest, there's flaws in the system" and he just went ... and he looked like there was remorse in his face and he hugged me and Lin. The auditor actually hugged me and Lin, and I have got witnesses to that, Rob Taylor, my next-door neighbour who worked in the shop and -- well, he said that he said he'd see us the next day to carry on. Never turned up. Went off to meet him, never turned up.

So, yeah, we was hoping that when he hugged us and that and you could see the remorse in his face that he might listen to us, but nothing.

- Q. And after the audit where Linda was suspended, what happened to you?
- A. Well, they didn't suspend me or nothing and the area manager, Paul Williams, we tried and tried to get hold 69

of him. He wouldn't answer his phone or reply back to our messages, and I withheld the number the one day and he answered, surprisingly. And I said to him, "Can I take over the branch while this is being sorted?" and he said, "No, because you're too close to Linda".

I was never suspended or nothing. I was just --I didn't exist really to those. It was ... yeah, SO ...

- 10 Q. I'm just going to ask you -- I think you've have 11 already said quite a lot about this -- but just if 12 there's anything you wanted to add about the financial 13 impact that this has had on you.
- 14 Well, yeah, me and my husband we was in such a mess. 15 It was just ... you can't describe really in words 16 what occurred, and trying to find the money to pay 17 them back, knocking on the door each week to come and 18 collect the money from Shopacheck and Provident. It 19 was just absolutely horrendous.

And can I just say that the Post Office, when we were in -- when Linda took over and we moved into the Portakabin, we were meant to have a new system. They never put it in. When we moved into the new shop, we were meant to have another system, a new one again because it had been moved, and they never done that.

We still had the old Horizon system from the very first one, 1999. It was never changed.

And the phone lines as well, they kept going and they had to put the booster on, a booster aerial, because we kept losing signal. And when I went to the charity shop a few months back, it was quite a smile moment for me. I was paying and I paid on card and they had to take the card machine out and go outside to get a signal, and I just thought, "Oh dear me, oh" ... yeah, so.

There's so much, there's just so much, I could sit here for a month, I think, and tell you so much what happened with the Post Office.

- Q. How are you now financially?
- A. Terrible. I still owe Provident, still owe Shopacheck. And because of, like, Christmases coming up, we never got any money and what we have to do we have to renew the loan so I can get some Christmas presents and obviously it just carries on from there.

So from when the Post Office -- because my husband took a loan out as well, so it's me and my husband who took loans out to cover the shortfalls and so now it just rolls over, if you know what I mean. So it's just a constant battle with debt, yeah.

Q. And I think you mentioned before that there were

1 people knocking on your door and asking questions. 2 How do you feel this has damaged your reputation?

Terrible, absolutely awful. I know Rob Taylor, who worked in the shop, he told me that -- because I haven't got Facebook, I don't have social media or anything like that, but he told me that there was a lot of comments on Facebook about us stealing money, et cetera.

> One of my children was also, like, asked at school and that and that's when I didn't go over the shop -- it affected one, as I said, a lot more one of my twins, who wants to be (unclear) problems he still has.

14 I forgot what the question was now, sorry. I've 15 just started blabbering. What was the question?

- Q. That leads on to the next point.
- 17 Oh yeah, he told people -- he messaged people to tell 18 them that this was not our fault and it was the 19 Post Office's. Also Worcester News was emailing me --20 they thought I was Linda -- and they wanted to do an 21 interview but obviously I just ignored them. It was 22 in the paper that it had closed down quickly and 23 nobody knew why.
- 24 You have also spoken about your family and I just 25 wanted to ask if there's anything else you wanted to

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1 1 add about the impact that this has had on your family. managers, et cetera, that are all still working at the 2 A. I wrote some things down. Well, basically 2 Post Office today should be removed from their 3 3 I haven't -- I haven't wrote that down. positions and be investigated. A new team of honest 4 What it had on my family was awful and it still 4 individuals should take over these roles and be 5 is. My husband's heart only works so many -- sorry, 5 trained to deal with subpostmasters if any issues 6 6 I can't think of the word it's called what he's got, occur instantly and work together to resolve any 7 and it put him under a tremendous amount of stress. 7 issues that occur and not instantly blame, suspend and 8 I mean, I basically had a mental break down and, 8 prosecute. A unit of trust and help should be 9 9 again, my children had to see that Mum just drunk or maintained and not shoved under the carpet. 10 just asleep, which was not very nice for them and 10 I would also -- I would like to say our 11 I feel very guilty for that, absolutely terrible, and 11 Post Office is visible from my bedroom window. It 12 I don't like to talk about it because it plays on my 12 holds very mixed emotions. Every day when I see it, I 13 mind something chronic of what happened. 13 get very sad, not just for the pain and torture it 14 **Q.** What would you like from the Post Office now? 14 holds but also the happy memories. I have seen people 15 A. Can I read what I wrote? 15 in there recently and they seem to be doing 16 Q. Of course. 16 a refurbishment. To say be least, this hurts. I do 17 **A.** I would like an apology from the Post Office. 17 not know what this will turn into. Example: rumour 18 However, I feel very strongly that this will not be 18 say it's a chip shop. I'm personally running the 19 sincere. Their words have always turned out to be 19 worry of it opening as a Post Office again. This will 20 20 be so very, very painful to see every day as it should 21 21 still be our shop and Post Office. I feel personally they have no feelings, no And there's just one more thing if I could just 22 morals, but just hardened criminals with the power to 22 23 destroy you who should all be held to account and face 23 say if that's okay. 24 24 Q. iustice. Yes. 25 The Post Office management, auditors, area 25 A. I feel it is only right that I should receive 1 a significant amount of compensation. I want to clear 1 give this evidence to me. I know how difficult all 2 my debts and pay back my family what I owe them. 2 these things must be and, as I say, I'm very grateful 3 Unfortunately, I will not be able to pay my grandad 3 for you appearing here today. 4 back. 4 A. Thank you, and thank you for listening to me. And 5 5 I also want to treat my husband, my three thank you for David as well for being such a great 6 beautiful daughters and my grandsons. I have also 6 person and happy birthday to him as well. 7 7 a step-son who my husband brought up and he's got SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right. 8 cerebral palsy, so he lives with us too. 8 MS KENNEDY: Thank you. Chair, I think that completes the 9 9 Yes, sorry. I want to treat my husband, my evidence for today. 10 three beautiful daughters from the stolen years that 10 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right then. So we'll break off now 11 occurred, for the lies and deceit from the 11 and we'll resume again at 10.00 on Monday morning; is 12 Post Office. Even though no amount of money can bring 12 that right, Ms Kennedy? 13 13 MS KENNEDY: Yes. Thank you, sir. back those horrendous years, I can make new memories 14 14 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right then. Goodbye everyone. happy ones and compensation will help this, though it 15 15 will never make things go away. 16 16 Q. Is there anything else you would like to say to the (Adjourned until 10.00 am on Monday, 21 February 2022) 17 17 18 A. I think I'd just like to say if anybody is having 18 19 these problems, then please get help now before it's 19 20 20 too late or things go wrong. 21 21 MS KENNEDY: I'm now just going to turn to the Chair to 22 22 see if he has any questions for you. 23 23 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No. No, thank you very much. I don't 24 24 have any questions, Mrs Powell, but I do want to tell 25 you how grateful I am that you've been prepared to 25 75 76

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