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STATEMENT OF WITNESS

Criminal Justice Act, 1967, sect 9; M.C Rules, 1981, r.70)
(Magistrates' Court Act, 1980, s102)

Statement of Eleanor Grace Muriel Nixon

Age of Witness (DOB): Over 18

Occupation and qualifications of witness: Retired Sub-postmistress

Address: [REDACTED]

This statement (consisting of 2 pages each signed by me) is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that, if it is tendered in evidence, I shall be liable to Prosecution if I have wilfully stated in it anything which I know to be false or do not believe to be true.

Dated 25 day of NOVEMBER 2009

Signed

GRO

I am a retired sub-postmistress. I first had a post office in 1969 but subsequently retired from there after 3 years to bring up my family.

Following my [GRO] right through to retirement from the Post Office in 2006 we ran various post offices, finishing in Highcliffe in Dorset. We returned to Leicestershire on retirement. Towards the end, although my husband was the sub-postmaster, I was working in the post office on a day to day basis [GRO] and managing the administration.

We were running a post office when the Horizon system was introduced. We were very much thrown in at the deep end. They had trainers who were not from the Post Office but from the computer company and they could not answer any queries relating to the Post Office or its procedures.

We were a busy office with 3 to 4 counters running at any given time and had to be reliant on our staff and the system.

Signed

GRO

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In the financial year of 2003/04 I was advised of a deficit in the region of £20000. I asked for help without success. I thought at first it might relate to National Savings Accounts. The original system was that, if monies were paid in, a giro slip would be completed which would be returned to the Post Office each night. When the system was changed to an on-line system, initially customers were still producing giro slips. Both the giro slip and the on-line transaction were being processed thereby, incorrectly, doubling the transaction.

I wrote to National Savings and received no help. I rang Chesterfield (PO head office) and got nothing back. The attitude I was being presented with was very much that I had lost the money therefore it was my responsibility to find it.

I received a very nasty letter from Boumemouth demanding repayment of the money which I refused. I was even questioned as to whether I trusted my staff which I did implicitly. I therefore started going through records on a week by week basis starting with weeks where there had been a large discrepancy. I could only do a week each night as we were a busy post office, often not finishing until 6.30pm and much later on balance nights.

Eventually, when going through a week that had been quiet on large transactions, i.e. foreign currency, I noticed a transaction that caught my eye. This provided me with the key and enabled me to identify that the problem lay with credit/debit cards being recorded as cash.

It was my opinion that the layout of the screens caused a problem. It came to my attention that if, when taking a debit card/credit card, the clerk inadvertently pressed the cash button rather than the card button, this would cause an incorrect deficit. At no time were we advised of this.

I rang Chesterfield to advise them that I had found the money. They were not interested. I therefore systematically worked through records to show the Post Office the amount in question, the week number and where the problem lay. I wrote to Chesterfield providing them with all the information. I did not hear anything for a number of weeks. I was then contacted by phone by a woman who told me that she was working part-time for the Post Office and had been asked to contact all sub-post offices where there were problems. She advised me that she would check up on my information and correct the problem week by week. Nobody came to see me but gradually over the following weeks it was corrected until the deficit was removed completely.

The reason I was able to do this exercise was that I possibly kept more records than other sub post offices did. We were not allowed to take copies of any paperwork or records that were sent to the Post Office overnight. I therefore used to keep a copy of the daily and weekly readings. Without keeping a record of daily transactions there is no way possible of subsequently cross checking this problem. At no time was I ever trained to keep this paperwork. I just did so as a matter of experience.

I have made this statement very willingly because I believe there was a genuine problem with the Horizon system and other sub post masters were suffering needlessly. I am willing to attend court if possible GRO

My husband and I retired in 2006, so I am unaware of any improvements that may have been made.

Signed

GRO