## Thursday, 17 March 2022

## (11.30 am)

MS HODGE: Good morning, sir.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Good morning.
MS HODGE: Our first witness this morning is Mr Chirag Sidhpura.

## CHIRAG SIDHPURA (affirmed)

## Questioned by MS HODGE

MS HODGE: Good morning, my name is Catriona Hodge and I ask questions on behalf of the Inquiry. Please state your full name.
A. Mr Chirag Sidhpura.
Q. You made a statement, Mr Sidhpura, on 11 March of this year; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. Do you have a copy of your witness statement in front of you?
A. Ido, yes.
Q. Could I ask you please to turn to the final page, page 20. Do you see your signature in the middle of that page?
A. Ido, yes.
Q. Have you had a chance to read that statement again since it was made on the 11th?
A. I did, yes.

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Q. What did that work involve?
A. It was taking care of approximately 30 sites throughout the country, maintaining and servicing an IT infrastructure on the offices and the main head office as well.
Q. How long did you work in that role?
A. Approximately just under two years.
Q. When did you first begin working in a Post Office branch?
A. I can't remember the year but it was actually at my father-in-law's Post Office in Reigate.
Q. What was your role in the Post Office?
A. It was just assisting, being a clerk.
Q. Were you involved in that role in balancing the accounts, for example?
A. No, not really, no.
Q. How long did you work in your father-in-law's branch?
A. About a year and a half to two years.
Q. Whilst working there, you applied to be the subpostmaster of the Post Office in Farncombe; is that correct?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. Why did you decide to do that?
A. I wanted a business of my own. I wanted some stability with a decent income but I didn't want
Q. Is the content true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. Yes, it is.
Q. There are three exhibits to your statement; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. The first of these is a spreadsheet; is that correct?
A. Yes, it is, yes.
Q. Which you produced yourself?
A. I did, yes.
Q. The second is a copy of your case file; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. How did you come to obtain that?
A. Under the subject access request for the Post Office.
Q. Thank you. The third, I believe, is a copy of your letter of termination from the Post Office; is that right?
A. That's right, yes.
Q. They will be adduced in due course, with your statement, thank you.

I'd like to begin by asking you a few questions about your background, if I may. Before you joined the Post Office you worked as a computer engineer; is that right?
A. That's right, yes.

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a post office which was already made or a shop that was already made, I wanted something which I could develop. I came across the one in Farncombe, which was very outdated and had a lot of potential.
Q. When were you appointed as the subpostmaster of Farncombe?
A. I took over the branch on 21 January 2013.
Q. How did you feel in taking on this new role?
A. I felt great. It was like a milestone in my life that I could really make a difference to a small community.
Q. How did you afford to purchase the Farncombe branch?
A. My mother-in-law and my father-in-law had lent me some money, as well as -- sorry, not lent me the money, they gifted the money to me and my wife, and also there was a bank loan as well.
Q. What improvements did you make to the branch when you purchased it?
A. Initially we just tidied up the branch, added new stock, new lines, just expanded on the range of products and goods that we sold in the branch, well, on the retail side, which made a difference because a lot more customers were starting to come in, as opposed to going to the other shops which were local to us as well.
Q. Did you employ staff to assist you in running the
branch?

card, and our ATM was the only one in the area that you could use that card with, unless they went to
another branch to actually withdraw money from that account.
Q. What effect did the Network Transformation Programme have on your salary as a subpostmaster?
A. Initially we lost -- immediately we lost $£ 12,000$, core
tier payment they called it. So whether the branch
was open or closed, you'd get $£ 12,000$ a year, so we
lost that and we were working on 100 per cent commission on the sales.
Q. What changes did you make to your opening hours as a result of the Network Transformation Programme?
A. Initially we were open from 9.00 until 5.30, Monday to Friday, and then 9.00 until 12.30 on a Saturday, closed on a Sunday. I then changed those hours so we were open from 8 am until 7 pm , Monday to Saturday, and 8 am until 1 pm on a Sunday.
Q. I'm going to ask you now, if I may, some questions about the training that you received.
A. Yes.
Q. When you were appointed as subpostmaster, so back in 2013, what training did you receive then?
A. I only had a one-week or two-week on-site training just on the counters.
Q. How did the business perform under your management and in the early years?
A. It was fantastic. It was really a very affluent business. I'm still there but it's still an affluent business.
Q. I'm going to ask you just a few questions about the changes that were made to your branch as part of the Network Transformation Programme?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you describe what changes were made, please?
A. We had a two-counter fortress Post Office, which was very outdated. It must have been approximately 45 years old, 45 to 50 years old, with a wooden frame. We had then come out of that fortress counters and we had two open counters, open counters being as open as this is (indicated), with just a slight plastic screen in front. Yeah.
Q. What arrangements did you make to enable your customers to access the ATM whilst these changes were being made to the branch?
A. The ATM was fully funded before the branch had closed. It had a substantial amount of money inside to service it for two weeks while the branch was closed because the -- there's a lot of elderly people with a Post Office Card Account, POCA, they call it a POCA 6
Q. Do you recall who conducted that training?
A. Cindy Kennard. She was an auditor/trainer from Post Office.
Q. That took place in your branch?
A. Sorry?
Q. That took place in the branch?
A. In the branch, yes, and she was just going through the selling of the products, on how to up-sell rather than down-sell. So instead of someone wanting six First Class stamps, try and push for 12 First Class stamps.
Q. What was your impression of the quality of the training that you received?
A. At that point, on the counters, it was fine.
Q. What training did you receive when the ATM was installed in your branch?
A. There was a representative from the Bank of Ireland that had given me initial training on the ATM machine. I had my brother-in-law overlook this with me as well, just in case if I missed anything. There was quite a lot of -- quite a lot to remember. I was shown how to load the ATM machine, how to de-cash the ATM machine, how to print out the reports required to input into the Horizon System, because the ATM machine worked completely independent to the Horizon System.

There was two reports that you need to print out 8
from the ATM machine to then just input one of the figures into Horizon of your 24 -hour -- last 24 -hour dispense figure.
Q. If I have understood you correctly, Horizon would keep a record of the amount of cash that was uploaded and should have been dispensed by the machine, is that right, once you had inputted it yourself?
A. Yes. So the only example I can give is, say, for example, in the delivery from the cash office you'd receive $£ 50,000$. On the following day when you print the report and the report says you have dispensed $£ 10,000$, you'd go onto Horizon System into a different stock unit to then input that $£ 10,000$, then go into declaring your cash and reduce that figure by $£ 10,000$.
Q. With the aim that the figure on Horizon would match what was held in the ATM?
A. Correct, yes.
Q. How would you describe the adequacy of the training that you received? I think you said that it was the
Bank of Ireland representative who initially trained you.
A. Yes.
Q. But how adequate was the training for you to understand what was required of you, in terms of reconciling the figures in the ATM and as shown on 9
discrepancies of a couple of pounds or a few pounds up
and down. If it was down, you'd put the money in,
just to balance it out at zero; if it was over, you take the money and then balance at zero.
Q. Your branch was first audited I think about four months after you took over; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. That audit took place before the ATM machine had been installed; is that right?
A. That's right.
Q. What happened at that audit?
A. It was a little bit short because the scratch cards were sold on the retail side, which the retail side's opening hours were a lot longer than the Post Office.
So that would never balance up until a Wednesday when we'd have to rollover where we'd stop selling the scratch cards at a certain point to check and balance. But I was told just to make -- it was, I think, about $£ 100$-and-something -- to make it good immediately, which I did, and that was fine, "Carry on".
Q. The next time your branch was audited was on 10 October 2017; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. Who attended your branch on that occasion?

## Horizon?

A. At first, I thought it was adequate enough. We were given a blue and white ATM sheet that we'd fill in of how much money you'd load, how much money was dispensed, a total value, how much money was remaining, tally that up and put that into Horizon. That was it.
Q. What issues did you experience after the ATM machine was installed?
A. From the first week of balancing, it was like $£ 10,000$ surplus, the following week it was like $£ 10,000$ shortfall. So the figures were -- I was doing something wrong, that I contacted the Post Office helpline to get someone out as quickly as possible to sort this problem out, because I didn't know what was going wrong. So Cindy Kennard was appointed and she came out to give me further assistance on the balancing of the ATM machine.
Q. What advice did you receive from Cindy Kennard?
A. Again, it was just to follow the blue and white sheet and you won't go wrong.
Q. Before your branch was audited in October 2017, did you experience any shortfalls and discrepancies on Horizon?
A. There was always discrepancies but only minor 10
A. There was two auditors, one named Anjum Zuberi and Bhupendra Shah.
Q. What were you asked to do on their arrival?
A. On arrival they put up a poster to say the branch would be closed until the afternoon. I was then asked to log into the Horizon System for them to create their own log-ins, add themselves into the system and then to show them where everything was.
Q. What were you told when the audit had concluded?
A. I was $£ 57,500$ short in cash.
Q. To what did that relate? You have mentioned cash. Was that in relation to the ATM machine, to your knowledge, or just simply it was a shortage in the cash?
A. At that point, they only just said it was just a shortage in the cash and then it was -- just after they said it was the ATM machine, is where the shortage has come from.
Q. How did you react when you were told about this alleged shortfall?
A. At first, I thought it was actually joking but he said, "No, I'm being serious, there's a $£ 57,500$ shortage" at which point my heart literally hit the floor.
Q. When had you last balanced your accounts on Horizon 12
before the audit took place?
A. On 4 October.
Q. What had been the result of your balance the previous week?
A. It was fine, as far as I was aware.
Q. Had you been able to check the ATM machine when you did that balance?
A. On 4 October, I didn't, no, because I had misplaced the ATM key, which was underneath a bag of coins in the main safe, so I rolled over with the existing figures on Horizon.
Q. What action did the Post Office take when this alleged shortfall was discovered?
A. Anjum Zuberi was the lead auditor that called the
contracts adviser, Anita Bravata, who then asked me,
"Where's the money gone? What's happened to the money? Have [I] got any knowledge of it?" which I didn't, who then suspended me immediately pending further investigation.
Q. What effect did your suspension have on your salary?
A. It was completely stopped.
Q. What did you do when you were informed by Ms Bravata that you were being suspended?
A. Sorry?
Q. What did you do when you were informed that you were 13
could get a temporary subpostmaster in, just to keep the services going. They did put an internal letter or memo or something out to their own contractors. I had two contractors contact me asking me the times of the branch opening hours and if there was an ATM machine or not. When I told them the opening hours and there was an ATM machine installed, they literally hung up on me.
Q. What steps did you take to seek support from your union when your branch was closed?
A. I was advised by the lead auditor to contact the

National Federation of SubPostmasters, which I did do.
I spoke to a guy called Keith Richards. I went to go and see one of the representatives in Newcastle shortly after.
Q. What advice did you receive from Mr Richards?
A. Once I had spoken to Mr Richards and told him my full story, I was advised at the end of it to get a criminal solicitor.
Q. You have explained in your statement the Post Office contacted you the day after the audit and your suspension; is that correct?
A. On the 11th, yes.
Q. Who spoke to you on that occasion?
A. I was called by Matt Mowbray, investigation security 15
going to be suspended?
A. At that point I had to hand over -- empty out all the Post Office drawers, hand over the safe keys to the auditors who then put everything, all the cash and the stock, into the main safe at the back, locked it up, put sticker seals around the safe. They tried to change the code on the safe and the alarm keypad, which they didn't know how to do, so they just left it as it was and they left at about 4.00.
Q. You explained the suspension resulted in your branch being closed by the Post Office. Did you take any steps to try and stop the branch being closed?
A. At that point I did -- on the point of where the auditor said there was a $£ 57,500$ shortfall, I did offer a cheque for the full value on the spot to allow me to continue trading. Even though I didn't have the money in the bank, I knew I would have had to source the money, but it would have given me a couple of days to get the money in the bank. But that was declined by the contracts adviser and he says to protect me and to protect them that we close the branch.
Q. Did you discuss the possibility of a temporary subpostmaster being appointed?
A. Yes, I did. I did say that it is coming up to the main period of the year, which is Christmas. If we 14
manager.
Q. What did he say?
A. At that point he gave me two options: option 1 was to pay the money back immediately or I'd be looking at a two-year prison sentence.
Q. How did you feel when you were told that you could be prosecuted by the Post Office for this shortfall?
A. Very scared, very scared.
Q. What did you do when you were presented with these choices?
A. I panicked. I literally called as many people as I could from my phone book to get money together to pay the Post Office back. My last and final phonecall was to my father-in-law, I explained the whole situation, who then called up the following day on 12 October to repay the full amount with a debit card.
Q. Were you then permitted by the Post Office to return to work?
A. No. At that point I was still suspended pending investigation.
Q. Do you know why, having paid the alleged shortfall, you weren't allowed to be reinstated?
A. Because they were doing an investigation to see what had happened.
Q. You were invited by the Post Office to attend
a criminal interview; is that right?
A. It was a criminal interview under caution, yes.
Q. When were you informed that you were to be interviewed?
A. I can't remember the exact date but I think it was

about a week or so later.
about a week ..... 6
Q. Do you recall who notified you? ..... 7
A. It was Matt Mowbray. ..... 8
Q. What steps did you take to obtain representation at ..... 9your interview?A. I did contact the National Federation of11
SubPostmasters, who said if I was going to challenge ..... 12
the Post Office on this alleged shortfall they would ..... 13
not be able to assist and to get a criminal solicitor, ..... 14
which they wouldn't assist in or get me a crimina ..... 15
solicitor under the Federation. I then contacted the ..... 16
National Retail Federation, who appointed me ..... 17
a criminal solicitor. ..... 18
Q. Your interview took place on 26 October 2017; is that ..... 19
right?20
A. That's correct, yes. ..... 21
Q. Who conducted the interview? ..... 22
A. It was Matt Mowbray and Mr Watson. ..... 23
Q. Was your lawyer present during the interview? ..... 24
A. Yes, my lawyer, Michelle George, from Blackfords. 17
Q. When were you notified of the outcome of the ..... 1Post Office's criminal investigation?
A. I think it was on 20 December 2017. I was told ..... 3initially that it was going to be 7 to 14 days fromthe date of the interview but it took longer because,apparently, the Post Office investigation team only
meet once a month to review cases.
Q. What were you told would happen next?A. At the end of the interview, I was actually supposed
to be provided with a copy of the recording of the ..... 10
cautioned interview. Unfortunately, the recording ..... 11
device had actually malfunctioned so no recording was ..... 12
available. On numerous occasions, I then challenged ..... 13
the Post Office and asked them for a transcript of the ..... 14
interview, which I was denied, saying that it was ..... 15commercially privileged documentation.
Q. Were you charged at the conclusion of the criminal ..... 17investigation?
A. No, there was no further action.Q. You attended a meeting on 15 November 2017; is thatright?
A. That's correct, yes.Q. Who conducted that meeting?
A. It was Paul Southin and that was conducted at ..... 23
Post Office Head Office, Finsbury Dials, and that was24816181920212224024
Q. I think you have mentioned he was a contracts adviser for the Post Office; is that right?
A. Correct, yes.
Q. What did you tell him about the shortfall?
A. I had no knowledge of any shortfall. I'd no knowledge of any shortfall in the office whatsoever. I had looked at -- once I discovered that there was this shortfall, once the auditors had discovered there was a shortfall, I had to then investigate my staff as well, to see if they had put their hands in the till, because I was still -- I was being told by the Post Office contracts adviser that the money has gone missing, that somebody has taken that money.

I was also being told the same thing by the National Federation of SubPostmasters, that somebody has taken that money.

So I investigated all my staff, looked at all their bank accounts, looked at their lifestyle, but no, there was nothing there. Nothing had changed.
Q. Did you take any records or other documents with you to your meeting on 15 November?
A. I did actually take a pre-prepared statement with me for the contracts adviser, outlining that I had no idea of any shortfall in the office, that there's got 20
to be some sort of error within the computer system, Horizon, it may have been that l've entered a figure wrong, because it tallied up to be a week's worth of money for the ATM machine.
During the refurbishment in 2015, while we were closed for the two weeks, the ATM was still operational. As a process of investigation, I looked back at the figures to see did I enter all the correct figures into Horizon at that time. I contacted the Post Office helpline to confirm this but, unfortunately, they don't hold the data and nor does Bank of Ireland.
Q. What were you asked to do at the conclusion of your meeting with the contracts adviser on 15 November?
A. I was asked to provide every printout of the ATM
machine and the Horizon System for the ATM stock unit from August 2015 to date.
Q. What steps did you take to gather the necessary information?
A. I had got my assistance from my brother-in-law, to come in to literally sit with me day and night, to not only photocopy every single piece of paper but to put together an Excel spreadsheet to track the ins and the outs of the ATM machine.
Q. The spreadsheet that you have just mentioned, is that 21
cash shortfall, it's a miscalculation of figures from the ATM machine.
Q. What did you tell Mr Southin about your findings in the meeting of 5 December?
A. I had presented him with the Excel spreadsheet and all the -- he had all the copies of the slips from the ATM machine as well, to which I never got anything back from.
Q. How did your meeting with him on the 5 th conclude?
A. I'd just have to wait until he gets back to me.
Q. Were you surprised that you were being asked to investigate and explain the cause of the shortfall?
A. Yes, because I didn't have the information that they have. So they can track all the deliveries, all the ins, the outs, everything from their end but I can only see what is in black and white in front of me.
Q. What support did you receive from your customers and your community during the period of your suspension?
A. Immediately after my suspension, there was two individuals, Eleanor Shaikh and Alan -- can't remember his surname, who -- Alan created an online petition. Eleanor had physically actually gone out and done a manual petition. In total, I think we received approximately 3,000 signatures. One of the customers, her name was Mrs Perkins, I remember her very well,
the document that's exhibited as Exhibit 1 to your statement?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. You had a further meeting with Mr Southin on 5 December 2017; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. Where did that meeting take place?
A. A garden centre in Norwich, on the 5th. I presented him with the information which I had found as a part of the investigation. Rather than the Post Office trying to investigate anything, it was me trying to investigate what had happened but I can only investigate what had happened from the documents which I had available to me.

Post Office have access to everything from A to Z in the back office of the system. I don't. I was completely locked out. I wasn't allowed to use the system, I wasn't allowed to log into the system, my username was deleted from the system. So I was left to my own resources to try and establish what had happened.

So, upon creating this Excel spreadsheet to track the withdrawals value, the inputted value, I discovered, potentially, there could be a $£ 53,000$ shortfall from the ATM machine but it's not a physical 22
she said that she would put her life on the line for my honesty, which was very heartwarming.
Q. You were notified on 5 February 2018 that your contract had been terminated; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. How was this decision communicated to you?
A. I'd received a Special Delivery letter in the post, just a three-page letter, to say that I had alleged breaches in my contract and my contract was being terminated with immediate effect and they would be in contact with me what the next step would be.
Q. That letter is your Exhibit 3, is that correct?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. How did you feel when you were informed of the Post Office's decision?
A. Heart-broken. Heart-broken, to the degree that I didn't know what to do, didn't know which way to turn, who to speak to, what the next process was. I tried to contact Paul to appeal the decision that he had made but I was told that I have no right to an appeal under the new contract.
Q. What action did you take to escalate your case within the Post Office?
A. I contacted Paula Vennells explaining the entire situation, the entire process. She got back to me 24
quite swiftly and said that I don't have a right to an appeal but she will ask Alisdair Cameron, chief auditor/accounts manager/director, to just go over the
case, which he did do. And a week later I received an
email from Flag Case Adviser, outlining everything
that Paul had already written, which was: I couldn't
explain the $£ 57,500$ shortfall; I don't know how
I could explain it if I didn't know it was there;
putting me back in would be a risk to Post Office
funds and brand damage; putting me back in would be brand damage because what if it happens again?
Q. You have explained in your statement that the Post Office raised two further issues. One related to your alleged failure to make cash declarations; is that correct? 15
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. The second one was that you'd allegedly not returned money when requested. Had these matters ever been brought to your attention before the termination of your contract?
A. Never. So I later learned that the Post Office Horizon System has a cut-off point at 7 pm . You've got to declare your cash holdings by 7 pm . If I was to do that, I'd be posing a risk to myself because my branch didn't close until 7 pm . So I was still 25

Rivers and her husband, who was a councillor, Paul Rivers. Both of them, myself and Eleanor, had contacted Jeremy Hunt, who we set up a meeting with, to ask Jeremy Hunt to intervene within this situation, to ask for a review or to assist in what can we do. Jeremy then, at the end -- Jeremy then contacted Paula Vennells via phone and she agreed to get an independent review of my case.
Q. Who was appointed to conduct the independent review?
A. Angela van den Bogerd.
Q. When did the review take place?
A. I can't remember the date.
Q. I don't think you have given a date in your statement.
A. It may have been around about March, March/April 2018.
Q. Of '18, yes. What steps did you take to arrange representation at your review meeting?
A. I had then contacted other subpostmasters in the local area. I was then put in touch with a guy called Nilesh Joshi, who's the National Federation of SubPostmasters representative, who agreed to come along to the review with Angela van den Bogerd. During that point, I had applied for the decision and rationale from the Post Office to all the documentation which the Post Office held on me, so I could see what was on the file that Paul had
serving customers up until that point. So if I was to take all my cash and stock out of the back safe and the BidiSafe held underneath the counter and put it on top of the counter, if someone came in and robbed the case I'd be held liable for that. Not only would I be held liable for the cash and the stock but my life would be on the line.

So I couldn't complete their request by 7 pm . But I only later learned that after the contract had been terminated.

So from August 2015 up until October 2017, I was doing cash declarations after 7 pm and it was never brought to my attention during that time that I was doing anything wrong. I used to send back money on a weekly basis. There was, I think, one or two weeks that I didn't send back any money because I didn't have the bags to send the money back in, which were on order. So as soon as I did receive the bag, all the money was sent back.
Q. As far as you were concerned, you had been balancing and returning correctly; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. What steps did you take to notify your local MP of your situation?
A. I was in contact with our local mayor which was Penny 26
written -- the original contracts adviser had written about my case.
Q. What did you discover on reviewing that file?
A. They had already made their mind up that they were going to terminate my contract from day one. One of the -- on one of the call logs, Anjum, who is the lead auditor, had called up the following day, so on the 11 th, and informed the call centre that the Post Office was -- this Post Office was going to be closed for the foreseeable future.

Also, Paul Southin had written a report based on lies, that I had allegedly owed my father-in-law the $£ 57,500$ that he had paid, which was not true because, he was a director to the business as well, so he had put that money in. And that was the first time that I had seen various notes that he had written -unfortunately I can't remember them off the top of my head.
Q. What action did you take to draw these matters to the attention of your NFSP representative?
A. So I showed the NFSP representative the documentation. He had quite clearly said, "The Horizon System isn't wrong, doesn't get it wrong, 2 plus 2 equals 4 , as far as the Horizon System is concerned". I actually went to his Post Office in East London somewhere for him to 28
demonstrate the way that he had set up his office, which was completely different to the way that my office was set up, and he had no idea of the way individual stock units worked, as opposed to a shared stock unit.
Q. What's the difference between an individual stock unit and a shared stock unit?
A. Individual stock unit is like having separate tills.

So, for example, when you go into Sainsbury's you have
got multiple tills but they are all independent to
each other. Whereas a shared stock unit is a combined
till. So, even though you have got two separate
terminals, the figures in the back end, the cash, the
stock, is combined between the two tills. So when you
do a cash declaration, you're putting in individual figures but they combine the two figures together.
Q. Can you please describe your meeting with Ms van den Bogerd?
A. She had said to me to go in with an open mind, which I did, and, again, went through everything, in terms of $£ 57,500$, I have no idea where it's gone. I had provided Paul with various documents which I had got, which was the Excel spreadsheet, as part of the investigation. The possibility that figures weren't entered correctly during 2015, when the refurbishment 29
and reopen the branch as a temporary postmaster to then become permanent.
Q. What changes did you make to the branch before you reopened it?
A. I had to secure -- give the Post Office a secure area in the back where the main safe was. I had to then divide the retail counter to the Post Office counter, by putting a secure door in between, as a temporary measure, but this was done all at my own cost.
Q. A post office auditor attended your branch on 18 June 2018; is that right?
A. That's correct, yes.
Q. What was the purpose of his visit?
A. It was to reopen the branch but no-one knew about it except them.
Q. He conducted a transfer audit at the branch later that date; is that right?
A. So on the 18th when he came in and he said he was there to reopen the branch, I told him that there was nobody here. The temporary subpostmaster that's coming in, he's working at another branch. He then went away, came back about an hour or so later and said that he's been told by his manager to conduct a transfer audit from me to them, even though my contract had been terminated and I had no longer
happened, but all this was disregarded.
And then Angela drew up to her own conclusion that the decision which Paul had made was the correct decision.
Q. How was her decision communicated to you?
A. It was via letter.
Q. You had a telephone conversation with her after you were informed of the decision; is that right?
A. Yes. Immediately after I received the letter, I called her back up again. I said, "I'm still not happy with the outcome because you still haven't provided me with any evidence of where this money has gone" and her words were that, "The money doesn't have legs, it can't run away; so where has the money gone?"
Q. What advice did she give you during your conversation?
A. At the end of that -- near towards the end of that phonecall, she said, "You need to stop dwelling on the past and think about the future". She goes, "You could get a family member to apply to be a subpostmaster of the branch".
Q. What steps did you take to secure the reopening of your branch?
A. I contacted my brother-in-law who was working at another branch at the time, who agreed to relocate himself and his family in Farncombe, so he could come 30
anything to do with any of it.
I allowed him to come into the back area and open up the safe, as he checked all the seals and I undone the alarm, put the alarm code in to deactivate the alarm. And then he had gone back to the Horizon System, inputted the figures that he had on -- no, he inputted the figures by counting all the cash and stock.

Sorry, take a step back. When he logged on to the Horizon System and pressed the cash declaration button and on the Horizon System, it was showing everything as 00 , whereas it should have shown the figures that were last entered. He then counted all the cash and stock, reentered the figures into Horizon and there was a further shortfall of just over $£ 5,000$.
Q. Just going back to when he first commenced the transfer audit, you mentioned that he checked the seals on the safe. Was he satisfied that the safe hadn't been opened since your branch was closed?
A. Yes, nothing had been tampered with, none of the seals were broken. He had a picture of the safe that the original auditor had taken and put on file.
Q. But when he did a check of all the cash and stock held in the branch, Horizon showed what would be, in effect, a further shortfall of 5,000 --A. Just over $£ 5,000$, yes.Q. How did the auditor react when he discovered thisapparent shortfall?23
A. He was quite shocked himself, at first. He then ..... 4
contacted -- he called the original auditor and said ..... 5
that this is what he's discovered. The originalauditor then -- he was on loud speaker on the phone,then said to me that I'm liable for that shortfall,that l've got to put the money in for that just over$£ 5,000$, which I said, "I'm not putting the money in,I'm not paying a single penny".Q. You reported this shortfall to Ms van den Bogerd, is
that correct?
14
A. Yes, I called her up immediately. I said this is whatthe auditor has found. She then spoke to the auditor15
and said to confirm that the seals on the safe were -- ..... 16everything was all fine, everything was still intact, 17which he confirmed everything was intact. She hadthen said to me leave it with her, don't worry aboutit.
She had then contacted Insafe, who is thecompany that takes care of all the safes. There wasa digital lock system installed on the safe in 2015,which somebody had come out from Insafe to actuallyaudit the safe, to confirm that nothing -- that that25
the withdrawal value and the dispensed since load figures, which should be the same.
Q. What action did the Post Office take in relation to the alleged shortfall of $£ 5,050$ that was discovered during the transfer audit of 18 June?
A. Once Angela said to me, "Don't worry about it" my brother-in-law came in, he took over. Shortly after, he had received an invoice from the Post Office asking for $£ 5,050$ for that shortfall. He wasn't even there. He was working at a different branch. How could they send him an invoice for something that he wasn't present, what he had no idea about?
Q. How did you resolve that shortfall?
A. My brother-in-law firstly called up the helpline saying that, "I've got no knowledge about this". I, then, while I was contacting Angela van den Bogerd, it was literally just cleared, just wiped away. I have since been pursuing it with my brother-in-law of where did this $£ 5,000$ shortfall come from. There's no answer to it.
Q. What effect did your suspension have on your business?
A. It was the busiest time of the year. We lost out on the entire Christmas trade. I had to send -- because we've got a lot of elderly in our community who can't get to another branch, I had to spend in excess of
safe wasn't tampered with or opened. Because it was all digitalised it tells them that if the door had been opened or anything had been tampered with, which everything was clear. There was no activity on the safe whatsoever.
Q. Do you recall the date on which your branch was reopened?
A. 22 June 2018 .
Q. Who attended to reopen the branch on that day?
A. It was the same auditor that attended on the 18th, Janad Tanwir.
Q. What advice did he give you about the recent update that had been made to the ATM?
A. At that point when he had come in, he had actually loaded the ATM up on 18 June when he came in to allow the community to use the ATM machine. So when he came in on the 22nd, a balance was done on the 22nd with my brother-in-law, who was the temporary subpostmaster coming in, and he had also mentioned, "Watch out for the figures on the ATM machine, as when the Bank of Ireland do a remote update, it throws the figures out on the ATM machine".
Q. What happened when you balanced your accounts on 27 June?
A. The figures didn't match. It was a difference between 34
$£ 6,000$ on my credit card to go to another branch to buy stamps to sell to the local community to make -it's nonprofit, because it was sold at the same price.
Q. For how long was your branch closed?
A. Between eight and a half to nine months.
Q. What effect did this have on your finances?
A. I had a very good retail trade but because I didn't have the foot flow coming through, it did have a small impact on my retail trade as well but I lost my income. My income was the Post Office income. I was serving just under 1,500 customers a week on a two-counter local Post Office.
Q. What consequence did the termination of your contract have upon your business?
A. I had to find money to pay the bills because I was in a deficit of $£ 4,500$ a month. People weren't coming in because they knew that the Post Office was closed, so the products weren't selling in the shop.
Q. What do you now do for a living?
A. I still currently work behind the Post Office counter.
Q. What's your role?
A. Manager, of the same branch.
Q. What impact did the Post Office audit and investigation have on your mental health?
A. I've had to pull away from everyone. I turned to 36
want to be left, like, on my own.
Q. How was your confidence in yourself affected?
A. It made me feel stupid, worthless, incompetent. I'd
a degree, I went to school, I was very academic, but it just made me feel I was worthless.
Q. How was your relationship with your children affected?
A. It affected my eldest child quite a lot because there
say, "Daddy, are you going to jail?" What response
can I give to that? I said, "No, I'm not, I'm going to be here".
Q. Have you sought to recover the sum of $£ 57,500$ from the Post Office?
A. I've had no choice but to join this Historical

Shortfall Scheme. Prior to joining the Historical
saying that I wasn't happy with the outcome of a lady called Julie Thomas to do a further review of my case, as she had gone through the first part of that review. I still have pride and passion for what I do, not only It's my good faith, it's my good name, it's my most.
Q. What do you think needs to be done to achieve justice for subpostmasters who have been affected by the failings of Horizon and the actions of the Post Office?
A. People need to be held to account for what they've case, it was months before the group litigation had just launched -- was due to start. They knew that there was a problem in the system. They had the opportunity to correct the errors but they decided to not correct the errors because of the Group Litigation, in my view, that if they had -- if Angela had reversed the decision then, it would have had a huge impact going forward on many other cases.
Q. I've no further questions for you, Mr Sidhpura. Is there anything you would like to say?
A. I have prepared a little summary, if I could?
alcohol to give me comfort. My marriage has broken down. I stay away from home as much as I can. I just
regarded myself as -- I'm an educated person, I have
was rumours going around. She used to come home and

Shortfall Scheme, I did contact Paula Vennells again,

Angela's investigation or review. She then appointed

The Historical Shortfall Scheme came up, which 37
makes me feel worthless on what I do, even though the branch -- even though I'm not the subpostmaster there, for the business but for the local community. To me, there's no amount of money that can compensate for it. standing within the community that matters to me the done to not only me but all the others as well. In my
she then said that it would be unfair for her to conduct a review of my case and to join the Historical Shortfall Scheme. At first, I didn't join the scheme and the closing date did close, at which point I did put in an application for judicial review for the Historical Shortfall Scheme, being led by -- I can't remember the solicitors' firm name now -- Herbert Smith Freehills, who were also involved in the HBOS scam and the Lloyds Bank compensation scheme.

Not only that, but once you joined the Historical Shortfall Scheme and the Post Office give you an offer, whether it be $£ 1$ or whether it be $£ 1$ million, you are bound in that scheme, you lose your civil rights. I don't see why I should lose my civil rights but l've been forced to now join that scheme and I'm waiting.
Q. So your application has been accepted, has it?
A. As a late applicant, yes.
Q. It's been acknowledged but you haven't had a substantive response to it yet?
A. I haven't had any response.
Q. How do you now feel about the way that you were treated by the Post Office during your time as a subpostmaster?
A. For something which I've given everything to, it still 38

Post Office brought misery not only to me but my family and also our local community. I had goals and plans to give myself and my family a better life and a brighter future. This was stolen away from me overnight.

Post Office, from the top to bottom, knew there were bugs, errors and defects within the computer system, especially when it came to an ATM machine.

Post Office tried to take away documents which I held in branch but were unsuccessful, as I stood my ground and told them that it's information which I have produced not them, so I would not be handing anything over.

I was advised by the auditor to have a look at my trading statements, which I had produced from Horizon, to try and identify the alleged shortfall. I had gone through all this over and over again but could not find anything wrong. I had followed everything the way in which I had been trained, not for days, weeks or months, but for years.

As informed by Post Office investigator, the alleged shortfall has come about in the last six months of the date of the audit. If that was the case, then why were Post Office continuing to send large amounts of money, week in, week out, to service 40
the office? Why was this not brought to my attention earlier via phonecall, email, letter in the post, to say that something may be wrong, that we could have investigated it at that time?
As far as I was aware, everything was okay.
I was left fearing I may have to leave my family and
friends behind for a while because I may be sent to prison or arrested. I cannot even describe the way
I felt as I've always been a law-abiding citizen with a clean record. Advised by the SubPostmaster
Federation to obtain a criminal solicitor due to the value of the alleged loss, threatened by the Post Office investigators that I'd been interviewed with police present under caution, to me this all bully tactics to try and get someone to say they have done something, even though they haven't.
I was shadowed by a fantastic solicitor, Michelle George, who gave me all the confidence to stand my ground. Approximately, over $£ 80,000$ worth of cash and stock was left in my premises for near nine months. Even though Post Office Limited terminated my contract, I was told I had no right to appeal this, which I thought was totally bizarre, as if I had murdered someone and admitted I committed the crime, the police would still have to build a case to 41
to go away and she will not respond to any more emails from me.

I was contacting many other subpostmasters who
helped me as much as they could to identify possible causes which led to me -- which led me to provide information to Paul Southin to investigate, rather than being the other way round.

I was left scared, anxious, depressed, stupid,
worthless, incompetent -- I'm sure there are many more
words that could describe my mental state and
feelings. This was all done by the hands of one
individual representing the most trusted brand in our
country, Post Office Limited. Angela van den Bogerd
was appointed to conduct an independent review of my case but because the trend was already set by
Paul Southin, she could not go back and change that, even if she wanted to, as this was months before the GLO was to start.

I was left a broken man. I used to be
confident, proud, outgoing, always made time for my
family and friends. This has now all changed due to
the way the Post Office have treated me. My marriage
is broken due to the stress of me trying to prove not
only to the Post Office but also to my wife that
I have not done anything wrong. Even today, we argue 43
take to the CPS, then to court. If I was found guilty of the crime I would still have the right to an appeal. It's the law of the land.

The law of the land also states that any person is innocent until proven guilty but with the Government-owned Post Office I was guilty until I could prove my innocence, like many others.

The contracts adviser, who has been there for many years, conducted little to no investigation to establish what actually happened. Instead, all I got from Paul, the contractors adviser, was a three-page letter outlining breaches to the contract, which I disagree with, as I was following the same process daily since January 2013. Also following the same process, after reopening the branch once the refurbishments were completed. If the alleged breaches were not a problem over those years, why has it become a problem all of a sudden?

I had challenged the Post Office for many documents, which should have been provided to me. Instead, I had to pay under the Freedom of Information and data access for information rights, to which I was generally told by Kerry Moodie, information rights manager, this is commercially privileged. When I kept challenging this, I was told in a polite way by Kerry 42
because I was in charge, so I am to blame. The Post Office has turned me into a self-centred individual, that all I seem to do now is to prove that I have not done anything wrong and always just want to be left alone.

Interaction with my children has been hard as my eldest daughter used to ask me, "Daddy, are you going to jail?" This broke me even more. I could not even look my kids in the face. I would lock myself in my bedroom and not come out. Sometimes leave the house when they were asleep and not return until they were asleep. I could not face anyone as fingers were being pointed. People had now a different view of me.

I had many thoughts of suicide, running away, relocating but I was extremely lucky to have my father-in-law, all my staff, all my friends, who supported me through my darkest days. They gave me strength and support to get to where I am today.

I have to give up something that I was so proud of and worked so hard for without any financial gain whatsoever. Post Office have a lot to answer for in the way they conducted my case as I still have not got answers. During the time when the Post Office was shut down, a further over $£ 5,000$ had gone missing from the Horizon System. The Post Office put this down to

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auditors' mistake and was quickly and quietly brushed 1
under the carpet. Why? Because the very person
dealing with the alleged second shortage could not go
back and say, "Sorry, this could be a systemic error",
as there is whole class action would have collapsed.
It would have been definitely saved the UK Government a substantial amount of money.

At this point, I have no doubt there is
definitely a problem with the computer system. All
the evidence is there. If a shortfall can occur when
the computer has been shut down, not used, what can
the system do when it is in use committing thousands
of transactions a day? I am today still passionately
serving my community behind the same Post Office that
I was accused of taking or losing $£ 57,500$. With the
help and support of the people I now --
With the help and support of the people around
me, I have now become stronger to have the courage and support to battle the Post Office. I would not now
allow a man-made computer system beat me. I am
determined. I have been left a broken man mentally
but with the support I have behind me makes me
stronger than ever.
I have had no choice but to join the HSS scheme,
the Historical Shortfall Scheme, as I do not have the 45
have some witness summaries that can be read,
I believe now, if that would be convenient.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, that would be fine.
IR
MR ENRIGHT: Sir, I will now read summaries of the full 4 and detailed witness statements that you have before 5 you.
Summary of witness statement of GRAHAM WARD (read)
MR ENRIGHT: Mr Graham Ward has an A Level in computer science and is also part qualified as an accounts technician. He has good understanding of computer systems. Mr Ward's father had worked for the General Post Office and Mr Ward says he thought of the Post Office as a large trustworthy institution. Mr Ward thought the Post Office would be a family business he could do until retirement and that his sons could one day take over.

Mr Ward was the subpostmaster of Rivenhall
Post Office from September 2002 to November 2008, and Feering Post Office from June 2005 to -- November 2008 also.

Mr Ward says the Horizon training was
incorporated into four weeks on-site training which
started on the date he took over the branch. Mr Ward
says he found the Post Office helpline advice
frustrating and they were unable to provide practical 47
bottomless pockets that the Post Office do, even though this, in my view, is abusing public money. I disagree with the HSS scheme because of the way that you're tied into the scheme.

What I would ask the Post Office to do is the right and lawful thing, which would be pay back what I have paid, including the interest, put me back into the financial position that I would have been in. Unfortunately, no amount of money is going to be able to buy time with family or love or mental health but what it can do is only help move on in life to do things which my family missed out on, due to the Post Office's wrongs.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity for me to say what I said. Thank you.
MS HODGE: Thank you.
Sir, do you have any questions for this witness?
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, thank you very much.
It's been very good to see you again,
Mr Sidhpura, and I am very grateful to you for your participation in this Inquiry and, in particular, for your willingness to come today to give evidence orally to me. So thank you very much.
A. Thank you.

MS HODGE: Thank you, sir. That takes us to 12.40. We 46
help. The helpline advice would double his shortfalls and Mr Ward would undo the shortfall by doing the opposite of what the helpline told him to do.

Mr Ward paid the Post Office or had money deducted from his wages to pay alleged shortfalls. Mr Ward received a letter from the Post Office threatening legal action and prosecution if he did not pay shortfalls. Mr Ward was audited and suspended by the Post Office for alleged shortfalls. Mr Ward's contract was subsequently terminated.

Mr Ward says he is still suffering stigma and reputational damage. He has been labelled a thief. The Post Office trainers told the new owners of the Post Office that Mr Ward had stolen money from the Post Office.

Mr Ward lost his family, his marriage of 13 years broke down and he feels guilty that he could not provide for his sons.

Mr Ward ended up with an IVA for six years. Mr Ward was embarrassed. He is no longer confident and does not feel worthy and good enough. It may come as a surprise that, despite all that he has suffered, Mr Ward says:
"I would like to think that Post Office Limited were just doing their job and what they were told. 48
I would like to think that they did not maliciously
target me. I would like to think that the shortfalls2

were accidental and the Post Office didn't know how to ..... 3
get out, so let it run." ..... 4
Mr Ward says: ..... 5
"I don't want Post Office Limited employees ..... 6
going to jail and ruining their families as that would ..... 7
not be fair on their kids. I don't want another ..... 8
family to go through what my family has gone through." ..... 9
Summary of witness statement of ISABELLA ARMSTRONG WALL(read)11
MR ENRIGHT: Isabella Armstrong Wall was the ..... 12
subpostmistress of the Bowness Road Post Office in ..... 13
Barrow-in-Furness from August 1995 until ..... 14
September 2011. Isabella worked as an operator on the ..... 15
telephone exchange for 20 years from the age of 17, ..... 16
working her way up to supervisor. She was able to ..... 17
become a subpostmistress, as there was a close ..... 18
relationship between the two companies. ..... 19
She was looking for a change of pace and thought ..... 20
that running a small Post Office was ideal. Isabella ..... 21
paid $£ 75,000$ for the business and $£ 5,000$ for stock, ..... 22
taking out a mortgage on the family home and ..... 23aking out mortage on the tamily home and
a business loan. She also spent a further $£ 75,000$ ..... 24
refurbishing the branch which also contained ..... 25
installed, which did not cover all the bills she was liable for. Isabella was declared bankrupt in 2017. Her shop was repossessed and all her investments lost.
3She sank into depression, as did her husband, and
still struggles with her mental health. ..... 5
Isabella has sought counselling for depression ..... 6
and anxiety. Isabella feels she has been treated like ..... 7
a criminal and received abuse from some in the ..... 8
community. ..... 9
Isabella says: ..... 10
"The Post Office caused me financial ruin but ..... 11
also severely damaged by mental health and caused ..... 12
great distress by treating me like a criminal and ..... 13
making false accusations. My husband and I had plans ..... 14
for our retirement but they were all ruined. It broke ..... 15my heart to have the Post Office taken away from mewhen I had loved working at the heart of the communityso much."
Summary of witness statement of SHANE JOHNSON (read) ..... 19
MR ENRIGHT: Sir, Mr Shane Johnson was the subpostmaster ..... 20
of the Victoria Road Post Office in Kirby-in-Ashfield ..... 21
from October 2003 until September 2014. Mr Johnson ..... 22
was a single parent who believed the role of ..... 23
subpostmaster would provide flexibility to work and ..... 24
parent at the same time. Mr Johnson attended25
a convenience store. She employed seven part-time staff.

Isabella received two days of in-branch training on the Horizon System. The Post Office trainer spent most of the time on his mobile phone, which Isabella says the training was inadequate. She began experiencing shortfalls, which she would use her own money to make good.

In 2009, there was a huge shortfall of $£ 37,000$ Isabella was suspended by the Post Office but later reinstated after she remortgaged her house to pay this. The Post Office made no attempt to find the cause of the shortfall, despite Isabella repeatedly asking for help. The insinuation was that she had stolen the money.

Some months later, another shortfall of $£ 11,000$ arose on the Horizon System. Isabella called the helpline again asking for help. She followed their instructions and the amount more than doubled to $£ 24,000$. She was audited again and suspended.

She insisted there was a fault in the Horizon System but was repeatedly told it was fault-proof. Her contract was terminated and she entered into an IVA to settle her debts. Isabella was paid $£ 2,000$ a month by the temporary subpostmaster the Post Office 50
a five-day training course, which covered basic transactions on the Horizon System. Shane then received further in-branch training for six days.

In 2007, Shane was advised by the Post Office that they were introducing cash machines into his branch. He received ten minutes of training on this by an engineer.

Mr Johnson called the helpline approximately five times a week, following the introduction of the cash machine as he began experiencing shortfalls following its introduction. He states that the helpline advisers had no knowledge of how cash machines ran. Mr Johnson estimates that he paid over $£ 50,000$ in shortfalls to the Post Office. An audit was conducted on 30 August 2007, where a shortfall of £25,000 was alleged.

Mr Johnson was not suspended at the time. On the advice of the National Federation of SubPostmasters, he agreed to split the shortfall with the Post Office. Mr Johnson paid half of the money, the Post Office agreed to write off the rest of the sum.

By spring 2014, Mr Johnson was on the verge of bankruptcy because the Post Office advised him that he was liable to pay the shortfalls or risk facing
criminal prosecution. As a result, Mr Johnson felt 1
compelled to resign and he sold his business at 2 a loss.

Mr Johnson blames the Post Office for putting 3

- 4
him in a no-win situation. Shane had to pay the
shortfalls but was on the verge of bankruptcy as
a result of doing so. His family life declined. He
was spending so much time at work worrying about the
shortfalls. He became paranoid and anxious, began
suffering with depression and lost all his confidence.
Mr Johnson believes he would still be running
a successful business had it not been for the flawed
Horizon System.


## Mr Johnson says:

I want the world to know that I and other ordinary 16
hard working decent people have had their lives ruined 17
by the Post Office. I am entitled to be properly
compensated for the losses I have suffered as a result of the Post Office. I would like this to be sooner rather than later."

Summary of witness statement of [ANON - W0217] (read)
MR ENRIGHT: Sir, [ANON] was the subpostmaster of the
Markfield Post Office in Leicester from November 2006
to April 2008. [ANON] had a background in the 53
now able to build a relationship again with them.
[ANON] says:
"What happened to me and hundreds of other
decent people is an absolute outrage. It is
a disgrace that it is impossible to put into words.
I hope to receive some closure, some vindication, an apology for what I have been through and what I have lost. I want the Post Office to be held to account publicly."
Summary of witness statement of DONNA GOSNEY (read)
MR ENRIGHT: Sir, Mrs Donna Gosney, her husband served in
the military for 23 years. Following his retirement
they decided to buy a post office to spend more time together.

Mrs Gosney thought the Post Office would be
a safe and secure job and that they could run until
retirement. Mrs Gosney received two days of training
on the Horizon System. Mrs Gosney contacted the
Post Office helpline at least 132 times between
November 2001 and April 2007, usually in regard to shortfalls.

Sometimes, when Mrs Gosney followed the helpline
advice, the shortfall would multiply. The helpline
told her that she was the only one with this issue.
When Mrs Gosney took over from the previous
financial services and felt confident he could build up a successful business with the Post Office.
[ANON] received two days of training on the Horizon System. [ANON] describes the training as inadequate. [ANON] found the system clunky from the start and shortfalls appeared from day one.
[ANON] sought help via the Post Office helpline but found the advice generic and unhelpful. [ANON] was told by the Post Office that the problems he was experiencing were a result of human error.
[ANON] paid more than $£ 12,500$ in shortfalls to the Post Office. [ANON] decided to sell the business as it was running at a loss. Any profit made from it were used to pay shortfalls. [ANON]'s contract was terminated following an audit. [ANON] was unable to sell the business and was financially ruined, as he had no income coming in. [ANON] had no other choice but to sell his personal belongings to pay bills and to cover shortfalls.
[ANON] blames the Post Office for the decline in his social standing, relationships, physical and mental health. [ANON] suffered stress and anxiety as, although he was not charged with a criminal offence, the threat of it loomed over him.
[ANON] was ostracised by his family and is only 54
subpostmistress, a system was in place where they would balance and check stamps by lunchtime, and then check the lottery and roll the accounts over at the end of the day.

The Post Office trainer expressly told
Mrs Gosney that she should continue with this process for balancing and said, "If it's not broke, don't fix it". This system was how Mrs Gosney's assistant, whom the previous subpostmistress had recommended to Donna, stole $£ 189,000$ from the Post Office.

Post Office Limited pursued Mrs Gosney to recover the $£ 189,000$, despite knowing that Mrs Gosney was not responsible for these monies. This is because the Post Office were fully aware that Mrs Gosney's assistant had accepted responsibility for this theft and was convicted of the theft in relation to this money. Donna says:
"What astonishes me is why the Post Office Horizon System did not pick up this massive loss of money but that it only came to light in an audit. And that Post Office pursued me for the money regardless of the fact that my assistant accepted responsibility of this theft and was convicted of theft of this money. Despite this, and despite the fact that it was accepted by the Post Office that I had no hand in this 56
theft, the Post Office sought to recover the money from me."
Astonishingly, the Post Office obtained judgment against Mrs Gosney in relation to these monies.
Mrs Gosney was interviewed under caution prior
to her assistant being arrested and charged with
theft. Donna describes this as the worst day of her
life. Mrs Gosney suffered reputational and financial
damage in 2011, she was declared bankrupt. Donna moved away from the village to live with her daughter as she could not cope.
Mrs Gosney is still on medication for anxiety.
Mrs Gosney had depression and contemplated suicide.
Mrs Gosney had to have a stressful and undignified conversation with her father when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She had to ask him to rewrite his will and leave her inheritance to her husband so that the Post Office Limited could not claim it.
Mrs Gosney's father died not knowing if she was
going to be all right, which Mrs Gosney finds unforgivable.
Mrs Gosney wants the Inquiry to recommend
redress for the 555 subpostmasters who were part of the Group Litigation. She wants the Inquiry to hold those at the Post Office to account for what they have 57
that he was responsible for the shortfalls and would have to make up the difference. Mr Sandhu had shortfalls almost every day and used the profits from the retail side of his business to pay the shortfalls.

In 2016, the branch was audited and a shortfall
of over $£ 5,000$ was discovered. Mr Sandhu refused to pay without being shown how the shortfall had occurred. He was immediately suspended and subsequently terminated by way of letter from Post Office. The Post Office began pursuing Mr Sandhu for the shortfall and threatened legal action. He tried to keep the retail business going but, without footfall from the Post Office, the business declined.

Mr Sandhu could not meet the rent and bills and his debts rose to approximately $£ 100,000$. Mr Sandhu was forced to sell the business at a loss and applied for an IVA. In addition to the financial burden, the emotional effect on Mr Sandhu and his wife, his family has been immense. He states:
"The situation put an enormous amount of psychological pressure on me and caused a great deal of stress. The process was very traumatic and I still suffer from health problems arising from it. A great stress was placed on my family and my relationships with my wife became strained as our debts increased.
done. Mrs Gosney would like Paula Vennells to be stripped of her titles and awards. Mrs Gosney does not want the Post Office to exploit others like they have her.

Mrs Gosney would like a printed apology in the newspaper where she used to live in Shipton to put her reputation right.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mr Enright, I think we've reached 1.00, so is that a convenient moment for you to take a break?

MR ENRIGHT: Happy to, sir. There are only three left, we could complete before lunch.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Okay, if you are happy to, let's do that.
Summary of witness statement of BALJEET SINGH SANDHU (read)
MR ENRIGHT: Mr Baljeet Singh Sandhu was the subpostmaster of the West Bolden Post Office between 2015 and 2016. He ran the business with his wife. Mr Sandhu and his wife received two days of training on the Horizon System before taking over the business. They found the training to be basic and inadequate.

Mr Sandhu began experiencing shortfalls very early on and would ring the helpline to inform them and ask for help. The Post Office advisers told him 58

I have tremendous worry that I have been unable to give my children the opportunities I wanted.
"I did everything I could to alert the
Post Office to the issues I was facing. I received no help from them. I would spend countless hours trying to work out why the shortfalls were occurring. I began doubting myself and my abilities. I became paranoid and would question everything. I do not think I will ever be the same person I was before these events. Through no fault of my own, I was treated like a thief and a criminal."
Summary of witness statement of DENISE LATREILLE (read)
MR ENRIGHT: Sir, Ms Denise Latreille ran the Exford Post Office in Somerset from February 2007 until March 2015. Denise ran the branch with her partner Gerald Shadbolt. Mr Shadbolt's supporting statement has been adduced in evidence supporting the evidence of Ms Latreille.

Ms Latreille was the subpostmistress and Mr Shadbolt concentrated on the retail side of their business. Denise received ten days of training on the Horizon System, mostly on how to sell products. Denise had a further five days of in-branch training, which included assistance with her first balance. Denise says she still found balancing very difficult.
She experienced small discrepancies every month, whichshe settled because she believed she had to under hercontract.Ms Latreille contacted the helpline regularly toreport shortfalls but found the advice unreliable.Sometimes the reversing of a transaction would doublethe shortfall. Denise would usually pay theshortfalls if they were under £200. Ms Latreilleestimates that she paid in excess of $£ 12,000$ to thePost Office to cover shortfalls. Ms Latreille wasinterviewed by the Post Office regarding theshortfalls in November 2010. The Post Officesuggested that her partner Mr Gerald Shadbolt wasstealing money. Ms Latreille found the stress too
much to bear and in 2012 Mr Shadbolt took over runningthe Post Office.He too became unwell due to the stress of havingto run the Post Office single-handed as they could notafford staff. The shortfalls continued. Theyattempted to sell their business with no success.Ms Latreille and Mr Shadbolt hold the Post Officetotally responsible for their loss of investment andhave incurred large debts which remain. They bothstill take antidepressants and both struggle withtheir mental health, something they attribute directly61
approximately 59,000 in or around April 2010.Following an audit, Ms Andre was told that herbusiness had accumulated a shortfall of $£ 90,000$. Shewas shocked and confused. The Post Officeinvestigators told Ms Andre that if she repaid themoney, it would reduce the risk of her beingprosecuted. Dionne was suspended. For six months,she heard nothing. She says it felt like agony notknowing what could happen to her and her business.Dionne's contract manager advised her that hercontract would be terminated if she did not resign.Following her resignation, the Post Officepursued Ms Andre for the $£ 90,000$ shortfall. Dionnewas forced to sell her business at a loss, max out hercredit cards and borrow from her family. Ms Andre wasemotionally and financially devastated. Her familysuffered too. She considers that she has changed asa person forever and can never return to who she was.Ms Andre still finds it very painful to thinkabout or talk about her experiences, so much so thatshe was reluctant to become involved in this InquiryIt was only as a result of her mother's persuasionthat she did so.
Dionne says:"The more damaging indirect effect is that my63
(2.13 pm)MR BLAKE: Good afternoon. We're now going to hear fromSami Sabet. He's just being brought into the room.
SAMI SABET (affirmed)Questioned by MR BLAKE
MR BLAKE: Thank you, Mr Sabet. As you know, I'm Julian ..... 6
Blake and I'm going to be asking questions on behalf ..... 7
of the Chair this afternoon.You have in front of you a witness statement andit should be dated 19 January of this year; is thatright?A. Yes, that's correct.Q. Can I ask you just to look at the final page, that'spage, I think, 12, and can you confirm that that's
your signature there?
A. Yes, it is. ..... 16
Q. Can you confirm that the statement is true to the best ..... 17
of your knowledge and belief? ..... 18
A. Yes, it is. ..... 19
Q. Thank you very much. That statement's going to be ..... 20
going into evidence and I'm going to ask you ..... 21
additional questions now. ..... 22
Can you tell us a little bit about your ..... 23
background. Where were you born? ..... 24
A. I was born in Egypt. ..... 2565Sheffield University and I then worked for a while.I then did a master's degree, an MBA, atMiddlesex University.Q. Can you tell us what jobs you did before taking overa post office?A. Well, I started off, I worked for Philips Electronicsas a trainee engineer. I then worked for Phillips asan industrial -- well, work study engineer it wascalled -- I worked for Gillette as an industrialengineer and then, post MBA, I moved to finance.I was a financial analyst, Gillette Northern EuropeanDivision and then financial reporting analyst for theEuropean division.I then got the job which appeared to have beenjust written for me, as an operation and businessdevelopment manager for an American multinational,packaging multinational. My job was to identifyopportunities and help and get certain joint ventures,so find partners in a different -- in the Middle East,Africa and Indian subcontinent, so look at themarketplace identify markets that would be good for usand also support the existing joint ventures to dowell and make sure that they succeed.I then worked as a commercial manager. I wentto Saudi Arabia, I worked there as a commercial15
Q. How long ago was that?
A. Oh, a hell of a long time ago. 1955; so 66 years ago.
Q. I think you are married and you have a daughter who's about 30 years old now?
A. Yes, she will turn 31 at the end of January, yes.
Q. You've lived around the world. Can you tell us a little bit about that?
A. Yes, I actually wrote a book called Judge Me if You Can, and it's got all the information within it, so I can just remember it now.
Q. If you can condense that book into about a paragraph?
A. I will, don't worry. Yes, born in Cairo in 1955, three years later travelled to Saudi Arabia with my parents, where we lived for about four years, back to Cairo in 1962. In 1966 travelled to the United States where we lived in Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, three years. We then moved to Libya where we were there when the revolution started and Gaddafi took over -- didn't like it very much.

Then we came to the UK in 1970. The whole family came here in 1970.
Q. I think you studied in the UK?
A. I studied in the UK. Most of my studies from secondary school onwards in the UK. I graduated with an honour's degree in electronics engineering at 66
manager for, again, a manufacturing company, which was one of the joint ventures for the company I had worked for. I then was asked to go to Egypt to help set up a can making company, the first two piece -- what is called two piece can making company in North Africa, which I did, successfully completed that, and I worked in Egypt as well, as a (unclear) for a private hospital, 250-bed private hospital, where I was the operations director, or director of operations, not the medical operations but the overall operations, until I decided to come back to the UK in 2003.
Q. So having led a varied career, what made you want to take over a post office?
A. Basically, when I left Egypt, I had had pretty high-level jobs, very stressful jobs, which I didn't mind as such but I thought that I'd had enough of the rat race and I thought I'd opt out of the rat race and get a small business. I didn't really need much money at the time I had enough -- I thought I had enough -and I was looking for something that was like that and thought, well, why not newsagents and a post office.

The reason I thought of the Post Office was because I thought that the Post Office would provide a regular income which would then support the business. So, basically, opting out of the rat race. 68
Q. Your first Post Office was the West Beach Post Office?
A. Yes, it was.
Q. Where was that?
A. That was in Shoreham-by-Sea, and it was actually -the reason it was called West Beach was because Shoreham has got like a peninsula or an island, which is Shoreham beach, and that was divided into two parts east and west, obviously west side was West Beach.
Q. When was that approximately?
A. 2003. I think I might have taken over -- I set up a company called Shorelife Limited, which then, in turn, bought this West Beach Post Office in about May 2003.
Q. Then there was another Post Office that you took over.
A. Yes. Having worked with the Post Office and the business, I slowly decided or felt that it wasn't that challenging, although I had started to do some relief work to get to know how other post offices were run and other retail outlets were run. I decided that I needed a little bit more than that. Silly me.

There was another office at East Beach, which
was only about a mile or so away from West Beach, and I had spoken with the landlady there, who was mature, she was practically almost in her 70s, and I managed to persuade her that perhaps she might be better off 69
you first experience discrepancies; do you remember?
A. I first experienced discrepancies with West Beach,
albeit they were very small, because West Beach was the smaller of all three post offices,
sub-post offices, but I thought it was my fault, inexperience and all that. It wasn't, as -- you know, the amounts were fairly small because of the size of it, one small Post Office.

So that's when I started experiencing them.
Then when I took over the other two post offices, all of a sudden -- well, not all of a sudden, about six months, almost a year, eight months, whatever, I was then sent what they call error messages and there were quite a lot of errors there. We were talking about hundreds of pounds and I was absolutely shocked because, apparently, they're supposed to have occurred months earlier.
Q. I think it was around 2006 that you first started to do something about that; is that right?
A. 2006 is actually when it started to happen, yes, and started to get that then. The problem is it was always the postmaster who is responsible for proving that it's not -- that the errors were incorrect and that was almost impossible to prove. I was caught out because having to look through a year's work, a year's 71
retiring, which she did and I took over the Post Office from her.
Q. Having taken over two post offices, I think there was a third?
A. Then I can monopolise the beach then. At the same time, because it had taken quite a while for the process to go through to be completed with the purchase of that, another opportunity arose, which is Mill Lane, which is in Portslade, which is only about three or four miles away from Shoreham beach, became available and showed a really good return on investment, and I couldn't resist that one as well, so I took that one as well.
Q. Initially, were those successful?
A. Yes, yes they were successful. I also -- apart from that, I also did some business services and some general consultancy work, and stuff like that. The businesses themselves were successful.
Q. Do you remember approximately how much they cost at all?
A. All three branches? They didn't cost an enormous amount. I think it was Mill Lane -- West Beach was about 45,000; East Beach was less than that, I believe around 40,000; and Mill Lane around 75,000.
Q. I'd like to talk to you about discrepancies. When did 70
errors or -- well, data was very, very tricky. You get slips from your Horizon System, and that's all you've got to go on. So you've got to look at all the slips, compare them, and then try to compare something else, and you can't really interrogate the computer itself, the system itself.
Q. Did you call the helpline?
A. I called the helpline and they weren't really that helpful. You know, they don't like people calling them. In fact, at one point, I had written to -somebody had actually said to me -- because I'd written a lot of correspondences to different people, Post Office, they don't like telephone calls, the helpline doesn't really like telephone calls and they'd rather that, if you get error messages and what not, you sent a written correspondence.

But yes, I did talk to a few of them but it was "You're wrong, we're right".
Q. You have mentioned correspondence and you have exhibited to your statement some correspondence. I'm not going to go into detail about each and every letter but perhaps you can give one or two examples of exchanges that you had?
A. Well, I've exchanged several correspondences, hundreds maybe of correspondences, so much so that I was
actually asked to stop writing. It had taken me, well, the two years between 2006 and 2008, I was trying to make them see that there is an issue, that there is a problem. I'd written to different managers, different -- every time I get an error notice, things that were -once I realised these errors were going on and I had to be very, very careful and I had to be quite alert to what's happening and look at the system properly, there was a cheque, for example, that was -- well, it they eventually found, "Oh, yes, yes, it's there, so we'll credit it to you on the system", because the system was showing, as far as I was concerned, a negative $£ 300$. When they did this I had a $£ 600$ error shortfall, instead of the 300 being wiped and there were several things like that.
things which I'd written about that -- things that kept disappearing and then reappearing. We had currency that was sent to head office that was completely settled and, all of a sudden, it appeared again on the system.
Q. You said that you sent correspondence between 2006 and
$£ 50,000$. They came to my home in the evening in my office, and they looked through everything, two big boxes with calculators and everything. been through all this hassle with the correspondences who was -- she wasn't very helpful and, in fact, I think she got really angry with me, upset with me I keep thinking to this day she was being vindictive by making sure I paid for it somehow. But --
Q. Do you remember any conversations that you had in your house with the auditors at all?
A. Yes, they interrogated me they taped what I was doing. everything out and have look at it, every so often look at each other, you know, saying, "Oh, yes, you know, he's in trouble" and they'd put it into the box. They wouldn't say why or whatever, they just did that. They took a lot of documents, filled the box up almost. And then I was interrogated and taped.

For example, there was a cheque all of a sudden, wasn't on the system $£ 300$ worth. When I called them,

A lot of things with the lottery. A lot of 73 afterwards and we sat, they looked around and we sat opened my drawers, cupboards, everything. They had It was quite frightening but I knew I hadn't done anything wrong. What had happened was having and meetings, particularly with the contract manager, They talked, as I was sitting there watching them take they would find some document or something and they'd

2008?
A. Yes, even beyond that.
Q. Once 2008 hit, 17 March of that year, you received an audit; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. How many auditors attended the property?
A. Well, I wasn't there at the time. I had a phonecall from Mill Lane at first who said, "Help, we've got auditors here". I can't remember how many there were. And then I had another phonecall from East Beach saying, "We've got auditors here". So they attacked both post offices, attended post offices at the same time. I went over. There was nothing I could do or talk to them about this.

I had -- well, do you want me to be specific as to what they, just said answer the question, or ...
Q. That's fine. They attended both -- two of the post offices?
A. Yes.
Q. How about your home?
A. Well, this is it. What had happened was they -afterwards, two of them came to my home and decided that they needed to search or look for anything that might show that I may have taken all this money because, apparently, in both post offices around 74
Q. Where did that take place?
A. In the office at my home.
Q. Were you aware at that time that there were other people in the same position?
A. No.
Q. You were suspended after that audit?
A. I was immediately suspended, yes. I was told by the auditors when they left that I would be contacted but it may take two weeks before I am contacted for them to have another meeting with me and to discuss this. At the time, I had already, as I said to you earlier, part of the business was to do some sort of consultancy and I was doing some training and I had a management training course that I was going to deliver in Egypt for the Egyptian Post Office -- it had nothing to do with the Post Office in the UK, it just part of a training programme.

That, unfortunately, was due to be done in April, beginning of April, so I had to contend with this, I had to go and deliver this training which was -- which took all my might to try and put it behind me and just concentrate on the training. I got back. Two weeks later, nothing happened. They never contacted me.

What I had decided to do before this, because of 76
all that issues that I'd had with the Post Office,
because I became fed up and saw that there was just no
way of me -- this is just taking too much of my time
and I was becoming almost bankrupt. Over the two
years or so that this has been happening, l've been
subsidising the Post Office from the other shops and
other businesses, from my own finances and I thought
this just cannot be. Perhaps it will be better if
I sold the post offices off.
That's what I decided to do. Unfortunately, the
Government had decided that they are going to shut, and this was before the audit.
Q. Yes.
A. Sorry, I keep going --
Q. Carry on, please?
A. The Government decided to shut the post offices and they'd chosen one of my post offices, West Beach, as one of the ones to be closed. In the meantime, trying to sell the business was almost impossible because nobody's going to buy a post office business knowing that it might be close down. So it was very, very difficult.

The other thing is I had to -- I had to resign,
so that the Post Office would advertise the business
on their website as part of the businesses that are 77
A. I was charged with the -- what had happened was, because -- I was going to say because of all this lack of cash flow, I was -- I had two choices, either to shut the post offices down and get rid of all the staff, and I had about 15 at the time, maybe 13. West Beach had shut down. If I did this, the staff would lose their livelihood, the community would lose it's post offices and I just didn't see what would happen.

I knew that the $£ 40,000$ was coming to me.
Post Office did not want to help in any way shape or size, they would not give me anything. I did plead with them to say that they are bankrupting me and so on, but to no benefit.

Anyway, what happened then was I had decided that one way of trying to get round this is to write postdated cheques and have the staff also write down what had happened and what's been happening, and document everything so that everything is transparent, no-one could ever say that I was trying to steal any money, I just was between a rock and a hard place. I had to do something.

That something is going to be -- it's going to affect everybody and it could affect them detrimentally, as well as myself, of course, because I would lose the business.
available for sale. I don't know whether that had anything to do with it or what, but they never spoke to me about the audit, never -- we never had a face-to-face discussion, we never tried to sort it out. But despite of several tens of correspondences that I've written, including a couple to Alan Clarke himself, including to whoever I could to try and get a face-to-face meeting, pleading with them not to destroy me and my family ... not to destroy me but to try and just talk about it, I had -- initially there came a time towards the end, where I know that I was expecting compensation from the Post Office that closed, West Beach, and they hadn't given it to me. $£ 40,000$, they still had it in their hands and they hadn't given it to me.
Q. There was a time when you were prosecuted?
A. Sorry?
Q. There was a time when you were prosecuted by the Post Office. You were prosecuted?
A. Yes, I was. Yes, I was. Yes, I was just going to say -- sorry, yes, I was. Yes, I was.
Q. In terms of timing when was that?
A. That was in 2008, it started off. The start of it was 2008.
Q. Do you remember what you were charged with? 78

So I'd written these cheques. So the actual charges were to do with that I had said that I had cheques to the value of whatever it was at each Post Office, talking about $£ 50,000$, when I had not, leaving the Post Office at the risk of loss or using the money for my gain, using money for my gain, or Post Office at the risk of loss.
Q. Do you remember what the official charge was?
A. That's all I know. The charge -- this was officially it.
Q. Was it fraud by false representation?
A. False representation, I guess. Yes, I guess that's what it was.
Q. It came to court. You went to the Magistrates' Court?
A. Started off going to the Magistrates' Court, yes.
Q. Then you went to the Crown Court?
A. Not quite. It went to the Magistrates' Court. I had already -- by that time, Post Office had already sent me a document stating how much I owed them, and whereas they discovered $£ 50,000$ shortages, the actual figure according to them on the document that they had sent to me was $£ 62,000$ and something.

Actually, when I tried to work it out, the figures just didn't add up but, at the time, you're scared, you don't know what to do, you just -- you 80
just have to -- you're just almost on panic button.
Then they had taken off the 40,000 and whatever, and then it ended up at about 19,000/20,000, which then they later changed and became 20,000, which changed and became something else. I had paid already 10,000 from my own money, reducing it supposedly to around 10,000 and something. So that was when they first -- when I actually appeared in court, I only really owed them about 10,000/12,000 -- 19,000/20,000, if that, and I had said that I would pay the rest when I sold the business, because I was trying to sell the business.
They did not complete the paperwork in time and so the judge -- the Magistrates could not transfer me to the Crown Court, so he dismissed the case. My solicitor at the time said, "Sami, you are free, they are unlikely to come back for you because they will have a bloody nose and they're not going to come back for you". Besides there still should have been $£ 10,000$ left or, as it turned out, $£ 13,000$, and that kept fluctuating.

> Four months later, they decided to serve me with
exactly the same summons, exactly the same charges and then it went to the Magistrates' Court and then it went to the Crown Court. 81

But I said, "Look, this is what's happening.
I had to plead guilty. However, can we talk and discuss this and try to settle this without having to go to litigation, without destroying all this", and I had the reply from him saying, "You did this, you did that, your offence is serious enough that they decided to prosecute you and I'm afraid the case must go on and, yes, you did say you are going to pay when you sold your Post Office but you have to put -instruct your solicitors formally to give us the money back when you sold it". But, nevertheless, even if I did that I'd still -- they'd still continue with the case.

I then wrote to the Prime Minister at the time,
Mr Brown, and had a reply from his office that said that he'd asked them to look into it again, saying the same thing. I had to plead guilty because otherwise that the sentence, the punishment, would be severe and I didn't want that.
Q. You came to be sentenced on 7 August 2009?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you tell us about that?
A. That was terrible. That was probably one of the worst days of my life. Picture this: you have been a prominent member of any community, you have worked 83
Q. You appeared at Lewes Crown Court on 26 June 2009?
A. Yes, Idid.
Q. I think that's where you pleaded guilty, is that right?
A. Yes, I was told I had to plead guilty to have a better chance of not actually going to prison. If I hadn't -- if I don't do that then the likelihood is that l'll definitely go to prison, which can be anything up to six/seven years, or whatever.
Q. How did you feel about that?
A. I felt terrible. I had a choice to make, do what I think, which I'm saying "I'm not guilty", or plead guilty and hope for the best because that would be the better chance of not going to court. But I didn't stop there.

I wrote to different people, I wrote to
Alan Clarke, who is the head -- the managing director of Post Office Limited at the time, and I had said to him, and I had written to him before about the errors and how unfair they were and that you are really claiming paper money, not actual money. You have not actually lost cash, this is all paper stuff and yet you are claiming it and you have taken it off us. So actually you are making money out of it, basically, as I said that to him.

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hard, you achieved a lot of good qualifications, you have achieved status, you have mixed with royalty, with senior personnel, with prime ministers, with all different types of society -- not that you're arrogant about it because, again, everybody's equal but, nevertheless, you went through this, and now all of a sudden you are -- because I went to a probation office, I went to other places and I saw people there that were probably ardent criminals and I think to myself and you think, "Am I like this? I'm now -this is what I am. Forget about all this other life, this is what I am".

And then you go into the courtroom. In the courtroom, my wife was with me, as well as my mother-in-law and my brother and sister-in-law. And you go into the dock, you imagine going into that dock, you must know what it's like, and it was the first time I realised where perhaps the comment "going down" came from. You stand in the dock, and there's stairs going down into the cell, where you would be sent when you are eventually judged to be guilty, and you are sent down. And that's where I was feeling I might go. I remember giving my wallet, giving my mobile to my wife saying, "This is it, in case I don't come back with you".
Q. What sentence did you receive?
A. Well, in the end, I received a one year's custodial sentence, twice for the two branches, the two cases, plus 180 hours community service.
Q. During the sentencing hearing, did you think that you might go to prison?
A. We had to send references to the judge. Character references, three character references. One of the character references was from a friend of mine a doctor, PhD, worked for a large defence company, very well respected and, in this reference, in his reference he had written that he felt that the Post Office was ... sorry.
Q. That's okay. Take your time.
A. The Post Office was unfair and the judge held this reference and he waved it and said, "How -- this reference, how dare he say that the Post Office is unfair, I can't accept this". Now, what do you think as a defendant you would feel or think when that happens? You're going to go down. He's not even prepared to accept. He's already made up his mind, forget about the fact he said you're guilty, he's already made up his mind. And my knees almost gave way.

A lady walked in holding a piece of paper in her 85
A. I consider myself lucky because I had -- I worked for an office furniture -- not office furniture, for a furniture charity shop. So that's what I had to do. I had to obviously clean, and everything, but this wasn't alien to me, this cleaning, whatever. I could have done a lot worse than that because, in order to save the business before this summons, before the audit, to try and make the business survive, I had this -- and not have to force any member of my staff to lose their livelihood, I actually took a job at a petrol station in the evenings.

So I was during the day trying to get the
business, keep it together somehow and, in the evening, I worked at the local petrol station, filling shelves, taking money from customers, cleaning toilets and the floors.

So I did all that.
Q. In addition to the sentence, I think --
A. Then the sentence came and so that was, I think, maybe somebody was trying to prepare me for that.
Q. You also had to pay the prosecution's costs; is that right?
A. $\mathrm{Mm}-\mathrm{hm}$.
Q. Now, I'm going to move on to the impact on you, the financial impact and personal impact. Let's start 87
hand and -- and she gave it to the judge who then unfolded it and then stopped my barrister from talking. He said, "Okay, I'm going to put you out of your misery". The barrister was saying things about recession, and what not.

He opened it and said, "Put him out of his misery" and he then turned to me and that was the first time that anybody ever talked to me throughout my court hearings. No-one ever cared what I thought and felt, or anything like that, and he said, "Until now, you have been a man of good character but now you have destroyed this in spectacular fashion". So I'm no longer this man of good character. And he pronounced the sentence which was, as l've said earlier, and that was an enormous relief because, at that point, I thought, "At least, thank God, I'm not going to actually go down, I'm not going to actually go to prison".

But it was the only time where I actually felt better. Before that, I really was going to collapse and I just could not believe how this could happen.
Q. You were sentenced to 180 hours of community service, in addition to the suspended sentence?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you tell us what you did for that 180 hours? 86
with financial. When you had the discrepancies, how did you manage to pay for that?
A. Borrowed money. Went to our families. My wife and I, we borrowed what we could borrow. It was a lot. We actually had -- in Egypt, we had built a house and it was there. We couldn't sell it and so they knew that they probably would get their money back, I guess, but they were prepared to help us and that's how they did
it. And so, using that money, l'd already -- my credit cards were all to the limits, I had loans. I couldn't find the cash to pay for the discrepancies, unless I borrowed it, and that's what I had to do.

At the time, I remember I didn't have £2 -- more than $£ 2$ in my pocket, just to give me enough petrol to take me to buy and purchase stuff for the shop or whatever.
Q. I think you said at one stage it reached about $£ 62,000$. Do you recall how much you repaid in total to the Post Office?
A. I paid in total -- well, I think in total it was 67,000 because after all the 40000 -odd, $£ 40,300$ plus the withheld salaries, and so on and so forth, it all comes out to about almost 67,000/68,000.
Q. I think we've heard from other witnesses some other kinds of financial impacts, such as insurance and your 88
ability to get insurance; is that right?
A. Oh, we lost the home insurance. They wouldn't insure ..... 2us.
Q. Is that because -- ..... 4
A. Because I had a criminal record. Once you have got -- ..... 5
I learnt a lot about this. Getting a criminal record ..... 6
isn't going to make it easier for you. It's going to ..... 7
make it even worse because then there are consequences ..... 8
of having that criminal black mark against you, andeverything becomes expensive. If you can get it, anyinsurance or anything, would be very expensive. Interms of the home insurance, you can't, and then youtry to apply to other companies, "Have you ever beenrefused insurances?""Yes, I have.""Well, sorry."Q. Moving on to personal impact, how did it affect yourreputation?A. Well, as the judge says, in spectacular manner.People just thought you were a thief. A communitypolice officer after this -- before the sentence,before even -- well, before even that, they heardabout the fact that I had been summoned by thePost Office, et cetera, and put 2 and 2 together andmade 15, and decided I was a thief and dishonest. And89
That didn't help reputation very much. We hadto -- people would walk across the street sometimes,so as not to talk to you and, even if they don't sayanything, you still feel -- it's the feeling about meit's not just the other people, it's how I myself
felt. ..... 6We eventually had to leave our house. We triedto sell it and had somebody renting it before theybought, and we moved out somewhere else, and we lostquite a lot of money having to go backwards andforwards. But the only way we could do it is to getaway from all this. We had people, creditors, callme. I hated my ring tone, because it meant that therewas a creditor on the other end and threatening tocome to my house and take things, and stuff like that.So I had to put up with that.Reputation -- reputation completely destroyed.Q. How about your wife and your daughter?A. My wife felt terrible. Actually, a friend of mine'spartner told my wife, advised her strongly to leaveme, said I was a criminal and that she should leaveme. Fortunately, my wife was excellent. She stood byme.
Q. I appreciate it's difficult.A. It is
. It is difficult, yes. Sorry.
91
one day there were some diaries that we were going to throw out, shop diaries, newsagents type diaries where, you know, no newspapers for number 15, no newspaper for number 25 , or whatever, and she decided to take that -- maybe somebody had complained to her, and told me that she's going to have to take it to the police station because she's going to have to report me because of the data protection, and you have thrown these out of that back door, they were out the back door, et cetera.

In the end, of course, they came back and then she said, "Just don't do it again", but it's that sort of thing. Afterwards, the neighbours just would not really talk to you. They tried to avoid you. People tried to avoid us everywhere.
Q. How did it --
A. One of the worst things, of course, is the newspaper that actually wrote an article about it, "Post Office manager pockets money", and that was there until even there now. Anybody who goes into the internet and Googles my name, that's the first thing that comes up. There is this criminal who's pocketed all this money. The way they worded it, they made a lot of -- well, a lot of things that were said that weren't quite true but, nevertheless, it's there for everybody.
Q. That's absolutely fine.
A. It affected both my wife and my daughter because they, of course, were subjected to the same sort of thing.
They are partners or daughter, whatever, of a criminal and, of course, he's a criminal, you know. What else can he be? And you start thinking all sorts of different things, you know, how they felt about you from the start, that sort of -- a lot of things. It's not very, very good, actually.
Q. How did it affect your health?
A. How it affected my health. Quite a lot. I developed diabetes. I then later on -- my behaviour changed. My attitude, my -- I became a bit more aggressive, my wife and I, we quarrelled a lot, we still do, because of the way I had become. I had become a different person. My siblings said that I'm a different person and I have a lot of issues with them, and that then at work, when I manage to work, they are also very stressful, et cetera, I eventually developed a heart attack --

Well, I had a heart attack and, as a result of that heart attack, I had to have an open heart surgery with five bypasses. I'm still alive but my peripheral vision is completely gone because what had happened, my blood pressure was reduced or it could have been, 92
the machines, as they might say, and it had affected the nerves in my eyes and not enough oxygen was received by my nerves and so, if you think of the vision being a circle and there's a horizontal, the
horizon, I cannot see anything below that. I can see
above, I can see -- I can see you but I cannot see anything below.

So if I'm walking, and my legs will testify to
this, something there I won't see it and I'll walk
straight into it. So that's much of it -- I have
tinnitus, l've got this ringing noise all the time in
my ears. I have a problem with my nose is that it is
always runny and I have to take spray, nasal spray, to
stop it from doing that.
Yeah, my health was affected quite
significantly, mentally and physically.
Q. In terms of compensation, as somebody who had been
convicted, presumably you received an interim payment.
A. Yes.
Q. I think you are also part of the Group Litigation; is that right?
A. No, when you say Group Litigation is that the 555?
Q. Yes?
A. No, I'm not. At the time when that happened, and

I heard about it, I just been going -- I'd just been 93
case, Magistrates case, was dropped, they came back after me without any thought, despite any pleas, despite anything for a pittance of money. How angry do you think I should be with that?

They at the time, 2007, roughly, 2008,
14,000-plus branches of Post Office were making
$£ 4$ million loss, a $£ 4$ million loss a week, and yet the
managing director gets a bonus. He gets a bonus. He
gets a bonus, another bonus that will he would get for
five years, on top of his $£ 250,000$ salary, whatever,
and Royal Mail as well got other bonuses, and for
£20,000 I was completely destroyed --
Not even $£ 20,000$ because, by that time, it was
only about what they said, and that's all their
figures. I could not query those. I could never contest them. Their figures $£ 13,000$. They destroyed a man and his family for $£ 13,000$. They had a chance not to do that when the first case collapsed. But four months later they insisted that they're going to come back and they would completely annihilate me, despite what I wrote to them they would not stop.

How would I feel? What sort of compensation?
What they have caused me, the pain and anguish, I wish
I could have -- if I had been -- if I had a normal
existence, if this didn't happen, the business was
healing from the heart attack, and what not and, in any case, I wasn't part of that group at all.
Q. What would you like from the Post Office?
A. I guess, like a lot of people, I'm -- what happens with this is that, first of all, you're terrified, you're scared. You just you can't think, you're in panic mode. You're trying to avoid something. You're trying to avoid punishment. You're trying to avoid, in this case, going to prison.

Then you have got this conviction and you've lost your reputation, et cetera, but I always try to pick myself up and just carry on and I suppressed everything, and these emotions, I never used to have these emotions, in the past, I just carried on.

Then the euphoria when we eventually found out that our sentence -- my sentence is going to be quashed, that my name is exonerated, I'm exonerated, my wife and I jumped up and down with joy. And then that happiness starts fading and you start becoming angry, angry, so angry with the people who did this because, if it has been found out now that this was wrong, that it shouldn't have happened, and they admitted it because they settled out of court and said that they were wrong, from what I understand, they not only made me go through all this but, when the first 94
starting to go towards the $£ 1$ million turnover. I can imagine I could have grown it a lot more and it could have gone -- it could have become possibly much bigger. Who knows. There may have been change of that. That's the first thing.

The second thing is, forget about the business, supposing I decided to work. Well, with all my qualifications and experience at the time, not that they helped me with this Post Office, I could have earned at least $£ 90,000 / £ 100,000, £ 85,000 / £ 90,000$ whatever, in those days, and that could have happened that could have lasted for what, until today, $14,000 / 15,000$. I had to retire early because of ill health.

I had to scrimp and save. I couldn't afford things, I had to sell my car, I had to sell my house. I had to try and avoid creditors, I had to come to agreements to pay very little but whatever I could, basically, which is very little, but that's how I lived for the last 14 years or so, having to do that. I want not to feel like that. I want to feel worth it. I lost my confidence. I'd lost -- and this loss of confidence made me more aggressive and perhaps made me confrontational with other people to try and prove that I am good. I'm not that so-called nobody 96
thief, or whatever that you have made me out to be, and that has its price, not only just the financial but all the health, all the mental things that I've been going through.
I want that -- obviously, I want a really good
compensation to compensate for that. I don't know
what you can think you can imagine, even the potential of a good pension is gone. Imagine how much pension I could have earned if I, say, invested my money or even in a pension scheme if I was working for a company at the levels that I would have been able to work at. What would I have done? That would have taken me maybe 20/30 years. What pot would I have had in the end?
That's the sort of thing that I want the
Post Office to pay for, as well as these people: why?
Why did they do this? Is it really the contract
manager, Carol Ballan, I think her name was. Was she
really so vindictive that she wanted to destroy me
because I thought that she lied the last time we met and the meeting minutes of the meeting were distorted and things in there that were said that weren't really said and they were put out of context and I said that to her and I wrote her a reply, to that effect? Is that what happened?

The compensations need to be proportional and according to the severity of their action and the individuals who were responsible at the time should answer to that. They are happy, they have taken their millions of bonuses, and what not, or golden goodbyes, as I believe Alan Cook probably did when he went somewhere else, or whatever. I don't know what the contract manager did or the others, they were happy there. But what about us?
Q. Thank you, Mr Sabet. I don't have any further questions but perhaps the Chair may?10
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, no, thank you very much, Mr Blake. ..... 12
Thank you Mr Sabet for your evidence this ..... 13
afternoon. I greatly appreciate it. Thank you. ..... 14
A. Well, thank you for allowing me to voice it. It's ..... 15a great help.MR BLAKE: Chair, we're now going to have a few statementsread in before the break.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, fine.MS PATRICK: Sir, we have three witness summaries to readon behalf of clients represented by HudgellsSolicitors and, with your leave, I'll start with the16
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you. ..... 1718 summary of the evidence of Mr David Blakey.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, fine.2324
25SIR WYN WILLIAM01

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#### Abstract

Why did -- and I wrote to them saying I want somebody who is unbiased, Alan Cook, I want somebody who is unbiased, somebody who can think logically, to see what is going on, what the hell's going on, what's going on with the systems. He just said. "It gives me -- it gives me no pleasure to write you such a thing but, basically, tough, you know, the case will have to take its course".

All these people that they have destroyed, not just me, all of them. How could they not have known? This has taken over 20 years, 20 years. You can't start to think, well, what's going on here? Are all these people -- I don't know how many there were, 700 or something, maybe more -- are they all of them thieves? And this person who's been writing to us telling us there's an issue, is he also an idiot? They were telling me, "Oh, you've got to prove". I said to them, "The money disappears from the computer, it sometimes appears and disappears". "Oh, well, you've got to prove it". How do I prove it? I don't have control over the computer. I can't interrogate it, I can't do anything. How do I prove something appearing or disappearing?


They just -- they need to be held accountable. 98

Summary of witness statement of DAVID BLAKEY (read)
MS PATRICK: Mr Blakey and his wife took out a loan and together they took over Riby Square Post Office branch. Mr Blakey's wife, Gillian, became the subpostmistress and worked at the Post Office from 1996. A summary of Mrs Blakey's evidence has already been read for the Inquiry during yesterday's hearings and they have both produced full statements.

Mr Blakey says they would often struggle with balancing the accounts. When the Horizon System was introduced in 2000, he attended a one-day training and a trainer came to their Post Office. He says the trainer lacked understanding of the system. When there were shortfalls he paid them directly into the branch.

On 13 May 2004, Mr Blakey says there was an audit. At that time, he says he knew there had been a shortfall the night before and that shortfall amounted to just under $£ 65,000$. He told auditors himself about the shortfall and they called the fraud investigation team. In interview, Mr Blakey recalls he was asked if he had spent the money on another woman or on gambling debts. He says that the investigators were very aggressive and he told them that none of what they were saying was true. He 100
recalls seeing the transcript of the interview and he says his denials were not recorded. He was not represented in interview.
He was summoned to court and he says he was advised the evidence against him could potentially result in his imprisonment for 18 months to three years, on charges of theft and false accounting. He was advised, following transfer to the Crown Court, to plead guilty, otherwise, he recalls, he was advised he could be looking at a three to five-year custodial sentence. He said he would not plead guilty to theft but would plead guilty to false accounting.
During the trial, he recalls the Post Office was
asked to produce evidence of theft, which they could not produce. He recalls the judge commenting that he knew Mr Blakey was not a thief but he called him a fool. He was sentenced to nine months in prison on false accounting charges, suspended for two years. He recalls the judge paused when he said "nine months in prison", so Mr Blakey thought he was not going home that day.
Following his conviction, the Post Office asked
Mr Blakey to pay back $£ 65,000$. He and his wife were forced to declare bankruptcy. They lost their car and their mortgage, they were forced to sell their home. 101
has been proven, he feels guilty about going through everything in the first place. He wants the Inquiry to know that he feels guilty about the impact everything has had on his family but one of the biggest things for him remains that he now does not own anything.
Summary of witness statement of KASHMIR GILL (read)
MS PATRICK: We move now to the summary of the evidence of
Mrs Kashmir Gill. Mrs Gill and her husband worked hard for many years to build up a large business.
She's been married for 46 years and has three adult children.

Her family operated two Post Office branches and
she also had the role of branch manager at Cowley Road Post Office. The family owned Cowley Road Post Office and Underhill Circus Post Office, and she recalls there were issues with Horizon at both branches. She and her family decided to sell
Underhill Circus, as it was making losses, due to frequent balancing problems with Horizon. Yet they continued to experience shortfalls. Following an audit at Cowley Road in June 2009, a shortfall of around $£ 50,000$ was discovered and Mrs Gill was prosecuted for theft, fraud and false accounting. Her contract was terminated in July 2008. Following legal 103

They tried to sell the Post Office and found three potential buyers but say the Post Office blocked each sale. In September 2017, Mr Blakey suffered a stroke. This forced him into retirement. He fully believes the stress and anxiety of the situation and having to relive it contributed to his stroke.

He suffered with low mood, a poor sleep pattern, tiredness, a loss of enjoyment in his activities, a poor appetite, poor concentration, a lack of motivation, low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and low self-confidence, and also feelings of guilt. He says he experienced suicidal thoughts, although he did not act upon them.

Mr Blakey lost his job following the allegations made against him and he stopped paying into his pension. He says his conviction also had a substantial impact on his relationships. He felt bitter, angry and betrayed. He recalls his wife says he used to be the life and soul of the party and he says this has taken away from him. He had a difficult relationship with his daughter for 20 years but he says they have now reconnected and have an excellent relationship. His Mum passed away before his conviction was overturned.

Mr Blakey says that, even though his innocence 102
advice, she pleaded guilty and was given a suspended sentence, a fine and ordered to pay legal costs.

Her conviction was overturned in April 2021.
Mrs Gill says for a period of around six months she lived in constant fear of going to prison. She says before Horizon she had a very happy and successful life. She says she and her husband were in a comfortable position and they now feel that their retirement has been taken away from them.

The accusations and her conviction have had a profound impact on Mrs Gill's mental health. She has been assessed by a psychiatrist and diagnosed with acute stress reaction, post traumatic stress disorder and enduring personality change after catastrophic experience.

She says she avoids going to the local area to do her shopping and now travels further away to avoid people and the anxiety it causes. She cannot go to the temple to pray when other people are in there. She says her family name was tarnished. She and her husband have suffered significant financial hardship following her conviction and have had to sell their businesses and property, as well as relying on family for financial assistance. She wants the Inquiry to know she still feels embarrassed, although she knows 104
She believes nothing can undo what her family has been subject to and she says the experience will stay with them for the rest of their lives.
Summary of witness statement of CARL PAGE (read)
MS PATRICK: Finally, sir, we turn to a summary of the evidence of Mr Carl Page.
Carl Page became subpostmaster of the Rugeley
branch in April 1997. From around 2001 he began to
notice shortfalls. He asked for further training but
says this fell on deaf ears. He made good shortfalls
which were only small amounts at first.
On 13 January 2003, he received a call from
Staffordshire Police and was asked to attend the
police station. He was informed then a customer from
the Post Office had been arrested on the grounds of
money laundering and Mr Page was suspected of conspiring with him.
An audit was conducted and identified
a shortfall which was substantial. Mr Page was
arrested in January 2003 and suspended on
14 January 2003. Following his arrest, he says he was
interviewed by Post Office investigators and he
describes the manner of the investigation as extremely
humiliating and upsetting.

she has done nothing wrong.
she has done nothing wrong. ..... 12
6evidence of Mr Carl Page. 105

## He says:

"I felt absolutely worthless. I felt upset and
angry and I'd lost everything I'd worked hard for."
His conviction was quashed in April 2021. He
reports he lost a significant amount of weight in
prison, dropping from 110 kilos to 91 kilos. He
suffered intrusive memories and he began taking
antidepressants in March 2008. He goes on in his
statement to describe the financial impact of
conviction, which included bankruptcy, increased
insurance cost and an inability to secure or to change employment.

He says many roads and opportunities were denied
to him because he needed a clean CRB check. He
describes the whole process from his initial arrest
through investigation, trial and appeal, and says it's
had a significant impact on his relationships. He
split from his first wife in 2001 but recounts that he
had a good relationship with his sons. He says this
was stopped when he was arrested.
He says:
"My sons had to change their name to avoid the
negative stigma attached to what happened to me, as
they continued in their respective professions."
He says -- and goes on to describe the impact on 107

He believes his contract was terminated in the autumn of 2003. In December 2003, the Post Office initiated criminal proceedings for theft of $£ 586,000$ and money laundering proceedings. His trial took place in June 2005, when he pleaded not guilty to charges of theft and money laundering. He was acquitted of money laundering and a verdict could not be reached on the alleged theft.

Subsequently, the Post Office again brought charges of theft but, again, this time concerning $£ 282,000$. He was advised, again, that, if convicted, he could face seven years in prison. He says he was advised at that time to plead guilty to theft of $£ 94,000$. He says he recalls being told, "Anything less than $£ 100,000$ would get me only two years in prison". Mr Page says he took this advice as he had a child and a family.

He pleaded guilty in December 2006. He was sentenced in January 2007 to two years' imprisonment. He was in prison for six months and then on a tag for the remainder of his sentence. Following on from his conviction, Mr Page suffers with PTSD. He says of his time in custody:
"Prison itself was such a humiliating experience."

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his own mental health:
"Things were getting on top of me and my debts were building up. This ended in a suicide attempt in January 2014 and I was admitted to a mental health hospital for three weeks."

Following the suicide attempt, he recounts his daughter's mother stopped him seeing her for around four years. He was very close to his daughter and he found this devastating but says he understood the rationale behind it. He had married in 2003 and he split from his second wife in 2008, he says, as a result of the strain of the prosecution and his conviction. He said he had found it difficult to be close to her or to anyone.

Although Mr Page's parents stood by him, he wants the Inquiry to know he always had in the back of his mind that he thought they must have thought he was guilty. His Dad passed away before his conviction was quashed.

He now feels his father died not knowing the truth. Mr Page wants the Inquiry to know that he remains saddened at the thought of what life he and his now partner could have had. He had lived a very comfortable life. This was all taken away. He says:
"Nothing will be able to undo what I was subject 108
to."Sir, that brings an end to the summaries to beread for the clients of Hudgell Solicitors. Thankyou.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you very much, Ms Patrick. Herecomes Mr Blake to tell me how to proceed henceforth.
MR BLAKE: May I propose a ten-minute break and then wehave our final witness, which is Ms Arch.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Certainly. So what's that, 25 to?
MR BLAKE: 25 to, yes.SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Fine.( 3.25 pm )( 3.34 pm )(A short break)MR BLAKE: Thank you, Chair. The next witness isNichola Arch.
NICHOLA ARCH (affirmed)SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Good afternoon, Mrs Arch. It's rather 18symmetrical that you are one of the first persons that 19I met when I started this work and now we end thesehearings with your oral evidence. So good to see youagain.A. Thank you, and you.Questioned by MR BLAKEMR BLAKE: Mrs Arch, you should have in front of you109
Q. What was your first Post Office job?1
A. That was as a counter assistant at Brimscombe ..... 2Post Office, just as an assistant.Q. Was that in 1993?
4A. It was, yes.
5Q. You then became something called a relief worker; is
that right? ..... 76
A. Yes, they sold it -- Brimscombe Post Office and
a family took over, so I wasn't required. So I then ..... 9
did relief work, because the subpostmasters couldn't ..... 10get anyone to cover them on holidays and things. SoI decided I'd work all over Stroud in Gloucestershire,covering for everyone's holidays. So I pretty muchworked in most of the small sub-offices throughoutStroud.
Q. By 1998 you were Chalford Hill Post Office?
A. I was, yeah.
Q. How did you get involved in that Post Office?
A. I started there on relief and then the subpostmistress got diagnosed with terminal cancer and, unfortunately, she passed away. So the husband wanted to keep the Post Office within the village, so he applied to take over the postmaster position, even though he wasn't working in the Post Office, he was what we'd call a ghost postmaster and asked if I would take it on and
A. Thank you, and you. 111
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a witness statement that is dated 15 March of this year.
A. It is, yes.
Q. Can you please turn to the final page of that. That's page $19 ?$
A. Yes.
Q. Is that your signature at the bottom?
A. It is.
Q. Can you confirm that that statement is true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. It is.
Q. As the Chair has said, you assisted Sir Wyn during the non-statutory phase of this Inquiry and you've provided a transcript and a human impact statement from that stage as exhibits to the witness statement, and all of those will become evidence in due course.

I'm going to start today with your background.
Can you tell us where you were born and where you grew up?
A. I was born in Bristol and I grew up in a sleepy village called Wotton-under-Edge, and then I went on to college in the Stroud area and then took residence there where my fiancé was.
Q. I think you trained as a teacher, is that right?
A. Yes, I did.

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continue working there, in order to keep the Post Office within the community, which is what I did.
Q. Was it just a post office?
A. No. He also gave me the opportunity to pay for the stock and to take over the shop, and I could run the shop as I see fit, alongside the Post Office. He would give me a small salary from the Post Office and the shop would be mine, as a new business venture. So with me and my fiancé just, sort of, setting up in the area, it seemed like a brilliant opportunity for us to start a little business of our own, so ...
Q. So you were, in effect, doing the job of a subpostmistress --
A. Yes.
Q. -- and running the shop?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you live nearby at the time?
A. I lived about two and a half miles away from Chalford Hill Post Office, in the sort of village that sat next door to it. So we'd just joined a shared ownership scheme with the Government to buy a little two up, two down terrace, and get on the ladder. So that was sort of our developing stage. We'd had the business, my husband -- who is my husband now, worked locally as well, so we bought a property, set up ready 112
to start a new life in Stroud.
Q. How old were you at that stage?
A. Which year are we talking?
Q. When you first started in that Post Office?
A. When I started at Brimscombe I was sort of 23 and then by the time I got to Chalford I was about 27.
Q. I am going to ask you about the roll-out and that's something that this Inquiry is going to be looking at the next phase in the summer. Can you tell us what the roll-out was?
A. When Horizon came about, obviously I'm trying to remember 22 years ago now, but we had a memo come through to say that it was going to be computerised, which I welcomed, because I'd bought all new fittings in the shop and modernised that, so the thought of modernising the Post Office as well I welcomed, and also it took so long to do it all manually that
I thought, well, with the computer system, within a couple of hours on balancing, we'd get it all done in half the time.

So I was one of the first -- we had a memo to
say Chalford Hill was going to be one of the first roll-out branches, which I was under the impression that it was a limited amount of offices, they would install the equipment in, say, for example, 50 , and, 113
following day in the evening -- well, at the end of the business day. So, no, I hadn't done any balancing work whatsoever on the system.
Q. I'm going to ask you about shortfalls and discrepancies. When did you first experience a shortfall?
A. The first week. The first time I did the balance minus a few -- I think it was about $£ 13$, it was $£ 1,000$ exactly short. I could see why. The pension dockets that we did, that people brought in, I added them up manually because it seemed an awful lot and I wanted to compare it with the computer system, so I knew I'd got it. And, at the end of each day we'd send all the dockets off out of the building, and I wanted a paper copy. So I used a printout calculator and added the dockets up myself each day before I sent them to Ireland because they'd go to Ireland and I'd never see them again.
Q. Can I just ask you what are pension dockets, for those who don't know?
A. Pension dockets are -- it's like a chequebook, like an old fashioned chequebook. There's two dockets per page and each docket represents one week of a pension whether it be family allowance, old age pension or whatever.
as it worked well and progressed, then it would then go on for a bigger roll-out throughout the country. But they was going to initially install it into the first few, which I was one of them.
Q. Can you tell us about the installation, what that involved?
A. Yes. Well, they turned up -- well, there was one gentleman who turned up, engineer, and set it up. It was a very tiny Post Office, so he sort of went in about half hour before, set it all up so it was running and he left. Then we opened the Post Office so it was open and running, and the shop, and the trainer was sat with me and, every time a transaction needed to be done, we were trying to do it at the same time and, within a couple of hours, the trainer left and left me with a big manual and said anything I needed to know thereon after would be in this manual.
Q. So you were being trained while people were coming in and out of the Post Office?
A. Yes.
Q. Were you there for the balancing when you were training?
A. Not whilst I was training no because that was the morning and I wasn't due to balance until the 114

The customers would bring the book in, we would stamp it, take out the docket and keep it, but then the computer system, when the system first got installed, you'd have to then put it into the computer system as well. So, in fact, it was twice as much work, to be honest, because we had to put it in the computer as well as do it manually when we first started off.

And then each day, as soon as you had a pile of them, because we would have you know 50/60 customers coming in in the morning, same in the afternoon, then we would add them up -- we didn't have to, but I would add them up with the calculator at the end of the day, then keep the printout of the calculator with it and then I would send the dockets off.

Then I would check my total against the Horizon total per day and it was right, and so I knew that everything was running as it should, or so I thought. But then on day seven, ready for balancing, the computer would automatically calculate my weekly totals for me. But a weekly total didn't add up to the daily totals, and so I could see that it was wrong.
Q. On seeing that it was wrong, did you call the helpline?

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A. I did, yes, straightaway the first week. I called them and said, "I can see there's a problem. My daily figures are correct, what I've paid out to customers is correct, my cash is correct, but the weekly total generated by Horizon is incorrect". And she said, "Well, it's only the first week", what am I expecting, I should just wait for it to settle down, it will correct itself and teething problems are bound to happen, and that I needed to stop being negative about being modernised.
Q. Did it settle down?
A. No. Week 2 , the 1,000 doubled exactly to 2,000 . Because I'd kept my daily totals as I did the first week, I did exactly the same the second week and I kept by calculator printouts each day. Looked on the weekly, and the weekly generated total from Horizon was completely different, short again, and it had doubled the shortage. The first week it was 1,000 , the second week it was 2,000 , and this habit continued for the first six weeks.
Q. Did you continue to call the helpline?
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A. I called them every single week and I explained what I could see and I kept my calculator printouts for each bundle of dockets, so I had it there. And then week 7 , I had a visit.
Q. Do you remember how many were there?
A. There was three, I thought, three auditors.

I recognised one of them because I'd been with
Post Office for nearly ten years then, so I'd had a couple of audits randomly in different offices that I happened to be working in. So one of them I recognised and they said they'd come along to do an audit.

I welcomed them, thought it was great, thought
the helpline was actually being helpful. So
I thought, you know, they are obviously coming to address the problems that I'd been talking about.

So I let them in. One of the -- well, the
auditor and one of the gentlemen went into the Post Office because it was a very small cubicle-type set up. They went on in, started the audit, and I stood out into the stockroom round the back with the lady who came with them, and made everyone coffee, had a chat, just normal chit-chat, everything was fine and then the gentleman, not the auditor, come out. He then said, "Oh, do you know you are $£ 32,000$ short" and I said, "Yes, I rang the helpline last night, I have already told them about this", I said, "but it's been an ongoing problem and I thought you were going to check it out for me to make sure 119
Q. That's an audit?
A. Yes.
Q. I think you've said in your statement that by week 6 it had reached $£ 32,000$ ?
A. Yes. It was literally doubling, square rooted every day, so it went from 1 to 2 ; 2 to $4 ; 4$ to $8 ; 8$ to 16; 16 to 32 and I rang every time.
Q. When it had reached $£ 32,000$ did you again phone the helpline?
A. I did, yes, and I was getting quite cross then and I said, you know, "This isn't right and I don't know what I can do about it". But I had to declare that everything was fine cash-wise because, otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to trade the following day and, obviously, I didn't have the money to put in and that was something, although I've listened to the Inquiry, it was something I never really got involved in.

When I balanced it each week, it may be out $£ 20$ one week, $£ 10$ the next, but I never touched the money I let it be, as it was, undeclared and then it would correct itself naturally over time and, manually, it always did. But obviously with this, it never did.
Q. The auditors arrived?
A. Yes.

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everything's okay".
Q. What was the response to that?
A. He said, "Oh right, okay. Well, we do need to ask you about it", he said, "but I don't think we'll be asking you about it here". And I said, "Well, why not?" and he said, "It's too small", he said, "we'd be better sat around a table". And, obviously, I didn't have the room, the Post Office cubicle was tiny. So I had no problem with that. He said, "I think what we'll do is we'll go over to Stroud Crown Office" which was about six miles away.
Q. How did you get to Stroud?
A. Well, I thought logic would be that I said, "Well, I'll come over in my car", because I lived about three miles away from the Post Office, so I drove to work. I said, "What I'll do, I'll follow you over to Stroud in my car and then, as soon as we're done, I can nip back and open the shop and get the Post Office up and running again". That seemed the most practical.

He said, "No, you won't be doing that. I would prefer it if you came in our car". And, at that point, I was getting a bit, "Well, that's a bit odd". I said, "That's a bit strange, why would I want to come in your car?" He said, "Well, the parking in Stroud is awful and it's double yellow lines outside 120
the Crown Office, so you're probably better just coming in our car and then we will bring you back anyway".
So I thought, "Oh, well, that makes sense",
because it is awful parking in the middle of town. So
I thought, "Well, yeah, that's fine then". I said,
"Well, l'll just ring the owner of the business and let him know that the Post Office" -- because, obviously, the villagers would be asking him, "Oh, why is the Post Office shut?" So I said, "l'll just ring him and let him know", and he said, "Yeah, if you can ring him and let him know where you are and that you will let him know how the day progresses".
I said, "Oh, right, fine". And I thought he was just sort of talking gibberish, to be honest, so I just rang the owner and said, "I'll be back in about an hour, I've got to go over, answer a few questions and then they're going to drop me back but l'll put a sign on the door so the customers know".
"No problem."
So then they put me in the back -- well, they didn't put me in the back of the car, I got in the back of the car with the lady and the gentleman was driving and, on the way there, she was sort of saying "This looks a very expensive place to live" which 121
Q. Can you describe the conversation that you had at that point?
A. They then said, "Oh, do you mind if we record this conversation", and I then said straightaway, "Why would you want to record it?" The gentleman then said, "I don't think you actually realise how much trouble you're in", and I was just taken aback. I said, "What do you mean? I've done nothing wrong". He then went on to say that he's ex-CID, he had met people like me before, he knew a liar when he saw one, and rather than waste more time could I just tell them what l've done with the money, so that they could all go home. Obviously, I hadn't touched any money whatsoever, so I made it crystal clear to him that there's no way I was going to say I've taken money when I haven't taken a penny. They'd spotted a postcard on the wall that I'd sent to the customers, because I had had a week's holiday, and he said, "Oh I notice you have been on a week's holiday. Did we pay for that?" And, obviously, I said, "Don't be so ridiculous, no". Well, this carried on until 3.45 in the afternoon.
Q. When did it start approximately?
A. We got there about 11.00, and I was locked in. I didn't leave the room at all, until they took me

I thought was a bit of an odd thing to say but -- and I said, "Well, it is, it's in the Cotswolds, so, you know, it's not cheap but", I said, "we've managed to get a shared ownership property, so we're just sort of getting ourselves" --
"Oh, that's very nice, it must take a lot of money". I said, "Well, yes, it is, but we're both working and, you know, we're getting on". She said, "Oh, that's good". And then we got to the Crown Office and then she was in front of me and he was behind.
Q. When you got to the Crown Office were you on your own?
A. Yes.
Q. Were you offered legal representation?
A. No, no, because we were going, what I thought, was for a chat.
Q. Where did you go in the Crown Office?
A. We had to walk through the main business side it had about 12 counters and it was really busy, but we walked through that and then out through a side door into a little back room.
Q. Who was in that room?
A. No-one. The gentleman walked in first, I walked in second and the lady was behind me. And then the door shut and it was pin coded door, so I was locked in.
back at 3.45 and said they would have to come back to me again because I've continually lied to them all day, which he was very annoyed about, which I just let him get on with it. I thought, "That's your opinion, whatever".

Yeah, then he took me back he said, "You do realise you will never step one foot in that Post Office ever again".
Q. Having dropped you outside the Post Office, were you able to get into the Post Office?
A. No. He kept hold of the keys since the audit had finished, since we left. He locked the door when we left and I never had the keys back ever.
Q. How did you feel at that point?
A. There was a mixture of things. I was probably, I would say, in shock because I'd gone to work that morning as a normal -- looking forward to the day. Yes, there was problems but nothing for me to worry about and then, all of a sudden, everything had gone. I didn't know how I was going to pay my bills, I didn't know what was going to happen to the shop. It just all happened so out of the blue. I had no time to really understand what on earth was going on.

I just got in my car, went straight home, I can't remember the journey going home at all but 124

I got home and I rang my Mum and my fiancé to say what 1 had happened and I was absolutely hysterical at that point.
Q. I'm going to ask you about your suspension and termination. You weren't the subpostmistress. What happened to the subpostmaster at that stage?
A. He then rang me. It was about 7.30 in the evening the
same day and said the Post Office had been to his home and basically said to him that he either gets rid of me or they will go after him and he was a 74-year old gentleman, he had just lost his wife four months prior to that of cancer, and he'd been married to her for 49 years, and he just said, "I can't go through that" which I could sort of understand.

So he said, "I'm sorry but", he said, "I'm going
to have to do as they tell me to do or I'm going to land up in prison" and I said, "What have they told you to do?" He said, "I've got to suspend you at the moment and then they will let me know what to do next", and then within three weeks l'd had a letter to say I was sacked.
Q. On receiving that letter, how did you feel?
A. I couldn't believe it because I'd done absolutely nothing wrong. I was excited for the future of the Post Office and all that it entailed and all the 125
all in my hair, and it got to the point where, I think it was part paranoia and part of what was true, but I felt like everyone was talking about me, I was the lady who stole off elderly people, and I just couldn't deal with it, so I stayed indoors and never, ever went out.
Q. Was there a particular link with elderly people because it related to pensions? Is that --
A. I assume so. That was conjured up by the Post Office 9 and that was how they worded it in the Stroud News and Journal, that I'd been stealing off elderly pensioners through the pension dockets. So, yeah, that was how the public perceived it, I guess.
Q. Moving on to the prosecution, about 12 months later you were notified of the prosecution. What were you charged with?
A. Theft and fraud. They'd charged me for $£ 24,000$ of theft. They'd found -- apparently, they'd found $£ 8,000$, and fraud for making the accounts correct for business on the Thursday.
Q. Was that a letter that came through the post?
A. Yes.
Q. How were you when you saw that letter?
A. I would safely -- I was absolutely shattered. I'd give in then. I didn't want to exist, to be honest.

modernisation, et cetera, and within -- you know, within a year, everything had gone. I could not get my head around it. I was in a state of shock. I was put on antidepressants. I just could not accept that I'd gone from starting a new, happy life with a new business to losing absolutely everything on that day and being mistrusted as well, and then it appeared in the papers also.
Q. I was going to say, how did people come to be aware of it?
A. I didn't know at all that it had been made public and then my now husband's grandmother rang the next day and said, "Is that the same Nicky as we know that they're saying has stolen from the Post Office?" and his grandmother had gone to her local Post Office and saw it on the front page of the Stroud News and Journal, that I had been stealing off old aged pensioners, and that was three weeks after.
Q. Are you aware of how they knew?
A. I've no idea but it wasn't from me.
Q. How were you treated by the local community at that point?
A. It was just awful. I went to the local supermarket, I felt like it was silent when I walked through the door. One day I got spat on twice outside. It was 126

My husband was at work. I rang him at work and said, you know, "They're charging me", because we was absolutely convinced there was no way they would charge me. They would see sense, it would either correct itself or, you know, it would obviously happen again, or they would soon realise that it wasn't me.

So -- and because we hadn't heard for so long, I'd been questioned twice in the local police station by them and nothing had changed, and so we genuinely, genuinely believed it was going to get dropped. So when I received that, that was just devastating.
Q. How were you doing financially at that stage?
A. We were getting in trouble -- well, I was because I hadn't worked, it was all in the papers, and my husband was a lorry driver, but he was a tree surgeon at that point, but he was self-employed. So a lot of the bills weren't getting paid and it got to the point where we had to decide whether we sold the house or had it repossessed because, we weren't going to be able to carry on not paying the bills, and it seemed more realistic to me to sell the property and try and get the asking price for it so that we could pay the bills.

But we couldn't, in the end, because I wouldn't go out mentally, I'd been on Prozac then for a year, 128
but I still couldn't face the world in any way, shape or form.
So we decided to sell it at a reduced price to
get a quick sale so that we could leave the village
and that was the only way I was prepared to go
outside, is if we would leave Stroud and go back to
Wotton, where I came from, and so we moved in with my parents.
Q. You've told us that your fiancé at some point became your husband. Was it around that time?
A. Yes, yes, it was -- well, he decided that we was getting married. I was trying to persuade him not to marry me because I thought it would be far better life for him to be able to walk away and not be involved in all this mess. It seemed madness to me that he would want to stay and get involved, but he was adamant that he wanted to stand by me.
So we arranged to get married. I wouldn't
celebrate in any way because I felt it was inappropriate with the court cases and things coming up. I didn't want to pretend I was happy and everything when I wasn't. So we went to the registry
office and got married and then just went home again and that was the end of it.
But then we had an evening visit to the 129
eat all the tablets", and it seemed like quite a good option at the time, to be honest.
Q. You mention not being able to get hold of certain documents and, at the beginning of your evidence, you talked about keeping quite a good record.
A. I did. I was very, very sharp on it because I knew

I hadn't understood the computer system as well as
I should have done but two or three hours was not
enough when people were interrupting me coming in. So
I wanted to do my own records as well. But they
wouldn't let me in the building. I had to get
a friend and my now husband to empty the shop for me,
because I wasn't even allowed to go back into the shop. I asked for my printouts of my calculations so that I could actually stand a chance of explaining what was happening because I could see what the problems were. But I was refused entry. Even my cash register and everything I bought, everything they kept. I didn't have nothing back.
Q. The case would have started at the Magistrates' Court?
A. It did.
Q. Stroud Magistrates' Court?
A. It did.
Q. Then it went to Gloucester Crown Court?
A. It did, yes.
solicitor's on the Thursday leading up to the trial and he said that I'm likely that I'm looking at seven years in prison because every single piece of evidence that l'd asked for, including my calculations that l'd done on the calculator, the Post Office refused to supply them to me.

They'd also, so say, destroyed the recording, so I couldn't have a copy of the recorded interviews either, and so the solicitor basically said that, due to the lack of evidence, he was really concerned that I was going to struggle to prove my innocence. So, you know, I need to prepare myself for prison.

So I remember walking home that night with my fiancé and then we decided that -- well, he suggested that maybe we'd take all the tablets that the doctor had give us to get through and we would end it all that day, and then we would never have to go through a court case. I'd never been in a court before in my life and I was terrified. I have to admit, I was terrified, but there was no way I was going to go and say I'd done something when I hadn't.

So I seriously considered this and he said, you know, he said, "I'll stand by you, no matter what, but if you don't want to go through it, I totally understand. We'll drive off somewhere nice and just 130
Q. Eventually, it was transferred to Bristol Crown Court?
A. Yes.
Q. Was that over a relatively long period of time?
A. It eventually -- it wasn't really because in Stroud I had to put in the plea, which was obviously not guilty, and then we went to Gloucester, and I don't know why it was changed to Bristol but it was a matter of months, and then up to April 2002 the date was set for Bristol Crown Court.
Q. Now, we've heard during the course of these human impact hearings about people who have pleaded guilty on advice. You didn't plead guilty.
A. No.
Q. Why not?
A. Because I wasn't guilty and also, I think, you know, because l've got to know a lot of the victims, obviously, and they've got families and things. I had no children. I'd lived quite an independent life with my husband. Maybe if I'd have had babies, I would have thought "if there's a chance of me not leaving them", then maybe I would have been tempted. But, no, I didn't have children and that made it easier for me to think "right, okay, we'll do a prison sentence". If that's what it's going to take because there's no way I'm going to say I've done something when 132
I haven't.
So it was a question of making arrangements togo to prison, which is what I did, for meals and billpaying, and things like that. I got my sisters and mybrothers involved, and they would -- because Steve
wasn't -- my husband -- wasn't very good at things
like that. So I managed to make arrangements so that
everything would be in place. Luckily, because we had
moved to Mum's and got rid of the house, he wouldn't
have to sort that out anyway. I was in an IVA at that
point to pay the bills, so it was one payment so Steve
was earning enough to make that payment, so it seemed
that I was ready to go to prison. ..... 13
Q. Very briefly, who can you recall giving evidence for ..... 14
the prosecution? ..... 15
A. The Post Office actually requested the subpostmaster ..... 16and my part-timer to be witnesses for them and theyalso had two customers, two elderly customers, but, as
it happened, they were all very favourable to me anddidn't do the Post Office any favours whatsoever.
Q. You gave evidence? ..... 21
A. I did. ..... 22
Q. How was that experience? ..... 23
A. It isn't easy. No, it was probably one of the worstthings I would wish upon anyone. I had prison
suggest. But it did make it easier knowing, because I genuinely believed, if nothing else, that judge knows that I'm innocent, and I was quite proud of that, to be honest.
Q. Can you tell us what the verdict was?
A. Not guilty, unanimously.
Q. What was the atmosphere like?
A. Unbelievable. It was very strange because the judge said, "Right, Nichola, you can go". The prison officers let me out, because obviously I was locked in, and I walked out into the corridor and it was completely empty, everyone had gone home but my husband and family and all were still in court because the judge hadn't released them at that point. But I just stood there, and my father was in hospital, so he wasn't there anyway, and I just fell to my knees. I couldn't believe it, that it was actually all over, after all that time, that we'd got to this point. The Post Office just left. They didn't acknowledge it, whatsoever. They just left the building and that was that.

Then the judge released my family and my
husband, and then he come and then we just celebrated.
And my Mum was in hospital with my father at the time.
He'd gone into hospital with kidney failure and he17
officers next to me, obviously. I'd been in the trial for two days by then, by the time I was called up. The barrister was really -- the Post Office barrister was very aggressive. He was very frustrated with what he would describe as my attitude, the fact that I was wasting everybody's time by denying it.

He threw a bundle of pension dockets actually at me, at one point, and, luckily, the judge of the case stopped it and said, "That's enough, she's not going to say any different now, so can you move on", and he just sat down then and, yeah, it went to deliberation at that point.
Q. So there came a time for the judge's summing-up. What do you remember about that?
A. I genuinely -- I'm absolutely convinced he believed me because he pointed out to the jury -- straightaway he said, you know, "Obviously when you go to deliberate and consider everything that you have heard, please, please consider whether a crime has actually even happened here", and when he said that I thought, "He knows, he knows l've done nothing".

Yeah, and I got reassurance from that, I have to say, because, obviously, we were all sent out then and I had to just wait in the corridor for the verdict, which was just the worst few hours of my life, I would 134
discharged himself for the evening to come home, so that we could have a little get together at home to celebrate, which is what we did.
Q. Thinking about the impact on you --

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Before we go on, Mr Blake, could I just intervene to ask this: when you say that the
Post Office called witnesses to give evidence against you, like, for example, the subpostmaster himself, I take it those persons gave oral evidence at the trial?
A. They did, yes. They did.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: It's often the case, and I only put it in this way because I just want you to try and help me by remembering if you can, but it's often the case that some parts of the prosecution evidence is actually read to the jury, all right. Can you remember whether statements were read to the jury, for example, about what Horizon had found?
A. No.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: There was nothing like that was there?
A. No, no. They asked -- the legal team were just asking -- I remember them asking each individual, "Do you know Nicky? What do you think has happened to the money" --
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That is what is slightly confusing me, 136
Mrs Arch. At some point in time the Post Office wouldhave had to try and establish that money had gonemissing, to put it loosely, all right?
A. Yes.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I'm wondering what evidence they mayhave called, either read or orally, to establish thatmoney was missing.
A. They literally went by the weekly balance sheet ofwhat Horizon told them.SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, I think you've answered myquestion now. So there was evidence before the juryabout what Horizon had said?
A. Yes, yes, they had the documents, the weekly report.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, that's fine
A. Every week.15
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you. ..... 16
MR BLAKE: Thank you very much. Did you manage to find ..... 17
a job after that? ..... 18
A. Not directly because, again, whilst we were in Stroud, ..... 19
sort of, a year or two, up until the trial no. After ..... 20
the trial, yes, I did about sort of six months. It ..... 21
took me a while to come to terms with what had ..... 22
happened and try and sort of -- I attempted to come ..... 23
off the medication I was on but that wasn't a good ..... 24
idea, so I stayed on that. And, yes, I did get a job ..... 25
damaged by shoulder and my kneecap, and the risks was getting a bit too often. So I took ill health
retirement at 48.
Q. I want to ask you now about the JFSA?
A. Yes.
Q. I think you joined in $2014 ?$
Q. Yes.
A. Yes.
Q. Why did it take so long in between your prosecution to get involved?
A. Well, I hadn't heard anything and I'd actually chose but, as soon as the trial was over, I thought, "Right, that's it, I've got to try and make a life for myself now", and I was in a different town as well, which helped. So yes, I put it behind me and then I saw on Google, I was on the computer, and then I saw what must have been at the point when Second Sight was doing their work and it caught my eye, and I thought, "Oh, my God, that's the same problem". And I then started reading up on it and then I got in touch with Alan Bates, and then I heard of Nick Wallis and then he was prepared to do a story about my story and listen to me, and it was the first time somebody had sort of shown any interest.
And so I did an interview with Nick, he followed
to try and put it by me, obviously, when it happened
that's it, I've got to try and make a life for myself 139

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eventually.
Q. There was also some good news: you had a child?
A. Yes.
Q. What was your physical health like, though?
A. It wasn't too bad. Yeah, in 2005, which obviously was only a couple of years after the trial, we decided to try for a child, and I did get pregnant but, as soon as I went into labour, I had to have a Caesarean and then they found out that everything was diseased inside, so I had to have a radical hysterectomy, so I was unable to have any more children after that.

I had been on antidepressants since this happened and I'm still on them today. I've tried several times, three or four times now, to come off them and it never really works. It's not a good idea.

And it keeps me stable and keeps me able to live a general life. I've got fibromyalgia, arthritis, anaemia, vitamin B deficiency, and so on, so l've got several problems health-wise and, obviously, menopause because of the hysterectomy. And I've had to have two operations on my feet, and so l've got no feeling in my left foot at all, which causes me to have a lot of falls, which recently I broke my foot.

So, unfortunately, at 48, I'm retired due to ill health because I'd had several falls at work and 138
my story on, introduced me to loads of other people involved, and then I joined the JFSA and supported it ever since because, as it unfolded in the meetings, it started off with 50 people, the next minute we knew we had 300 , then 400 people, then 500 . It was just absolute madness.

So yeah, so that's how -- and I've been with them and stuck with them ever since trying to get some sort of justice.
Q. In terms of compensation, interim payments you haven't received an interim payment --
A. No.
Q. -- is that right? And that's because you weren't successfully prosecuted?
A. Yes.
Q. You wrote to the Prime Minister, I think?
A. I wrote to the Prime Minister and I also wrote to Mr Scully as well. I wrote to my local MP because I -- to me, malicious prosecution is exactly that. You're either maliciously prosecuted or you're not. You know, to me, that area of the law -- and I could well be wrong because I'm not obviously adverse to that -- but to me that area is about the prosecution and I was maliciously prosecuted. I lost absolutely everything. It was all in the papers and everything 140
else, and now the Post Office has decided to bend the rules again and decide that, unless you were convicted, you can't have a malicious prosecution claim, and I just do not understand why that would be
Q. So in terms of the interim payment, what were you told?
A. I was first told by Mr Scully that I was entitled to pursue a malicious prosecution claim, so therefore an interim payment was likely, and then I had a letter to say he'd made a mistake and that in fact, because I'm not entitled to a malicious prosecution claim, l'm not entitled to an interim payment either.
Q. You were also part of the group action is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. You did receive some compensation for that?
A. I did.
Q. You've also submitted another letter from Mr Scully in relation to that; is that right?
A. I don't know.
Q. Can you tell us about the group action, please.
A. Obviously, I really appreciate the JFSA. Without them, none of us would be where we are; so, you know, that goes without saying. But I was actually paid $£ 9,500$ in total and so I thought that was ridiculous, obviously, because l'd lost far more than that. 141
them because every single time that you think you're a step forward and, yes, we won, we won as a duo -- we didn't win at all.

The Post Office made this deal, paid 56 million
quid, which is absolutely disgusting considering the amount of lives they have absolutely ruined and wrecked. They were the winners. But Judge Fraser has made it crystal clear that they were guilty, totally guilty, and now they're deciding what they want to do about it. So they're carrying on that behaviour, that learned behaviour that we know they're very good at that. You know, it's almost like plausible
deniability that they get this learned behaviour that wreaks through the whole company and, even now, they're saying, "Yeah, we were found guilty but we'll pay compensation our way, and we'll do it when we want to do it, and we'll do it in such a way that suits us". And I do not understand for a company that guilty of wrecking that many lives why they're allowed to dictate how we move forward because none of us can move forward until they abide by the law and pay back what they've stolen off of the victims involved in this.

They've taken money that wasn't rightly theirs
to take. All the shortages and things that people

But the settlement agreement that they agreed to after the group litigation, you know, there was an agreement made that those without a conviction cannot pursue a malicious prosecution claim and it's a clause within that settlement agreement, which I was annoyed about because I felt that for those -- I mean, I'm trying to find out how many of us there are that were actually proven to be innocent, so that we could get together and actually investigate this and take it further because it just seems ridiculous to me.

We're struggling to find -- you know, at the moment there's Suzanne Palmer, who I believe has given evidence already, and myself. Lee Castleton is slightly different but similar. But I can't seem to find anyone else who's in that same position. But I believe we should have been shown that settlement agreement before it was agreed because I never would have agreed to it.
Q. What do you feel about compensation for those who were acquitted?
A. To me, it shouldn't be questioned. To me, if you're maliciously prosecuted, you're maliciously prosecuted. You know, to me the law is absolutely crystal clear and I do not understand why the Post Office seem to have the ability to bend our country's rules to suit 142
have given them, put their tills right, paid 20,000, sold their properties to put it right, they've put all this money in the kitty. The Post Office had no right to take a penny of that money. Yet they still have it and they still own it and get interest on it, and still all the victims are waiting.

I do not understand why they are allowed still -- and now they'll say, "Well, we'll wait for the Inquiry. We'll wait for that to end and see how it goes then". Why are they allowed to dictate how they serve their punishment when they have been found guilty by the biggest court in this country, from the High Court? What was the whole point in Judge Fraser doing all that work, writing that incredible judgment, for us all to ignore it and say, "Well, Post Office, do what you want when you want. Just let us know when you're ready" because that's what it feels like now.
Q. What would you like from the Post Office?
A. I think an apology is pointless. I asked for an apology and they refused to give me one because I wasn't convicted. Apparently, the apology is linked to conviction as well, which to me is shambolic.

I'm slightly different. I don't want to sound disrespectful to the victims who have been to prison because I cannot imagine what they have gone through. 144
What worries me the most now is if we worked out whoare the guilty parties in this, there's hundreds andhundreds of people who are guilty -- not just thePaula Vennells or the CEO, that CEO. We've got -- tome all the barristers that sat back and watched thesepeople get prosecuted week in, week out, week in.Nobody saw a habit growing. Nobody thought, "Oh, thisis a bit strange". All the judges, everyone, all thePost Office, the Government, the BEIS, all the people,if we added up all the people who are guilty and party
to this event, the victims will be waiting for years
and years to get them all through the court system tobe proven guilty like they are.So to me -- and then we will lose even morepostmasters. We've lost 33 already. If we carry onwaiting and waiting and waiting for all these peopleto go through the courts, it will take more than mylifetime. I'm in my 50s now. I was in my 20s whenthis happened.To me now, I would love a name and shame. Let'shave a couple of newspapers with all their faces inand all their names so we can all see what they doneand who they done it to. We'll have pages of that.What worries me more is poorly victims now whoare at very tender stages of their lives waiting and145
in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but that is the endin England and Wales and I am very grateful, as I'vesaid, to all those who have been willing toparticipate in these sessions.Just in case there is any confusion, there arestill three focus groups which deal with human impactswhich will occur, one tomorrow, and two next Friday,but, as I have said, once -- well, rather not asI have said, once those are complete then that willmark the end of the human impact phase of this Inquiryin England and Wales, and I will make an announcementabout when we can resume in Scotland and NorthernIreland as soon as appropriate arrangements are made.So thanks to everyone.Mr Blake, is there anything further to add atthis stage?
MR BLAKE: Not at all. Thank you very much.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, it's been -- I think I saidbefore these hearings commenced that I expected thatthey would be very informative, and that's a very drylegal word to use but in fact it's an accurate word touse about these sessions. So thanks to everyone.
(4.28 pm)
(The hearing adjourned)
waiting for the year that their person who did it to them might go to trial because that could take 10, 20, 30 years from now. So I think it's fruitless.

I don't see the point in wasting taxpayers' money on these people. I wouldn't give them the time of day. Let's get their faces in the paper and their names so we all know who did what and when and to who and move on. Give us our money back, our right redress, our compensation so we can build new lives and start again, and never, ever have to think about the Post Office again.

That is what I think should happen.
MR BLAKE: Thank you. Chair, do you have any questions at all?

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, thank you very much. My last few words are these. First of all, thank you so much for coming to give oral evidence, Mrs Arch, and thank you for the clarity of your evidence. I'm so pleased that you felt able to engage with the Inquiry in the way you have.

Secondly, which is not confined to Mrs Arch but is my heart-felt thanks to everyone who has participated in this phase of the Inquiry. Today marks the end of the human impact public hearing sessions in England and Wales. There will be sessions 146

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