Tuesday, 22 February 2022
(9.59 am)

MS KENNEDY: Good morning, Chair.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Good morning.
MS KENNEDY: Our first witness today is Mr Parmod Kalia.

## PARMOD KALIA (affirmed)

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Good morning, Mr Kalia. I'm very pleased that you've been able to come to give evidence this morning. Thank you very much.
A. Thank you.

## Questioned by MS KENNEDY

MS KENNEDY: Mr Kalia, I think you know my name is
Ruth Kennedy and I ask questions on behalf of the
Inquiry. Have you got a copy of your witness statement there?
A. I have.
Q. It should be dated 26 January 2022; is that right?
A. Yes, it is, yes.
Q. If you turn to page 16, your last page, is that your signature there?
A. That's correct.
Q. Have you read through this statement recently?
A. I have.
Q. Is it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. It is.
Q. I'm going to start by asking a couple of questions about you. How old are you now?
A. I'm 63 now.
Q. I believe you currently volunteer at a charity. Could you describe that for the Chair?
A. Yes, certainly. It's a spiritual based charity. Its main base head office is in India. It has offices, branches, here in the UK and Canada. It is just a spiritual organisation. It is not religious based, it is for all religions Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Muslim for all religions.
Q. What family do you have?
A. I've got a wife and I have four children.
Q. Prior to working for the Post Office, could you just briefly describe what jobs you had?
A. I worked for National Westminster Bank since 1977 until 1990, until taking up the Post Office.
Q. What did you do at the bank?
A. I started off basic junior, and then I done the banking exams, AIB stage 1 in evening classes, and stage 2 on day release the next year. I worked my way up to the assistant manager.
Q. Was that the position you had when you left?
A. Yes.
Q. Turning then to the Post Office, why did you want to 2
for one and a half days.
Q. How adequate did you find that training?
A. It seemed okay at the beginning. I was used to computers. I was used to financial trading with the banking transactions, I was doing before. It seemed okay.
Q. What else were you provided with at that time from the Post Office?
A. As in?
Q. I think your statement you mention a manual?
A. Oh, yes. There is a manual I was given to refer to in case I needed any further help or assistance with anything else as well.
Q. How helpful was that?
A. I didn't really get the time to refer to the manual much. Whenever there were any problems or issues, the first port of call was always the helpline.
Q. Turning then to the shortfalls on the system, did you notice any shortfalls on the Horizon system prior to the audit that was carried out?
A. Yes. The shortfalls were beginning to occur from about January 2001 onwards. They were small ones to start with, maybe $£ 100$. Before that, with the manual bookkeeping, we used to have shortfalls maybe $£ 20, £ 30$ but then, with the Horizon from January, they started
to get $100 / 150$, but still I was putting it in from my shop side to make it good. Gradually, it got into the thousands and that was the stage where I couldn't put in anymore from the shop side, so I was declaring that I had that cash.
Q. You mentioned the helpline previously. What use did you make of the helpline?
A. Plenty. Every time -- every time there was an error, it wouldn't balance, the first port of call was always the helpline to see if they could help me and assist me what I could do and what I should do, but they -their response was always, basically, you should be getting an error notice, which should come to help to resolve the issue. Sometimes the error notices did come but, quite often, there were no error notices.

So the differences were -- then I would refer back to the helpline again, saying it's now been two weeks and no error notice, and that's when I was suggested to make it good.
Q. Who else did you speak to at the Post Office about these alleged shortfalls?
A. My regional manager/area manager. I spoke to her as well and, again, the suggestion was "You have to make it good".
Q. Who else did they tell you was encountering these
problems at the time?
A. They didn't tell me there was anyone else encountering any problems at all. They didn't say any of that.
Q. How did you feel about being unable to identify the solution to the problem?
A. Very, very disturbed. I would quite often be in the Post Office balancing until 12.00 or 1.00 at night, with my wife, with my little girl. She was six or seven at the time. She'd be sleeping there, she'd have to come out early in the morning with us, and she'd have to be sleeping behind the shop counter until we finished. It could be 12.00/1.00 at night.
Q. You were then audited, I think, in July/August 2001; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. How many auditors attended?
A. Three -- three people came.
Q. What was that process like?
A. They came in. The Post Office had already opened at 9.00 , I think it was, and they came in, they said they was going to do an audit, which I knew the protocol that they come in, you stand to one side at the back of the Post Office and let them do what they need to do, count their stock, and so I just stood there at the one side at the back and let them count what they 6
needed to count.
Q. What did they tell you that they had found?
A. They told me they'd found a discrepancy, I think it was in the region of 27,000 at the time, but since then -- I think they're now putting 22,000 in the paperwork, but I think it was 27 to start with.
Q. They suspended you that day; is that right?
A. Yes. They suspended me. They told me they was going to interview me and I could have a family friend, a solicitor or a representative from the Federation of Postmasters present at the interview.
Q. Who did you choose?
A. Well, I didn't choose a solicitor. I didn't think I needed a solicitor because I hadn't done anything wrong. So I chose the Federation, National Federation of SubPostmasters rep.
Q. What did the Federation representative say?
A. When I phoned him and explained what had happened and there was an audit and there was a shortage of 27,000 , his first reaction was "How quickly can you put that right to keep it out of the courts?"
Q. How did that make you feel?
A. He was a senior person to me, he was an experienced person to me, I expected him to know what he was talking about. I followed his advice. I was
distressed as to where I was going to get that money from to put it right from straight away, so I had to go to my Mum. I had to go to my Mum and ... sorry.
Q. Please don't apologise. Let me know if you need a moment.
A. I had to go to my Mum and I had to tell her I need $£ 27,000$, straight away. She wanted to know what for, why, what's happening. I said "Look, I just need this money now to keep me in a job". So she gave me a cheque from her building society for the figure that they claimed it was short.
Q. How did it feel having to ask your mother for that money?
A. Very humiliating. Very shameful.
Q. How quickly did you give that cheque to the Post Office?
A. Within two days. Within two days, I took the cheque to the head office, which was in Bromley, and I gave it to them in person.
Q. What did you think would happen then?
A. I was assured by the Federation rep that that would be the end of the matter and I could possibly carry on. So I thought shortly I would hear confirmation from the Post Office to say "Fine, it's all sorted, you can start opening the Post Office again". It was closed
all the duration of this period.
Q. How did the rest of your family take you borrowing that money from your mother?
A. Immediately, nobody knew other than my wife, obviously, because she was in the shop side but my younger brother got to find out, eventually, that I had taken Mum's money and he wasn't happy. He wasn't happy that I'd taken Mum's life savings from her. In fact, we've fallen out, my brother and myself, as a result of that as well.
Q. The Post Office then wanted to interview you formally; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. What did your Federation representative say then?
A. I again contacted the same Federation rep and his response was "Make up a story and plead guilty to get a minimum sentence".
Q. So what did you do?
A. I made up a story. I made up a story that I'd been buying shares.
Q. Why did you make up a story about buying shares?
A. I'd worked in the bank for ten years or so. I'd done those transactions for customers. I'd been buying shares and selling shares on behalf of the customers. That was the first thing that just came to my mind 9
because of the amount involved, they couldn't deal with the sentencing, so they referred it to Croydon Crown Court.
Q. What sentence did you receive?
A. I received a sentence of six months.
Q. A custodial sentence?
A. Six months' custodial sentence, yes.
Q. Were you taken to prison then?
A. Straightaway.
Q. Which prisons did you go to?
A. Originally -- first of all, I was taken to High Down but it was all -- I was numb at that time. When I was taken -- when I was given that sentence I didn't know what was happening, where I was going or what was going to happen to me. The solicitor actually dealing with my defence at the time did come to see me when I was taken down and he suggested "There's no point in appealing because it's going to take that length of time for the appeal to be processed" and he said I should be out in three months.

I was given a six-month sentence, I should be out in three months, and there was no point in appealing. It came as a bit of a shock when the prison wardens wanted my belt and my tie off me. That, I felt, was a bit humiliating itself.
that, "Yes, okay, I spent that money on buying shares", and, as the Federation had suggested "You'll get the minimum sentence, maybe even a community order as opposed to going to prison".
Q. How did it feel making up that story?
A. It didn't seem right. It didn't seem right. Why was I doing that? But I was following his advice. He was a senior person to me, experienced. I was following his advice.
Q. I think your contract with the Post Office was terminated in around September 2001; is that about right?
A. Yes, that's correct.
Q. They proceeded to prosecute you for one count of theft.
A. Correct, yes.
Q. So just confirm, what did you plead?
A. I pleaded guilty.
Q. Why did you plead guilty?
A. As I was advised by the Federation rep: make up a story and plead guilty.
Q. Where was your case dealt with?
A. Originally it was at Bromley Magistrates' Court.
Q. Then, I think, did it move to the Crown Court?
A. Yes, yes. At the Magistrates' Court they said, 10

First of all, they took me to High Down prison, which is Category $\mathrm{B}, \mathrm{I}$ think. Within about a week and a half, I was transferred to Ford Open Prison.
Q. What was High Down prison like?
A. Walking through the front gate, first of all, front door, being asked to strip and given the uniform. I had a cell, there was a bunk bed in there and there was somebody else already in one of the bunk beds and I was locked up in there, basically, 23 hours of the day.
Q. What was Ford Open Prison like?
A. Ford Open ... I just kept myself to myself. I didn't make friends. There was a temple in there. I spent a lot of time in the temple in there. I knew I had to do something to keep myself occupied. I applied for a job as ... sorry.
Q. Please don't apologise. Take a moment.
A. It's the first time she's hearing this.

I had to apply for a job to keep myself busy and occupied, so there was a garden centre. I'd do whatever's necessary there.
Q. How did you feel while you were in prison?
A. Basically, I think I shut down. I wasn't acknowledging anything, I wasn't -- it was just biding time. I couldn't wait for that three months to come

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up. There was a regime. You obviously had to be in bed and be checked in, make sure you're still there and you hadn't absconded or anything. It was not something I was used to. Not something that I've seen before.
Q. What was it like coming out of prison after that time?
A. When I was released, I was released on tag. Basically, they sent me home by myself, said "Here's your ticket, off you go home and someone will meet you there at 6.00 in the evening", or something. And then I was put on tag, which restricted my movements. I couldn't go out the house after 6.00 pm . I had to -- couldn't leave before 9.00 am in the morning. I couldn't go back to my shop. My shop, at that time, was being run by family, my wife and our children.

At that time, we'd also started doing newspaper
deliveries, so I couldn't go in for the early morning deliveries. My son obviously expanded into the off-licence section as well, to try to make ends meet, because of the loss of the income from the Post Office, and I couldn't stay late at night for the off-licence. I was on tag for three months. I was restricted with my movements.
Q. How did it feel not being able to help your family?
A. Very shameful. Very shameful that my job was to care
for the family, look after them and I couldn't do it.
Q. I think your conviction was quashed last year; is that right?
A. Yes. Yes, that's correct.
Q. I'm now going to ask some questions about the impact that this has had on you and I'm first going to ask you about the financial impact. Can you describe for the Chair what happened to your shop?
A. After I was released from prison, the family, my wife and my children were running the shop. The sales were going down, the takings were going down, the Post Office income had completely stopped. We had to still try and make ends meet.

In 2005 -- in 2005, I started looking for another job as well, to try and make ends meet. I got a job as a chauffeur. The reason being that I couldn't afford a car of my own. This company gave a car, they gave the training, they gave -- it was on a PAYE system, so I was going to be guaranteed an income, as opposed to being self-employed.

So I worked with this chauffeur company, while the family, my son -- my second son was at university. He was coming and going from university and helping out as and when he could. So it was my older son and
my wife and she had a couple of young kids, as well, 14
to look after, my daughter's, but I started working as a chauffeur first and then I moved on to minicabbing after that as well.
Q. What impact did that change of employment have on your finances?
A. There was a reduction in income from the Post Office.

I fell behind with my tax situation, as well. I was being fined for penalties, interest, surcharges. We couldn't keep up. I was trying to sell the shop, tried on many occasions to try and sell the shop. There was no Post Office, nobody was interested. The footfall was decreasing. The sales were going down. Nobody was interested.

The shop, eventually I ended up closing down altogether. I couldn't sell it, I didn't get any goodwill for it. When the lease came up for renewal, I couldn't carry on taking on that lease with that reduced income, so I had to close it down.
Q. What other financial consequences did this have on you?
A. Financial consequences, my son, second son, he was at an independent fee-paying school before the audit and he was finishing school to go on to university. My second daughter at the time -- my first daughter, sorry, Nicky is the second. My oldest daughter was
just turning 11. Before, again, the Horizon, I had already admitted her into the same fee-paying school. I had to take her out of that after I came out from prison. I had to remove her and then she had to be admitted to an ordinary state school. They were capable children. They've done their -- they're bright, intelligent children but I've destructed her education. She'd made friends there and she told me that she's lost those friends, as well, for good.
Q. How did that feel?
A. Again, being -- it felt as though I was letting the family down again. I wasn't supporting, caring for the family as I should have been. The plans that we had made for the children's education had all failed.
Q. What compensation have you received to date?
A. The only compensation l've received is, being a member of one of the 555, the compensation that was paid out, I've received a proportion of that, $£ 27,000$ I think. Since my conviction's been quashed last year, I have applied for interim payment. That's been refused. I believe I'm one of three who have had their interim payments refused and it does make me think: is it because of colour? The three of us are of colour, that I know of. Why? Why has this interim payment been refused?

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My solicitors, Hudgells, have done a very good job understanding and appreciating and acknowledging that I wasn't at fault. They've done everything they can to refer my case to the CCRC, as a result of which, because of their intervention, the CCRC, the Criminal Cases Review Commission have then decided to refer my case to Southwark Crown Court with a view to having my conviction overturned. The judge believed, obviously, what was said and my conviction has been quashed. The Post Office are still adamant that I'm not entitled to any interim payment for some reason.
Q. How has your health suffered as a result of all of this?
A. Since 2002, after all these events, my health -- l've got diabetes type 2. I have other conditions associated. They don't know for sure but they're putting it down to possibly diabetes. My eyes -I have issues with my eyes, where they kept blinking excessively. The specialist put it down to blepharospasm, treated it with botox and told me that that's not a cure, that is just a temporary fix for three months, and then come back. I've had that consecutively for two years or so.

My feet are -- neuropathy is what they diagnosed
as, difficulty in walking with my feet. They stay
cold all the time, daytime, nighttime. My diabetes is virtually out of control at the moment and the doctors are talking about putting me on insulin.
Q. What about your mental health?
A. Since I came out of prison, I have kept very much to myself. I haven't discussed with anybody the aspect of what's happened to me, the Post Office. I've buried it. Completely totally buried it, and it was only in 2015 when I saw a Panorama programme about the Post Office, and that's when I realised that that's possibly what could have happened to me.

From 2001 to 2015 I'd completely buried that aspect of the Post Office. I wanted to carry on with my life but it was only in 2015 when I saw that Panorama programme that I realised that that's possibly what's happened to me and actually, since then, I'm now in depression, anxiety issues, with constant delaying of, first of all, the CCRC, they refused it, but my solicitors applied and managed to convince them that, yes, I am a victim of this Post Office scandal.

Then the court case for quashing my conviction,
it was in -- I received confirmation from CCRC in January 2021 last year that they were going to refer it to the courts. The Post Office, first of all, they
gave a date in February, delayed it again for two weeks, then it was in March and then it was in May. So they kept delaying it and that just builds up my anxiety even more, a lot more. Anxiety -- I'm on depressant now. In April last year I went to my GP and, for the first time, I told him I was suffering from depression, anxiety, and I had attempted suicide on three occasions in 2015.
Q. How --
A. He's put me on antidepressants, my GP, for that.
Q. How do you feel about yourself as a person now?
A. I'm not myself. I am very quiet. I'm forgetful but I'm not -- I'm not as I used to be with a get up and go enthusiasm. I'm lacking enthusiasm to want to do anything. I'm just accepting what it is.
Q. I'm now going to ask you some questions about the impact this has had on your family. You talk in your statement about culturally the impact of having a conviction. Could you just explain to the Chair what the cultural impact of having a conviction has meant for you?
A. Cultural impacts. I'm Indian, I'm Asian. I'm British Asian, I'm happy to be British as well. I've been here all my life, I've been here since the age of 6 in this country, I've grown up here, I'm educated here
but I do still have some Indian values in me as well whereby, yes, we do still follow our culture.

One of the main aspects of our culture is the marriage system for the children. The marriage system is it works in conjunction with their acceptance. I know the children were all born here, they had their freedom to make their own choices, nothing is imposed upon them but with the marriage system it works more often as an introductory, as an arranged marriage, where you meet the family of the other side and then, once there's a mutual understanding, marriages can be arranged.

But with a conviction around me at the time my older son was due to be getting married, no Asian family would want to consider anybody with a criminal conviction. That is a very bad stigma against any Asian family, either any member of the family. It doesn't have to be the partner, any member of the family, if they have any kind of a criminal conviction, it is looked as a very bad stigma upon them.

I then had to, literally, arrange a marriage for my son, my older son, in India. I had to take the whole family, my wife, my children, to India in 2005. That was in 2005. Prison for an Asian person is very
much a stigma altogether. I have lost many friends who I used to -- at the time before the Post Office, we were very good friends. They were other postmasters. I knew them. We were on very good terms with postmasters. Since then they haven't spoken to me. I don't have those friends either.
Q. What was the impact of this on your wife?
A. The children and the wife, and my wife, they couldn't understand what had happened because I had no explanation. They understood that there was an audit, there was a shortage, where's the money, I have no explanation. I can't say it was the computers because I didn't know it was the computers. The children have been actually been doubting, "Have you actually taken the money?" Even now, until fairly recently, it's still -- the relationship with my wife is to an extent that, since 2015, after my suicide attempts, I was taken in by this charity and I stay there, I live there, I don't live with my wife. But I'm there, I haven't gone down the route of divorce.

She's a foster carer, as I am. We were registered foster carers in November 2013. We were both registered as foster carers. So if she needs me for anything because -- to take care of the children, the foster children, I'm there I'm only a telephone
very high regard, very -- respect, she's an elder, she's a parent to me and she has helped me out on occasions when I have needed her help, more than anybody else. She has been there for me.
Q. I think it is right that she died before your conviction was quashed; is that right?
A. Yes, that's correct. She passed away in September '19 and my conviction was quashed in May '21.
Q. How does it make you feel that she didn't get to see your conviction quashed?
A. She didn't know about it. She hadn't been told about it. At the time when I was due to go to prison, she was sent away to India so she wouldn't know. Had she known, had she found out, I think that probably would have killed her then and there. She had her own health problems. She didn't know I had a conviction. There was no way I could face to tell her that I'm a convicted criminal and been in prison.
Q. What about your siblings? Did they know?
A. My brother knew. My brother knew from the beginning. He'd been helping me in getting legal assistance. He'd been coming in and checking on the family while I was in prison, making sure they were okay, but there is still an aspect of he is accusing me of having taken his inheritance, quite rightly. He's blaming me
call away, I can go in I can see it. But we don't have that husband and wife matrimonial relationship. I've been living away from home since 2015.
Q. How did it feel to have your children doubt your innocence?
A. Sorry, say again?
Q. How did it feel to have your children doubt your innocence?
A. It feels inadequate. It makes me feel inadequate. I haven't supplied for them, I haven't provided for the children, I haven't -- they actually call this as a dysfunctional family at the moment. They have classified this as a dysfunctional family, all because of my conviction.
Q. You mentioned borrowing money from your mother earlier. What impact did this have on your relationship with your mother?
A. My mother -- a parent will always love their children. My mother has always loved me, as being the oldest son. I was living away from home, from '15 to '18, when she wasn't too well, my mother. She was diagnosed with cancer. So I moved from the charity to take care of her from '18 to '19. She passed away in September '19.

But my relationship with my mother is always of 22
for that. My brother has been there but we're not on talking terms at present, over this issue of this money l've taken from Mum.

My sister, she's older than me. She didn't know a thing. She didn't know a thing until two days before my conviction was due to be quashed. She didn't have a clue that l'd been in prison.
Q. How did it feel to keep something like that from your immediate family?
A. I had to try and keep my sanity. I didn't want to disrupt the family any more than the immediate family that had been affected already, my wife, my children, my brother knew. It was just something I couldn't discuss with them. It was unbearable to think as to how I could even tell them I'd been a convicted criminal.
Q. What would you like from the Post Office now?
A. Post Office: apology? No. Apology is no good. We've had an apology. I've had an apology. It's not worth the words it's written on. The Post Office need to -in all of this time this has been going on, the Post Office has been accusing us of -- us postmasters of taking money. What I don't understand is, they were then classifying themselves as victims. They were investigators, prosecutors and they were

Why has someone or anyone not gone to them and say "Where's the money? What have you done with it?" Why has someone not gone round to their houses and looked under their mattresses and said "Where's the money? Search them around". Justice needs to be done. We need to find out from the Post Office what's happening there. What happened? Why? Why did they do this to so many people, innocent people?
Q. Is there anything else you'd like to say to the Chair?
A. No, I think that's fine. Thank you.
Q. I'm just going to turn to the Chair now to see if he has any questions. Do you have any questions?

## Questions from SIR WYN WILLIAMS

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Just one or two, Mr Kalia. You've told me that you've had an apology from the Post Office but you've also told me that you've been refused an interim payment.
A. Correct.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I'd just like to get the sequence of events right, if I may. Did you get the apology before the refusal of the interim payment?
A. Yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I take it that was in writing?
A. Yes.

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SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Do you still have that apology?
A. Ido, yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Would you be good enough to send it to the Inquiry so that I can see it for myself?
A. Certainly, yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you.
Then yesterday we had one of the -- we had a lady giving evidence who, like you, has had her application for an interim payment refused and she was prepared to send me the letter of refusal. Would you do the same, please?
A. Definitely. I can do that as well, sir.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you very much, Mr Kalia, and thank you, again, for coming to give evidence before me this morning.
A. Thank you for the opportunity for letting me come to give my evidence, sir. I appreciate that.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, I'm pleased to hear you say that. Thank you.
MS KENNEDY: Chair, our next witness is Mrs Joan Bailey who is appearing remotely. I propose we take a ten-minute break and perhaps come back at 10.50 to take her evidence.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, that's fine Ms Kennedy. So I'll break off for ten minutes. Thank you. 26

MS KENNEDY: Thank you.
(10.39 am)

## (A short break)

(10.52 am)

MS KENNEDY: Chair, our next witness is Mrs Joan Bailey. SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Good morning, Mrs Bailey.

## JOAN BAILEY (sworn)

## Questioned by MS KENNEDY

MS KENNEDY: As I think you know, my name's Ruth Kennedy and I ask questions on behalf of the Inquiry. Have you got a copy of your witness statement there with you?
A. Yes.
Q. I think it should be dated 11 February 2022; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. If you turn to the last page, which I think is page 20 --
A. Yes.
Q. -- is that your signature?
A. It is.
Q. Have you read through this statement recently?
A. Yes.
Q. Is it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. Yes.
Q. I'm going to start by asking you a couple of introductory questions about you. How old are you now?
A. I'm 71 now.
Q. You talk in your statement about your husband who was a subpostmaster; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. How long have you two been together?
A. Oh, near on -- about 48 years.
Q. How many children do you have?
A. Four.
Q. I think you say in your statement for a long time you lived near Shrewsbury in Shropshire; is that right?
A. Yes, we lived in a small farming village.
Q. What jobs did your husband have before becoming a subpostmaster?
A. Well, when he left school, he went to college and he learned to be a builder, a carpenter and he spent about seven years at college and with work experience, and then he did that until the early '70s. And then the building trade wasn't doing particularly well, so he then went into the motor trade and he stayed in the motor trade and he went right up to be -- from a service manager to being a general manager, and he quite enjoyed the job, but the places he was working
it was not doing particularly well. So he was made redundant and he went then to learn to be a cheesemaker, and he did very well. He loved the job and he won many prizes for his cheeses and he made county cheeses and he really enjoyed that.

But later on, he was offered a job at Mullers in Market Drayton, which was much better paid and much less hours. He was working 72 hours a week when he was a cheesemaker, and he took that job and he worked for them and, you know, he stayed with them as long as -- until I was taken ill.
Q. What jobs did you have before you started to work for the Post Office?
A. Well, when I left college -- I left school and I went to college and there did an HND in hotel and catering and I worked in hotels and then restaurants, French restaurants. And then, in the early '70s, my brother and I opened a French restaurant and we were quite successful, and we got into the Good Food Guide after about two years, and it did very well.

And then we decided to sell the restaurant because my husband then wanted to move back to Shropshire because the restaurant was in Stoke-on-Trent. And so we sold the business, went then to Shrewsbury and I had two more children -29

I had my two younger children.
Q. You mentioned a moment ago that you got ill. Could you just explain to the Chair, I think that happen in the year 2000. What happened to you?
A. Well, I hadn't been particularly well, very bad headaches for quite a while and, this particular day, I went to work in the morning and I said to one of the girls, "I feel really poorly, I have to go home" and I went home and my husband was on nights, so I just climbed into bed by the side of him and when he woke up, to get up, you know, to have his dinner before he went back to work, they couldn't wake me properly.

So they took -- my eldest daughter took me straight to the doctor's surgery and I went in and, by that time, I'd gone into a coma and my blood pressure was extremely high and the doctor said "Right, I'm calling for an ambulance I just don't like the look of this at all", and so he called for an ambulance and I was rushed to the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, which was about four miles from our house. And they did -I think it was a CT scan, and they said that -- well, I don't know because I was unconscious, and they said that I had a brain tumour but that the pressure on my head wouldn't allow them to fly me to -- by helicopter to Smethwick, so they sent me to Stoke-on-Trent. They 30
have got a very good department there for brain injuries, and such.

I was taken by police escort to Stoke-on-Trent and I had an operation because -- first of all, to get the pressure off my head because I had high -- because the tumour that I had was growing over the natural drain in my head and so my head obviously was, you know, just not good. And so they drilled a hole in the top of my head here (indicated) and they drained the fluid off my brain and then, when I woke up a couple of days later, they told me that I had a tumour, that it had got to be removed and they said they would do it as soon as possible within the next two days.

But the next day my sight went completely and so then they realised that they'd have to do it as an emergency. So they did the operation as emergency and I was -- I think I was in the theatre, they said, my daughter said, for around about 12 to 13 hours and then I, you know, I woke up a few days later.

But during that time of when I was, you know, kind of recovering from the brain injury -- because when you have any brain injury they don't wake you if possible, they kind of let you rest, so that everything is resting so your brain can recover, and

I got an MRSI and so I was very, very ill, and that nearly killed me. But the doctors, again, were magnificent and they -- after a few days, I was much better. But it did take me a long time to recover.
Q. After that, I think you say in your statement that your husband thought it might be a good idea to work together, so you weren't working alone. What idea did he have about what you could do together?
A. Right, okay. So once l'd learnt to, kind of, look after myself and feed myself, because I'd got no co-ordination at all, so my husband was talking and I wanted to get back to work. I'm not a kind of couch potato, I do like to, kind of, be busy. And so my husband was kind of wondering what kind of work he could do and then he, kind of, come up with "Well, perhaps if we had something like a Post Office in a little shop, you know, you could run the shop or Post Office and, you know, we can spend more time together", because then he could always be there if I was ever taken ill.

Because when I first, you know, recovered from the tumour, I did have occasional fits. So, you know, he wanted to make sure that he was there with me. So we decided to buy the shop and the Post Office.
Q. How did you feel about working for the Post Office at

## that time?

A. I was a little bit -- well, I think that the thing that really -- we went for our interview with the Post Office in the May 2005, and we told them that we were selling a house and that were thinking of buying the particular Post Office, and so they seemed very happy with us and they said that they would do the normal checks that they do and that they would arrange for training as soon as we took over the Post Office, which was -- we rang them in June, the end of June/beginning of July said "Our completion date is 20 August 2005, can you arrange for the training?"
Q. Just pausing there for a moment, I think the Post Office you're talking about is the Howey Old Post Office; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. Where was that?
A. It was in Llandrindod, in Mid Wales.
Q. So you moved from where you were living in Shrewsbury or near Shrewsbury to Wales, to run this Post Office?
A. Yes, we knew Wales very well and my husband knew this area because he had been fishing, you know, in this area.
Q. Can you describe that Post Office for the Chair?
A. Yes, it's a beautiful building, stone building, built
in about 1864. It's just very nice. As you come into the village and you see the property, and it is a lovely property. And it had a nice big garden, which I loved, because I love gardening, and we had two Dobermanns, and so they loved the garden because they could run round, and it was very nice. You know, we were really attracted to it.
Q. What role did you have in that Post Office?
A. Well, because we had the Howey Post Office, also my husband took on the two satellite Post Offices. So he ran the satellite Post Office at Hundred House, which is near Builth Wells, and then, in the other direction, he ran the Llanbadarn and, you know, he kind of went out two days a week to those two Post Offices.
Q. I think you mentioned a moment ago the training and requesting to be set up. Could you describe what training you received when you started working for the Post Office?
A. Well, the training should have commenced in August when we took over the property but the Post Office said they'd got nobody to train us. So the previous postmaster came to do the Post Office and we kind of, you know, looked after the shop but he was running the Post Office and then on the days when he went to 34

Llanbadarn and Hundred House, his wife stood in at Howey Post Office.

This went on for three months, so we weren't being paid and also the Post Office include a small office payment, which pays for electricity for computers, so we paid for two computers, two printers $24 / 7$ for three months, because the previous postmaster didn't tell us about and so we weren't paid, and it was about $£ 250$ a month, and it was November when they started the training.
Q. In November what training did you receive then?
A. About four days, at the most, and the days when the trainer went with my husband to the satellite Post Offices I didn't get any training, so I suppose mine was about two days.
Q. How sufficient do you think the training was?
A. It wasn't. It wasn't. It was the busiest time of the year, you know, this is kind of November when there's lots of posting ready for Christmas and everything, and it was just so busy and we were trying to learn how to do the job and the training was totally inadequate.
Q. I think you wrote to the Post Office, is that right, requesting further training?
A. Well, yes, we wrote -- well, the man who trained us
actually wrote a letter himself and wrote to the Post Office and said that, you know, "These people need more training and we must arrange for more training for them". And when nothing had kind of happened within a few weeks I again wrote to the Post Office myself and said "Can you please, you know, do some more training for us?"
Q. When was Horizon Online introduced in your Post Office?
A. I think it was 2009.
Q. What training did you receive on that?
A. I think it was a day or half a day, something. It wasn't very long.
Q. I'm now going to ask you some questions about the shortfalls that showed on the system. What shorffalls did you notice initially?
A. Initially, it was just a few pounds. It would probably be $£ 5$ or $£ 10$, something like that and I thought, oh, I'd probably -- you know, because we hadn't been trained very well, I thought, well, I must have done something or I must have, kind of, put in two lots of stamps, or whatever, and so I just put the money in and, you know, I took it out of the shop takings and just put it in the Post Office and I did this, you know, for quite a while.
(9) Pages 33-36
Q. What use did you make of the helpline?
A. I rang them up and they -- well, they were totally useless. I mean, they didn't really want to know. They just said, "Well, look if it's short and you can't find it, you're going to have to put it in". So, you know, that was their stock answer. Or they said, well, if it was something that I didn't know how to do, they'd said "Well, look in the manuals". There was 12 manuals, ring-backed manuals. How on earth did they expect you to go all through them when you've got a customer waiting? It was ridiculous.
Q. Did you notice a change in the shortfalls appearing when Horizon Online was installed?
A. Yes, they got much higher. And I'd do cash declarations at night and then l'd do one in the following morning because they were different, completely different.
Q. How did you feel about being unable to resolve these issues?
A. Well, I was really distressed. I kind of -- I mean, I kind of, again thinking: well, is it me? You know, is my tumour coming back, because I just couldn't seem to reconcile anything. And I kept putting money in and it was getting higher, and higher, and higher, and I just thought: this is ridiculous. It took all our 37
savings. It took, you know, money that we had and then I started having to kind of borrow money from loan companies, to kind of -- to put the money in.
Q. How much money would you estimate that you put in?
A. Probably over the years, over the six years, probably about $£ 40,000$.
Q. What types of loans did you take out to finance putting that money in?
A. One of them we took -- well, we took two smaller loans, one from RBS and one from Barclays. I think one was about 10,000 and one was about 7,000. And then, towards the end, we took one out from -- oh, I think it was Blemain Finance or something like that and that was a secured loan and, you know, we took that out and -- to kind of get the -- you know, to kind of balance up properly.
Q. What happened eventually?
A. Well, eventually, it got to the point where I couldn't borrow any more money, we'd used all our savings and I just -- I was just beside myself and I didn't tell my husband because -- well, I thought that he'd think it was me, that I'd done something wrong, that I just wasn't taking care, which wasn't true because I'm always very careful. And in December 2010, we had a very bad time with our children. Our oldest 38
daughter had miscarried her baby in late pregnancy, one she'd been trying for over ten years, and so we were very upset about that. My youngest son's relationship had broken off, and he was living in a car, so that he could be close to his children and then ... sorry.

Our youngest daughter, she'd been ill -- well, she is ill now, as well, with liver disease, and just wasn't getting any better, and she was going through a particularly bad time. So my husband was distraught over this and I couldn't tell him. Sorry.

I couldn't tell him about the money and then on -- I think it was 5 January 2011, the auditor came and I was in bed ill at the time. I'd got, I think it was swine flu, I was really poorly in bed, and my husband was downstairs and the auditor checked through the money and checked through the stamps, and then she said she wanted to speak to me. And my husband said "Well, she's very ill, could you just go and speak to her upstairs", and she said "No, tell your wife to come down here".

Sorry, 'lll just have a drink.
Q. Please don't apologise. Let me know if you need a moment.
A. So I went downstairs and she said that "You have
a shortfall in your money", and I said "I know", and she said "Well, where is the money?" and I said "There isn't any money". I said "I just don't know what's happening, I can't do it anymore", because we'd just used up all the money that we had.

We had a lot of money that we had from the sale of our house and we'd spent $£ 30,000$ renovating all the shop and part of the Post Office and I said there wasn't anymore, and so she said, "Well, I must ring the office", and she spoke to someone, I don't know who it was, and she told my husband that he'd be -I can't think of the word. What's it called?
Q. Suspended?
A. Suspended, yes. She told him he'd be suspended and then she proceeded to ring a Post Office just a bit closer to town and said that "Is there anyone who could cover Howey Post Office because there was a problem, a short" -- not a shorffall, it was "a deficit in the Post Office and did they have anyone spare that could come and run the Post Office". And the people said "No, there isn't anyone". So the Post Office was closed.
Q. I think, just to be clear, the discrepancy identified was in the region of $£ 13,000$; is that right?
A. That's right, yes.
Q. I think you've touched on this but your husband resigned shortly after this audit; is that right?
A. Well, what happened is we were told to go down to Swansea, I think it was, or was it Cardiff? I can't remember -- and to see a Mr Burston, and we went down and we had an interview and it was recorded. He told us it would be recorded and that they would send us a copy of the recording on CD, and then a few days later they would send the password, so that we could get in to go through the CD ourselves.

And they questioned us both about the shortfall and -- when they did the audit on Howey, they couldn't do the audit on the Post Offices that my husband ran, the satellite stations, because the computer was down again. So they couldn't do it at that time, and so they had to come back later and do that audit on that, and that was over by about $£ 45$.

So when -- they kind of took that $£ 45$ off the
13,000 , and so it was -- I don't -- $£ 12,000$ and something. I can't remember.

They did send us the CD but they sent the CD and the password in the same envelope, so that was good security. You know, there was no security and yet they'd harped on about the security issue. And so my husband at this time was really quite ill. Because of 41
all the worry we'd had over the children, he wasn't really well anyway, but then when all of this came out, he was referred to the mental health team because he was talking about that he didn't see any point, how he couldn't kind of go any further. He was talking about suicide.

And so they -- they kind of -- he went to see them quite often, two or three times a week, and he was put on antidepressants.

I'm sorry, I've forgotten where I am.
He was put on antidepressants and he had -- we were told that it would probably be a couple of weeks for them to reach their decision.

After about two weeks, I rang Mr Burston up and I said, you know, "We haven't had an appointment -- we haven't had an answer yet". It wasn't him who answered, it was his secretary, and she said that he'd gone on holiday for two weeks. So, by the time we had a reply of what the Post Office was going to do, it was March. So we went from the beginning of January to March and they wrote a letter and they said that my husband could have the Post Office back and he spoke to the mental health team that had been dealing with him and they advised him that he shouldn't do it. They'd said that it was not a good thing for him to do 42

I was just very, very worried.
Q. You've mentioned some meetings with investigation officers. I think you had one you mentioned in March. Who represented you? Did you have representation then?
A. Yes. There's very good solicitors in Shrewsbury and I had the criminal solicitor. I think his name was Andrew Tench and he went with me to the first interview.
Q. I think it's November 2011 that you are told -- that you are given a caution for false accounting; is that right?
A. That's right, yes, yes.
Q. So you had to wait a long time?
A. Well, March until November.
Q. What was that like?
A. Well, for that meeting -- the first meeting was in Shrewsbury, which was fine because -- it's fine because we've got two daughters who live in Shrewsbury, so we were able to drive -- my husband drove over and we stayed the night at my daughter's and went to the -- well, I went to the interview and then we drove back.

But when I went for the caution, we had to drive, I think it was Newport, Shropshire, which 44
actually from our house is 120 miles round trip, and it was -- I'm sure it was disused because there was no vehicles there, there was nobody around at all and we just went into this little -- l'd describe it as basically a broom cupboard. It was disgusting. It was dirty. It was just not nice at all.

I was given the -- I can't think of -- caution. I was given the caution, and that was it then.
Q. What happened to the business?
A. Well, we carried on with the shop because it was a nice shop. You know, the one storey of the house was the street-level storey, and that was originally built as a shop and part of the shelving in the shop was the original shop, you know, from 1864 or whenever, and what we did when we renovated it, a friend -- a carpenter who we knew, he kind of made all the units and everything to match the original shelving, and it was a beautiful shop, it really was.

We had a large fridge, and I used to do all the baking and cooking for the fridge, and lasagne and cottage pies, and all sorts of things, steak and kidney pies, which I had a waiting lists for that, and chicken and mushroom pies. And I used to bake all the cakes and at Christmas time I'd make all the Christmas cakes. One year I made about 35/37 Christmas cakes 45
and then, the following year, it increased because they'd been told about the cakes. So, you know, it was very successful.

But I don't know. Our heart had gone, you know, because we enjoyed the amount of footfall that was coming in when we had the Post Office but it was just got to the point where we had -- I don't know, Tesco came and Aldi came, and people preferred to walk, you know, two miles into town and get their milk for $£ 1$ whereas our milk was 1.35 . It got to the stage where our electricity bills were about, kind of, $£ 800$ a quarter and we just couldn't do it. We just couldn't do it.

We were using our pensions up because our pensions had kicked in then. My husband's private pensions and both our state pensions but, even then, we still couldn't do it, because we couldn't run our house without -- while we were trying to pay bills for the shop, because we'd taken out -- we'd used up all the -- we paid the Post Office, to keep it level, out of our takings, so we'd built no reserves up.

So we decided that we would have to close the shop. There was nothing we could do. It was in the winter and we'd gone all through the winter not putting the heating on in the house until around 7.00 46
at night, and just putting it on for two hours and then going to bed, so that you know we didn't use money on our heating. So we closed the shop and then the following year my husband was taken ill with cancer.
Q. Was the reason that you didn't have any reserves because, in part, of the money that you'd paid into the Post Office to make good the shortfalls?
A. Yes, yes, yes.
Q. Are there any other financial consequences that you would like to tell the Chair about?
A. Well, it just drained us. You know, we'd always -- it had always been -- you know, we both had to work hard because we had four children to take care of and -but, you know, we always had a good Christmas, the children had lots of things, we went on holiday for a fortnight every year as the children were growing up. And, you know, we went from kind of not really having to worry about money to, kind of, every penny counts. And it was just -- we were just drained.

It was -- oh, I don't know. It was just -- we just couldn't do it anymore. I got to the point where, you know, I was trying to think how we could save money but there was no way we could save it because we were doing everything we possibly could do 47
not to spend money.
Q. You spoke earlier about your husband's health. What impact has all of this had on your health?
A. Well, I've always been -- even though l've had brain -- problems with my brain, l've always been a glass half full person. I've always been an optimist. I've always been "Don't worry, it will be fine", kind of thing. But, unfortunately, with the stress and everything, it took its toll in a different way, and so it caused quite a few illnesses which were all stress-related. You know, diverticulitis and angina, asthma. These are all exaggerated by stress and, you know -- and I had a stroke a few years ago. It was only a small stroke but I had a stroke, so now I have to take medication for that, and angina and I have the spray under my tongue for that, and I didn't have these before. I didn't have these problems before.

As I say, I was always you know an optimist, the eternal optimist, my husband used to call me and, you know ...

So, it was just very difficult and I was trying to support him and so I felt as if everything was on my little shoulders, and I'm 4 foot 10, and I couldn't stand the kind of pressure that it was putting on me,

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but I couldn't let my husband have the pressure because I knew how ill he was.
Q. What about your reputation in the village you lived in? Was there an impact on that?
A. Yes, there was, yes. I mean, the people who knew us and friends of ours, they were fine. They just couldn't get over it and they said, "Well, this is ridiculous, I mean, how could the Post Office treat you like this?" And the people at Llanbadarn and Hundred House wrote to us and they said "Well, we just don't understand this, how could they treat people like this?" And at that time we didn't know that there was hundreds, hundreds of postmasters, we just didn't know, because they told us we were the only ones. They said "Well, nobody else has got any trouble with it, why should you have falls, you know, if nobody else has got trouble?"
Q. What about your family? What impact did this have on your family life?
A. I don't know. I mean, family rally round, don't they, they kind of, you know, try to support you the best they can and -- but they couldn't, you know, help. They couldn't help. I mean, when we were really short of money my eldest daughter lent us $£ 9,000$ to help partly with the Post Office, to try and get it 49
straight, and also just to kind of -- just so that we hadn't got to fret about having no money at all and, you know -- I mean, most people who knew us, they were fine. I mean, you know, they were just disgusted with the Post Office treatment.

But there was others who didn't. I mean, you know, they -- I mean, they kind of said "Oh, well, there's no smoke without fire" and, you know, "They must have been fiddling the books", as they called it. And, you know, you can't do anything about that. You know, if that's how they believe, they believe like that, you know, so ...
Q. What would you like from the Post Office now?
A. I'd like them -- well, I'd just like them to kind of own up that, you know, that somebody knew all along. It took 20 years. You can't tell me that the same people worked in the Post Office for 20 years. People must have come and gone. Why didn't somebody raise the alarm, unless they were all tied up with, kind of, non-disclosures or something and ... you know.

I mean, I have, kind of, written out something and I would like to read it if possible?
Q. Yes, please do.
A. I'll just have a drink first.

In 1868, Prime Minister William Gladstone said 50
hopefully, the Inquiry will bring to justice the people in the Post Office who covered up this travesty.
Q. Is there anything else you wanted to say to the Chair?
A. I don't think so. I mean, I think the whole thing just goes beyond angry. You just can't understand how people could do this to other people, how they could treat other people like this because they knew. They knew all along. They still continued to do it. I mean, that's obscene.

I don't think there's anything else.
MS KENNEDY: Thank you. I'm just going to turn to the Chair.

Chair, do you have any questions?
Questions from SIR WYN WILLIAMS
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes. Mrs Bailey, I'd just like to ask you, if I may, some more questions about you receiving a caution because the Inquiry's heard lots of evidence about people who have had criminal convictions but I think you may be the first one we've heard from who was cautioned, all right?
A. Yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So l'd like to understand the process you went through. In March 2011 you were interviewed under caution. I've understood that, yes?

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A. Yes, yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Then, as l've understood your evidence, many months went by until November 2011 before you had any other communication from the Post Office.
A. That's right.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That's right as well?
A. Yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So how did it come about that you were cautioned? Who raised that as a possibility?
A. I don't know. I don't know. They just said "Could you attend this other meeting, you know, with the investigator", and that's the one in Newport, in Shropshire, and I was on my own, and I went into the room and he, basically -- I think it was Mr Bradshaw, I think, and he kind of asked me again some of the questions he asked me in the original interview and then asked if I'd stolen the money and I said, "No, we have not stolen any money at all", and so he said, "Well, I'm going to -- I've got a caution here and I'm going to caution you for" ... I can't remember the word. What's the word? Making up the amount of money I'd got.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: False accounting.
A. Yes, false accounting. That's right. And he says, "So I'm going to caution you for that". There was no 53
police involved. There was no police called --
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, that's what I wanted to get at. From what you tell me -- and I don't want to put words into your mouth, so you must tell me if I've got it wrong -- in March, there was no discussion about a caution?
A. No, no. There was no --

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So trying to deduce what occurred, so to speak, you must have received a letter in which you were invited to another interview, and did that letter make any reference to a caution?
A. No, no. No, it just said "a further interview".

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right.
A. A further interview.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: But you're quite clear in your mind, are you, that at that meeting in Newport, you were actually -- well, there's a kind of little formal process. You probably had to sign something, did you?
A. Yes, yes, I signed the caution. There was -- you know, it required my signature at the bottom.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Normally, when the police administer a caution, they do so only after they are satisfied that you are actually admitting that you had done something wrong. Was there anything along those lines on this occasion? 54
A. Do you mean actually on the caution itself or --

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Or orally -- discussed orally?
A. I think I've got a copy of the caution here.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Have you? Oh well, can I stop you then, Mrs Bailey. Would you be good enough to send a copy of the caution to me so I can examine it for myself?
A. Yes. The solicitors have got a copy of it.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thanks. That's great. That will probably mean that I don't have to ask you any more questions about it, so that's even better from your point of view.

Thank you very much for your evidence,
Mrs Bailey, and I hope the weather's not too bad in Mid Wales?
A. Well, the wind's dropped last night but we did have a torrent -- we did have a raging river running outside the house last night.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Just so that I can picture where you are, I'm right in thinking that Howey is just south of Llandrindod Wells, on the way to Builth Wells, yes?
A. That's right, yes. We're about two miles from there, yes.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, thanks very much. Nice to meet you.
A. Thank you, Sir Wyn. Nice to meet you.

MS KENNEDY: Chair, our next witness is Mr Christopher Trousdale. I propose a 15 -minute break and we would come back at 11.55 , if that would be suitable?
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So the provisional timetable has changed. We're going to deal with him next, are we?
MS KENNEDY: Yes.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That's fine by me. I'm just trying to get myself orientated, so to speak.
MS KENNEDY: Yes.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So 12.05.
MS KENNEDY: Thank you.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thanks everybody.
(11.39 am)

## (A short break) <br> (12.04 pm) <br> MS KENNEDY: Good afternoon, Chair. Our next witness is Christopher Trousdale. <br> CHRISTOPHER TROUSDALE (sworn) Questioned by MS KENNEDY

MS KENNEDY: As I think you know, my name is Ruth Kennedy and $I$ ask questions on behalf of the Inquiry. Have you got a copy of your witness statements there?
A. Ido.
Q. It should be dated 26 January 2022?
A. Yes.
Q. If you turn to page 19 , which I think is the last page --
A. Yes.
Q. -- is that your signature there?
A. It is.
Q. Have you read through this statement recently?
A. I have.
Q. Is it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. There's a few spellings which I pointed out to you, some names of people but, apart from that, it's true.
Q. I'm going to start by asking you a few introductory questions about yourself. How old are you now?
A. 39.
Q. How long have you been with your wife?
A. 22 years.
Q. How many children do you have?
A. Two: one four and one eight.
Q. Your family have a long history of working in a Post Office?
A. Longer than most. 150 years. It goes back to my great grandmother, great grandfather, both grandparents, my great aunt, and my mother.
Q. I think you mention in your statement that your grandfather ran -- and you will have to help me with 57
the pronunciation --
A. Lealholm.
Q. -- Lealholm Post Office?
A. For 40 years.
Q. He retired due to a heart condition; is that right?
A. Yes. The other businesses we ran as well, and he was due for a heart operation, so he sort of took retirement and the Post Office was passed to a lady who worked for him and she ran it for a year.
Q. So he leased it to her, I think you say?
A. Yes.
Q. Then you decided to apply for that role; is that right?
A. Well, yeah, I was studying at Newcastle College and the plan wasn't to move back, actually, I was going to stay and do my -- I was doing an HND and I was going to stay and do my degree. And then the subpostmistress tendered her registration, she was moving on, and the Post Office, and there was an associated petrol station and shop, was put up for sale but all the people who wanted to buy it wanted to close the Post Office. So our family had served the community all those years so I thought it was important to try and keep the office open.
Q. How old were you at that time?
A. 19.
Q. I think you mention in your statement you also started a design business at that time?
A. Yes, so as part of the application, the Post Office wanted to see that your business plan was viable to take over the office, because the remuneration was quite small so, as part of that, I was awarded a grant from the Prince's Trust and started a small design business, as well as the shop and the Post Office.
Q. You took over that Post Office in July 2002?
A. Yes.
Q. Do you know how your grandfather felt about you taking over?
A. (Pause) I think proud would be the word.
Q. When you first started working for the Post Office, what training did you receive?
A. Well, it was two weeks/ten days but, let's be clear, that the lady who came to the office to train me, I think at least five of those days were spent doing tasks like reordering correct envelopes, replacing manuals, ordering name badges, changing the point of sale, lots of things like that weren't Horizon training. And then, on top of that, there was things -- your customer service training, looking people in the eye, thank you, pleases, upselling
products.
So the actual Horizon training, of which the majority of that was just selling things not actual accountancy side, was three days and actual Horizon accountancy training would be next to nothing.
Q. How adequate did you find that training?
A. Totally inadequate. I mean, I have friends who are counter clerks at banks who were sent away for weeks upon time to intensive training courses, who then were shadowed intensively for weeks when they got to a counter and then they were shadowed for another six months after that, unintensively, and it sort of should have rang alarm bells at the time but youthful naiveté, maybe, I just thought this system's obviously so good, that's what's needed.
Q. I think you did ask for more training at the time?
A. Absolutely, yes, I wasn't confident, especially the balances. The first balance we did didn't balance and I felt: well, hang on a minute, this -- you know, what's going on here. And I asked for more and the trainer just said "You're lucky you have got me for as long as you have had me".
Q. Turning then to the alleged shortfalls. I think you say in your statement that in 2003 you started to notice discrepancies?
A. Yes. So they were not always shortfalls. So the balance could be up or down. So it just didn't balance either way. It wasn't all shortfalls and I think even the first -- so even with -- the trainer, called Helen, was sat over my shoulder for the first week, watched every transaction, still didn't balance on the times that she was there and, again, it should have been red flags at the time but enthusiasm and everything else took over and you think: well, I can get through this and there's this fantastic support line I've been told about, so that's there for me if I need it. Yeah, if only it had been.
Q. How often did you notice those discrepancies, would you say?
A. I don't think there was a week there wasn't a discrepancy, up or down.
Q. What did you do when you noticed a discrepancy?
A. So my thought was: don't interfere with the Post Office stock system, so leave it. If it's up, don't take it out; if it's down, don't put in. Then I know that I haven't taken or touched the Post Office money, it's its own unit and that was my, sort of, way forwards.
Q. I think you mention in your statement that the discrepancies got worse; is that right?
A. Yes, yes, so the discrepancies built then you'd ring the helpline -- well, I called it the "hell line" because, if you could get through and if they hadn't shut the line early, if you didn't get someone on the other end of the phone who was just totally frustrating and shouting at you or, you know -- or you just cut out in the middle of the call, if they didn't like what you were asking them.

And it was just, sort of, "How do I sort this out?" And you got this message back all the time that was either "You're the only one having this problem" or "You'll just have to roll over and -- because you have to be open tomorrow, you must be open tomorrow". We balanced every week and there was no option of not being open the day after, you know.
Q. How did you feel when the person on the helpline was telling you that?
A. Frustration was -- I mean, a lot of the time it got to anger, real anger, and I remember when we asked for the records of my call logs to the helpline, in various court cases, they wouldn't supply them. They only actually supplied them when it got to the CCRC, so they actually lied to me twice. First, they refused to disclose the call logs to me in my initial case. Then in the mediation with Howe \& Co , and then 62
with the Freeths case in the High Court they still said that they'd destroyed them and they weren't there.

Then, miraculously, at the CCRC, this sheet appeared with my call logs, 188 calls over the -well, 15 months, or whatever it was I was there, it's about one every other day and, clearly, it says -this is their paperwork, it says "Related calls request for contact with line manager, six related to Horizon Issues, 155 to transaction issues, 29 related to balancing enquiries". There's six other calls look like they have been deleted. I would suggest that those calls were where I was explicitly told to sign the cash account and roll over.
Q. I'm just checking to see if we've been sent that. Would you be prepared to --
A. I'm sure it's in the disclosure pack but I'll make sure that the solicitors -- Hudgells have been fantastic; they'll send it to you afterwards.
Q. Thank you. I believe you were audited on 16 September 2003; is that right?
A. If I can just go back a step, actually, I think it might be useful to the Inquiry that -- obviously, we will get to the point where my mother took over the office but, in 2009, which was years after I left the
office, she was also explicitly told to falsify an account and roll over to open. Now, she having the hindsight of -- having the benefit of the trouble I'd been through, she made a log of that call so we actually have that call reference, the time, the person who told her and the copy of the cash account, which she refused to sign.

So if that would be useful to the Inquiry,
I think that tape recording could be very enlightening because I'm not the only one that was explicitly told to falsify an account.
Q. Yes, please, I'm sure we would be very grateful to see those.

So turning back to the audit, which I think was on 16 September 2003?
A. Yes, people like to call it an audit but Kevin, the young man that came to my office, I don't think he had any qualifications, financial qualifications or forensic accounting qualifications, or computer programming qualifications. So when you say an "audit", what you are actually saying is a person turned up to press a few buttons on a faulty IT system.
Q. How many of the purported auditors showed up?
A. Just Kevin to start with and then afterwards he was
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joined by my area manager, Julia Stephenson obviously. I remember the morning very vividly because my brother was in my house, we had massive problems with power cuts, and by brother wanted fuel from the petrol station, which we were running at the same time and he couldn't because the power was off. It had been off for days previously and glitches, so I was in the house, it was 50 yards from the office, so I knew when the power came on in the house I could then walk over the road, open the office. No point opening it otherwise, not allowed to if the lights aren't on.

So I was sat in the office, we were having a chat stood in the kitchen, lights flickered on, so I walked over the road and there was a man stood on the doorstep there and I thought: oh, this is interesting. So my brother went and helped himself to petrol and he went to work. And he announced himself as the auditor and so I took him in the office and I immediately said "Well, I'm absolutely glad you are here because you can come and help me find out -- you can do things on this system that l'm not allowed to do or unable to do".

So as soon as he walked in I said "I think you'll find there's $£ 8,000$ not showing on the account". At that point, he then -- wheels were set 65
in motion, he rang the area manager who then appeared rather quickly.
Q. What happened when the area manager arrived?
A. Well, this is where I started to be managed. So the pair of them, without cautioning me, forced me to sign a statement which was then produced against me as a guilty, sort of, statement. Kevin stood over me and, sort of, read back to me what he thought l'd told him that morning and if you look -- l've got a copy of the statement, and l've got beautiful handwriting normally, it looks like a three-year old has written it. Because the adrenaline was obviously flowing, and, you know, there was obviously a bit of shock, and things like that.

And, yes, so without cautioning me they forced me to write a statement and then I remember making a few noises to say "I think it might be worth me ringing my parents or leaving the office", and then Julia Stephenson started to usher me by cleverly saying, "I tell you what", holding me, "just come and sit here, I'll make you a cup of tea", putting herself between me and the telephones in the back office because they obviously didn't want me to involve anyone else because they know, if I had, their little plan that they usually run in these situations, would 66
have fallen apart.
So that's how the day, sort of, went and then there was various things, then the auditor came into the back room, Kevin, and he came and said "It's all right, there's not $£ 8,000$ missing, I found what the problem is", and I said "Is it to do with REMs", because I thought I had a problem -- my cash remittance was about $£ 8,000$. So I thought: there's nothing else, there's no transactions that we handle that are that big. So when you are looking for a single thing and suddenly a figure jumps so high, you think: what do we handle? You look for what's that sort of -- roughly that figure. "My REMs are 8,000" and Kevin said "No, you haven't put your REMs in, there's a REM bag here hasn't been included".

I thought "Thank goodness, it's all" -- I had been awake for about 50 or 60 hours before this, the night before, trying to find out what had happened, paperwork everywhere, you know, every little slip trying to go through it. Then, ten minutes later, after he chatted to the area manager, oh no, suddenly the REM was right and there was $£ 8,000$ missing, right.

So I said "Right, well, you tell me where it is then because I haven't taken it". And then the area manager said to me "We've got two system specialists
or specialists coming down, I think they're in Scotland or Berwick, or somewhere up north, we will have to wait for them to get here", four or five hours, how ever long it took. So then they sort of managed me all day, prevented me contacting anybody and -- yeah, and then the investigators turned up and things rolled on from there.
Q. What happened when the investigator showed up?
A. Sorry. So when the investigators came, first they went into the office and they obviously were chatting and they kept shutting the door to me so I couldn't hear what they were saying and then they said "Oh, we need to have a chat". I said "Oh, that's no problem at all, l've got nothing to hide, let's have a chat". I'm assuming they wanted to -- naively assumed they're going to ask me about inputting certain things on the computer, have I made sure this is right, have I done things in the correct order. I thought these two specialists had come to go through the computer. How stupid I was.

So they said "We can't do it here", because of the power was flickering, "Can we pop to your house?" I said "Well, the power's the same but we can go over there, if you want, that's fine". So went over to the house, stupidly made them a nice cup of tea, and then 68
they were talking to me but they were very -- now,
I know what they were doing but, at the time, it didn't seem that suspicious.

They talked to me but separately, so one would be in the lounge, one was in the kitchen but, every time they did, they'd make sure they keep shutting the door. Now, I think that's so that they honestly couldn't, if they were asked, say what the other person was asking me or telling me. They were saying things to me like "Now, you don't want to be -- you don't want to look stupid here", you know and they firmly reminded me that l'd sign the Official Secrets Act, which just terrified me when they started talking about that.

I thought "Hang on" and then, by this time, my mind was just like jelly. They said "You've signed the Official Secrets Act, so you are not allowed to talk to anybody, anybody at all, about this", because I'd been making noises about trying to contact, get hold of my parents, Joanne, my wife, you know, this is -- "I need to contact somebody", and they were very, very clever in preventing me from getting anywhere near a telephone.

So then the next thing, I was in the lounge with one of them and the lounge door was shut -- I can
picture them in the chairs now, and one of them got up and went out, and I don't know what he was doing, he was a long time, I wonder if he was searching that house without my permission in the areas that -because the lounge was right at the back of the house, and then -- I mean, the car was 20 steps away from the house. I think it took him about 15/20 minutes to bring a tape recorder back. And they said "Oh, we're just plugging this in because it saves having to writing everything down, et cetera, et cetera. You can have someone here but" -- I said "Excellent, fine, yeah, I can have someone here", "But only if they are another Post Office worker or, like, a colleague or a union rep". I said "Well, I don't have any colleagues, I work by myself in the Post Office, there's only a few counter assistants but, you know". "Oh, well, they can't come in, no".

So they wouldn't let me have my wife in, obviously, so they said, "No, that's not allowed".

Then, yes, so they went through the Post Office saying "You are not allowed" -- they reinforced "You are not allowed to talk to anyone about this". Then the tape recorder went on and they said "You've said you don't want anyone here and you don't want a solicitor". And at this point I'm thinking: well,

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I'm not allowed to talk to anybody. So I said, "No, well, obviously not", you know, so that was how we proceeded.

All this time, they just kicked my wife out of the house in the evening in the cold and just left her outside. Obviously, she couldn't go to the Post Office because they had taken the keys for that. By this time, they had actually stripped the office, and when I say "stripped it", they took every scrap of Post Office paperwork -- and I'd like to say "take", but they didn't, they stole, there's no warrant, all of my personal trading invoices, bank statements, they emptied the safe, which had a copy of my lease in it, they took all of that away, and folded boxes full of stuff.

They just stripped the office bear, never, ever returned it, you know, we never got another sight of it after that.

Then, obviously, the interview started. Now, before the interview had started I'd been mentioning this REM and this $£ 8,000$ because, to me, it was the most likely area where a figure could have jumped that big. It's the only transaction we could handle that was that sort of size was a remittance, coming into the office. And, obviously, we were talking about
that REM pouch and things like that, and then they sort of said "Right, before we start the interview, tell me about this REM pouch, et cetera, et cetera". Okay, we'll do that then, I was just doing what I was being told, you know.

At some point, I thought: we're going to get on to them asking me about the inputs into the machine, look at my log-ons, look at the cash accounts, look that the balances for the recent few weeks. Of course, they weren't interested in that at all. So they started, and I started to tell them about this pouch that I think I might have lost, have I thrown it in the bin, so many things going through my mind, because the only message the helpline reinforced was "It will turn up, if there's an error we've got this system which finds it, it will come back as a correction, an error notice, up or down".

And you think: right, so this is obviously how the system works, you know, if the computers done something wrong, they have got this back end which finds this and then corrects your office. So you think it's going to come back.

And then in the interview I said "Right, well, we'll start off with this REM pouch, might have lost this REM pouch", as one of the possibilities, because

I didn't know what happened. And then they turned that round and said -- they then turned round to say that I was trying to lie about this REM pouch. I said "Hang on a minute", and then it all went downhill from there. They started mentioning -- it was Tony Robertson and Jude Trotter, and l've got this pervasive image of her sat in my great-grandma's chair, she looked a bit like a witch with -- awful. I can't get it out of my head unfortunately.

They started -- she started asking me about docket fraud. I didn't even know what docket fraud was. I was 19.

She said "We found these docket slips in the till drawer", and I said "Right, well, they're part of the cash", because the office when the power went out you couldn't scan the barcode but I could still accept the docket, pay the cash out, and then when the power comes back on, you can then input them. So that docket, face value, is cash, which I paid out.

So the second the area manager removed them from the stock unit and passed them to an investigator, she instantly created over $£ 400$ deficit at that moment. So they had them in the interview, in my house, these dockets "What are these here for?" I said "They're just some dockets that need putting on the system
because the power's been off". They wouldn't have that. They started asking about giro fraud, docket -I didn't know what they were talking about.
Q. Mr Trousdale, just at that moment, I've got a message from the transcriber, just asking if you can slow down slightly.
A. I do apologise, my blood is boiling, and I'll --
Q. Totally understood, but no, no, don't apologise, but if you could, just slightly slower. Sorry, you were going on to say something else.
A. Yes, so then it just went on to "You've taken this money, where is it? Have you got a nice big posh car?" "I don't have a driving licence". "Where have you been on holiday?" "I've just come out of university and l've just started work for you guys, I haven't been on holiday anywhere". "Do you gamble, do you drink?" "No, what's this got to do with the computer system?"

And it just went on from there, you know. "Where's this money?" I said "Look in my bank accounts, do whatever you want, I haven't got any money, you've got it or your system has it".

And it I just went bad to worse, unfortunately, that interview and, afterwards, I felt so stupid that I'd let them trick me, and coerce me and manage me, 74
actually, because years after, I wrote to them and said "Can you just confirm this", and she said "Oh, yes, it was" -- the guy who actually planned the budget wrote back to me and said it was a year on generators, that's how bad the power was.

Yes, so, it's -- they then had to take me to the police station because they couldn't plug their tape recorder in Lealholm, no power, and, at that point, I wasn't fit for interview at all but they still -they didn't care. They weren't interested in any regulations or rules or PACE, or anything likely that.

They were a law unto themselves, so they took me to the police station at Whitby and I had to be booked in by the duty sergeant, he asked me a few questions. I told him, I said "I shouldn't be here, I was medicated by the doctor", and I forgot the name of the drugs now but, if you look at the side effects of the drugs, I think I had 90 per cent, I had such an adverse effect, it affected my vision, everything.

It was absolutely horrendous and I said to him "I'm on these tablets, I can't think straight, I can't talk straight" and the Post Office man looked at him and said "That's what we do, it's all right". He just, this sergeant, stood there said "Oh, well, off you go then". At that point, a duty solicitor had 76
been called for me, who I think was probably more used to dealing with breaches of the peace and drunk and disorderly, certainly not an intensive case like the Post Office were admitting -- or alleging l'd done.
Q. Did you feel properly supported at all during that interview?
A. Oh no, I don't think the solicitor spoke in the whole interview. I think I had 10/20 seconds with him before. They didn't give any prior disclosure, they didn't say to him "This is the evidence we're going to put to him", or anything like that. It was literally he was seeing it as they were putting it to me in the police station interview room.
Q. Can you describe what happened at that interview?
A. Yes, so they had some sheets of paper which were spreadsheets, nothing like we're used to seeing off the Horizon system. We used to get big long columns and A4 printouts. And they had this spreadsheet that they had obviously cobbled together themselves and they put them under my nose and say "this date here, eight months ago, is this a true figure?" I'm like, "I don't know".

And, again, very clever semantics. They'd -and repetitive as well. They'd ask me a question and say "Well, is this an accurate figure", I said "Well,
it could have been up, it could have been down". "Was it a shortfall?" "I don't know, I couldn't tell you". Then they'd keep repeating a sentence but then drop a word, maybe, every time they repeated it, up until the point I was just at the end saying "Well, it might have been yes, just yes, whatever, I don't want to be here" and, you know. In the end, of course, if you read all of their internal paperwork "Oh, he admitted this, he admitted that", "Look at the interviews, I didn't, I just wanted you out of there".

At one point he said "You have asked for a solicitor". If you read the transcribe, I thought he was a solicitor, one of the other investigators I hadn't seen before. Didn't even know who I was talking to. It even says "I am talking to a solicitor, I was facing him over the table", and my solicitor was sat next to me on this side and, you know, it was just horrendous.
Q. How did you feel after that interview?
A. By that time, I probably didn't feel anything at all.
Q. What did you expect would happen after that interview?
A. Well, I think they clearly said "Then we're going to prosecute you", and I was absolutely just -I still -- it was so fanciful the -- you know, the scenario and I think l'd been told to sign these cash 78

So they said "If you don't plead guilty, we're going to add the theft charge and escalate it to the Crown Court and you can be facing seven years in jail". So at the Magistrates' Court, you know the maximum they can do, they said "If you don't plead guilty, we're going to add a theft charge, and there's 14 charges held on account, and we're going to escalate to the Crown Court". So I didn't have any choice.

Everyone just looked at me and said "You can't go to jail, especially with this, when you haven't done anything".
Q. I think you mention that one of those hearings, the Post Office accepted that the alleged shortfall figure was false; is that right?
A. Yes. So before that even I was promised that this Tony Robertson wouldn't appear and at one of the cases he decided it was in my best interest for him to appear and put me under stress and pressure. And, unfortunately, I was carted off in an ambulance because my legal team said "He shouldn't be anywhere near, at all, the court. If he's not giving evidence, he doesn't need to be there". But he decided to turn up anyway. That's how nasty they were.

Yes, so, in court, bearing in mind I'd never been given a contract, the only thing I'd ever signed 80

literally their own law.

8 March 2004; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. What sentence did you receive?
A. It was community service, a fine and a year's probation.
Q. Your conviction has been quashed?
A. It was in December '19.
Q. I'm now going to ask you some questions about the impact that all of this has had on you. You mentioned -- dealing firstly with financial impact, you mentioned previously about borrowing money from your parents. What other financial losses have you suffered?
A. You can't really quantify it over 20 years. Even little things, like getting insurance, you have to go to the underwriters, if you can get it. Even if my -you know, they put the premiums up on things that you need, even getting a bank account, you can't get, you have to be given a basic bank account with higher charges, and you're not allowed a current account, because you have got a criminal record. There's all to pay back my family, I still owe some of it. You
figure here, they had inflated by 15 per cent. So they had provided -- they had created a false account for the court, I think to increase the severity.

So the auditor, good old Kevin, when he was in, had pulled the cash drawer out and, when my mother had taken over, she'd pulled it a little bit further and, in the back, was foreign currency he hadn't counted and stamps he hadn't counted. Fair enough.

And then there was these dockets, and cheques on hand. So I had taken a cheque for a service, so that's effectively a cash figure. Instead of deducting those from the audit figure, they added them. And the $£ 400$-odd of dockets, instead of deducting those, they added them on too. Then they also refused to deduct the cash and the stamps that had been found in the till drawer afterwards, as well.

None of those funds were ever returned to me, by the way, so they admitted in court, and they said at the next hearing -- because then it had to go for pre-sentence -- pre-sentencing report, or whatever. So the next hearing they promised that they would present the correct account, having already provided a false one to the court. They never did. They were a power to themselves. Even the courts couldn't make the Post Office do what they wanted. They were 82
think: when will this ever stop following me, you know, and it never does.
Q. How much do you still owe people?
A. I don't know the exact figure but it was, including interest, I think it was about $£ 19,000$ I had to borrow off my parents, a big chunk of that was to give the Post Office alleged shortfall and then, obviously, just to cover life, rent and bills at home, and things like that. And then there's, oh, all sorts of other help I've had off people, which ... you just can't quantify.
Q. What about the business itself?
A. So the business was just, sort of, taken away from me, if you like. Not taken away, but I was just removed from it by them. So after I committed this heinous crime, in their eyes, the most arm's length person they could ask to go and watch the Post Office was my mother, which didn't -- at the time -- all this just doesn't add up, does it? Then my poor old Mum, she was in a well paid job, she was a manager in a canteen, so she came to keep the office open, took some holidays and she thought it would just be a short-term thing because all of the indications from the Post Office were this is going to get sorted.

And, of course, constantly we're asking "You 84
tell us -- we'll pay for the forensic accountants, if you want, you just tell us we'll pay for it, no problem because this needs to be sorted out". This is
before the trials, obviously. And, of course, after all the family history, my Mum didn't want the office to close either, so she ended up staying and, obviously, she went from a job with holidays, holiday, sick pay, pension, et cetera, et cetera, took a pay cut and has been stuck in a Post Office ever since.
Q. How did you feel about your mother taking over the Post Office from you?
A. Again, my naiveté, the only thing we wanted the office open for was the village. The village was such a nice -- it's a rural idyll. It's right in the middle of the North Yorkshire Moors, I think the Sunday Times called it the "prettiest village in England" and the community was brilliant. We thought "Well, we fought all these years, we served all these years, let's not let this wreck it". It wasn't for the Post Office's benefit, it was for the village's benefit, and you think: well, you just -- I do not know, what went through their minds I don't know.
Q. What did you do for work?
A. So, to start with, obviously initially afterwards, there was no work and then the local landlord offered 85
me some shifts, just ad hoc casual work. So I sort of got back into there. A few years after, I sort of worked in the kitchens in the pub and things like that, and I did a few years like that and then, as time went on, family encouraged me to pick up the design work again, so I started picking up a bit of that. And then, eventually, I was lucky, my Dad ran a small printing business and he said "Well, come and do the design work for us", and we sort of, over the years, I just sort of naturally merged, if you like. You know, we sort of went down that route and I'm glad actually.

I didn't sign on, I didn't want to be a burden on the state but so many more of my colleagues haven't had that ability to go into work, so I do feel -"lucky" is a weird word to use but I feel lucky, if you like, that I had an opportunity to be able to start paying my own bills again.
Q. You have already mentioned some of the impacts that this has had on your mental health. What impact or continuing impact does it have?
A. I don't think you'll speak to a person in this Inquiry that it won't be with them forever.

I just hope that the Post Office ... it's -- my
brother came up with a good analogy. Trying to 86
explain it to people: imagine your house has burnt down, "Oh, you left a candle on by the curtain", "But I didn't have any candles in the house, it was this magical dragon appeared and burnt my house down". It was a fiction as far fetched as that the Post Office could like and then cover it up for all these years and then when they even explicitly were told the truth by external auditors, continued to cover it up and not at that point say, "oh, your conviction's unsafe".

They let us suffer for longer -- even now, you can read the Post Office dribble that they put out and you think: you've got no contrition, you've got no remorse, you're just in brand protection 101 mode, that's all you're interested in. You just think: just put the victims first, for once. That's all we want.
Q. How do you feel about yourself now?
A. I don't know. The battle has kept us going, I think. The fight for justice. Alan, obviously, formed the JFSA and, oh, the first meeting I went into ... I walked into this little village hall, after being told I was the only one this ever happened to, and --

It was funny actually, there was a friend of my Mum, she had heard from a wholesaler of hers that his son-in-law in Bridlington, which is a town just down
the coast, this is a few years afterwards, having problems, and would -- then looked into it and heard about this JFSA, and I walked into the village hall and I looked round and I just thought: these just look like my grandparents because of most of the subpostmasters had retirement jobs, et cetera, I was once of the exceptions, being so young. And I looked around and I thought: are these all ... oh. The weight just lifted and I thought it's not just me. They have lied. This is disgusting, you know. And then the support was excellent and I think that's what's kept everyone going is the truth always comes out, always comes out. It's just taken 20 years for it to get there.
Q. I think you mention in your statement that you feel like your personality is different now?
A. Oh, yes, it's just suspicion of most things and people and, like, hyper-vigilance, things like that. Never go away. It's absolutely draining sometimes. Sometimes it's been an advantage to be so fastidious about things and careful but, other times, you just think I just wish I could let loose and be my old self.
Q. I think you also mention in your statement about the impact it's had on your physical health as well?
A. Yes. All that stopped because you'd get snide remarks before I took over, I was playing rugby, swimming, running, weight lifting, you name it. I did swim sprint for the county, I was a sprinter for the county, I threw discus, things like that. I was very, very fit and then, when you don't want to go out afterwards, it just disappears.
Q. You have touched on this a moment ago when you said you didn't want to go out. What impact has this had on your social life?
A. Well, we always made an effort every New Year's Eve ... we make an effort to go out -- because it would signal another year on from it. Sorry.
Q. What's happened to those New Year's drinks?
A. Well, that's the one thing we tried to keep going and, obviously, when we started, when we figured out the Post Office were this massive pack of lying hounds, this sort of battle took over. So for a few years, not immediately after, but years after, we thought: well, let's celebrate getting another year past.
Q. I think prior to all of this you mention in your statements you used to be quite social and go for Christmas drinks with friends? 89
off people, even five, six, seven years after, snide remarks. Even when I worked in a new job, you'd go and see a customer and he'd say, "Oh you're so and so", and you think: oh, it won't ever leave me, you know. It was in the papers, and all that sort of jazz and you just think, oh. And so, in the end, you think I just can't be bothered with the hassle. I can't be bothered trying to tell them this tale about the fantastical dragon that didn't exist. So you think it's just easier to stay in.
Q. What snide remarks would you hear?
A. Just, you know, sort of "Oh, have you got a new car outside, have you been on any nice holidays", same sort of things, you know. "Aren't you the guy that lost all that money", and things like that. So you just think, well, you know.
Q. What about your family. How did this impact on the relationship with your grandfather?
A. Well, let me start somewhere else. So my little brother was still at school, he would get all sorts of comments at school. Obviously, my poor old Mum, who took the office over, she got stress-triggered rheumatoid arthritis and she was diagnosed with PTSD as well.
(Pause) 90

And then my wife, she was also dragged to a police station by the Post Office and interviewed, against her will, and "You have to come, you must come", you know. So she had that to deal with. And then she was diagnosed with about four or five stress-triggered autoimmune conditions. (Pause)

And then, yeah, my maternal grandfather, who'd run the office, he was a Post Office man, unfortunately, so he sort of thought: how can this glowing organisation, the jewel of the British Crown, how could they possibly lie? If they say the computer system's working, it's working. So that was it for me and him, really. We ...

I do apologise.
Q. Please, don't apologise. Do let me know if you would like a moment.

I think it's right, isn't it, that your grandfather died before your conviction was quashed?
A. Yes. So that's one of the biggest tragedies.
Q. What do you mean by "tragedy"? How does it make you feel?
A. I think you can probably understand. But for him, he wasn't around long enough to hear even the truth come out in the high courts, reading internal documents and then even -- even after the High Court where they came 91
to the settlement and they still even then hadn't disclosed other evidence which was pertinent to all our cases -- which, in my view, makes the 555 settlement totally unjust -- and then when we get to the High Court, suddenly what's this Clarke advice? What's it? Oh, you did know about the -- why didn't you tell us that when we were in the High Court when you're supposed to be open and honest. So he didn't get to hear any of that either. You know, he didn't get to see that -- he didn't get to see that these people were systematically -- I mean, I would even say it was a conspiracy. It was that far.

The investigators -- I mean, I read somewhere that they were incentivised for results. I mean, you basically turned them into bounty hunters on commission. How is that even a thing in the British justice system? They absolutely destroyed people's faith in justice system and if he had seen that outrage, I think that would have helped.
Q. What compensation have you received so far?
A. So from the High Court case, I think I got awarded 12,000-something and there was another balance, a little balancing payment, afterwards and, again, I just used that to -- well, some of the money I went to put straight back into the campaign because we knew it 92
wasn't the end. We knew they were still lying. We knew there's some coming up, so I put a couple of thousand into the ongoing campaign and the rest I just started paying people back.
Q. What would you like from the Post Office now?
A. You'll have to bear with me. I beg your indulgence. There's a few points I'd like to make.
Q. Please.
A. Just going back actually into my -- just a bit back, there's -- the investigators (indicated) never investigated, like the police would be forced to do. Even if someone admits to a murder, the police still have to go and check those facts and check that they're not being forced to admit to a murder. The investigators never, ever -- you can look at all the internal paperwork -- investigated the system. They didn't look that power cut problems the office was having. They didn't look at the communication. BT had to put a second ISDN line into my office because at that point there was two lines we had. I think we had four lines into the office because the communication was that bad.

After my Mum took over, the computer system was "replaced" and you think why was none of this -- why didn't they investigate the system? Why did they only
look at the subpostmasters? And I think the answer is it was cheaper and easier and they were being incentivised maybe. And you think, well, if investigators aren't performing their duty as an investigator and then as a prosecutor -- you think, well, surely when we get to these High Court cases -and then -- oh. Sorry, I digress. It beggars belief.

Right. After -- sorry, bear with me.
After a few years, the area manager (that was my area manager became my mother's area manager) came back to the office after she'd left the Post Office, I suggest out of guilt, and she told my Mum that she was sorry what they'd done to me -- and I'm going to use a swear, I apologise, but l'm quoting. She said:
"That Tony Robertson was a bastard who loved his job too much and no-one at the Post Office liked him."

And why would she make the effort to go all that way back after she's left the Post Office to see my Mum and apologise? My Mum was that paranoid when she took over the office instead of balancing once a week, she balanced every day because she was that afraid of this system. There was one occasion where she had a deficit which was exact amount of the foreign currency to the penny that she had experienced. So when she rang the area manager, they agreed that was
the problem, that must be what it is. They didn't investigate. They just said, "You have to pay the money back". So this was -- this continued. This wasn't just isolated to me. I want to sort of paint the picture that when I left, the problems didn't leave with me, they kept on going.

The helpline: I would suggest that they're very complicit in this scandal. And when we talk about "Horizon IT system" I want everyone to realise that that system included human teams as part of that system as the feedback loops, in the error notice and transaction corrections, and the helpline. So we're not just talking about a computer system that went wrong; we're also talking about the human teams within that IT system that went wrong or were complicit or did things on purpose.

I have a weird survivor's guilt now as well, as well as the guilt of being stupid and all the things that's happened to my family. You have a -- I think 33 people have died before receiving anything like compensation or their names cleared, and that figure's only going to go up if there's a delay.

I'd also like to say that one evening I was carted off to the police station after I was convicted to have my DNA fingerprints taken from me forcefully,
and they said it: if I didn't comply, it would be forcefully because they had the right to do it 30 days after any conviction. I was then kicked out of a police station at 12 at night with no phone, no money, 12 miles from home.

So I think the police need to look at themselves and I would suggest that no private prosecutions should be allowed to use police premises. The Post Office investigators did that to intimidate people. I'm absolutely sure of it. They wanted people to believe that they were the police or bigger than the police. They bullied the police. We've heard it in lots of witness statements where they just "you've got to charge them, you've got to do this". So one of my suggestions is that police infrastructure should never be allowed to be used for private prosecutions.

This takes me on to something else: the Director of the Public Prosecutions and the Justice Select Committee. I think it's incomprehensible that a private prosecution can be brought from someone who is both a victim, the investigator, and the prosecutor. How can that happen in this day and age?

I would like to see the creation of a private prosecution register because if there had been one 96
when I was -- my solicitors would have been able to do a quick search, hang on a minute, look at all these other Post Office cases all been told they're the only one. My prosecution would never have gone ahead.

I'd also like that any private prosecution in the future is automatically passed to the DPP and at which he point he can allow it to go forward; he can refuse it because, like our cases, they were just a total malicious affront to the public conscience that should never have been anywhere near a court. They abused the court system more than anything you'll effort read about, I think, in our lifetimes.

And -- or he could strip it from them and pass it to the CPS and the police, so that proper oversight, proper investigation and a proper decision could be made about prosecution, unlike what the Post Office did.

To the Inquiry, I'd like to make a suggestion. Mr Beer started calling the Post Office "POL". I was prosecuted by the Royal Mail. There's been Consignia and various legal guises of what "the Post Office" is, but they are the Post Office. They're not POL. The public don't know what POL is. Sorry, bear with me.

They're not Voldemort. We can name them. They always have been, and they are, the Post Office.

They're not POL to many people -- certainly not to me. They're the Post Office. So that's one thing I would like you to consider, is call them the "Post Office" because that's who they are and that's what did the wrong.

When I was prosecuted, Adam Crozier was the Chairman or the Chief Executive. I read in a BBC Telegraph article that a few years before he took over he admitted falsifying sales figures and he was let off for youthful indiscretion. This is the same man that then decided for a few thousand pounds that I should be prosecuted and destroy my life. I think he should be here answering questions, as well as all the other heads of Post Office. I don't think there's one that can be allowed to get away from this. This has happened for 20 years.

To the Federation, the National Federation. Now, when I first contacted the Federation, they advised me to write letters of contrition to get my job back. They formatted the letters and, if you read them, they're a load of dribble. But they were then used against me as a sign of guilt. Those letters were presented as a sign of guilt. The NFSP (who obviously we all know now has been stripped because they're not a proper union), I think that the minimum 98
they should be doing is paying back all of the subscriptions to the subpostmasters that have been affected. And I think they should be disbanded actually. I think they're too -- too closely wound up with this whole scandal to survive it.

Specifically to the Post Office: I want you to remove onerous threats, NDAs, gagging clauses from any of your serving or past staff because I know the reason that people haven't come forward like we want them to, and we've -- as the JFSA, we've had these people come to us and say, "I've got this information. We can't say it because we've been threatened". If you really, really are wanting to get this behind you, let those people come forward: the investigators, the helpline staff, the investigators. Let them tell us what they know because without that we're not going to get to the bottom of this.

I'd like to know -- I think from the evidence I've seen -- this is my submission of the situation -but the Post Office bosses were paid bonuses based on performance. And we all know that the Post Office were operating suspense accounts into the millions, massive suspense accounts, which were either postmasters' money, failed two-sided transactions, and I'm pretty sure in saying that, from my understanding,
that those suspense accounts were added to the profit and loss accounts of the Post Office, therefore inflating the performance figures, therefore inflating the bonuses that the top staff were getting. Victims' money, in my opinion, was going into the pockets of those that had persecuted them -- directly nearly.

I'd like a proper answer from them about how their investigators were incentivised. I want to know whether it was something to do with promotions, bonuses, remuneration, but I think that should be investigated properly. I want to know why they approached the High Court cases with such disregard for openness. And I also want to know when our convictions were overturned why they felt it necessary to stand up in court and read out all of the guilty things they thought we were in court just before our convictions were quashed, when a lot of that evidence, as we know, was gleaned from nefarious ways.

Finally, I'm going to be a bit flippant but there is a serious point. I'd like to make an offer of money to the Post Office. Don't all fall off your chairs, but I'd like Nick Read to put on the wall of all these people dealing with these historic thingies their strap line, with a slight amendment:
"Helping our victims to get life's important 100

| 1 | things done." |
| :---: | :---: |
| 2 | I want that put on every wall because until they |
| 3 | put that on every wall and put the victims first (not |
| 4 | themselves, not their solicitors, not the Treasury, |
| 5 | and not the Government), until the victims are put |
| 6 | first this is never going to go away. We will be |
| 7 | a thorn in their side ad infinitum. They will never |
| 8 | get closure, they'll never be able to privatise it, |
| 9 | they'll never be able to move on unless they put the |
| 10 | victims first. And I think, even now, with the fake |
| 11 | photocopy apology we got and things like that, |
| 12 | everything you read, there's still -- people haven't |
| 13 | got interim payments. They're still hanging on to |
| 14 | these shreds of notes that were written up by |
| 15 | investigators, of them being interpreted, interpreted, |
| 16 | "Oh, they're guilty. Look, he admitted this, this, |
| 17 | this, this and this". But none of its true because |
| 18 | the Horizon system was spitting out figures that just |
| 19 | didn't add up. And until they put the victims first, |
| 20 | I don't think we can ever, ever move forwards. |
| 21 | My last point is we've seen in -- I think |
| 22 | there's been 700 prosecutions, the High Court cases, |
| 23 | the failed mediation and the quashings that I don't |
| 24 | know how many judges or magistrates that involves, but |
| 25 | we know that in most of those cases the Post Office 101 |
| 1 | that. So I've had an interim payment and I shall be |
| 2 | following them for compensation until the day I die. |
| 3 | SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right, I understand fully. |
| 4 | A. I'd also -- let me just -- sorry, sorry, Sir Wyn. |
| 5 | SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, please carry on. |
| 6 | A. I'd like to make the point that the 555 , the victims |
| 7 | who are in this little loop, feedback loop, I think |
| 8 | it's incomprehensible that they are not dealing them |
| 9 | with open honesty and coming forwards. The minimum |
| 10 | they should be given back -- let's exclude |
| 11 | compensation -- is the money that they took off them |
| 12 | falsely. |
| 13 | SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. It just remains for me to |
| 14 | thank you for making a comprehensive witness |
| 15 | statement, for coming to give oral evidence, obviously |
| 16 | preparing yourself extremely thoroughly to do so, and |
| 17 | giving me the benefit of many important details. So |
| 18 | thank you very much. |
| 19 | A. Thank you, Sir Wyn. |
| 20 | MS KENNEDY: Chair, Ithink we're back at 2.00. |
| 21 | SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. See you then. |
| 22 | MS KENNEDY: Thank you. |
| 23 | (1.03 pm) |
| 24 | (Luncheon Adjournment) |
| 25 | (2.00 pm) |

were not forthcoming. They didn't give full disclosure.

So hope this Inquiry has the teeth to force that evidence out of them because I know, from personal experience, that they will try and hide it.

That's all I've got to say thanks.
Q. Is there anything else you wanted to say?
A. That's all, thanks.

MS KENNEDY: I'll just turn to the Chair to see if he has any questions for you.

Do you have any questions, Chair?
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Just one question, please. When Ms Kennedy was asking you about compensation, you mentioned the compensation from the civil proceedings but obviously, because your conviction is quashed, you may have made an application for an interim payment. What is your position on that?
A. Yes, let me be clear, Sir Wyn. So I didn't actually receive any compensation from the High Court. It was the JFSA gifted us a proportion because we went in with an all-for-one attitude to start with.

So in the High Court they specifically said, "We're not giving any compensation to anyone who hasn't had a conviction". So now I feel that I'm a bit lucky because I have a legal route to chase 102

MR BLAKE: Good afternoon, Chair.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Let me unmute. Good afternoon, Mr Blake.
MR BLAKE: We have this afternoon two witnesses who have been granted anonymity.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes.
MR BLAKE: The first I'm going to refer to as Witness 0283 , and that is the number that I've taken from the right-hand side of the witness statement that he has provided.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Fine.

## WITNESS 0283 (affirmed)

 Questioned by MR BLAKEMR BLAKE: Thank you very much. As you know, I'm Julian Blake and I'm going to be asking questions on behalf of the Chair this afternoon. We know you as Witness 0283. You should have in front of you a witness statement. Can you confirm that you have a witness statement dated, I think, 4 February of this year?
A. Ido.
Q. Can I ask you just to turn to the final page of that witness statement. I think it's page 21. Can you confirm that that is your signature on that page?
A. Correct, it is my signature.

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Q. Can you confirm that that statement is true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. It is. Thank you.
Q. Thank you very much.
l'm going to start by asking you about your background. Now, you don't need to tell us exactly where you live but can you tell us what area of the country you live in?
A. I live in Oxford.
Q. You're married and we're going to hear from your wife next. What about your family life? Do you have children?
A. I've got two children. One 24 , in his final year of medicine at Leeds, and my daughter is 21 . She's finished her university and she is working in a recruitment firm.
Q. What job did you do before running a Post Office?
A. A little bit of history. I arrived in UK ' 86 . I worked for London Underground for a short period, before joining the Prison Service, I was five years in London, and then moved to Oxford for the next five years. I finished my service in ' 97 in the Prison Service. I did three years in a travel agency, travelling from Oxford to London, which meant I woke up at 4.30 in the morning to catch the bus at 7.00 to 105
reach my place of work, 8.30/9.00. I'd finish from there and return back to Oxford by 7.00 in the evening and, at that particular point, my wife and we decided that this was too much and we needed something more stable and looked at a post office.
Q. You have mentioned that you spent some time in the Prison Service and I think that's why you have been granted some anonymity. Can you just tell us what your duties were, in general terms, there?
A. I was a prison officer, locking, unlocking, dealing with all aspects of a prisoner's life.
Q. Why did you want to run a post office?
A. Secure income, good prospects, a community, working within the community, permanency. So a lot of -I mean, the Post Office being the Post Office, with a set salary so, you know, you were assured of some sort of an income, in spite of any other events that might happen.
Q. You weren't the subpostmaster; is that right?
A. That's correct. The business that we purchased was in the limited company's name. [Redacted], because she put in her savings into the company, was the director and I was the company secretary, so it was felt that, as the director, she should be the postmistress.
Q. I am going to pause you there briefly, just because 106
there was a name that was mentioned and I might just take two minutes just to check with the solicitor to the Inquiry whether it's necessary to break for a short period.
A. I apologise.
Q. That's absolutely understandable.

Obviously, for all of those who are in the room, there are restriction orders in place with regards to the identification of yourself and your wife.

So your wife was the subpostmistress and what was your technical role, what was your job description?
A. Practical everyday working of the shop and the Post Office on a day-to-day basis was my job. In practice, I was the subpostmaster because my wife, she had a job, she was a deputy head school teacher working in a job share. We had two young children at that point who were one and four years old, so we felt that the set up of the Post Office and the shop, and me looking after that, would allow us, with her job share, to combine a business salary earnings with the children's lives.
Q. You said that there was a business as well. So what did you sell?
A. It was a retail shop. At that particular point, it
was more of a newsagent when we took it over. Over the years, we developed lots of services within that shop.
Q. Can you remember the year that you actually bought the Post Office?
A. 2001 .
Q. 2001. I'm going to ask you about Horizon.
A. Yes. It was 2001 on $9 / 11$, the exact date that we had a stock-take.
Q. When you purchased the Post Office was Horizon in place at the time?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you receive training on Horizon?
A. Two days' training on site.
Q. How was that training for you?
A. They taught us how to go through transactions, how to pay pensions, sell stamps, sell fishing licences, how to do daily transactions. They went through that both practically and with manuals being provided, should there be a need.
Q. Was it useful?
A. I knew nothing of the Post Office or the shop, so for me, it was useful in the sense I learnt a new skill of what to do on an immediate basis, if a customer came into the Post Office, how and what to serve them, yes. 108
$\qquad$
Q. Is that the only time when you were trained on Horizon?
A. I had issues with the system in terms of shortfalls, in terms of discrepancies, which I consistently raised with the area manager. There were shortages which built up and we were audited in February 2002 and that audit showed a discrepancy of just under $£ 2,000$, which I was told to make good, and I could make it good immediately from the shop sales. The area manager, she looked at what had happened, acknowledged, and said that there were mitigating circumstances and she was going to arrange for additional training for me to happen. That was an extra Wednesday when a trainer attended.
Q. Was that extra training useful?
A. Yes, in a sense. It certainly was useful.

Unfortunately, things didn't go wrong or happen as and when you demand things to, you know, for transactions to take place. So, certainly, their input helped my understanding a little bit but unexplained shortfalls didn't go.
Q. So you didn't experience shortfalls during the training session itself?
A. He was there for a balance and, you know, if there was a small amount of a shortfall, you know, by this time, 109
because of the written warning that I was sent that I must make good any shortfalls, and if there were overs I should take them out, I meticulously made sure on every Wednesday balance the totals were correct. I put money in. So there was no shortage after the audit in February 2002.
Q. So l'd like to talk you through the various shortfalls. When did you first experience shortfalls?
A. Right from the start, right from the start, ranging from small, a few $£ 20, £ 30, £ 50$, right up to $£ 300 / £ 400$. Again, you would get correction notices a few months down the line and, on occasions, that may give you a positive surplus balance, again, that would be in the region of $£ 100 / £ 200$, which we would then take out but balance the books.
Q. Can you tell us what is a correction notice?
A. If there was an error that was discovered subsequent to the balancing, by the back office -- Post Office back office, they would then send you a written correction, an invoice sort of a thing, saying that, for this particular thing, this much amount to be debited or to be credited. And then you sort of rang the help desk and said "I've received this correction note, what do I do, how do I deal with it?" They would talk you through and get you to enter that into 110
correction note, but I was able to put that into the suspense account, and move on, so that the following day we could open.
Q. When you did call the helpline, in general, did you speak to just one tier? We heard another witness talk about --
A. There were two tiers. If the first tier couldn't help you they would then escalate and say to you "We will pass this to tier two, who will subsequently get in touch". That was the problem because you needed something sorted before 8.00 on the balancing day, otherwise you had issues with opening up the following day. So, at that point, you would then do the best you could, as you understood it, to balance and turn over a new page to start work on the following Thursday.
Q. You've mentioned a couple of particular shortfalls and I'd like to take them chronologically, if we can. So after, I think, six months, do you recall a particular shortfall?
A. That's the $£ 5,000$ shorffall that I mentioned but, at the audit, we had a shorffall, cumulative shorffall, of just under $£ 2,000$, at the first audit in February 2002, where I was given a written warning by the regional manager.

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Q. In total, how much do you think you paid to cover alleged shortfalls?
A. It could be anywhere from $£ 20,000$ to $£ 65,000$. To qualify that, unfortunately we don't know because my staff, who was a manager in the Post Office, was committing fraud, benefit fraud, in the Post Office and when we had the second audit and the auditors and investigators arrested my staff, took him to the Post Office, they searched his house, they found $£ 10,000$ in cash and they found $£ 5,000$ worth of benefit books in his possession there.

And that has complicated getting an exact figure
of -- but when the audit took place in 2004, July, there were no shortages. In fact, on completion of the audit, we were $£ 99$ over because, at every balancing day, I made sure that we covered any shortfall, if there were.
Q. So the figure that you have given me, I think, was quite a broad figure and that, I think you said, included sums that perhaps were stolen or were outside direct shortfalls.
A. Yes.
Q. I think in your statement you said between $£ 17,000$ and $£ 22,000$ in shortfalls?
A. Correct, correct, correct.
Q. Let's talk about the audits. You have mentioned that there are two audits.
A. Yes.
Q. The first, 8 February 2002, where you were told it was a shortfall of $£ 2,000$. At first, how many auditors attended or people who were carrying out an audit? How many attended?
A. Two.
Q. Did anybody else arrive?
A. Oh, yes. When they discovered the shortfall, they then called the security team, so security people arrived and I was interviewed, I was cautioned, the interview was recorded. At the end of that, the area manager, she decided that what I had said was going to be taken as mitigating circumstances and that she was going to issue me with a written warning.

Now, this is all in spite of me not being the subpostmaster, to warning was given to me in my name. I was considered and taken to be the postmaster in all these interactions.
Q. You said you were interviewed. Where did that take place?
A. That took place in the Post Office, in full view. It
was a three-counter Post Office. As you enter the shop with glass windows, open in sight of everyone. 114
Q. I think you said that you paid back the $£ 2,000$ shortfall?
A. Yes. Fortunately for us, we developed our shop, which was turning over a substantial amount, you know. So we had a good cash flow and that helped me to be able to cover the shortfall.
Q. The second audit was 15 July 2004.
A. Correct.
Q. What kind of an audit was that?
A. That was, I understand, an asset verification audit.
Q. Were you there for that initially?
A. No. I lived about 45 minutes away from the Post Office and, by this time, I was concentrating more on further developing the shop because the Post Office salary, the pensions had all started to go directly into banks. At one point we were paying approximately $£ 100,000$ weekly in benefits to Claimants. That was slowly drying up. I couldn't see a greater future in the Post Office, whereas I could develop things in the shop. So I was not there in the Post Office to open up.
Q. When you did hear that the auditors had arrived, what did you do about it?
A. So I received a call from my staff saying that there were three people who were not allowing the

Post Office to be opened. I thought that this was a hostage situation. I called the police, said that I'd received a call from my staff that they were unable to open the Post Office, I was leaving immediately to attend, and I reached just around 10.00 .

By this point, the investigator had actually arrested my staff in the Post Office. They had conducted the audit, finished it. They had found nothing to help them but they had arrested that member of staff.

They now needed to be able to search his house but they couldn't do that without evidence of wrongdoing and, despite not finding anything in the audit and in the Post Office, they had the time up to 12 noon to get some evidence, and they fabricated one document. One of the investigators produced one document saying that I found it, I found it, we can now get a warrant to search my staff's residence.

They went on to obviously search his house and they found what I described previously.
Q. It's right to say that your staff member had stolen or was found to have stolen --
A. Yes, he was found guilty. He received two and a half years' prison sentence as well.

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A. It was -- I was suspended. The subpostmistress was
Q. In relation to that audit that took place at that time, despite what happened with your employee, was there a shortfall showing to auditors?
A. No, there was a discrepancy. There was not a shortfall. That discrepancy was that it was $£ 99$ over, the Post Office owed me that money. So, in essence, there was no shortfall but they still called this financial irregularities, splashed me over the front pages of [redacted] and suspended -- took my keys, suspended me, and installed a new subpostmaster and not -- yes.
Q. Can you describe a conversation that you had with the auditor?
A. No conversation whatsoever with the auditors.
Q. Were you told what would happen to you?
A. Yes. Simon Smith, the area manager, told me that if I did not co-operate with the Post Office then they would seize our assets, our home, they would freeze our bank accounts and I was left under no doubt that I had to follow and do what they asked me to do. He told me I would never work in a post office, although I had no contract with the Post Office, I was not the subpostmaster. All these things were done to me.
Q. What happened to your branch?
suspended. Our keys were taken. We were prohibited from entering and the new subpostmaster was warned that if Simon Smith saw us inside the Post Office, he would terminate that subpostmaster's contract as well. Simon Smith told me that he had done this previously. He suggested that I resign to prevent my business from going bankrupt.
Q. In all of that experience, how did you feel?
A. I felt, you know -- my, you know, stomach was churning, you know. It's difficult but every thing -you know, I was nervous, I was afraid, my future was flashing before my eyes. Overnight, I lost $£ 50,000$ salary.
Q. I want to talk to you about the impact on you both financial and personal. Let's start with financial then. You said you lost your salary of $£ 50,000$. How did you manage to keep your business?
A. So we -- where have I got now?

So we obviously started developing the shop much earlier. We developed a colour photo lab. We managed to get the National Lottery. We introduced an off-licence. We started making sandwiches and delivering sandwiches to shops in Oxford.

We started providing financial services, Western
Union. That was a bone of contention with the
were moving from our house, which was 45 minutes away to a place which was literally five to ten minutes away from the shop, because with two young children, school going, all the other things, it had been become very difficult to -- you know, to commute and get from work to home and, on that particular day, front page -- the name of the Post Office, and it was splashed on the front pages whilst we were transporting our goods, we stopped at a petrol station and I saw in the [redacted] the front page, and I just could not believe that this is happening to us.

They said -- put my name in it, they said I was a subpostmaster and they said this was -- there were financial irregularities. I mean, that falsehood -there were no financial irregularities. Their audit proved that there was a credit in the audit and that absolutely destroyed our money transfer business, you know.

We were sending thousands of pounds for customers to Kenya every month and, like I said, we had our own money business service licence, our consumer credit licence, customers would come in to send money and if I was not available, they would take -- complete a send form, wrap it round the money that they wanted to send, leave it with my staff and 120
$\qquad$
go away. Amounts would range from between a few pounds to a few thousand pounds. They simply left the money, no receipt or anything. They absolutely trusted me. Their trust was not misplaced and they affectionately called me the "old man".
Q. How did that go after the newspaper article?
A. It absolutely -- it absolutely crashed. A Kenyan woman who used to use our money transfer shop, money transfer, you know, came into the shop a few years ago and said that, as a result of the newspaper article and the financial irregularities as reported by the Post Office, we stopped using the shop to send money and that business absolutely closed.
Q. How about your wider reputation in the local community?
A. Because we lived further away, where we lived it didn't matter that much but when we were at work, at the shop, we were openly accused of being fraudsters.
Q. How about your health?
A. I subsequently developed diabetes, I had heart issues, I got thyroid problems, I'm on constant medication -again, a lot of these are stress-related, whilst not directly contributed by the Post Office, certainly those are, you know, factors which have contributed to the ill health. At one point, my feet and back were 121
hurting so much I started taking paracetamol. When that stopped having an effect, I moved on to co-codamol. When that stopped having an effect I went on to tramadol, and I recognised that this was not good.

I tried to stop. My body would start shivering. I would not be able to sleep. I'd be pacing up and down my bedroom, disturbing my wife and the children sleeping on the floor below. So, again, at 2.00, in desperation, I'd take a tramadol. My shaking would subside, I would get some sleep, wake up in the morning, go to the shop and continue.

In holiday time, my wife went with the children for a week to London and that period I decided I'm going to stop taking these painkillers, I stopped, I suffered for a full week, but I was finally able to get off those medications and, I mean, now I just take the medications which I'm required to take as a preventative measure for the diabetes and for the cholesterol, for the blood pressure and heart. But those are maintaining the status quo, rather than for ...
Q. We're going to hear from your wife shortly but what was your observations about her at the time. Do you think she was affected?
A. Enormously. I mean, I tried to shield her as much as possible and take all the flak on my shoulders but, at the end, you know, money issues and childcare I couldn't be there as much as I previously did, you know. When I finished in my Prison Service and whilst I was working for the travel agency, I would look after my son and I would change his nappies and my wife was a deputy head, so she used to work and I used to look after the children, and I would work and she would look after. We interchanged roles.

But these things, it's a partnership. We worked together, we suffered together. She silently suffered without saying much.
Q. How about your children?
A. Oh, yeah, when I had my heart attack they were both magic. They both stepped in, they both came into the shop, you know, did all the ordering and did the shop sales and worked on the counter and actually supported my wife and said to her, "Listen, you have to be strong for all of us now". I was for five days in a coma but, you know, that's health. I can't blame the Post Office for that. What -- they did contribute to that but, yeah, the children were really wonderful, you know. You know, I can't bless them enough.
Q. Finally, in terms of the Post Office, I think your
wife was a party to the Group Litigation, the Bates and Others case; is that right?
A. Both of us were. I was. Even I was and she was, yes.
Q. Did you receive a payment from that?
A. I did. I received a small payment of $£ 5,000$.
Q. Do you know how much your wife received?
A. I think it was about 40,000 .
Q. Okay.
A. I don't know the exact figure for her but about 40,000.
Q. What would you like from the Post Office now?
A. So, I mean, the financial part was that we remortgaged our house on an interest only 140,000 which was due for repayment on July 2020. We had 90,000 ready, we were short of 50,000 , the bounce back loan came, we took that, we paid off, and cleared the --
(Unstable connection)
Q. If you could pause for one moment.
A. -- the bounce back loan, we already defaulted on the bounce back loan.
Q. Sorry, I think there was a problem with the internet connection there. Let's try once more. I think you were talking about your house and loans that you had taken out is that right?
A. That's correct. $£ 140,000$ interest-only loan, which
was due for repayment in July 2020. We had $£ 50,000$-sorry, we had $£ 90,000$ put aside. We didn't have the balance, we were able to take a bounce back loan of 50,000 . We were able to pay off the mortgage, based on that, to clear off the finance that was taken to purchase the shop in the first instance, but we cannot repay the bounce back loan. That has now become $£ 51,000$. NatWest have threatened to stop providing us with banking services.

We, sort of, need help now or the bank will put us into bankruptcy.
Q. So what you are asking for is financial. Is there anything else that you'd like?
A. Sorry, yes, lots of things, please -- not lots of things but, you know, what is truly amazing is that the Post Office have not put forward a single case, not one case of a subpostmaster living in luxury, driving a Ferrari, having expensive goods, holidaying and partying. What has happened to their ill-gotten gains? No-one asked the question "Where is this so-called missing money?" In fact, every single affected postmaster has been shown to be suffering, broken financially, emotionally, physically and reputationally.

I am torn between wanting full and final 125
compensation and retribution for the perpetrators. But, no, not retribution, actually justice for all the pain, suffering that these executives are responsible for and ministers are culpable for allowing it to happen. These people were not unpaid voluntary workers but all extremely well paid individuals and not one person accountable.

Lord Coulson of the Appeals Court correctly described the actions and behaviour of the Post Office as Victorian factory owners and Justice Fraser, in hundreds of pages of carefully considered arguments, delivered a judgment that totally shredded all Post Office's defence. The Government and ministers have not come out in good light in these judgments either.

Finally, why was the Barrister Clarke's advice not disclosed to the GLO, Group Litigation, but only at the Court of Appeal for the CCRC recommended cases? How can the settlement be called full, fair and final whilst this was concealed? Surely such concealment might be a criminal offence. It is of utmost urgency that the 555 from the GLO are immediately refunded the legal costs they had to pay.

Finally, please on the last, let me thank your Honour for providing us with this opportunity to 126
tell what happened to us and also we appreciate the
efforts made by your team in making this report interaction take place. Thank you.
MR BLAKE: Sir, do you have any questions at all?
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, I don't have any questions. Thank you.

I'm very pleased to accept your thanks but, really, the thanks is all down to you and people like you who are prepared to come to tell the Inquiry all the important details that you have been divulging to us. So thank you very much.
A. Thank you.

MR BLAKE: Chair, the next witness is another anonymous witness, Witness 0282, and that's the first anonymous witness's wife.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes.
MR BLAKE: I'm going to allow her to be sworn in now so will move out the way.

## WITNESS 0282 (affirmed) Questioned by MR BLAKE

MR BLAKE: Good afternoon. As you probably heard by now, I'm Julian Blake and I'm asking questions on behalf of the Chair today.
A. Hello.
Q. Hello. We are referring to you as Witness 0282.

That's taken from the top right-hand corner of your witness statement. It's the number that your statement has been given.
A. Yes.
Q. I'm not going to identify you by name but can I just ask you to confirm that you have that statement in front of you, it's dated 4 February this year?
A. Yes, that's right, yes.
Q. Could I ask you to turn to the final page and just confirm that that is your signature? It's page 14.
A. That's right, yes, it is.
Q. Can you confirm that that statement is true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. It is.
Q. Thank you very much.

What did you do before you became a subpostmistress?
A. I was a teacher.
Q. How long had you done that for?
A. Ten years.
Q. Why did you want to become a subpostmistress?
A. It just fell with in our family life, as my husband just talked you through. It was a family decision that, you know, maybe this will help supplement our income because he had, you know, finished with the 128
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Prison Service and this was the next step for our life. We were ready to, you know, invest a bit of money and go into a small business and Post Office also seemed to be a fixed, steady income.
Q. We've hearing that your husband received training on Horizon. Did you receive any training?
A. I didn't. No, I didn't receive any training.
Q. I think we've also heard that your role was relatively limited in terms of the actual running of the Post Office branch; is that right?
A. Yes, yes, it was. I left most of the running to my husband. I think what happened is we took over in September but then in -- after a few months, I did go into the branch on certain days in December when there were double payments in the Post Office and the staff called in sick and there was a queue outside the door up to the bus stop on the main road, and my husband rang me saying "I need some help". So I had to step in and learn as you go along on the job.
Q. At that time, you were still working as a teacher?
A. I was still working as a teacher then, yes.
Q. Did a time come when you didn't work as a teacher?
A. Yes. This was three months gone and then I think it was another -- so six months since we got the business, it was getting to a point where [redacted] 129 business banking was coming, there was something else happening, somebody coming in for a fishing licence -it was lots of new things which the two days that my husband had as a training, I did not -- I don't think that covered the whole thing. So, you know, also calling the helpline was taking time. So sometimes it's easier to call a subpostmaster who we knew locally.

So that -- me being in the shop front also relieved him, my husband, of the pressure of, you know, watching that part or making sure that when the reps came from different parts for the business, one of us was around for that.
Q. So did you ever call the helpline?
A. I did not, no. I did not call the helpline.
was coming in later and later trying to balance and work out the Post Office balancing.

Sorry, I said the name.
Q. I'll stop you there for one minute. We'll just make an adjustment to the YouTube.
A. Sorry.
Q. That's absolutely fine, and everybody in this room and everybody who's following on a live link is aware that there are restriction orders in place that protect your identity.
A. My husband was coming later and later --
Q. I'll just stop you there for one minute, just while they check.

That's fine, that's absolutely fine. So, please, do continue.
A. So, yes, he was coming in later and also we realised that things are not as easy as they sound when you go into, you know, employ people. They come in and sometimes there's not a steady staffing on the days you want. So you do realise -- sorry, I'll just ...

So that's where I think we started thinking about that if I step in and help, also that it gives one more manpower from the family itself to develop the other side, as well, of the business. We were trying to concentrate on that right from the 130
Q. So while your husband was calling the helpline or calling another subpostmaster, you would assist on the shopfloor?
A. Yes, yes, that's right, yes.
Q. We've heard about the shortfalls and we've hearing about the audits so we don't need to go into detail about that today. What we're interested in hearing is the effect on you personally.

How did you feel when you were aware of the shortfalls?
A. It's very worrying. It's worrying because they were not small amounts. We were working hard to -- as a school teacher, you know, you earn that amount in a month and then in a week, if you're having a shorffall of 2,000, that is a big amount to cover. You know, like my husband just said, that we were trying to develop that and we were fortunate that we added so many new aspects of the business. There was no off licence; we added that. So we kept on adding new things and he created the cash flow and he was able to put in the shorffalls.

But I think -- I worried more because he was -his nature is just get on with it and let's, you know, sort it out. I worried about the financial aspect but how were we going to make this up, how we going to do 132
this? So that, you know, was worrying.
Q. We heard about some impact on your family. Can you tell us about the impact on your family?
A. Family, mainly it is also that I think both [redacted] and I now realise --
Q. Sorry, you have mentioned the name again.
A. Sorry.
Q. I will just alert those who are -- that's absolutely fine --
A. Sorry.
Q. Those who are in control of the YouTube link will now be aware of that and I'll mention again that everybody is aware that there are restriction orders in place in relation to your identity your husband's identity. Thank you very much. Please do continue.
A. So we were -- sorry. We now realised that how bad our health had gone with both -- but he mentioned about his, you know, all the other heart attacks and everything. But I think we've all both realised that we had worked blindly without looking after our own health. We were just very, very committed to the fact we wanted to keep our head afloat, make sure our children were fine. So, yes, that was the main thing.
Q. Did it affect your position with friends and the local community at all?
A. Yes, that's right, yes, yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: But in the end you were unable to successfully challenge your suspension and termination; is that right?
A. Yes, yes, that is right. I think it was Bond

Pearce -- I think a couple of lawyers, they wrote back to us from the Post Office side. But, yes, we were not ready to accept the suspension because we had done nothing wrong. We just couldn't accept it.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: It follows, I presume, that you wanted to challenge the suspension because you actually wanted to continue running the Post Office?
A. Yes, yes, I had the petition, I had the Post Office kept on advertising they wanted a Post Office in [redacted] and all the locals wanted it and we thought yes. In fact, when we redeveloped the business and we asked -- when we had the pharmacy put in the shop, we did go with the proposal to the Post Office saying that we would give them a combi till at the Post Office. We were quite, I think, futuristic-thinking because now they're doing that as combi tills Post Office but that time they wanted a fortress, a three-counter fortress which I don't think there was enough -- they were running it as one 135
A. I think the main thing was local community -- we were working all hours so that I don't think we paid much attention. Family, yes. People, our friends and family were concerned, and my parents kept saying about especially when we were wrongly convicted -when we were wrongly suspended, sorry -- we were wrongly suspended, my husband wanted to prove it otherwise that why can't we be reinstated because we had done nothing wrong. We spent lots of money going to barristers and, you know, paying big large amount. It was almost 25/30,000 at that time we paid in lawyers' fees. Nobody was ready to touch or look at the Post Office case because they're such a big identity and, you know, nobody was ready to listen to us.

At that time my parents kept telling us that, you know, just leave it get on with it but I think, you know, that time our families were worried about us and they did keep telling us but we just didn't listen, I don't think.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Can I just be clear about the reason why you were taking legal advice and let me summarise it as I see it.

Following your suspension, you wanted to challenge it because you thought it was wrong, and is 134
counter when they suspended us when they had the other subpostmaster there. So we did say we would give them one counter Post Office but they did not want that.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. Thank you sorry for interrupting, Mr Blake.
MR BLAKE: No, not at all and, to follow up on that question about lawyers and litigation, we know that you were involved in the groups action the Bates and Others case. Can you tell us briefly how you found that experience?
A. That was a big relief to find somebody else who was there to do it and I think our voices to be heard jointly, mainly because there was hope at that time that maybe some -- we could not believe initially. We were quite cynical, [redacted] and I having gone, having fought with the barristers and --
Q. Sorry, I will just let those following on YouTube again to cut that short.
A. I'm so sorry.
Q. That's absolutely no problem at all and I'll just repeat once again for everybody following the live link and in the room that there is a restriction order in place in relation to your identity and your husband's identity. Absolutely, no problem at all. Please do continue.
A. So having been down that route of fighting with the barristers and lawyers, we were cynical initially when we joined the Group Litigation. We didn't think anything is going to come of this because Post Office -- and then, as time went along, we started thinking and we were feeling that, oh, there is support. The Freeths lawyers were listening and we were thinking this -- we are not alone, this has happened, and we could not believe how many people were affected -- could not believe how many people.
Q. We've heard about what you received from that. What would you like from the Post Office now?
A. I was going to work to -- keep the subpost -- I've still got it out for 20 years. I would have been a subpostmistress until I was going to retire at whenever it was, 65/70. So that is one big thing, my -- all these years.

Also, I would like the Government to pay the expenses and costs associated with the Group Litigation as they were responsible for the bad handling of the subpostmasters and of how the subpostmasters were treated. They should make good the losses we experienced, as I would have carried on being a subpostmistress if I had not been forced out. I also strongly feel that the Inquiry must hold 137
those responsible to account. So that is the main thing.
Q. Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add?
A. No. I think l've -- we've covered everything, yes.

No, I think that's fine.
MR BLAKE: Chair, do you have any questions at all?
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, thank you. So it just remains for me to express my thanks for you coming to give evidence before me. We have the witness statements of both you and your husband and now your oral evidence as well, so thanks very much.

Could I ask you when I stop speaking if you would mute your microphone, because I have noticed with a number of witnesses that occasionally they start talking about things which I shouldn't hear. So it's best if you mute it straight away and then there won't be any danger of me hearing things that you don't want me to hear. So thank you very much.
A. Thank you very much to listen to us. Thank you.

MR BLAKE: Thank you very much. It's 10.30 tomorrow morning.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes. Thank you, Mr Blake. So 10.30 in the morning everyone. Goodbye.
( 3.02 pm )
(Adjourned until 10.30 am the following day) 138

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