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# Oldest Post Office victim offered a third of payout



Oldest Post Office victim 'treated like dung'

**Emma Simpson**

Business correspondent, BBC News

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Post Office scandal: Oldest victim says she's 'treated like dung' - BBC News

## **A 91-year-old former sub-postmistress, the oldest victim of the Post Office IT scandal, has been offered less than a third of what she had claimed in compensation.**

Betty Brown and her husband spent more than £50,000 of their savings to cover the unexpected losses which started as soon as the Horizon computer system was installed in her branch.

She was hounded out of her job and forced to sell her post office at a knockdown price in 2003.

“We’re just treated like dung,” Mrs Brown told the BBC. Meanwhile the government said it was settling claims at a faster rate than ever before.

Mrs Brown’s lawyers, with the help of forensic accountants, spent nearly three years preparing her claim for compensation.

When her offer came through, it was for 29% of what she had claimed.

“I’m totally disgusted. It simply adds insult to injury,” she said.

Mrs Brown rejected her offer and told the BBC she would take her case to an independent panel for assessment, which will all take more time.

“Next year I’m 92 and I struggle to keep going, to keep the mobility.”

## **Forced out**

Mrs Brown was one of the Post Office’s golden girls before the era of Horizon. Her branch was one of the most successful in her region.

But as the losses mounted, she was forced out of her business by a Post Office manager who thought she was “too old” and wanted “new blood”. She’d never wanted to retire.

She finally broke her silence at the start of this year, telling the BBC about how the stress had taken its toll which saw her lying awake at night putting a sheet between her teeth to stop them chattering.

Mrs Brown was one of the original 555 victims who took part in the landmark group legal action led by Alan Bates against the Post Office.

They won their battle five years ago this month but never received proper compensation because the money they received was largely swallowed up by the huge costs to fund their case.

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They now have their own compensation scheme but so far only 221 victims have been paid their final redress.

## 'No goodwill'

“You talk about the Christmas and goodwill. Where’s the goodwill towards the sub-postmasters here,” said Mrs Brown, from County Durham.

She said with the help of her government-paid advisors, multiple reports were prepared to back up her detailed claim.

More information was then requested by lawyers acting on behalf of the government which oversees the GLO scheme.

In Mrs Brown’s offer letter, she wasn’t awarded anything for loss of future earnings and was offered only a third of the amount she claimed for past loss of earnings.

She was also not awarded the full amount she claimed for harassment, even though the Department for Business and Trade acknowledged she had suffered harassment linked to issues with Horizon.

Mrs Brown said she couldn't understand why one set of lawyers were being paid to carefully analyse and present her case only for another set of lawyers to then knock her claim down to a "paltry" 29%.

Lawyers representing the firms involved in delivering compensation were questioned by the Business and Trade Select Committee last month, amid complaints about the slow progress and complexity of the various schemes.

“We do try to maximise the offers. We do try to give the benefit of the doubt. We assess that and we are looking at fairness across the board,” Mark Chesher, a partner from Addleshaw Goddard, the law firm which assesses claims for GLO payouts told MPs.

Mrs Brown disagreed. “What they say and what they do are two different things.”

A government spokesperson said: “We recognise the immeasurable suffering that victims of the Horizon scandal like Betty have endured and we are working tirelessly across government to provide them with full and fair redress.

“This government is settling claims at a faster rate than ever before. At the end of October, approximately £438m has been paid to over 3,100 claimants

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across four schemes, up 85% since the end of June."

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