Wednesday, 9 March 2022 1 1 a break, by which time we are all hoping that Mr Page 2 2 will be present. 3 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Good afternoon everyone. 3 Mr Enright, are you going to read it? Thank you. 4 When we were in Cardiff last week, I felt I could 4 MR ENRIGHT: With your permission, Chair. Your legal team 5 legitimately welcome everyone to Cardiff. I think it 5 has confirmed to me today that before you and them are 6 6 would be presumptuous of me to welcome people to Leeds, the full witness statements of those whose summaries 7 so I will confine myself to say I'm very pleased to be 7 I will be reading into the record today. 8 here in Leeds, taking evidence in a location which is 8 So I start with Mr Brian Skirrow. 9 convenient to some of the people who wish to 9 Summary of witness statement of BRIAN SKIRROW (read) 10 participate. 10 MR ENRIGHT: Mr Skirrow was a subpostmaster of Egremont 11 Before we start, Mr Page, who will be sitting on 11 Post Office in Cumbria from January 1998 to September 12 my right-hand side, is, I'm afraid, caught on a train 12 2015. Brian began experiencing shortfalls within around 13 between Sheffield and Leeds, as I speak, and we're going 13 six months of Horizon System being implemented. Brian 14 to start, I think, with some reading in of summaries, 14 repeatedly contacted the helpline seeking assistance 15 but I don't think he will have arrived by the time that 15 when a shortfall arose and was told to simply put the 16 concludes, so that, unless any of the legal 16 cash into the post office which he always did because he 17 representatives have any objection, I propose to hear 17 didn't want the balance to be short. 18 the first witness in his absence. 18 Feeling pressured by Post Office, Brian paid 19 He will, of course, be able to watch it and read 19 approximately £15,000 of his own money to account for 20 the transcript for himself and I don't think that he 20 the shortfalls. He used his savings, profits from the 21 will be disadvantaged in any way if that occurs, and 21 retail side of his business and deductions from his 22 that will ensure the smooth running of this afternoon's 22 salary to make good the shortfalls. 23 session. 23 Brian felt he had no alternative but to pay the 24 24 shortfalls because he had to balance in order to be able So the current plan is that we read in some 25 summaries, then hear our first witness, and then take 25 to continue to trade the next day. Brian also thought 1 that paying the shortfalls with his own money was the 1 2 only way to avoid being prosecuted. 2 3 Mr Skirrow says: 3 was simply impossible. 4 "I have always suffered from a guilt complex and 4 5 5 this was made worse with these losses. I knew they were 6 not real. We were constantly second-guessing ourselves 6 7 7 and my wife was under a lot of pressure having to double 8 and triple check figures to try to find errors. This 8 9 9 put a huge strain on my marriage. My wife and I would 10 argue about the shortfalls and how we ended up in this 10 11 situation. We knew the losses were not accurate and so 11 12 having to pay for shortfalls that were no fault of 12 later terminated. 13 13 ourselves was very frustrating. I will never forget how 14 the Post Office treated us and how they ruined mine and 14 15 my family's life. 15

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"We came out of the business in debt, unable to live the comfortable life we had planned for ourselves."

Summary of witness statement of CHRISTINE COSGROVE (read)

MR ENRIGHT: Sir, I turn to Ms Christine Cosgrove.

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Ms Cosgrove was a subpostmistress of the Lance Lane Post Office in Liverpool from November 1997 to May 2002.

Christine found the Horizon training inadequate and was told that it was the responsibility of subpostmasters to interpret problems by themselves.

Christine remembers that under the old paper based

system she would have been able to investigate discrepancies. However, under the Horizon System this

Subpostmasters were told to trust the Horizon System by the Post Office. Ms Cosgrove experienced regular shortfalls and was required to make good those shortfalls from her own money. The Post Office helpline and the Post Office auditors told her the fault must be hers, that there were and could be no errors with Horizon. Because of the shortfalls, Christine was subsequently suspended, her contract was

Christine appealed the decision but she was unsuccessful. Christine feels that she was let down by the National Federation of SubPostmasters who represented her. Christine says that her Federation representative did not say a single word in her defence.

Christine and her husband suffered extreme financial hardship. Ms Cosgrove and her husband attributed their ill health to the stress and trauma of the Post Office's conduct toward them.

Christine says that the Post Office destroyed her life -- their life and reputation, the same good reputation that the Post Office told her and her husband was so important when they interviewed them to run the

post office. She says: "We lost our livelihood, our dreams of retirement, our hopes for our son's education. We just wanted a life that we could enjoy. All of our aspirations disappeared overnight. To this day, 20 years on, there are some people who don't know what happened to us. It is a dark secret I feel that I have to hide. I will never get over it and it is the psychological impact that has been the worst thing for me." Summary of witness statement of COLLEEN INGHAM (read) MR ENRIGHT: Sir, I turn to Ms Colleen Ingham. Colleen Ingham was a subpostmistress of Cockfield Post Office in County Durham between August 2002 and February 2016. Prior to running the post office Ms Ingham had worked for the police as an administrative officer. She ran the post office with her husband, a retired Metropolitan Police officer. The couple chose the post office in a rural area because, after a period of serious ill health, Ms Ingham's husband was advised to change his lifestyle. After training on the Horizon System that she considered completely inadequate, Ms Ingham began to experience shortfalls and called the Post Office's helpline for assistance. No assistance was offered.

Ms Ingham was often told to simply ignore the problems she was experiencing. On one occasion, after a shortfall appeared, Ms Ingham called the helpline and they went through a step-by-step procedure which doubled the shortfall. Ms Ingham experienced regular and significant shortfalls which the Post Office decided were her responsibility, arising from error, and deducted the sums of the shortfalls from Ms Ingham's salary.

Ms Ingham's branch was eventually closed as part of the Network Transformation scheme. During the 14 years Ms Ingham was a subpostmistress, she struggled financially, due to having to make good the shortfalls.

Ms Ingham blames the behaviour of the Post Office for the strain her and her husband were put under, which led to her husband turning to alcohol. Ms Ingham's reputation suffered and she suffered with depression and anxiety. Colleen concludes in this way:

"The Post Office and the Department of Business who own it have known for years that Horizon is a broken system. I believe they knew or should have known, when they were destroying my life and the lives of others, that their Horizon System was unreliable. I would like compensation not just for the financial losses but also to take account of the loss of the life I had and should

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have had. I would like them, Post Office Limited, publicly held to account and shamed in the way I and my family have been."

Summary of witness statement of WITNESS 0208 (read)

MR ENRIGHT: Sir, I will now read a summary from an anonymous witness, a witness you granted anonymity. I will refer to the witness as 208.

The Witness 0208 was a subpostmistress of New Boston Post Office from June 2011 to June 2016. She also ran a general store and a bakery at the branch.

In 2011, the witness started to experience shortfalls. She was assured by the Post Office helpline that they would be sorted out centrally.

The witness also was told by Glen Cheshire(sic), the Post Office regional manager, that he did not believe that the problem lay with the witness or her husband.

In 2016, the witness received a letter in which the Post Office alleged that she owed a central debt of £31,494.56, a payment plan was put in place for deductions from the witness's wages. She had no say in this and the Post Office deducted the money without her consent.

During an audit in April 2016 auditors took the witness's keys, put all the money in the safe and told

her that she would not be allowed to re-enter her premises. The witness's previously supportive regional manager suspended her with immediate effect.

The witness was told by the Post Office investigator that she might be prosecuted. Three months later her contract was terminated.

The witness's retail business and bakery revenue fell dramatically as a result of the loss of the post office. She was forced to close the business and became unemployed. People in the community spread rumours that she had stolen from the Post Office and that she was in prison for theft. The witness's grandson was teased in his primary school.

The witness says that everything was taken from her. She had to move out of her house as she could not afford the rent. The impact of Horizon and the Post Office's treatment drove the witness to attempt suicide. She was prescribed anti-depressants and her grandson now lives with her as her son does not want her to live on her own.

The witness says:

"Everything was taken from me."

She considers that the years between 2012 and now have been an unending period of increasing poverty, sadness and stress. The witness was treated like

1 a criminal. She states that: 1 Janet would call the helpline regularly, 2 "What happened to me and others was done by the 2 particularly on balancing days. Helpline staff rarely 3 3 answered her calls and when they did would not sort out Post Office, a government organisation. It cannot be 4 allowed to go unpunished." 4 discrepancies. 5 Summary of witness statement of JANET BRADBURY (read) 5 The shortfalls increased significantly following 6 6 MR ENRIGHT: Sir, I turn to Mrs Janet Bradbury. the installation of an ATM machine in 2003. Multiple 7 Janet Bradbury was the subpostmistress of Clun 7 shortfalls occurred over the years. Janet requested 8 Post Office between September 2003 and May 2009. Janet 8 that the Post Office come to investigate. She did 9 had a background in finance and was the Finance Officer 9 everything she could to try to solve the problems with 10 of a school. She and her husband decided to move away 10 Horizon. Despite this, the Post Office held her 11 from the City to a more rural area where they could 11 responsible for the shortfalls. She had to use her own 12 raise their family. 12 money to make good those shortfalls. 13 They decided that running a post office would be 13 Janet and her husband decided to move the 14 perfect for them. Janet and her husband used the equity 14 post office into more modern premises, hoping that the 15 15 in their home to buy the post office. newer wiring would solve the problems with the 16 16 Janet received five days of classroom training and Horizon System. However, the shortfalls continued. 17 two days of in-branch training on the Horizon System 17 Janet continued to make up the shortfalls and the 18 before taking on her role as subpostmaster. 18 Post Office took the money directly from her salary. 19 Janet found the training to be inadequate. She 19 Janet felt forced to resign in March 2009 as she 20 was told by a trainer to open a separate account in her 20 could no longer cope with the stress of the shortfalls 21 own name into which she should transfer any 21 and the increasing financial strain. Janet could not 22 22 discrepancies that arose. find a buyer for the business and in the end sold the 23 Having a finance background, Ms Bradbury did not 23 goodwill of the business for a peppercorn price of £1. 24 follow this advice as she knew that this would be 24 The Post Office chased her for the shortfalls and 25 improper and potentially illegal. 25 she received letters before action in 2011, the final 1 one demanding £10,522. Janet found the letters very 1 three times a month in the early stages, owing to 2 threatening. 2 regular and repeated shortfalls. The helpline were of 3 Janet felt forced to move away from the area with 3 little help and would say that the Horizon System would 4 her daughter. She had used all of her savings to pay 4 right itself and, if not, he was told he was to make 5 5 the shortfalls and her husband had to use money from his good the shortfalls. 6 pension pot, which he resented, causing a rift that 6 Mr Valentine distinctly remembers being told by 7 7 could not be healed. the helpline that he was the only one who had such 8 Janet says that: 8

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"I have no financial security, for me or my family. The experience has caused me years of stress and brought on ill health. I am very unwell and my health is deteriorating as a result of the stress that the Post Office caused. I have huge concerns about how my daughter will cope if anything happens to me, as she has no security because the Post Office took everything from us."

Summary of witness statement of JOHN VALENTINE (read)

18 **MR ENRIGHT:** Sir, I turn to Mr John Valentine.

> John Valentine was the subpostmaster at Platt Bridge Post Office in Wigan between 1981 and 2002. Mr Valentine used the paper-based accounting system for almost 20 years prior to the introduction of Horizon and experienced no major problems.

After the introduction of the Horizon System, Mr Valentine contacted the Post Office helpline two to problems.

Mr Valentine made good the shortfalls when they occurred. An audit in 2002 discovered a supposed shortfall of £15,000. A follow-up audit two days later saw this reduced to £900. Nevertheless, he was suspended. A short time later, his contract was terminated, despite 21 years of service.

A temporary subpostmaster was appointed to run the branch but Mr Valentine was still liable for the rent on the premises, despite having no income. He lost the value in the business and the investment he had made into refitting the premises.

Prior to the issues with Horizon, Mr Valentine's business was worth between £180,000 and £200.000. Mr Valentine recalls that he spent endless hours searching for apparently missing money. He was constantly stressed and anxious. He lost hours of sleep and lost valuable family time. He became withdrawn and

1	depressed and considered taking his own life. He felt	1	helpline when she was unable to balance the	
2	the stigma of being accused of stealing from Post Office		Horizon System. Moira was often put on hold for an hour	
3	Limited and also fell into debt. He blames the	3	by the helpline and then advised to reboot the system or	
4	Post Office for the downward spiral of events.	4	simply reverse transactions.	
5	He states:	5	This advice often increased the loss. When Moira	
6	8 "I became withdrawn and depressed. I considered		questioned the helpline on the system, she was told the	
7	taking my own life on a couple of occasions. I was		Horizon System cannot make errors.	
8	paranoid, thinking my staff were stealing. I became	8	Ms Hegarty paid more than £5,000 in shortfalls.	
9	suspicious and turned into a person I barely recognise.	9	She resigned when the Post Office approached her under	
10	I felt I had failed at my job. I was treated like	10	the Network Transformation scheme. Moira felt she was	
11	a criminal. My business was destroyed. My finances	11	forced out of her branch by the Post Office as a result	
12	ruined. My mental health suffered, as did my pride.	12	of the demands she considered unrealistic.	
13	The Post Office action against me devastated my life."	13	For example, the Post Office tried to insist the	
14	Summary of witness statement of MOIRA HEGARTY (read)	14	store should remain open 365 days a year. With no	
15	MR ENRIGHT: Finally, sir, I would like to read a summary in	15	support, with continuing shortfalls and being treated	
16	relation to Ms Moira Hegarty. Moira Hegarty was the	16	with contempt, Moira felt she had no option but to	
17	subpostmistress of the Limeside Post Office in Oldham	17	resign.	
18	from January 2012 until June 2015. Ms Hegarty had	18	Ms Hegarty was forced to sell the business at	
19	previously worked as a Crown employee for the Post		a loss, losing a significant amount of money.	
20	Office. She was promised two weeks of training on the	20	Ms Hegarty blames the Post Office for the decline	
21	Horizon System, prior to taking up her role in the	21	in her relationships. Moira's working life and trying	
22	post office but found the training to be sporadic and	22	to run the business at a loss had a negative impact on	
23	only covered basic transactions. Ms Hegarty requested	23	her physical and mental health. Moira underwent	
24	further training but this was denied.	24	counselling for feelings of failure and low self-esteem.	
25	Ms Hegarty sought help from the Post Office 13	25	She believes that she would still be running 14	
1	a successful business, which she intended to do until	1 N	IS HODGE: Ms Williams, as you know, my name is Catriona	

retirement, had the Post Office admitted to the mistakes with the Horizon accounting system.

She states about this period:

"I had zero quality of life as every waking minute was spent at work trying to find out what was going wrong. I began to neglect everything. This was on my mind every second of the day."

Moira states:

"My dreams of running my own business were shattered. I was made to question my abilities, my actions. I was left feeling isolated and risked being branded as a criminal."

Thank you very much, sir.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Enright.

Are you and your client content that we proceed in the fashion that I suggested we would?

18 MR ENRIGHT: May I check just one moment?

19 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Please, of course.

20 (Pause)

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Thank you very much, Mr Enright.

22 Over to you then, Ms Hodge.

23 MS HODGE: Thank you.

> **HEATHER SARAH WILLIAMS (sworn)** Questioned by MS HODGE 15

Hodge and I ask questions on behalf of the Inquiry.

3 Please can you state your full name?

4 A. Heather Sarah Williams.

5 You made a statement, Ms Williams, on 27 January this

6 year; is that right? 7

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8 I can see you have a copy of that statement in front of 9 you?

10 I do, yes.

Could you please turn to the final page, do you have it 11

12 there? Do you see your signature there?

13 A.

14 Have you read this statement again since it was made?

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Is the content true to the best of your knowledge and 16

17 belief?

18 A. It is, yes.

19 Thank you. I'm going to begin by asking you a few

20 questions about your career at the Post Office. When

did you first start working for the Post Office? 21

22 In 1985, straight from school. I started as a YTS.

23 Forgive me, as a ...

24 A. A YTS.

25 Q. What's that, please?

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- 1 A. It's the Youth Training Scheme where we were paid £25
- 2 a week to do three or four days in the post office and
- 3 two days at college a week, and they would pay for our
- 4 lunches, our bus fares and everything like that as well.
- Q. You explained you took that up on leaving school. Howold were you?
- 7 **A.** 16.
- 8 Q. In which branches did you work as part of this team?
- 9 A. Dacre Hill in Rock Ferry.
- 10 Q. Thereafter?
- 11 A. Then I moved to Liverpool, to Park Lane, and then
- 12 I moved to Woodchurch Lane in Prenton because it was
- 13 a bit closer to home. Then I went to Upton Post Office
- in Upton in Wirral, that's where I learned to drive.
- 15 Then a job opportunity come down from the next
- post office, they were looking for a relief manager, so
- 17 I applied for that and I got the job. I was 22 and --
- 18 sorry?

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- 19 Q. Not at all. What is a relief manager, can you explain?
- 20 A. I used to go round and make sure that if staff had been
- 21 sick or there had been an armed robbery or anything like
- that, somebody had been stealing, I would go in and help
- 23 find out what the problem was and get the post office up
- 24 and running again.
- 25 Q. By whom were you employed as a relief manager?

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- A. It started as Martins, and then Forbuoys bought it out
 and it was classed then as TM Retail.
- 3 Q. For how long did you work for TM Retail?
- 4 A. That I can't remember, I'm sorry.
- $5\,$ $\,$ Q. $\,$ That's fine. Why did you decide to apply to become
- 6 a subpostmistress?
- 7 A. I had got friendly with one of -- one of the counter
- 8 clerks in one of the offices and we became partners, so,
 - rather than me travelling backwards and forwards from
- 10 Birkenhead, she lived in Runcorn, so I went to live with
- 11 her. And I had had a nasty accident one day coming back
 - from Llanrug Post Office and I had severe back injuries
- and, after that, I thought the driving is a bit too much
- 14 now because I was travelling all over the country.
- 15 Some days I could be down in Worcester so I would
- have to leave at 5.00 in the morning and get home like
- at 9, 10 o'clock that night to be told "Oh, you're back
- there tomorrow", so it was a long journey. It was,
- 19 like, some days six/seven hours before I had even done
- 20 a full day's work.
- 21 Q. Do you recall when you were first appointed as
- 22 a subpostmistress?
- 23 A. I do. I was approached by Glenn Chester and Colin Brown
- 24 and they said there was a post office come available in
- 25 Elton, it has been tried to be sold for a while but

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- there had been some bad armed robberies and hostage situations there. So then I was a tough person, you know, nothing frightened me. I would take on the
- you know, nothing frightened me. I would take orworld, and we decided we would go for that one.
 - So I tried to get a mortgage to buy the property but no banks or anything would give me the money off my house, because of the armed robberies, it wasn't a safe
- 8 office. So I had to go through -- I'm sorry, I struggle9 with words and everything.
- 10 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** You take your time, Ms Williams.
- 11 A. Okay. Somebody that helps you get a mortgage when you12 can't get one.
- 13 **MS HODGE**: Is that a broker?
- 14 **A.** Yes, that's the word, thank you. And he arranged it, so
- we sorted all that out and me and my partner took over
- 16 the post office. And it was run to the ground, there
- was a massive hole in the ceiling in the kitchen where
- the last robbers had got through. It was all scorched
- and burnt around. So we -- when we took over it we had
- a lot of things that we were told to do, like new
- carpets, new front signage, I had to get that ceiling
- fixed before our parents come in and saw it, otherwise
- 23 they would have said, "Oh, no, you're not working here",
- 24 because that was always our fright, that if the kids
- 25 come in and saw that, or our parents, it would put them

- 1 off, but it was a lovely village, absolutely lovely.
- 2 Q. Just going back then to cover a few points you have
- 3 raised. You have explained you were approached to take
- 4 on the Elton Post Office. Was it in or around May 2001
- 5 that your appointment took effect?
- 6 A. Yes, 29 May.

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- 7 Q. You have also explained taking on a loan to purchase the
 - branch. Do you recall how much the branch cost?
- 9 **A.** I think it was dropped down to 47 or 49,000, plus then
- 10 there was stock, which there was no stock but we didn't
- 11 know, because we weren't allowed in the premises.
- 12 Q. What did you pay for the stock?
- 13 A. That I don't know. I can't remember, sorry. Not much.
- Only about 1,000, something like that, maybe one and
- 15 a half.
- 16 Q. You have also described carrying out renovations to the
- 17 property. You have explained in your statement you
- spent more than £4,500 doing that; is that correct?
- 19 A. Yes, it is, yes.
- 20 Q. Can you please describe the business which you ran from
- 21 the premises?
- 22 A. It was cards and stationer's shop, so when we first took
- over we had to fill it with everything, because there
- 24 was just nothing in there, so that was also expensive,
- 25 to get the shop up and running so that it looked nice,

- 1 welcomed the customers back, because people would rather
- 2 bypass their own village post office and go three miles
- 3 down the road to the next post office, rather than using
- 4 that one. But we turned it round and, you know, we got
- 5 them all back because we liked humour, you know, we had
- 6 these quirky sayings to people and that, and people
- 7 loved it. And they would come in just to chat to us
- 8 when we weren't busy and tell us their life stories and
- 9 everything. It was brilliant, but the Post Office
- 10 ruined it.
- 11 You enjoyed your work --Q.
- 12 I loved it.
- 13 -- as a subpostmistress?
- 14 A. Mm-hm.
- Q. What salary did you receive from the Post Office for 15
- 16 running the Elton branch?
- 17 **A.** It started, I think, about 31,000 and then it went up to
- 18 about 39, maybe 40, I think, was the highest, and then
- 19 when the -- they got rid of, like, the pensions and
- 20 things like that, the salary just dropped. When they
- 21 changed over postage stamps to labels, you didn't have
- 22 enough time if you've got, like, ten people coming in,
- 23 it was quicker to put it through the system and then put
- 24 the stamps on as soon as you could. But when you had to
- do the labels that was just slowing us down, because 25

- 1 people were coming in with, like, 50 packets.
- 2 What sort of income were you receiving from the retail
- 3 side of the business, do you recall?
- 4 It could range from 250 to 500 a week. Α.
- 5 Q. That's --
- 6 A. We done quite well, yes.
- 7 Q. Yes.
- For a little office. 8 A.
- 9 Q. Was the Horizon System already installed in the Elton
- 10 branch?
- 11 No. no. Α.
- When was it first installed in the branch, do you 12 Q.
- 13
- 14 That I can't remember, I'm sorry.
- That's okay. We know you took over in around May 2001. 15 Q.
- 16 A.
- Was it shortly thereafter, do you think, or some time 17 Q.
- 18 later?

- 19 A. I think it was. I think it was the June or the July
- 20 because I know that then my wife was -- she had already
- 21 been trained, the official training, as -- where
- 22 I hadn't, so I had to go off for the training, which was
 - like one and a half days in Bolton, and that was it.
- 24 Q. Had you had any experience of using the system, the
- 25 Horizon System, before your appointment --

- 1 A. Yes
- 2 Q. -- as a subpostmaster?
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- 4 Q. When had that been?
- 5 A. When I was doing relief work. Certain offices had it so
- 6 I had to be trained and ready to go in at a drop of
- 7 a hat and take over.
- 8 You just said you received some further training when
- 9 you were appointed and you described that in a centre in
- 10 Bolton, initially, for a day and a half. What did that
- 11 training cover?
- 12 A. Reversals, and like a balance technique, which didn't
- 13 make sense because, at the time, the company that I was
- 14 working for, they had -- they couldn't finish their
- 15 balance until the Thursday because of the lottery,
- 16 because it didn't shut down until 7.30, so their takings
- 17 for the Post Office was already balanced and shut, so it
- 18 was all confusing. So then when I had to learn this
- 19 other way, it was hard in some things but other things
- 20 it was fine.
- 21 Q. Did you receive any testing before your training was
- 22 completed in the centre?
- 23 A. Yes, we had to do a test.
- 24 How did you do?
- 25 A. Okay. We weren't allowed to leave until we had passed.

- Did you receive any on-site training after your training 1 2 in Bolton?
- 3 Well, the day that we were to go -- that's it, I'm
- 4 sorry. The day we were to go live, the night before we
- 5 had had a break in and they had smashed the whole of the
- 6 front door in, the front window in, and they had come in
- 7 and they broke open the ATM's doors and then smashed all
- 8 my cameras off the walls and left. So the shop was
- 9 smashed to bits and that was that time, so we got it up
- 10 and running again.
- 11 We got no training then because the trainer that
- 12 was due to come in the next day we couldn't do anything
- 13 because we had to get the auditors in to do an audit on
- 14 the branch, so we -- the training was cancelled, so we
- 15 had to go live by ourselves and I kept asking for some
- 16 help to come down, could somebody come down, and we got
- 17 half a day training, which was on the phone most of the
- 18 time anyway, talking to other branches, helping them.
- What were you told -- you have just explained someone 20 did come down to your branch, I think for about half
- 21 a day, you have said.
- 22 A.

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- 23 What were you told to do if you experienced problems
- 24 with the system?
- 25 A. Ring the helpline.

- Q. What was your impression of the adequacy of the trainingthat you received from the Post Office?
- 3 A. Horrendous, horrendous. It was a case of "Get in there,4 pick it up and learn it yourself".
- Q. Did you seek any further training from the Post Officeon Horizon?
- A. No, never. I asked for help with audits and things when
 the money was going missing, but they still didn't help.
- 9 Q. When did you experience your first shortfall on theHorizon System?
- 11 A. I think -- the first loss, I think, was in 2002/2003, 12 but -- sorry, just before the first loss, we just had 13 the same break in this time but they had come in with 14 an axle grinder, or whatever they use, and broke into 15 the ATM again, sawed it open and took the cash machines 16 out. So that time we lost over 72,000, I think it was. 17 So then, again, we had to work on the shop to get it all 18 done because they cut the wires, they cut everything,

the phone lines. We had no security in the office.

Some days we had up to 12 people working on the shop to put it right, get the post office up and running again. They wouldn't let us open because -- with not having security on the place and because of the bad reputation it had, so that was the first robbery that took place there and that was absolutely destroying,

1 again after we had just repaired it after it had just

been broke in. But the police seemed to think the first

3 time it was to take pictures.

4 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So can I be clear --

5 **A.** Yes

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SIR WYN WILLIAMS: -- you told me about there being a break
 in the night before you were due to have your training.

8 A. Yes, yes.

9 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Do I take it from what you have just said

10 that a lot of damage was done but nothing was stolen?

11 A. Yes.

12 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Then some time after that, a lot of money was stolen?

14 A. Yes, the same thing happened and --

15 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Right, and can you just give me, only

approximately, the kind of time interval between those

17 two dates?

18 A. A couple of months. Two or three months, no more than19 that.

20 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Right, so these two events took place right at the beginning of your stewardship of that

22 post office?

23 A. Yes.

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24 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Okay, thank you.

25 MS HODGE: You have explained quite a substantial sum of

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- 1 money was stolen at the time of the second break in.
- 2 How was that resolved with the Post Office?
- A. They just wrote it off. It was just in, like, the
 suspense account for a few months, and then it just
- 5 disappeared.
- 6 Q. Do you recall experiencing any shortfalls in your
- 7 accounts --
- 8 **A.** Yes.

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- 9 Q. -- around this time?
- A. Yes. Straight after we started losing money and there
 was a lady there, her name was Sue Higginson(?),
 I think, was the area manager at the time and because we
 had had all these people in working on the safe, working
 on the electrics, she said "Don't worry about it, I will

make sure that this is written off by the Post Office".

And she said that to me and my wife at the ti

And she said that to me and my wife at the time, and then the next thing she is gone, she has been -- took redundancy and that's when -- I think it was Glenn Chester has come in at that time and he said "No, it's a shortage, it's lost in your branch, you have to pay it", so we ended up doing -- where we had to pay it monthly. So, as soon as we had finished the £2,000 one, the next one straight away was 3,000. It seemed to overlap. Not just 2,000, it would be 2,000 and something, or 3,000 and something. And you're pulling

yourself to pieces wondering where it was.

So we paid it all back each time. The amounts kept going up and up. I kept asking for the auditors to come in but they wouldn't send them.

Then I had a lovely lady, called Karen Vernon Harris(?) and she was my new area manager and with her we won awards, we won prizes. For a little tiny branch that we were, we were winning Crown Offices in these competitions because I was pushing and pushing and we done it, and we made it and she was brilliant. She was so nice. She pushed us, she helped you along the way.

She encouraged you to do things and then she got

transferred elsewhere and that's when Glenn Chester come

14 back into it, and that's then when things started going

15 downhill

Q. Okay. So just to clarify then, relatively shortly after
 vou took over the robbery occurred --

18 **A.** Yes.

Q. -- where a substantial sum of money was stolen, and then
 you had two shortfalls, relatively significant ones, in

21 the region of £2,000 and £3,000; is that right?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. What you have explained is that you were told at the

24 time you wouldn't have to make those good?

25 $\,$ A. No, that's when -- the first lady, Sue Higginson, she

- 1 said that because of what had gone on, and everything
- 2 else, that would be written off by the Post Office,
- 3 because I couldn't have ears and eyes everywhere with 4 all these people in and out.
- 5 Q. You have explained, thereafter, you had guite 6 a successful period of running the post office; is that 7 right?
- 8 A. Yes and no, because these amounts just like appeared 9 from nowhere but when the ATM machine was fitted in --10 I think that was in 2003, we noticed that the 11 post office had been balancing all week, but when the 12 ATM was rolled over into the post office, even though 13 the ATM balanced, all of a sudden there was a shortage 14 there and we couldn't find it. We ripped the place to 15 pieces.

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We would be there after 9.30, 10 o'clock at night. Romec used to ring me and tell to shut the safe at 8.30. I said "I need a little bit more time, I've got a lot to do". So they kept ringing me "Shut the safe, shut the safe", and that was an ongoing thing on balance night, and then getting back there 6 o'clock in the morning on the Thursday. I would have to go in first and then my wife would follow with our youngest child and take her and put her in school, and come into work and try and help me find stuff. But there was nothing, nothing --

- 1 there was not a penny discrepancy from what we had
- 2 entered into the system.
- 3 Q. If I can just clarify one point. You mentioned
 - experiencing problems when a cash machine was installed.
- 5 You recall that being in around 2003?
- 6 A. Yes.

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- 7 Q. I just want to check with you because in your statement
- 8 you estimated it was approximately 2008 and I just
- 9 wondered if that --
- 10 A. To be quite honest, I have not really thought about
- 11 looking into that bit because I knew I had written it
- 12 down but I couldn't remember because, with all the
- 13 stress and everything else that had been going on,
- 14 I suffered a stroke and --
- 15 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: It doesn't matter which year the cash
- 16 machine was installed, all right?
- 17 Yes.
- SIR WYN WILLIAMS: But what I would like you to confirm, if 18
- 19 it's correct, is that you started to have problems with
- 20 shortfalls after that ATM was installed; is that right?
- 21 Well, before, before.
- 22 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Before and after?
- 23 A. Yes, both, yes.
- SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. 24
- 25 **MS HODGE:** Did you take steps to notify the helpline?

- Straightaway, but it took like over an hour sometimes to get through on the Wednesday night, or they would say "Okay, I will just check", and the phone would go dead and then you would have to start again. And that's why we were there so late, and then I think the helpline at
- 6 one time shut, I think, at 8 o'clock. Well, that's no 7 good for us when we had the lottery and we weren't

closing until 7.30 at night.

So the only help we could wait for is 8 o'clock the next morning and they would tell you to do something and you would do it their way and the next thing the figure would double and she would say "Oh, just wait for an error notice to come through". That was always the case, "An error notice will come, just put it in the suspense account and we will sort it out". But then I get Glenn Chester then saying, "No, you have to pay it back". So, again, it was arranged that we would pay it back on a monthly basis and it was always taken out of my salary.

Can I just add one thing about the system? One day I was serving a customer and she came in for a car tax and I had scanned it all, bleeped it and it come up £170 on the system. As I pressed to pay and to finish, she put her credit card in and it come up that she owed me £340, even though there was only one transaction on

- 1 the thing, it had doubled. So, if I hadn't have
 - noticed, that poor lady would have had another 170 taken
- 3 out of her bank account and there was no explanation for
- 4 that, nothing whatsoever. And I kept all the receipts,
- 5 all the reversals, everything, but I wasn't allowed back
- 6 in the branch when I was finished up, so I've got no
- 7 records. We had diaries of things. I didn't get
- 8 anything, nothing at all.
- 9 Q. All of those records have been retained in the branch;
- 10 is that right?
- 11 A. I don't know where they are.
- 12 But forgive me, at the time that you left the branch --
- 13 A.

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- Q. -- all the records would be in there? 14
- 15 A.

- 16 Q. You have explained in relation to the shortfalls you
- 17 sought some help from the helpline. Did you also
- 18 approach your area manager at the time?
- 19 Yes, plenty of times. Α.
- 20 What advice did you receive?
- 21 Just a negative thing, just a negative attitude all the
 - time: "There's nothing we can do, you're losing the
- 23 money, you have to pay the money back." And I knew that
- 24 we weren't losing the money and it sends you -- it sends
- 25 you mad because I'm thinking, "Well, what mistakes am

I making? What mistakes is my wife making?" I'm not stealing and she would never steal a penny in all her life so where was the money going to? And he just didn't want to know.

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So, in the end, when all these amounts kept going up and up and up we used my father's bit of inheritance money that we got, she -- my ex-wife's father's inheritance, we had to put that in straightaway as well. I had to -- I had had a car crash and it was ongoing for years, so we had a shortage of 14,000, so we didn't have any money left. You know, we had paid everything that we had out. We were rowing all the time, arguing, I changed personalities, I became nasty. I couldn't cope. I couldn't cope with it all.

So then we had the 14,000 loss, so I had to ring solicitors and say "I will settle out of court" and I got 15,000, so we had to put that in by the next month. But what amazes me is whenever I was short in the branch, I had 30 days to start making that money either good, paying it back in full, or doing a monthly contract. And we were sick of doing monthly contracts and that's when we got this — the bigger payments, we could pay it off, but why would we want to steal our own money?

It just didn't make sense and I kept ringing and

- 1 asking for auditors to come in, check to see what we're
 - doing wrong, have I missed something out. I had -- when
- 3 I worked for TM Retail, one of my closest friends was my
- 4 area manager, Sheila Connick(?), and she even came
- 5 across to the branch to help me to go through things and
- 6 everything was spot on because you think "What am
- 7 I missing?" It really does send you mad and in the end
- 8 I just couldn't cope any more. It was just too much,
- 9 losing everything.
- 10 Q. You have described paying some quite significant sums of
- 11 money to cover shortfalls shown on Horizon?
- 12 **A.** Over 60,000.
- 13 Q. In total?
- 14 **A.** Yes.
- 15 Q. After -- you have referred to a shortfall of £14,000.
- 16 In your statement you have explained that occurred
- 17 in October 2013.
- 18 A. Yes.
- 19 Q. Does that sound correct?
- 20 A. Yes, yes.
- 21 Q. After you experienced that shortfall, you asked for
- 22 an audit of your branch; is that right?
- 23 A. Yes.
- 24 Q. To whom did you make that request?
- 25 A. To the helpline and also Glenn Chester.

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- 1 Q. When did the audit take place?
- 2 A. It didn't. Nobody came. Nobody came at all. And then,
- after that, home life was absolutely horrendous. Nobody
- 4 wanted to live with me. Things just deteriorated
- 5 completely. Everything went wrong. Everything we had
- 6 worked hard for. The 30 years service that I had put
- 7 in, just snatched away because nobody would say "Oh,
- yes, there are problems in the system", and, in the end,
 I said to them "If you don't get the auditors in I'm
- 10 going to the press". And I was told "You can't do that
- 11 because of the Official Secrets Act, you're not allowed
- 12 to talk to anyone".

So you were under a lid in a barrel, so you couldn't speak to anyone about it, so where do you go

- when, you know -- I was never threatened with court or
 being sacked or anything. I was just asked for the
- 17 money back each time because they knew that I was good
- at my job and I knew that the experience I had had over the years, I wasn't stealing money, my wife wasn't
- stealing the money, so the system was stealing the
- 21 money, but nobody would own up to it and everyone that
- came, even the auditors, they were all finished up on redundancy now.
- 24 Q. I would like to ask you about an audit in May 2014.
- 25 **A.** Yes.

- 1 Q. Do you recall that?
- 2 **A.** I do.
- 3 Q. Who conducted that audit?
- 4 **A.** Um ...
- 5 Q. You have mentioned the name in your statement of a Paul
- 6 Fielding?
- 7 **A.** Yes, yes, thank you.
- 8 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I'm sorry, was the date 2014 or 2013.
- 9 MS HODGE: May 2014 I believe.
- 10 **A.** Yes
- 11 Q. What happened when Mr Fielding attempted to reconcile
- the cash machine balance and your office balance?
- 13 **A.** The ATM balanced, my office balanced. When we pressed
- 14 to do the trial balance, it come up as 21,000 and
- something short and I nearly dropped dead on the floor.
- 16 I said "That's not gone", I said "That's got to be
- 17 here". So we ripped the place to pieces, we done
- another full balance, but it stayed the same figure, but
- 19 when we pressed for the final -- the final balance to
- 20 come out, it came out as 29000-something, so why did it
 - jump from that to that to that, and there was no
- 22 explanation for it.

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Everything was bang on for the cash that I had declared, the stock that I had declared, everything was

25 perfect, but for some reason things start -- it was --

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like as if -- as soon as the ATM rolled over, it was like as if -- we thought it was the ATM at one time that was causing the problems, but it wasn't, it was Horizon itself.

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There was a glitch in that system and they knew and they kept taking our money off us and making us broke and paupers, while they're all living in the big houses with everything else and it's like a stab in the back off them. Paula Vennells even rung me one day to congratulate me on winning an award and I think "How two-faced is that? You knew, you knew what was wrong and you let us all" -- people have died. I have tried to commit suicide. It's wrong what they have done.

- 14 Q. Can I ask you, please, about how Mr Fielding responded 15 when you both saw this discrepancy appear?
- 16 A. Yes. We left there at 10 o'clock at night and he took 17 every bit of paperwork home with him. We had two copies 18 of the trial balance, two copies of the final balance, 19 so he took a set and I kept a set in the office in case 20 the auditors come in the next day, and that was on the 21 Wednesday, and he rung to say that he is working on it 22

And then we got a phone call on the Monday to say that he had worked on it all weekend, himself was an auditor, his wife was an area manager at the time for

the Post Office as well, and he had asked his neighbour 1 2 across the road who was an accountant to come in and 3 help him, and they all sat at the kitchen table trying 4 to sort out why this money had gone from 21,000 to 5 29,000, no explanation for it. And he was there and he 6 said "I don't believe what I have just seen", and then 7 a couple of weeks later we find out that Paul's gone, he 8 has took redundancy, him and his wife. But he knew that 9 I was right. It wasn't us that was stealing the money. 10 It was the Post Office system that was taking the money 11 off us.

> How come that everyone that I had had there was made redundant after doing an audit? It just doesn't

- 15 Q. What happened to the discrepancy that was discovered on 16 the date of that audit?
- 17 It was still sat in the suspense account. Nothing --18 the Post Office didn't even try to say I've got to pay 19 that money back. Nobody approached me at all over 20 paying that money back and, like, sleepless nights 21 didn't come into it, just didn't come into it.
- 22 Q. About six months after your branch was audited 23 in May 2014, you were broken into again; is that right?
- 24 Yes. on 3 December. 25

What happened on that occasion?

1 A. Can I start from when things started going wrong that 2 week? On the Monday, with it being the first week 3 in December, they had said that they were going to send 4 in over 100,000. Well, we didn't need that much, so 5 they sent in it -- I think they were trying to send in 6 150,000, something like that, so I got it down to 105. 7 So that was due in on the Monday and then on the Monday 8 night most of that was transferred then into the ATM 9 once we closed at night, and we do that together.

> [Redacted] would do -- sorry, I didn't mean to mention that name.

My wife would do the paperwork side and I would do the cash side in counting --

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Would you just hold on a second. If you 14 15 don't want that name published, we can do something 16 about that.

17 A. Please, yes. Sorry about that.

18 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** No, no, that's fine.

> We will see to that. Sorry to have interrupted you. I think you were telling us that a very large amount of cash had been put into the ATM?

22 A. Yes, it had.

23 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right, so carry on from there.

24 A. But it hadn't gone in on the Monday because the REM 25 didn't arrive, which is the money that comes in, it is

classed as the REM. He had locked the safe in the van with all our stock and money in. So I said "Well, I'm by myself tomorrow", because me and my wife were going through a divorce then and he promised that it would be in before 10 o'clock so I would count it, close for half an hour at lunch, because we never closed, with it being a large amount and get it all away, put into the bottom cell, where it was safe.

And he didn't come in until 5 o'clock on the Tuesday night, the same time as the postman, which Christmas time we had about 14, 15 letter bags going out as well. As he tried to bring the money in, the postman is trying to get the mail out. It was horrendous. I had bags of money everywhere, which were then booked in and put -- just thrown into the safe room because I didn't have time to sort everything.

So as soon as he dropped all the money off and the postman had took all the mail, it was about 5.10 at night and I closed. That was on the Tuesday. So all I had done was open the safe and threw it all in, just in the bags. I didn't even open the bags until the next day, until my ex-wife come back in to help me with the balance and to sort the ATM out, because since I had had -- since I had the stroke, it left me with a short-term memory, or trying to explain things that --

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1 or understanding words that I should know but I can't 2 explain them and so [redacted] was all -- I have done it 3 again, I'm sorry.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Don't worry. Can I just say that if that name is spoken every time please delete it from the video and transcript.

A. Thank you. Where was I up to? I'm sorry.

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MS HODGE: Forgive me, so you were explaining that --

A. Oh, the ATM. So because I had a short-term memory and 10 they had to change the password numbers and everything, that was her job. I run the post office, she looked 12 after the ATM and we done the balances together and 13 that's how we worked, and we worked as a good team 14 normally but, because of all these losses, I couldn't 15 cope with our family life. We had a big house, we had 16 teenagers at home, we had a younger child at home and, 17 as you know, kids aren't cheap these days, are they? 18 School uniform was £500 just to start the little one 19

> So [redacted] and I was left with the house and the post office and she kept screaming at me, you know, "It's caused all these problems, sell it, get rid of it, get rid of it", and I said "But what am I going to do? That's my career" and she said "I don't care, sell it because I need somewhere to live". So --

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Can I just take you back a little bit? 1

You were starting to tell us about the events leading up

3 to another robbery or break in, in December.

A. Yes, I'm sorry, yes.

5 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That's all right. So you tell us about 6 that then?

7 A. Yes, sorry. We will go back -- we finished the Tuesday 8 when I had locked the safe early and everything else. 9 On the Wednesday [redacted] had come in, I had counted

10 all the money and I had transferred a lot of the money 11 that belonged to the Post Office and some to the ATM in

12 the bottom cell and the money that we were going to put

13 into the ATM that night, because it wasn't the main 14

balance night, because it should have gone in on the Wednesday, we had something like 120,000 to go in, but

I couldn't get it all in, so that's why some of it went

back into the safe.

So [redacted] was a parish councillor at the time. She had an emergency meeting, so, as I was doing -filling up the ATM with everything else, there was a knock on the door, about 6.10, I think it was, and I looked through the door and I thought "That's a postman back, I bet he has lost his keys again and he is looking for his keys". So, as I opened the door, I've got a card stand here and card display there, so

the door opened that way, so as I opened it slightly and I said "What have you forgot?", something like that, he pushed the door open, knocked me back into the thing and he had a gun. And all I could see was this toggle and he went into the safe room "Give me the money, I want all the money". And I had already put 40,000 in one of the ATM boxes that was right by his feet and I didn't tell him, I didn't say "There's money there".

By the time I put the money that was ready to go in the other boxes, I was shaking and the punches and everything else, money had scattered all over the place and then he kept hitting me and hitting me, "Open that, open that". I said, "I can't open that. It doesn't open for 35/40 minutes".

"You're lying, you're lying", so he punched me again. Then he slammed the safe door into my head, as I was down trying to put the money into the sack. And then when he knocked me I fell back and I hit my back against the door frame, my whole spine. And my neck took such a wallop there as well, going back, because I was a big girl still at that time, and going back in that force really hurt me. And, as he was leaving, there was no lights on in the shop, the only lights that was on was behind the post office counter because I didn't want anyone to see me working in the safe room

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which was separate. So there was enough light coming from the counter side to shine through for the safe room, so I didn't need to put the lights on in there. So not only had I managed to save the money that was in the safe and the 40,000 right by his foot and, as he left, he said "Don't be calling" -- what was it he said?

He said something and he said, "I know where you live, [redacted]". Can that be blocked out as well, please. And that frightened me because I thought, "How does he know where I live?" I was there by myself, I was petrified. I had a broken nose. I had black eyes for over three months.

Then that's what happened that day.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, thank you. 14

MS HODGE: That was in December 2014; is that right? 15

16 A. December, yes.

17 About three months later, in March 2015, you were 18 suspended by the Post Office --

19 Α. Yes.

20 Q. -- is that right?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. What caused your appointment to be suspended?

23 Somebody who come in from the public that we know as 24 a businessman, you know, he was friendly with us, we had

25 been friends with his daughter for years, and he said

"You can't open tomorrow". I said "What are you talking about?" He said "I have heard that there's going to be an armed robbery on your branch". So I said "Don't be stupid", I said "Don't be stupid saying things like that, do you know how bad I'm suffering as it is?" because living at home and [redacted] had left by this time, [redacted] left on 13 February completely from the post office, so I was left alone to do it all, and then he comes in and says that to me.

So he says "Don't ring anyone, don't bring it to attention". I said "Of course I've got to", I said "You don't do things like that".

So when I got home I phoned -- I phoned Karen Vernon Harris at the time. I didn't bother with Glenn Chester because he was just a waste of space. He just -- he was not interested in anything, that man, and she contacted the people that needed to be informed on the Post Office side. I phoned the police, so CID come out straight away. They took a statement and they said that they would be back in the morning, "Don't go to work, just stay at home. We will be here first thing in the morning".

So I told them who had told me, who it was that had told me about this armed robbery, and straightaway they said "Right, you're arrested under conspiracy to

rob the Post Office", and I said "What?" and I was suspended on the spot because I think Glenn Chester was there as well at the time, I can't remember that bit.

I was suspended with no pay but I was told that if it comes back that I wasn't involved in it, I would get my full money back, my salary that I had lost, and everything else, but it was strange because the robbery — that happened on the Wednesday night.

By the Friday, he had somebody to run the post office and he said to me "In order to keep your post office open and running, we're going to put this company in and they will have your full salary". And I said "Well, they will have to pay all the bills", I said, "Because I've got nothing". I didn't know that I could get money off the dole.

I was so embarrassed. I didn't want to leave the house. I was in such a mess. I was a complete wreck. And my neighbour across the road used to bring me food. [redacted] used to come down and sit with me and talk with me. I couldn't explain it. I wouldn't have done anything like that. He was a friend. We went to a Sky Premiere night. It was horrendous what they accused me of after all the years.

I knew he wanted me out, Glenn Chester, because I wouldn't open at 8 o'clock in the morning until

8 o'clock at the night, and that's one of the reasons that, you know -- we were on a precinct. I had Martins retail at one end and I had Spar at one end. Both could fit the post office in, so they were both fighting for the post office.

And I soon then went into hospital because I was struggling walking, after having the knock on the spine. It affected my legs and everything. My legs swelled up, my body swelled up and I went into hospital and I was there for a week and they learned me how to walk up and downstairs.

Then I was sent home and then within ten days I was rushed back into hospital with my ex-wife, my neighbour across the road was there, my doctor was there and I went into this ward and I was hallucinating. I thought I could see people. Like, my mum had died and I thought I could see my mum in the bed opposite and I'm like "Why are you over there? Why aren't you over here with me?" Other people who I (inaudible) heard me shouting across this ward and I don't remember none of it

The next thing, I believe, I was rushed into intensive care, because I had bleeds everywhere. I had two haematomas the size of my fist, one on my spine and one on my kidneys, and they didn't know where all the

blood was going out of my body, so they were pumping blood into me. I swear that was filling up all these bleeds in my head -- my head swelled like a football, it wasn't recognisable. Twice I nearly died and then -- and then when I come out of the second coma, I didn't know who I was, I didn't know where I was, or anything.

And I remember waking up, and I could hear "Heather come on, Heather come on, wake up now, wake up now". And I woke up and, as I say, I didn't know who I was, I found I couldn't see hardly because my eyes — because of being so swelled it had all crusted over. I had been ripping my hair out in the coma, so my fingernails were all full of blood. So when I finally got to see a bit better, I found a phone number and it said this lady's name. I didn't know who she was, and I kept thinking "Where's my mum? Where's my wife? Why am I here by myself?"

So the nurse dialled this number for me and I spoke down the phone and I said "Hello, my name is Heather, do you know me?" And she said "Yes, love, I live across the road from you. I was your mum's best friend", and I didn't know. I thought my mum was still alive. I couldn't remember anything, and I have lost so much since that.

It took me over 12 -- then I was in hospital for

19 months. I had to learn to walk again. That took over 12 months to do. That was one of the hardest things I have ever done in my life, but I done it and, in that time, I had lost my home, I had had my interview with the Post Office, even though I was in hospital, I had to go in a taxi down to one of the hotels in Liverpool where I was interviewed by a panel. I also had an advocate working for me, which was helping me because with having these brain problems I couldn't understand. I didn't know what was going on.

So when we arrived, he was told he wasn't allowed to speak, he wasn't allowed to say anything and I thought "Well, why did you say he could come, you know the state that I'm in, why are you putting more pressure on me?"

So they just said, you know, because the landlord hadn't been paid, his bill was nearly £10,000 so the landlord got in touch with me and he said "Heather, are you going back to the post office? Are you able to go back to the post office?" and I said no. I said "Not at the minute". I said "I have only recently learned to walk, let alone anything else". And he said "Well, I will give it another couple of weeks, but if you're coming back, let me know, and I will wipe that full debt off for you because you have been such a good tenant".

And I -- I said no, I wasn't going back.

So he had the locks changed immediately because I was under the impression that company that took over was going to pay the bills out of the salary, like I had to, but they paid for nothing. I didn't get anything out of the shop. I didn't get none of my personal belongings, things in there that belonged to me, nothing. I don't know who has got it, who has seen it, who has read my personal items.

Then I was told by somebody that the lady that was running the post office there, she was having cigarette breaks and leaving the bandit screen door open, or sitting in a chair in the precinct in the sunshine when it was quiet, with the bandit door screen open, and I'm being blamed for all this money going missing, and my security was high level. I never had a problem with security, apart from the passwords because I couldn't remember them and I would write them down. And I would put them under my mat so that every month when they changed it I would change it, and I would just lift up that -- well, one day Glenn Chester come in and he saw that I had my password under my mat. I got a written warning for it.

It was anything he could pick at me for. I'm sorry for babbling on but I could go on for days over

how I have been treated and everything.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I'm sure you could. I just wanted to get
 the time sequence right.

4 A. Yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I have understood that all these very serious illnesses you were suffering when you were hospitalised, that took place after you were suspended?

8 A. Yes, yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right, and during that period of time you were first suspended, then you were terminated and then you tried to appeal?

A. I did.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That was the meeting in Liverpool you told me about?

15 A. That was, yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That appeal was unsuccessful?

17 A. It was just a waste of time going. It was a waste of18 money.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: After that, of course, you had nothing 20 more to do with the Post Office?

A. No. I was told I couldn't enter the premises. I was to
 not go there, and that was it.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So I've got it in sequence now, so
 Ms Hodge will ask you some more questions.

25 MS HODGE: I would like to talk to you about how this has

1 affected you a little more. You have described some of 2 that impact.

You have explained that your landlord, I think,
 forfeited your lease; is that right --

5 A. Yes

Q. -- on the branch? As a result of your termination, you
 lost your post office branch; is that right?

8 A. That was the reason they shut it down, yes.

9 Q. What happened to your retail business?

A. There was nothing left. I didn't get a penny. I wasn't allowed to enter the building. By this time, people were thinking "Oh, she robbed the post office and that's why she has disappeared". Nobody knew I was in hospital. Nobody knew because, as my wife was driving one night to visit me, somebody was driving down the wrong side of a dual carriageway, racing home to watch a Liverpool football match and crashed straight into her as a head on, she broke her neck, her ankle, her arm, her leg, ribs, and she was smashed up to hell and nobody told me. And I kept saying to the nurses "Can you ring and find out where she is", and it was about a week after -- because I thought "That's not her. She has been there all the time to look after me because she

And when I found out about the crash, I couldn't

knows that I'm innocent in everything".

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believe it because I felt it was my fault because I was so poorly. If she didn't have to come and see me and bring me fresh clothes and nighties and things, that crash wouldn't have happened and everybody in the family blamed me as well. The kids, her sisters, everyone.

And then the post office -- sorry, the police said -- come back that no further charges were to be made against me in the robbery, I wasn't involved in it at all and everything since then. So my advocate rung Glenn Chester and spoke to him because he was there, he was there when Glenn Chester had said "Yes, we will pay you all your salary back when the police say that you're not involved", but then they hit me then, as I say, with this landlord thing, but I wasn't well enough to go back.

I had come out of hospital after 19 months. I lost a five-bedroomed house, the post office, I moved into a council house, I have still got no flooring in my lounge or bedrooms, most of my clothes are second-hand, because all my clothes went missing somewhere and I can't survive on what I get. I can't live. It's not worth living.

- 23 Q. Have you sought any compensation from the Post Office?
- 24 They paid 60,000 out but when I first came out of 25 hospital the Post Office Federation gave me £3,000 to

help me because they knew I wasn't involved in any robbery like that. I had had a good clean record all my life for the Post Office. And I come out and I had nothing. I moved into a two-bedroomed semi-detached house and I'm a hermit in there. I don't like going out. If I do, I just go to the shop and come back.

My sister in December, that caused a big rift between the family and everything, so I have lost touch with all of them

10 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** The £60,000 compensation you just told me 11 about, that came from the civil litigation, did it?

12 Yes, it did, yes.

13 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right.

14 MS HODGE: How do you feel now about the way that you were treated by the Post Office and its employees? 15

16 A. They don't care about anyone. They knew that there was 17 problems in there and they were the ones that were 18 cashing in the money. They were the ones that were 19 earning the millions of pounds a year and there's us, 20 30 days to pay the money back. Well, I have waited 21 20 years now for them to pay me and compensate me for 22 what they owe me. The stress, losing my home, losing 23

- the business, losing my family, my wife, jewellery,
- 24 stamp collections, coin collections, everything's gone.
- 25 What do you think the Post Office needs to do to put

1 this right?

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2 A. I'm a bit stuck on that one. Is this where I read my 3 statement? Yes, okay. I have made a statement, is it 4 okay to read it?

5 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, please do.

A. I'm sorry, my dog broke my glasses and I can't afford a new pair, so I'm a bit like off Coronation Street.

"Wednesday 9 March 2022. To Sir Wyn Williams.

"My final closing statement that I know needs addressing immediately is for the Post Office to compensate us for all our life changing situations and losses. The Post Office ruined my life and when our offices showed huge shortages we had a month only to find the money to sort out the loss but, yet, you have had over 20 years and we still haven't been compensated for the glitch in the system that you all denied was happening.

"I lost my beautiful wife, my family, because it changed me completely. I lost my dignity, personality and my soul, in the end. My mental health is in a bad way. I felt I didn't matter when I asked for help, until I was prepared to go to the press. Auditors who had finally attended within that month, were paid off as redundancy. I think it is because he believed me. He watched as the figures of the balance changed in front 55

of our eyes.

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"So, for all the loss and illness that this has caused, it is totally mental cruelty pushing me to a mental breakdown. Suicide, yes, I have been there but, do you know what, no more, no more. I'm entitled to live. As to what my declining health needs, I need a bungalow to survive. Otherwise, what's the point of living? I can't get upstairs in my house."

9 That's it. Thank you, Sir Williams for listening. 10 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That's fine and thank you very much for 11 coming here under obvious difficulties and distress to 12 giving me your evidence.

13 I didn't think I would cry. I thought I was tougher 14 than that but it is just too emotional.

15 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: People react in all kinds of different 16 ways so don't you worry about it. Thank you again for 17 coming.

18 A. Thank you.

19 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: We will have a short break now. I'm sure 20 Mr Page is here by now. I suspect he has been listening 21 to guite a bit of it in another room and I see a wave 22 from another room to confirm that. So we will have 23 a ten-minute break and start again when we are all 24 ready.

25 (2.28 pm)

I'm going to begin by asking you a few questions about 1 (Short Break) 1 2 (2.41 pm) 2 you. You currently live with your partner in North MS HODGE: Our next witness is Ms Janice Attwood. 3 Yorkshire; is that right? 3 4 JANICE SANDRA ATTWOOD (affirmed) 4 A. Yes. 5 Questioned by MS HODGE 5 Q. Do you have any children? 6 MS HODGE: As you know, Ms Attwood, my name is Catriona 6 Α. I've got five. 7 Hodge and I ask questions on behalf of the Inquiry. 7 How old are they? 8 Please can you state your full name? The youngest twins are 25, 36, 40 and 42. 8 9 9 Q. So they are grown-up? A. Yes, it is Janice Sandra Attwood. 10 Q. Thank you. You made a statement on 11 January this 10 A. 11 year; is that correct? 11 Q. Do they still live with you? 12 A. Yes. 12 A. Two do. 13 Q. Do you have a copy of that statement in front of you? 13 Q. What do you do now for a living? 14 A. 14 I manage a Cancer Research charity shop. Can I ask you please to turn to the final page? Before working for the Post Office, you were employed as 15 Q. 15 16 A. 16 a civil servant; is that right? 17 Do you see your signature at the top of that page? 17 Yes, I worked -- well, it was the DHSS then. How did you first come to work in a Post Office branch? 18 A. Yes, I do. 18 19 Have you read the statement again --19 I was married and I lived on the Isle of Man, and then 20 A. 20 when my marriage broke up I came back next door to my 21 Q. -- since it was made in January? 21 parents, who had the post office, and then when my 22 22 father died we took it over. A. Yes. 23 Q. Are the contents true to the best of your knowledge and 23 Q. Where was that post office? 24 belief? 24 A. In Helperby. 25 A. Yes, yes. 25 That was run by your parents originally? 57 A. 1 Yes 1 2 You worked for them? 2 purchase it from them at that stage? 3 A. I worked -- from about 1986, I used to do twice a week 3 4 and then Saturdays, sometimes, if they wanted to go 4 5 caravaning and -- yes. 5 yes, bought it from my mother. 6 Q. Assisting them in running the branch? 6 Q. How did you afford to do that? 7 7 Yes, anything to fit in with the school time. 8

- 8 Where were you living at that time? 9 A. Next door to the post office. 10 Q. You just explained your father passed away; is that riaht? 11 12 A. Yes. 13 Q. It was as a result of that that you applied to be the 14 subpostmistress? 15 A. Yes, we -- well, we were having a baby and then it
- 17 and then when my father died he was still a postmaster, 18 so we ended up buying the post office because my mother 19 wasn't coping very well, so ... 20 When you say "we", are you referring to your current 21 partner? 22 A. Yeah, lan and I.

turned out to be twins, but we were looking for a house

- 23 Do you recall when you took over as the subpostmistress 24 of the branch?
- 25 It was September 1996. A.

- I think you said your parents owned the branch. Did you
- Yes, well, my father was the postmaster when he died, so my mother -- my mother didn't want to carry on. So,
- We got a massive mortgage -- well, massive for then, it
 - was £120,000 and then that was on the basis of both our
- 9 wages. My Post Office wage and then lan's wage to pay
- 10 it back.
- 11 Q. What steps did you take to modernise the branch when you
- 12 took it over?
- We made -- it was -- you know, we completely -- it had 13
- 14 a sorting office as well, so there were three post
- 15 ladies attached to the house. So we had to make up
- 16 a bullet-proof screen and we altered where the actual
- 17 office bit was because we had a shop as well. So, yes,
- 18 with new screens, had to get a new lozenge for the
- 19 outside and -- I can't remember how much we spent on it.
- 20
- 21 You mentioned a shop. The branch had a retail side to
- 22 it; is that right?
- 23 A. Yes.
- What did you sell from the retail side? 24 Q.
- 25 We tried to do everything. We had fresh fruit and veg, A.

- 1 fresh bakery every day, we got an off-licence, Christmas
- 2 trees, logs, just everything, papers, everything we
- 3 could think of selling, we did.
- 4 Q. Did you live in the branch itself?
- 5
- 6 Q. There was a residential --
- 7 A. Yes, yes, there was a big house next to it.
- 8 Q. You have explained you took over in September 1996. Do
- 9 you recall when the Horizon System was installed in your
- 10 branch?
- 11 A. I think it was 2000.
- 12 Q. What training did you receive when Horizon was
- 13
- 14 A. Two days at the -- one of the hotels in Boroughbridge.
- 15 I'm -- I think somebody came out just briefly to sort of
- 16 go through it in the shop and then we had a training
- 17 mode in the back, screen where you could practice, so
- 18 I used to practice a lot on that.
- 19 Q. What did your training cover?
- 20 A. It was really rushed. I remember it was really rushed.
- 21 Just -- I don't know if they did the balancing then. It
- 22 was just basic transactions and -- I don't know if we
- 23 did reversals, I think we did. It is a long time ago
- 24 but ...
- 25 Q. You described it as "rushed".

1 A. Mm-hm

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- 2 Q. What was your impression of how sufficient it was in
- 3 preparing you to use the system?
- A. 4 I was better when it was in the post office. I remember
- 5 there were two older ladies there, they had the village
- 6 post office and he was really grumpy with them because
- 7 they'd never been anywhere near a computer before but,
- 8 as far as -- I was really quite excited about it because
 - I thought it would be progressive.
- 10 Did you seek any further training from the Post Office
- 11 after -- I think it was three days you described?
- 12 No, just I rang up if I had problems and people would
- 13 talk you through it.
- 14 Did you have problems with the Horizon System?
- 15 I would have shortages. Before we would have, like,
- 16 an envelope in the safe and either put the money in or
- 17 take the money out, it usually balanced, but --
- When you say "before", do you mean before Horizon? 18
- 19 Before Horizon, yes. So you would, sort of -- if you
- 20 had made -- it didn't have to mean -- if you kept the
- 21 money in the safe, you would take it out and put it in
- 22 if you were short, and then if you were over you would
- 23 put it in. And I think it all pretty much -- everybody
- 24 did that but when the Horizon came, we just didn't seem
- 25 to have any -- there always just seemed to be shortages.

- 1 Not big ones, little ones.
- 2 Q. So before Horizon came in you had occasional
- 3 discrepancies?
- 4 A. Yes.
- 5 Q. Some shortages but some gains?
- 6 A. It balanced out really.
- 7 But you felt they roughly evened? Q.
- 8 A.
- 9 Q. What did you do when you experienced the shortages?
- 10 A. Well, ring the helpline lots and then end up putting the 11 money in.
- 12 Q. How often do you think you contacted the helpline?
- Just loads, just -- especially balance days. I was 13
- 14 constantly on the phone to them on balancing days
- 15 because I could never balance and, sometimes, the
- 16 screens would freeze. I think we had one time it was
- 17 down for a whole week, so I kept ringing the helpline
- 18 and they would say it was -- they would send an engineer
- 19 out and it was BT's fault, and then BT would say it was
- 20 their fault. And, in the end, it was water down the
- 21 line -- after a week it was water in the line outside
- 22 the shop
- 23 Q. What were you told to do when you had a shortage on
- 24 a balance day?
- 25 A. It depends -- some of them would try and tell you to

- look for it, but quite quickly it started doubling,
 - you know, when I was doing the final balance it would
- 3 double, the discrepancy would double, so I would ring
- 4 them and they would -- if they told me to do it again,
- 5 it would do it again, so I just didn't. In the end,
- 6 I just had to put the money in.
- 7 How did you do that, where did you find the money to --
- 8 Usually out of my wages, just so -- you know, just write
- 9 a cheque or -- yes. They weren't massive, so, you know,
- 10 they would be 100 and something, or ...
- 11 You have just explained there were times when
- 12 discrepancies would double. When did this happen?
- 13 It was fairly early on. On balance days. I had --Α.
- 14 I told my area manager about it and he came out
- 15 in November 2020(sic) and I made him stand and watch me
- do every single press of the button and then I would 17 sort of say "Right, I'm doing this, you agree with that,
- 18 I'm pressing that", and he watched me and it got to like
- 19 the final balance and I said "Right, I'm pressing this
- 20 button now, will you watch me", and I pressed it and it
- 21 doubled, and he just had not a clue and I never heard
- 22 from him again, really, about it. He just didn't know.
- 23 You have referred to your area manager. Was that Kevin
- 24 Duffield at the time?
- 25 A. Yes.

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- Q. You said he couldn't explain what was causing thisdiscrepancy?
- 3 A. He couldn't explain, he saw it with his own eyes.
- 4 Q. How much do you think you paid the Post Office to make
- 5 good shortfalls that were shown on Horizon?
- 6 A. Well, apart from the one I was suspended for, you mean,7 or --
- 8 Q. In total, if you're able --
- 9 A. I don't know. Maybe about 6,000 altogether.
- 10 Q. The first audit of your branch took place before Horizon11 was introduced; is that right?
- 12 **A.** Yes, I had two audits in my time there before the last
- 13 audit.
- 14 Q. What was the outcome of that very first audit?
- 15 A. It was the same chap twice, and he was just really nice.
- Just sent me like a report of the audit and "Thank you
- 17 very much for the tea and biscuits", and just little
- 18 pointers that I might like to do.
- 19 Q. Forgive me, that was two audits pre-Horizon?
- 20 A. Two audits pre-Horizon, yes, and --
- 21 Q. Both didn't give rise to any problems?
- 22 A. No.
- 23 Q. Your third audit was in early 2001; is that right?
- 24 A. Yes, it was either January or February.
- 25 Q. How did that audit come about?

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1 A. I don't know. It was just like an audit. I didn't know
they were looking for the amount they were. I hadn't
a clue, so they just came one Thursday morning, but they
were both -- there were two car loads, and they just
swung in -- because we had cobbles outside the shop,
they just --

For a moment, I thought I was going to get robbed because they just -- they came in like the Sweeney, it was -- so I was already a bit shaken when I opened the door to them. I could see they were officials and I opened the door and then there were four of them and --

- 13 Q. Were these employees of the Post Office?
- 14 A. I think so, yes. Auditors. I don't know, I didn't even
 ask them. They just went through everything and I can
- remember sitting on a stool with my back against the
- 17 radiator, because it was quite a big area, the office,
- and they just turned round and said that I was £4,000
- short, and I thought they meant I was £4,000 missing out
- 20 of the safe. I just couldn't get my head round it.
- Q. Before the auditors arrived, did you know you hada shortfall?
- A. No, not like that, no. I hadn't a clue. I mean, apart
 from the weekly ones and I think we had had a couple
- 25 that had built up and I had had to ring up and say
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- 1 "I can't pay all this at once", so they put it in
- 2 suspense and just waited to see if it would turn up
- 3 and ...
- 4 Q. So you had reported prior shortfalls --
- 5 A. Yes, I had.
- 6 Q. -- to the Post Office.
- 7 **A.** Yes.
- 8 Q. Was that via the helpline, do you know?
- 9 A. It might have been Chesterfield, I can't remember,
- 10 because it was ten years ago, but I had reported it to
- 11 say "I don't know where it is or what it is".
- 12 Q. What action did the Post Office take when the shortfall
- of £4,000 was shown in your branch?
- 14 A. They suspended me on the spot, they just said "There's
- 15 £4,000 missing, where is it?" I said "I don't" --
- 16 I think I said "If there is 4,000 -- if I had taken
- 17 £4,000 where is it?" and they just sort of said "Well,
- 18 you tell us". And I couldn't just make sense of it at
- 19 the time.
- 20 Q. So for how long were you suspended?
- 21 A. Three months.
- 22 Q. Were you paid during the period of your suspension?
- 23 A. No.
- 24 Q. Who took over running the branch?
- 25 A. My friend Lynn, who used to come in and help me with the

- twins when they were little. She would, like, play with them while I did the shop and she also -- my mother
- 3 became ill, she -- my mother, sort of, helped me with
- 4 the shop beforehand, and then she became ill and she had
- 5 life-changing surgery on her face, so we didn't see her
- 6 any more, so that's when I trained Lynn up to do the
- 7 post office. So Lynn used to help me with the
- 8 post office anyway. So, as Lynn was there looking after
- 9 the babies when the auditors came, they sort of signed
- 10 her in then and there.
- 11 Q. The Post Office launched an investigation into the cause
- of the £4,000 shortfall shown on Horizon; is that right?
- 13 **A.** Yes

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- 14 Q. Do you know who was responsible for conducting that15 investigation?
- 16 A. I think it was -- well, somebody told me it was
 Bill Earnshaw that had reported me, but I don'
- Bill Earnshaw that had reported me, but I don't know how true that is. He was one of the area managers.

19 I went to -- they said I could take a friend,
 20 somebody -- or a NFSP representative, or I think it was

21 the legal -- anyway, I went to see a solicitor in

22 Harrogate and I asked her to help me but I had

absolutely no paperwork as to why this shortage was and

she said how tricky they were to deal with and she

didn't think she would be able to help me and she

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said -- her exact words were "They behave like the last bastion of the British Empire, they won't give out any information".

So I went for an NFSP rep and I got invited to an interview in York Crown Office, the offices above York Crown Office, so I asked for the rep to go with me and they said "Take relevant paperwork", and the only paperwork I had was -- I got all my old bills from BT, and they were about that thick and I had just gone through them all with highlighters so they could see how many times I had rung the helpline, and that's all I had. And I was a bit naive, I thought he was going to have some paperwork there regarding my shortfalls and be able to sit down with me and go through them.

So I got there and he was just awful from -- he was just awful right from the start. He was really aggressive and he just had pieces of paper and they just had numbers on them and he kept saying "How do you explain that, how do you explain that why have you done that?" and I was like "I just don't understand it". And I hadn't a clue, I hadn't a clue what I was looking at to be honest.

23 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Can you remember, was this an interview 24 under caution, a formal interview, or was it something 25 different from that?

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- A. I can't remember. He was an interviewer from the 1
- 2 Post Office, I know that, but that's --
- 3 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So it was after you were suspended?
- 4 A. After suspension, there was a little time and then
- 5 they -- I think his words were "You are invited to
- 6 interview", so I assumed it was just like a kind of --
 - **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** You don't remember being cautioned?
- 8 A. I can't remember, to be honest, but I -- I honestly
- 9 thought we were going to sit down together and try and
- 10 find the mistake. So I just started crying -- he just
- 11 made me cry right from the start because he was so awful
 - and I just kept looking at the rep for help and he never
- 13 opened his mouth once.
- 14 **MS HODGE:** You said you had approached the National Fedration of SubPostmasters. 15
- 16 Yes, my local one was on holiday so he came from --
- 17 I don't know where he came in from. He just didn't open
- 18 his mouth once.
- 19 You have described being reduced to tears by the
- 20 interview. Can you describe how it made you feel?
- 21 Just awful, just -- because I kept looking at them and A.
- 22 he didn't believe me, and I knew he didn't believe me
- 23 but I knew I hadn't taken it, but the more you say
- "I haven't done it", it's just -- it's just awful, it 24
- 25 still is, it's awful.

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- Q. The Post Office arranged a further meeting with you. 1
- 2 I think it was three months after the audit; is that
- 3 right?

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4 A. Yes.

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- 5 Q. Where did this meeting take place?
- 6 A. I got the choice. I could go back to the office, or --
- 7 the Crown Office, or it could be a place of my choosing
 - or back at my house, and I decided I wanted him at my
- 9 house because I wanted him to see me as a person.
- 10 I wanted him to see my children's paintings on --
- 11 you know, just instead of -- I just wanted to have
- 12 a little bit of control back and try and get him to see
- 13 me as a human being, instead of just -- I don't know.
- Who attended that meeting on behalf of --14
- A. It was the same chap that shouted at me at the 15 16 interview
- 17 Q. You don't recall the individual's name?
- 18 A. I wish I could. No, I can't.
- 19 Q. What were you told at that meeting?
- 20 I was told if I admitted to false accounting -- because
- 21 the helpline -- I forgot to say, the helpline had told
- 22 me to rollover -- like, if it was in one week and
- 23 I couldn't pay.
- 24 So I was told if I admitted to false accounting,
- 25 they would drop the theft charge, and pay the £4,000,

- and they would reinstate me, which they did, and 1
 - I couldn't get -- I couldn't understand, if I was
- 3 a thief three months ago, why was I fit to run
- 4 a post office afterwards? Now, I'm either a thief or
- 5 I'm not, so -- I just -- yes, it's like nothing happened
- 6 after I was reinstated, and he was really nice to me
- 7 when he came to my house, he was all smiley, he wished
- 8 me well, it was really weird.
- 9 Q. So the condition was you repay the money --
- 10 A.

- 11 Q. -- admit that you had --
- 12 Yes, admit to false accounting.
- 13 Falsified accounts --O.
- 14 A.
- -- and you would be reinstated to your branch? 15 Q.
- 16 Yes, like nothing had happened.
- If you didn't admit the charge or repay the sum, what 17
- 18 was --
- 19 I don't know. We didn't get that far. We had to keep
- 20 the house. I needed my work to pay the mortgage and
- 21 five children, it was a lovely big house, we --
- 22 I just -- I'm just so glad it was only 4,000 and not
- 23 like everybody else's 65, or whatever, because
- 24 I wouldn't have done it.
- 25 When you admitted to the false accounting, were you Q.

- 1 aware that other subpostmasters were experiencing --
- 2 A. I hadn't a clue no. But it was quite new, wasn't it,
- 3 then? I suppose it was right at the beginning of
- 4 Horizon. Oh, I do. One of the ladies in the village,
- 5 she was House for Duty church -- you know, church lady.
- 6 She worked in the post office in Acomb in York and she
- 7 was a friend, she used to come and have a coffee, and
- 8 she said to me that exactly the same thing had happened
- 9 to a lady in York. That was the first I had heard about
- 10 anything.
- 11 Q. When you say you admitted to the false accounting, how
- 12 did that take place? Were you required to sign
- 13 something --
- 14 Α. Yes.
- Q. -- to say that you --15
- 16 A. Yes.
- 17 Q. You didn't receive a criminal conviction though, did
- 18

- 19 A. No, nothing. Just like it never happened, as long as
- 20 you pay the £4,000.
- 21 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: But, just to follow up on what Ms Hodge
- 22 has asked you, you do remember signing something?
- 23 A. I'm pretty sure, I'm pretty sure -- because, I mean,
- 24 I had everything until about three months before I heard
- 25 about Nick Wallis, and I'd burned it all, but I'm pretty
 - 73

- 1 sure having a document that said that.
- 2 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: We have heard evidence from one or two
- 3 people who signed what's called a caution. Does that
 - ring any bells with you?
- 5 It might have been I don't know. The whole thing was so
- 6 shocking, it sort of --
- 7 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right, that's fine. That's fine.
- 8 MS HODGE: But you then were reinstated in your branch.
- 9 A. Yes.

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- 10 What happened to the £4,000 shortfall? I think you were
- 11 asked to repay it; is that right?
- 12 A.
- 13 Q. How did you afford to do that?
- 14 A. We just had -- we were doing the house up and we had
- just put a little bit of money away to do the house up, 15
- 16 so that's what we used.
- 17 Q. How did your appointment as a subpostmistress come to
- 18 an end?
- 19 I sold the business and the lady that I sold it to had
- 20 exactly the same problems.
- 21 Q. When did you sell the business?
- 22 A.

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- 23 Q. Why did you decide to do that?
- Why did I? 24 A.
- 25 Yes, why, ultimately, did you decide to?

- 1 Because I just -- it was just -- every balance day
 - I would get to the -- I would be absolutely stricken
- 3 with, like, the thought of balancing and it would
- 4 just -- it would affect my whole day. I would like
- 5 dread it, and dread it, and dread it and then I just
- 6 didn't want to do it any more. I just ...
- 7 Q. Between your audit in early 2001 and your decision to
- 8 resign -- I think to resign in 2008, did you continue to
- 9 experience shortfalls on Horizon?
- 10 A. Yes. Nothing like that 4,000 -- I mean, I still don't
- 11 know where that 4,000 figure was, where it come from
- 12 because -- yes, there would be, like, still 100 and
- 13 something, but it would still double. The thing would
- 14 still double at the end of the day when you pressed that
- 15
- final button, the amount would double and it carried on
- 16 for the lady that bought the post office.
- 17 Exactly the same thing happened to her, so
- 18 I think -- yes. She was invited to join, you know, the 19 claims for the postmasters as well, so she is in
- 20 a different scheme, unfortunately.
- 21 Q. Did you join the Justice for Subpostmasters Alliance?
- 22 A. Yes, I'm one of the 555.
- 23 Q. You're one of the 555. I would like to -- before we
- 24 come on to that, I would like to just ask you a few
- 25 questions about how this experience affected you and

- 1 your family. What affect did the shortfall shown by
 - Horizon have on your finances?
- 3 We were just hand to mouth. It was -- there was one
- 4 time Ian had to take the boys on holiday abroad and
- 5 I had to stay behind because we couldn't afford -- we
- 6 couldn't afford all of us to go and the boys needed the
- 7 holiday. We just didn't have any spending money.
- 8 It was more what it did to me -- you know, what it 9 did to me.
- 10 Q. How did it affect you?
- 11 I was -- I felt really ashamed of myself. I didn't like
- 12 going out and I -- I hadn't told anybody for -- the
- 13 first time I said anything -- I mean, the villagers
- 14 don't know, they probably will now, but the first time
- 15 I did anything about it was 18 years later, and I worked
 - with --

- 17 It was when all the stories were coming out about
- 18 all the other ones, and I woke up and I had been crying 19 in my sleep, and I just -- I got up and I -- it was when
- 20 Nick Wallis was doing -- you know, started reporting on
- 21 the stories and I read somewhere "If you've got
- 22 a story". So I woke up crying and I went downstairs and
- 23 I just fired off an email. I looked at the clock and it
- 24 was 4 o'clock in the morning and that was 18 years
- 25 later. It still, you know, it still -- and the

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- 1 Post Office was long gone, but it was still affecting me 2 3 Q. What has the long-term impact been on your emotional 4 wellbeing?
- 5 A. I still sort of feel a bit ashamed and I feel really 6 inadequate that it happened to me. I'm a mess -- when 7 it gets to cashing up at the charity shop, if it's out 8 I get -- there was one time it was £20 out and 9 I couldn't stop crying because -- just because it was 10 happening again, and it was ridiculous because it was 11 under the till, you know, it had slipped under the till, but it just makes me really anxious, like stuff like
- 12 13
- 14 Q. How do you now feel about entering a post office, for 15 example?
- 16 A. If I can help it I won't go. I buy my stamps from 17 WH Smith. Yes, I did have a small job afterwards and it 18 was mornings in the post office -- in one of -- it was 19 a community post office, and it was lovely because I did 20 just Tuesday mornings and, at the end of the Tuesday you 21 would balance your money, which was fine because it 22 wasn't like a balance, but I think I had made a mistake 23 and it was my mistake, in the morning, or something, so 24 it wouldn't balance, and I just couldn't stop crying,

couldn't stop crying.

They were all fantastic and I just left the job because I just couldn't cope and I know -- I hadn't told them about -- I hadn't told them about me being suspended. It was just like this -- I was just too ashamed.

6 Q. You have already described the financial impact that 7 affected your family, in that you weren't able to go on 8 holidays with them. Can you describe a little bit more 9 how your partner and your children were affected?

10 A. My mother, who was the postmistress before, and, as 11 I said, she had sort of a lot of surgery on her face, 12 I was sort of her main carer, and she always wanted to 13 know what was going on in the post office, and one of 14 the worst things was I didn't ever tell her because 15 I didn't want to worry her that I had been suspended and 16 it was like this massive secret, so much so that it was 17 a bit of a relief when she died because I didn't have to 18 tell her -- I know that sounds dreadful, but I didn't 19 have to lie, or I didn't have this awful secret any more 20 and I'm really cross that they made me feel like that.

> The children, the little ones weren't affected because we kept it from them. My -- one of my middle sons, we were talking about it about two days ago and he said that Ian -- he said "You remember the time when Ian said we might have to sell, we might have to move

- 1 house", when he was little, and I didn't even know lan 2
 - had had that conversation with him. They were all
- 3 right, you know, they did all right, but we made sure
- 4 they were all right. It was horrible.
- 5 Q. You have mentioned that your mother was unwell. You 6 said in your statement you would have wished to care and 7 support her more than you could; is that right?
- 8 A. Yes, yes. Just -- yes, well, I was -- it was more the 9 fact that I -- I hadn't lied, I just didn't tell her and 10 it was such a massive thing going on in my life -- we 11 normally shared things and I couldn't say. So much so
- 12 that when she died it was -- the secret went with her. 13 Q. You have mentioned already that you were a claimant in
- 15 A. Yes.

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16 Q. Did you receive any compensation?

the Group Litigation; is that right?

- 17 A. £2,000 back and then I think about 200 after that a bit 18 later.
- 19 Q. £200?
- 20 A. Yes, so 2,200 altogether.
- 21 Q. Did this amount cover what you had to pay in to make up 22 the shortfalls?
- 23 A. No, nothing like.
- 24 Q. How do you feel now about the way that you were treated 25 by the Post Office?

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- 1 I still can't get my head round it. I still -- it's
 - just so incredible how they behaved. I have started to
- 3 feel angry but it's more like I just find it incredible
- 4 that humans can treat other humans like that. It's 5
 - beyond me.
- 6 What do you think should be done to put right what 7 happened to you and other subpostmasters?
- 8 That's in my last bit, the statement. Can I do that?
- 9 Q. Please.
- 10 A. When I was a child I used to play post offices. We 11 featured on cards, jigsaws money boxes, as part of 12 a solid reliable vision of Britain. I was proud to be 13 a subpostmistress and I was trusted within the village

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and it felt good to be useful.

I sincerely hope that the Post Office can see from the impact statements just how much damage they have inflicted on ordinary people who were just trying to do a good job in a trusted institution.

This is the first time I have spoken about what happened to me in 21 years but I followed the harrowing stories of all the others for a long time. Just before I came here, the little village post office that I used to work in afterwards, I sent the lady an email because I didn't want to come here without telling her -you know, I felt bad that I hadn't said anything.

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So I sent her an email just to explain what was happening and that I was really sorry that I hadn't told her and she sent me a lovely email back and then just about half an hour before I come in here I've got another one from one of -- because it's a cooperative, so it just says:

"Dear Jan,

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"You may remember me. I followed you on from your [that's where it is] on a Tuesday. I remember well your professionalism and your caring approach to the customers. I had no idea what you were going through. Although you were not able to talk about your circumstances, I am glad you can take some comfort at being part of our happy band. We still are a happy band and the shop goes from strength to strength. I just wanted to wish you all the best for the hearing at Leeds. It must be very traumatic but I do hope you get the justice you deserve."

And that was just before I came here. And to follow on, I have said I wonder if the investigator who questioned me ever gave me a second thought as I've never forgotten him. Yet I feel lucky that my shortfall was £4,000. It may well have been 200,000. I still didn't take it. I would like to see not a written apology of the "lessons have been learned" type but

I want to see the faces of the bullies who were

complicit in this and hear the words coming from their

3 mouth. I would like to see them punished financially, 4 unlike us for something they didn't do, but for

5 something they knowingly did. I would also like to see

6 every person affected by the scandal get the financial

7 redress to enable them to try and rebuild their lives, 8 as it transpires we didn't steal from the Post Office,

they stole from us, not just money but livelihoods and

10 futures.

> I just want to end, I want to thank Nick Wallis and Alan Bates and everybody for helping me get to this place. And thank you very much for listening. That's

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15 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you for being prepared to come and 16 tell me all this when you spent so much time not telling 17 people, so I'm very grateful.

Thank you. 18

19 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right, so we have one witness left this 20 afternoon, so we will have a short break and then we 21 will assemble for our last witness.

22 (3.15 pm)

23 (Short Break)

24 (3.29 pm)

25 MS HODGE: Thank you, sir. Our next witness is Mr Michael

1 Fogarty.

MICHAEL FOGARTY (affirmed) Questioned by MS HODGE

MS HODGE: As you know, Mr Fogarty, my name is Catriona

5 Hodge and I ask questions on behalf of the Inquiry.

6 Please can you state your full name?

7 A. Michael Patrick Fogarty.

8 Q. You made a written statement for the Inquiry on 9

25 January of this year; is that right?

10 A. That's correct, yes.

11 Q. Do you have a copy of that statement?

12 **A.** There is a copy in front of me, yes.

13 Q. On the final page of that statement you should be able

14 to see your signature. Are you able to --

15 A. I have checked.

Q. You have checked? 16

17 A. Yes, yes. I've got the eyeball, so yes, I have checked.

18 Q. Have you read this statement again since you made it 19

in January of this year?

20 A.

21 Q. Is the content of this statement true to the best of

22 your knowledge and belief?

23 A. It is, yes.

24 Q. Your wife Diane's name is on the table in front of you

25 as well.

A. 1 Yes.

2 She was due to give evidence today; is that right?

3 She was. Unfortunately, due to ill health, she is not

4 able to attend.

5 Q. Your wife Diane has also made a statement for the

6 Inquiry; is that right?

7 That is correct.

8 Is it correct to say that your and your wife's

9 experiences are materially the same, that is to say you

10 both operated your post office together?

11 Very much so, though the impact on Diane, as I will

12 explain, was much greater than on -- than maybe myself

13 in many respects.

14 Thank you. I would like to ask you, Mr Fogarty, a few

15 questions about your background, please. Where did you

16 grow up?

17 A. I grew up on the island of Jersey in the

18 Channel Islands.

19 For how long did you live there?

20 The first time I left I was 15 and a half, brief time in

21 the Merchant Navy on a small tramper, and then I ended

22 up back in the island for about a year or so and then

23 you get restless -- once you have left it's not the

24 same, so I joined the Army.

25 Which regiment did you serve? Q.

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- The Royal Hampshire Regiment. 1
- 2 You met your wife, Diane, while serving in the Army; is 3 that right?
- 4 A. Yes, that's correct. We were serving in Ebrington
- 5 Barracks in Londonderry at the time and a decision was
- 6 made to support -- help us with manpower by bringing
- 7 certain WRAC in to take over some roles that could free
- 8 guys up to go out on the streets on patrol.
- 9 Q. You just mentioned the WRAC, is that the Women's Royal
- 10 Army Corps?
- 11 That's correct, yes. Α.
- 12 Q. Is that where your wife was serving at the time?
- 13 She was part of that corps but she had, obviously,
- 14 different roles because you never do the same thing in
- 15 the Army. When she came to our regiment she was
- 16 involved with the Signals Platoon and part of their
- 17 roles -- it was to do with the encryption of radios and
- 18 stuff like that.
- 19 What qualities did you and your wife develop serving in
- 20 the Army?

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- 21 **A.** A can-do attitude, I suppose, is probably the big one.
- 22 Resilience. Fight for what you believe, you know, and
- 23 sort of -- I don't know, you just get on with it. Do
- 24 you know what I mean? You can't -- it's sort of -- in
- 25 the Army or in the military you can't sort of step back

- and say, you know, "I don't like this", you have just got to get on, you know, focus on what you need to achieve and get on with it.
 - So she was very much a glass half full person. you know. Outgoing, confident and capable, quite frankly.
- Q. For how long have you and your wife now been married?
- 8 A little over 20 years.
- 9 You have one daughter together; is that right? Q.
- 10 A. That's correct, yes.
- 11 In 1990, you left the Army and returned to Jersey; is
- 12 that right?
- 13 A. That's correct.
- 14 Your wife, Diane, was pregnant with your daughter at
- that time; is that correct? 15
- 16 A. Yes.
- 17 Q. What did you do upon returning to Jersey?
- The first job I had was as a funeral director -- well, 18
- 19 in fact, technically, I was still in the Army because
- 20 I had been posted to the TA unit, which had recently
- 21 formed in Jersey, and, technically, I was attached to
- 22 them for my last six months, but they had their own
- 23 permanent staff instructors, so they didn't really want
- 24 me hanging around. So I was able to take up another
- 25 role and, literally, I suppose, the day we arrived in
- 1 Jersey, a company called Maillards were advertising for
 - a funeral director and they wanted somebody -- a mature
- 3 person, so I went down and got the job, basically.
- 4 Q. Did you later come to work for the Police Service in 5 Jersey?
- 6 A. Yes, after about three years, because it was a very --
- 7 it was a family company and I was always going to be,
 - sort of, a junior employee, so to speak, and also when
- 9 you're dealing with grief all the time, it has an effect
- 10 on, you know, on yourself. So the police were
- 11 advertising for civilian support workers at the time and
- 12 I had -- because I had experience in communications and
- 13 operations, and stuff like that, I was able to secure
- 14 a job in the control room, as a cheap policeman,
- 15 basically.
 - So I would use things like the Police National Computer and the local intelligence systems to answer, you know, officers' questions over the radio and all that sort of stuff.
- 20 Q. Did your wife return to work after your daughter was 21 born?
- 22 A. Yes, she did. My mother was able to help looking after
- 23 for Sam, until she took ill, but, yes, Diane went back 24 to work and she was working for Barclays Bank
- 25 International, basically looking after international

- 1 clients and finance, and God knows what else. I don't
 - know much about that side of, it to be fair. We didn't
- 3 really discuss work too much at home. We sort of got on
- 4 with life and that was it.
- 5 Q. How did you and your wife, Diane, come to acquire
- 6 a post office?

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- 7 Diane -- all Diane's family are back here in -- or in
 - the UK but, mainly -- you know, her mother is located
- 9 back in West Yorkshire, in Halifax, so -- and her
- 10 brother, who is also living in Queensbury. So after her
- 11 father died, she felt the urge to come back to the UK
- 12 and I'm one of those, you pick me up, put me down, it
- 13 doesn't matter, you know what I mean. So Jersey didn't
- 14 hold any great attraction to me in terms of I had to
- 15 stay there because that's where I was brought up, so
- 16 I said to her "If we can find a suitable way of earning
- 17 a living back in the UK, I'm happy to move".
- 18 And we did -- one of the things that came up was 19 the idea of maybe taking on a post office and that's
- 20 what led us eventually to take over the post office in
- 21 Queensbury, which is where my wife grew up.
- 22 What attracted your wife in particular to the idea of Q. 23 owning a post office branch?
- 24 She always saw it as -- you know, it's like a pillar of A. 25 the community type job, you know, where people, sort of,

took account, gave you a little bit of respect. I mean, you know, we were responsible for signing documents for people's passport applications, things like that, so it was -- and also she felt she could sort of bring it back into the community type of thing and make it a little more of a difference.

> Just a sort of example was she knew everybody in the village, because she had grown-up there and I remember there was a couple of ne'er-do-wells that lived not too far from the post office, they were hanging around outside and this little old lady come in for her pension and she needed it -- I think she had saved up for about four/five weeks, you know what I mean, so she was actually carrying quite a lot of money, and I was dispatched as bodyguard to get that lady back home.

That's the sort of thing that, you know, she -she would just try to help people. She had a big heart and, you know, she was really enjoying it, really enjoying it and we took over, it was sort of paper based for that first four or five weeks and, you know, she -it was great and we were having -- you know, she was re-engaging with old friends, and so on and so forth, so yes, it was all pretty positive to start with.

25 Q. I believe you purchased the branch for £180,000; is that

- 1 right?
- 2 That's correct, yes.
- 3 Q. You made an investment in the stock as well --
- 4 A. Yes.

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- 5 Q. -- is that right?
- 6 Yes. I honestly can't remember figures. I would have 7 to sort of trawl through and see.
- 8 Q. I think the figure in your statement for stock was
 - £1,400, does that sound about right?
- 10 Yes, that sounds about right. It was things like cards, 11 sweets, pop, toys, that sort of thing.
- 12 Q. How did you and your wife fund the purchase of the
- 13 branch?
- 14 Well, basically, we had obviously -- I took redundancy
- 15 from the Armed Forces in 1992. We had used that money
- 16 to help us buy a property in Jersey, which we
- 17 subsequently renovated and extended, so when we sold
- 18 that we made enough money to get us established back in
- 19 the UK, because you had to find I think it was a third
- 20 of the purchase price, if I remember correctly, so -- of
- 21 the 180,000 we had to put 60,000, a minimum of 60,000
- 22 down of our own money.
- 23 Q. What made up the remainder?
- 24 A. Bank loan.
- 25 You were appointed as the subpostmaster and moved into

- 1 the branch in January 2000; is that right?
- 2 A. Yes.

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- 3 Q. Did you and the family live in the premises?
- 4 A. No, we had a house just a little ways away.
- 5 Q. You have described, I think, running -- the stock you
- 6 have just described, did you run a retail business from
- 7 the premises as well?
- 8 A.

- 9 Q. How large was the branch that you purchased?
- 10 A. Well, it was one of these -- you know, where you do the
 - DVLA stuff, so people would come there for their car
- 12 licences. So once a month you would have people queuing
- 13 down the street for quite some distance waiting to get
- 14 in to change their car tax, and so on, so it was quite
- 15 a -- it wasn't a particularly large premises but it was
- 16 quite a busy post office.
- 17 Q. Did you employ staff to assist you in running the
- 18 branch?
- 19 Yes. A.
- 20 How many?
- 21 **A.** There would be Diane or myself plus two.
- 22 Q. Do you recall how much you received by way of salary 23 from the Post Office?
- 24 A. This is going to sound terrible but, no, I can't. It is
- 25 somewhere around -- between 40 and 50K mark.

- 1 What were your and your wife's hopes and aspirations for 2 the business when you took it on?
- 3 I think, basically, even though my name was as
- 4 subpostmaster, it was very much Diane's passion and her
- 5 skills that were operating in the branch. I had never
- 6 envisaged myself in that particular role long-term and
- 7 so the idea was we would always use that as a sort of
- 8 stepping stone to doing other things, specifically me.
- 9 She wanted to do -- she was looking to establish that as
- 10 our main sort of -- the bedrock from which our children 11 could grow up, and so on, and we could then, you know,
- 12 pay-off the house and all the rest of the things, and
- 13 I would then find something else to follow, which
- 14 eventually that's how it had to happen.
- You have explained that the branch was paper based when 15 16
 - you first took over?
- 17 A. That's correct, yes.
- 18 How did you find managing the accounts under the paper
- 19 based system?
- A. 20 Laborious but actually relatively straightforward, so it
- 21 was fairly easy to follow, you know, once you were
- 22 shown. It was just time-consuming because it was like,
- 23 you know, checking each docket and all the rest of it.
- 24 So, yes, but it wasn't rocket science. It was just
- 25 being methodical, paying attention to detail and making

- sure you follow -- you know, you follow that proper procedure.
- Q. Did you experience any unexplained shortfalls using thepaper based system?
- A. No, because if we had we had one or two, obviously,
 little errors when we first started, but we found them,
 if you know what I mean. It's because two dockets have
 become stuck together or something like that, so you
 would have to go back and go through everything and find
 it and you could track down the problem. It was there
 in front of you to see. But nothing major, you know.

It's like -- I don't know, whatever, say a £30 pension docket had sort of -- they had stuck together when we were counting them, sort of thing, so you would look for that -- something else, you know what I mean? So you would have to go back through all of that stuff, find the error and, you know, then you could eventually go to bed. It was one of those.

- 19 Q. You have explained in your statement that the
 20 Horizon System was installed about one month after you
 21 took over, does that sound about right?
- 22 A. Yes, it was -- the hardware was already on the counters,
 23 it just wasn't being used when we moved in. So all
 24 the -- you know, the wiring and all that sort of stuff
 25 was all there. It was just waiting to be switched on.

Q. So about a month afterwards it was switched on; is thatcorrect?

3 A. Yes.

- Q. What training did you receive from the Post Officebefore the system went live?
- A. Very little, as I recall. There was some training. I honestly can't think of the duration of it, I can't remember, but I do remember going somewhere and there was a number of people from different post offices and we were sat round a table, we were going through some handouts that they were giving, which sort of took you through each stage, and it -- there was no -- and there was a -- you know, like these projectors that were projecting on the wall and stuff. But it wasn't a PowerPoint, it was like slides, type of thing.

But it seemed -- on the face of it seemed relatively straightforward once you got your head round it and -- so when it turned on there was somebody came to the office -- I can't remember who it was -- and just, you know, stayed with us for a day, whilst we sort of -- because we all done our own individual sort of training but just stayed with us so we could see the initial thing and the shutdown at night and, after that, we were sort of left to fly on our own.

You had the option of that call centre where you

could -- the help desk, or something.

As I say, if I'm honest, my recollection of that time is not great because the impact was such that it was one of those, it was toxic, if that makes sense, so I put it in a box and I have put it on the shelf and got on with my life. That's how I had to deal with it, because the repercussions of it were far beyond any of this — the shortfalls and things like that. The financial aspect was bad enough, but the rest that came after was — that was the worst part of it all. It rocked my confidence, really, in the system.

12 Q. I will come shortly to the impact it had on you and, in13 particular, upon your wife.

Before we do, you mentioned that -- well, you have explained in your statement that your wife contacted your area manager shortly after your appointment; is that correct? You recall that?

A. Yes. When we were struggling to get the thing to balance correctly — because you automatically assume that you're doing something wrong, aren't you, and we were going through the — we would proceed, she would do it, I would do it and we were coming back and it was still not balancing and, sometimes, it would balance different each time, which was — it was just bizarre and so we'd call help in.

The thing was, if it they couldn't -- they didn't seem to figure out what it was. They just did something and sort of put the discrepancy to one side, type of thing, and said, basically, it will come right next time and -- but the next time it didn't come right and, of course, you had to balance the books, so we were ending up actually making up the shortfall so that everything balanced out. And we were doing that out of our own pocket, basically, without being told, because we couldn't see any other way, you know.

Because it's such a weird system. You are self-employed when it suits them but their slaves when it doesn't. That's the only -- very -- very bizarre way of operating, the contract, but we didn't know any better and we had come from a military background where you assume that the people who are sort of guiding you, giving you, you know, your guidance, or what have you, that they're sort of looking after your interests and they've got your interests at heart because, at the end of the day, we're all working towards the same goal, but it became apparent, certainly in the latter part of that episode, that that wasn't the case at all.

Q. You have explained that you had -- in addition to your
 wife, there were two members of staff who assisted you
 in running the branch. Did there come a time when you

came to suspect that they might be responsible for the shortfalls?

A. Yes. We had no choice. We were trying all sorts, right? My brother-in-law at that time was the -- he was in security for one of the local stores, a Yorkshire thing, Wilkinsons. So he suggested we install cameras and he came in and installed some pinhole cameras for us above each work station to see if we could see anybody stealing money from the till because we couldn't work out -- do you know what I mean?

And the thing was that some of these -- some of the people that came to work in the post office were friends of Diane from years back and we just didn't believe it but, at the same time, things were piling up and it wasn't me and it wasn't her, so who's dipping around in the till, and we were trying to find out if we could catch anybody out, you know.

And I will — it doesn't matter how close you might be, or whatever, that kernel of doubt gets sown and so everything becomes sour, yeah, because then it became apparent that — because when you start asking questions and all the rest of it, "What happened at this — what's this" and, of course, as soon as you bring out something on CCTV or anything like that people then think "You don't trust us, we don't want to work

here" type of thing and then friendships get sour.

We would never do it again. We would never work closely with friends, it just doesn't work. So it was a really sad time to be honest. It was horrible, horrible.

But, you know, you're in that situation and you're trying to make things work and you -- you're trying to understand what's going wrong. That was the thing. We could not, for the life of us, understand and the only thing you're left with is somebody's taking money from the till somehow and, of course, then you can't -- you're trying to watch them like a hawk and it's -- so we tried all sorts to see if there was anything going wrong but we could get no evidence that anybody was taking anything.

- 16 Q. The shortfalls you experienced initially were in17 relatively modest sums; is that right?
- 18 A. Yes
- 19 Q. In the order of £20 or £30?
- 20 A. Yes
- Q. You have explained in your statement that they did
 increase over time. They came to be nearer to £100,
 - I think; is that right?
- 24 A. Yes, yes.
- 25 Q. You have also -- you told us already you were required 98

1 to make good these sums --

- A. That's correct.
- Q. -- by the Post Office; is that right? What effect did
 using your own funds have upon you and your wife
 covering these shortfalls shown on Horizon?
 - A. Well, eventually you start dipping -- you have to dip into your savings and stuff that you're putting to one side for that next, sort of, venture and things. It wasn't -- at that sort of thing -- point it wasn't breaking us financially, because we had that income coming in every month and we were able to cover the shortfalls. Also, Diane had -- because of her local -- you know, a lot of local people knew her and stuff, the sales in the shop side of things had increased an awful lot since -- you know, since we took it over.

So we had sufficient, and that's the thing. I couldn't understand why people would think we were trying to take money from the Post Office, we didn't need to, do you know what I mean? We had enough to live on and it was — the implication of it was that somebody was stealing, but, you know, from our point of view, it wasn't us, so it had to be somebody else because Post Office were saying "Well, it can't be the system, the system is right", you know, "Nobody else is having any problems". That was their big one: "nobody else".

And we were quite isolated. We weren't really -there wasn't a big network of subpostmasters and things
like that, so we weren't told that other people were
having problems, do you know what I mean? They never
mentioned that.

So, as I say, Diane was -- operationally, she was there much more than I was because I had sort of gone off to work in a different role for a short time and it was just as I, sort of, started in that element when things sort of -- you know, the timeframe for me is a little bit vague, to be honest. As I say, I can't -- ask me what happened last week, I'm okay. 20-odd years ago, no, maybe not.

But, yes, we were able to get through it. It was a bit tight at times because, you know, some of that money -- it's sort of hard work to find it. You think you have worked and then -- I think there was one incident -- it just got to -- I mean, there was like a £2,000 thing that -- you know, and that was really the straw that broke the camel's back, I think, in that sense.

- Q. You have explained in your statement that your branchwas audited in or around March 2001; is that right?
- **A.** Yes. But they had been out several we had had them out on a sort of regular basis when we were having

problems, saying "This is not working properly", and they just really weren't that interested. They would come and have a look and that was it, "Well, no, just put the money in", and that's it basically.

And then, as I say, I think, you know, they came out in March to do this audit and then that was it.

- Q. Before the audit was carried out, your wife had balancedthe accounts; is that right?
- 9 A. That's right.
- 10 Q. And she had discovered a shortfall?
- 11 A. Yes, she had.
- 12 Q. Was that the figure of £2,000 that you have mentioned?
- 13 A. Yes.

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- 14 Q. You have explained that you had settled the sum before15 the audit took place; is that right?
- 16 A. Yes.
- 17 Q. How did you do that?
- A. We had put a cheque for £2,000 to make that balance and
 as I showed the post -- you know, and that's how it was
 covered, so we sort of -- we had the money, you know,
 but I was saying to her "This is getting ridiculous",
- 22 and then they came out and did the audit.
- Q. You weren't present on the day of the audit; is thatright?
- 25 A. No.

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Q. Was your wife permitted to supervise and observe whatthe auditors did?

3 A. I don't think she was. I think she had to -- well, she 4 might have been allowed out in the shop bit, but she 5 wasn't permitted to interfere with anything that they 6 were doing. So -- well, you know what a post office is like. You've got the post office area, you know, which 7 8 is behind the antitheft screens and all the rest of it, 9 and we had the little shop area where all the cards and 10 toys were. So, technically, I suppose they couldn't 11 kick her out of that, although I think she was asked to 12 leave. I can't remember off the top of my head. 13 I would have to go through the statement to remember. 14 But I know I got a very distraught phonecall and

then I made my way back to the office but, again,
I wasn't allowed in to do anything and it was a crazy,
crazy system.

- 18 Q. Were you ever shown any reports or findings of theauditors?
- 20 A. No.

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- Q. You were suspended on completion of the audit; is thatright?
- 23 A. That's right.
- 24 Q. Did you receive any pay during your suspension?
- 25 **A.** Not -- from the point we were suspended, that was it, we 102

1 didn't get any.

- 2 Q. Do you recall for how long you were suspended?
 - A. I honestly can't remember. Months, it was months. It wasn't just a short time. I remember trying to fight it, you know, so we were invited to an interview after the suspension and, again, please, I can't honestly remember the timeframe between. It was probably, you know, a week, maybe ten days after, or two weeks, or a month. I honestly can't remember.

We went down and we were interviewed by this chap and I had engaged a solicitor from Rowe Cohen in Manchester to come and support us because I thought -- I didn't know where this was going and because the implication was that, you know, we were being charged with theft, basically.

So -- and we were given the impression that the chap interviewing us was like a police investigator that worked for the -- he was appointed to work as a -- like a Post Office investigator but had the same sort of powers as a police officer. I didn't know any different, do you know what I mean? So I really didn't think it was going to go anywhere. You know, I thought I will go down, we haven't done anything wrong, but it was -- again, it's just -- I was at a loss for words.

We weren't -- the solicitor -- initially he wasn't 103

allowed to come in with us, that was the first one, so we said "Well, if he can't come in, we ain't coming in", so then they said "Well, he can come in but he can't say anything". So that was that, so I've got a guy sat

there on God knows how many pounds an hour not allowed,

actually, to help represent us in any way, shape or
 form, people accusing us of things without any apparent

8 evidence. And that was it, and they said "We will write

9 to you", I think it was, "and inform you of our

decision". So they wrote and said "We're confirmingyour termination", and they give you a right to appeal.

I got in touch with the Association, you know, with the representatives, and all that, and I had to go all the way out to -- a lot further up north, a friend of mine drove me up and they said, basically, "la, la", you know, and it was like, "Yeah, well, you have obviously -- they have obviously assumed that you have been stealing, if you've got no evidence that you weren't". And I said "But you are supposed to" -- there really wasn't any evidence and it only became apparent years later that there were so many people going to these guys, they were fed up, they couldn't defend

people. There was no way for you -- it was impossible to defend yourself. You couldn't get the documentation,

25 they locked you out of everything, you know.

At the end of the day to maintain the post office they gave you a list of people who they approved as temporary sort of substitute postmasters, so another postmaster from — an Asian gentleman from Bradford came out and he ran the post office and he got the salary and it was only after we had had quite a bit of a fight with him — and you're on a bit of a hiding to nothing but we had to get him to make sure he reimbursed us for anything that was sold through the shop, and to actually pay some rent on the property, because the property was ours. It was bizarre, you know.

You're kicked out of the property, it's yours, the Post Office don't own it but, yet, they can just do — they just steamrollered us, and we didn't really know any better, to be honest. We weren't young, but we were — you know, we were quite naive. We had had a sort of fairly strait-laced life, I suppose, up to then and certainly never encountered any sort of — you know, that sort of problem. And to be accused, it just puts you on the back foot. You just don't know where you're going.

So I did appeal and I can't remember where it took place, but again it was up the North of England somewhere and there were two guys in the room and unfortunately -- I will tell you what I did, you can 105

take it or not. Because I had certain things I had done in the military I thought "Right, I will take my brief case with me", and I installed a voice activated recorder.

Anyway, whilst I was there I gave my version of events, "Ia, Ia, Ia", explained the Post Office had never lost a penny because we had always put the money back and I said "As is the case this time, so I don't understand what the problem is". I said "You can't think we're stealing the money. If we were stealing the money, why would we put it back out of our own pocket?"

So after I sort of said my piece, and then I was asked to leave the room, so I left the brief case in there and these two chaps talked about football, you know, what they were doing at the weekend, playing golf, Ia, Ia, Ia, and that was it. Did not discuss the case one bit. So let's face it, I had gone in there, complete waste of time, it was already pre-judged.

Unfortunately, I can't bring that evidence now because (a) they didn't know they were being recorded and (b) it was 20 years ago, and I have since lost the sound file.

So it was at that point, you know, you can't -- you know, where do you fight? You can't. Spoke to a solicitor, he said "You would need tens of thousands 106

of pounds if you want to try and fight this again". And it was at that point that I realised we couldn't fight, and we just had to go to plan B and get on with our lives, and that was pretty hard for me, from my point of view, that feeling of powerlessness. I've never been like that in the past.

It was the first time where I felt I actually couldn't — everything was out of my control. I — even though I wasn't responsible, as far as I was concerned, I wasn't responsible for anything, neither was Diane, but it was totally out of our control and our lives were suddenly at the behest of some smug — I won't say it, but supercilious prat that had never done anything in his life probably, except lick a stamp, then accusing you of all sorts of crimes which you hadn't committed, and yet you couldn't fight back because they were the big team and that team just steamrollered through everybody, as it turns out. Not just us but many others, and many others lost much more than we did, much more, some of them their lives, which is crazy. The injustice of it is crazy, in this country.

- Q. What effect did the loss of your salary have upon yourbusiness?
- A. It was -- well, it just knocked us -- you imagine even in this day and age, Sir Wyn, if you lost -- if you
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had a salary of 45 grand a year, and suddenly somebody took it away from you, you're still not going to find it easy to get on, so go back 20 years and imagine where we were. We were lucky, in the sense that I had my father -- he is not one of your Jersey millionaires, he was a welder, but he had some money put to one side and he was able to help us out to get through the worst of it. And then I got -- I was able to get another job and money was starting to come in, once we sorted out -- but we got a pittance for the rent of the post office and all the rest of it.

But, again, we had no -- there was no point to argue. It was either that or shut it down and, right up until the end, of course, I was still thinking that I would be able to appeal this and I thought justice will prevail in the end, because there is nothing -- we hadn't done anything. But that wasn't the case, but it was some months before it went from termination -- you know, being suspended, to the appeals process.

So, during that time, financially things were very tight, because we still had a mortgage to pay, we had the bank to pay back and all the rest of it, so we were left at the end with no option but to sell the post office.

Of course, the problem was there that we couldn't

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sell -- we were -- everybody knew what had happened and there was, at one point, for some reason -- I don't know how this -- well, I do know how it got back into the village, but one of these manager chaps had told another postmistress not far from us, I won't say which one it was, that we had stolen £100,000 from the Post Office, right. Now, it was like the bush telegraph, yeah, it was in the village and people were thinking -- to this day, people still think that we had stolen £100,000, as if, you know, they would have let us walk if we had had done that. But that's what was -- the sort of thing that was going round.

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There was all sorts of rumours, that's what got to Diane more than anything else. It wasn't the financial thing, it was that her friends were saying, "Well, you must have nicked it because otherwise they wouldn't have kicked you out of the post office". And that's how it was, and it didn't matter what you said because everybody thought, "No, the Post Office is this shining beacon of British society, it's been there for years, it's a staple of the community", la, la, la. Unfortunately, they didn't realise the sort of people that were working at the Post Office, for the management of the Post Office at that time.

> So, you know, you were accused -- guilty, 109

regardless. You were guilty and that was it and, 2 luckily, as I say, the families rallied round to help us 3 through that initial difficult time and, you know, 4 without them, we would have -- well, things would have 5 ended up much worse. We bounced back, you know, we put 6 it behind us and we bounced back, and so be it, and, 7 you know, the thing is if we were dishonest we wouldn't 8 be where we are now, that's the crazy bit of it and I --9 I'm not -- I'm angry about being powerless to bring the 10 people to account that actually forced this upon us 11 and --

12 Well, I don't know -- there's no point me going 13 on. Every -- I have heard it today and there's people 14 out there that have had -- it's horrendous the impact it 15 has had on their lives. I think I -- you know, all 16 I could do was say "Right, that's it, you know, it's 17 behind us we've got to get on, we can't look back all the time, we need to focus and get ourselves out of 18 19 this", and that's where my mindset was. And so I just 20 sort of shut the box, put it on the shelf and got on 21 with my life because, otherwise, we would have just --22 you sort of mope about, saying "It's crap, life's 23 shit" -- excuse my French.

- 24 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I've heard worse.
 - A. But all of it, you know, so I was able to -- I was just

a little bit older, a little bit more resilient maybe and I suppose the shock -- the biggest shock to me was the effect it had on Diane.

Q. I would like to ask you a little bit more about how or why it affected your wife because she was not able to come today. What impact did the rumours you mentioned have upon your wife's relationship with her family?

A. Well, like I said, initially the family helped us out but when that rumour got back into the village about this £100,000 thing, the sort of -- they believed it almost, do you know what I mean? There was that element of -- it was like that seed had been sown because. really, they didn't know that much about me because, you know, I wasn't a villager, I had come from outside, you know, that foreign country over the Channel, and I suppose there was that element of "Oh, did they or didn't they?"

And then comments get made and, you know what it's like with families, once the shutter comes down, that's it, the bat and ball is taken home. So there were fallouts with the family because Diane is a very, very loyal person. She won't -- you know, she stands by people until, you know, until the death, basically, and the fact that people would doubt her was the most damaging thing to her and her friends were cutting her

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off, the family were -- you know, basically distancing themselves from it, because they were still associated with the village, they didn't want to be associated with us, and there was lots of tittle-tattle.

People -- the only time people would talk to you it was as if they wanted to just get -- see if they could get information from you. So when you told them it was absolute rubbish, you know, they would -- that wasn't what they wanted to hear, if that makes sense. They just wanted to sort of try and get some more dirt and it took its toll on her very badly, to be honest, and I think the biggest -- one of the other things that was -- really got up my craw, was our daughter was -you know, she was -- we had spent a lot of time teaching her to read, so she was flying at school and, as a result, she was actually, like, having to go into classes like a year up at some points to do certain things, because she was at that stage.

And then she started getting the -- you know, the comments, because kids are terrible, they overhear half a conversation between parents, so then Sam was coming home in tears, Diane would then get into tears and angry, and then powerless to do anything about it, and the school, at the end of the day, regardless of what the teachers -- they weren't going to -- you can't stop

the kids in the playground and, you know, all of that stuff going on, "Your mum's a thief, your dad's a thief", la, la, la.

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So that resulted in us saying "Right, that's it", so we took her out of that school and moved her to a different school, primary school, and then luckily it hadn't done too much lasting damage, I suppose, because she went on to grammar school, got herself into grammar, and then university and then she is living her life.

But at that time it did affect her and she wasn't a cry baby, but the -- you know, it's relentless, is what it is, it's relentless. So we had to sort of put some distance between her and her friends, people that she had made friends with. You know, she would sort of go to the rugby, girls rugby, and all that sort of -all that came to an end. So it was like we had been back in the UK since 2000 and then by the end of 2001 we had -- it was like we had never arrived. We had to reset and start all over again, but in a much worse position than we were when we first arrived, unfortunately.

- 22 Q. Have you and your wife sought any compensation from the 23 Post Office?
- 24 We didn't -- we put it -- we didn't even think about the A. 25 Post Office until the group -- the 555 group got 113

1 together and we were -- we either read something or we 2 were contacted by probably another -- one of the other 3 subpostmasters knew what had happened to us and put two 4 and two together. Anyway, they got in touch with us and 5 we joined that group and we have received a small amount 6 of compensation as a result of that action, yes. 7

- Q. Does that cover the losses and the harm --
- 8 A.

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9 Q. -- that you suffered?

10 A. No, no, because it probably would have been better --11 but you're all aware of exactly how that balanced out because some obviously wealthy people put money up to 12 13 cover the expense of taking the Post Office to court, 14 because you're effectively fighting the Government who 15 have the biggest chequebook in the world and they were 16 trying to use that chequebook to beat us down, 17 basically, and that's what it was at the beginning, 18 you know. I couldn't fight them as an individual, you 19 couldn't afford it, you know, even people like Branson 20 would think twice before taking on that sort of 21 organisation.

> So when we got in touch with that group, they asked us for statements and that's what we did, we put statements in and it took its course and Horizon was found -- you know, proved to be a load of crap and 114

- they -- it went from there and, of course, the bulk of that money that was allocated as compensation went to the people that were funding the legal action, so the subpostmasters saw very little of that, really, in comparison.
- 6 Q. Can you confirm how much you received?
- 7 A. Oh, God, I'm hopeless with this. I would say somewhere 8 around between -- I think it is somewhere around 28,000. 9 It might have been slightly more. I'd have to --10 I don't honestly -- terrible with figures, but yeah, it 11 was certainly no less than 28,000 and no more than 32, 12 thereabouts, because it came through in two lumps. 13 That's why I'm hesitating to say -- I think in total it 14 was about £28-30,000, thereabouts.
- 15 Q. How do you now feel about the way that you and your wife 16 were treated by the Post Office?
- 17 A. Appalled. Who do I direct it at? I don't know. This 18 is how -- this is the only way we're ever going to see 19 any justice, is the fact that it has got to this point.

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You know, the -- my wife was -- went through about two years where she wasn't the wife -- the woman I married. How the marriage survived is, you know -- it was just -- we had to work at it, we really had to work at it because financial pressures, the -- being shunned by your friends. It didn't have that impact on me

because, you know, who did I know in the village? I had known them as acquaintances.

There was one friend that stuck with us throughout this and he eventually helped -- it was about two and a half years after all of this and he sort of -- Diane started understudying him as a property developer basically and subsequently she went on and that's what she does for a living now.

But that period of two to three years, four years, it's hard for me to remember because to be honest it -if you break your arm and things like that, you know, when you get injured you just put it to one side. It's very hard to actually recall the amount of pain and everything else that went on at the time and that's how I feel about this period in my life. I have put it behind me. It's like things in the Army that happened. I know they happened, but the repercussions of it, no. not so much, because if you did you would never get up and walk out the gate again, so you tend to put things to one side.

That side of it was okay, but Diane couldn't do that because it wasn't that physical trauma, it was emotional because of her family and her friends and the effect on our daughter and -- she was in bed, you know, she would sort of stay in bed for days, she wouldn't

leave the house, all of that sort of stuff and that went on for, I don't know, 18 months, two years, and then eventually she sort of got a grip of it and worked her way out and started to pick up the pieces really and then after that, well, you know, we both knuckled down and got on with life and that's where we are now basically.

So I'm here today because I feel people -- I can't believe that something like this would happen in this country, but then I realise that actually it can happen and it has happened and there seems little recourse without this sort of body to pick it apart and see what went wrong and I -- it's just been a massive cover up by the Post Office, or attempted cover up. It's been blown open now, but at the time, you know, people were covering it up and the thing was, in my opinion -- and it's only my opinion -- these people that were coming out, these auditors, these managers, area managers, must -- must have known that something was wrong because you don't suddenly have hundreds of subpostmasters and subpostmistresses stealing money that's never happened before, but suddenly it's like "Oh" -- it's like a COVID-19 series of bouncing through all the Post Office system that suddenly all these people that work for the Post Office -- they don't, they actually

work for themselves -- are suddenly starting to steal the Post Office's money. Absolutely ludicrous, but because they kept us all separated we didn't know. I didn't. I didn't know of anybody else at the time that had been affected in this way. It was only after -- well, we're going back 15 years later that it came out that the Horizon System was faulty and you only need a little bit of code in one of those systems, you know -- and it wasn't that we were dummies, you know, we both run successful businesses now, so we know what it's about.

I just hope that the people whose lives it affected much more than ours -- because I think we were sort of young enough and resilient enough eventually to bounce back from this. There's a hell of a lot of people out there who couldn't. They didn't have the resources to bounce back from it and it's horrendous. It's horrendous.

Sadly the things that are going on in the world now are going to overshadow this Inquiry and I hope, you know, that you, Sir Wyn, don't allow it to be overshadowed and you get justice for the people that deserve it because, you know — I mean what happens to the people that have died? You know, crazy.

Q. I have no further questions for you, Mr Fogarty. Is

1 there anything else you would like to --

I've got just one statement, just one appeal I would like to make basically and please excuse me if I stutter a little bit because it is not easy to read, but I had to write it down.

Just as a historical point really, more than anything else, back in 1945/1946 the statement "I was only doing my duty and following orders" was not considered a defence at the Nuremberg trials and neither should it be here.

On accountability, none of the people who implemented this feudal treatment of subpostmasters and mistresses has been held to account and they will have taken this toxic cancer-like management culture with them into other organisations and risen up through those organisations to this day.

I would ask the Chair to seriously consider this point in his deliberations and bring pressure on those responsible to explain their actions.

Thank you, Sir Wyn.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: And thank you, Mr Fogarty, for coming here to give your evidence to me and a particular part of my thanks relates to your willingness to explain things so vividly in relation to the impact on your wife who can't be here, so I'm very grateful that you have

1 done it for both of you.

2 A. Thank you.

3 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you very much.

4 A. Thank you.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: And on a very technical point, 6 Mr Enright, given that we have had such a vivid 7 description of Mrs Fogarty's position, for my part 8 I don't require a summary, given that we have had

a witness statement and now this vivid oral testimony
 from Mr Fogarty.

non wir roganty.

So that concludes today's business, yes, Ms Hodge? So 10 o'clock in the morning everyone? All right, see you then.

14 (4.30 pm)

(The hearing adjourned until 10.00 am on Thursday, 10 March 2022)

|--|

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