1		Thursday, 10 March 2022	1	Α.	It is.
2	(10	.00 am)	2	Q.	I'm going to start by asking a couple of introductory
3	SIR	WYN WILLIAMS: Good morning. This northern air is	3		questions about you. How old are you now?
4		making my voice a bit flaky, so excuse me.	4	Α.	I'm just turned 70 in December gone.
5	MS	KENNEDY: Chair, our first witness today is Ms Carol	5	Q.	Where did you grow up?
6		Edmondson.	6	Α.	I grew up in Golborne near Warrington, where I still
7	SIR	WYN WILLIAMS: Good morning, Ms Edmondson.	7		live.
8	TH	E WITNESS: Good morning.	8	Q.	What did you do after finishing school?
9	SIR	WYN WILLIAMS: Over to you, Ms Kennedy.	9	Α.	I went to college and I studied accountancy and math
10		CAROL EDMONDSON (sworn)	10		and then I got a job in a wages office of a local
11		Questioned by MS KENNEDY	11		company that made seating for cinemas.
12	MS	KENNEDY: Hello. As I think you know, my name is Ruth	12	Q.	When did you start working for the Post Office?
13		Kennedy and I ask questions on behalf of the Inquiry.	13	Α.	After I had had my family, I got a part-time job in
14		Could you state your name, please?	14		our local post office and that was in 1978. That was
15	Α.	Carol Edmondson.	15		in the Wigan area, yes.
16	Q.	Have you got a copy of your witness statement there?	16	Q.	How long did you work there part-time?
17	Α.	Yes, I have.	17	Α.	I worked there until 1984 when I took my first
18	Q.	I think it should be dated 8 January 2022; is that	18		post office on myself.
19		right?	19	Q.	Which post office did you decide to take on yourself?
20	Α.	Yes.	20	Α.	Well, even though I had been working in the very busy
21	Q.	Is that your signature on page 12?	21		post office in Wigan, I thought it would be sort of
22	Α.	Yes, it is.	22		better to start off smaller, so I took a rural office
23	Q.	Have you read through this statement recently?	23		in the outskirts of Tarporley, Cheshire, a little
24	Α.	Yes.	24		place called Duddon.
25	Q.	Is it true to the best of your knowledge and belief? 1	25	Q.	Why that shop specifically? 2
1	•	Wall at the time, my husband was leading for	1		that and no neuronence, but still your busy and up
1	А.	Well, at the time, my husband was looking for a different vocation as well and the shop itself	1		that, and no newspapers, but still very busy and we were kept yes, it was a very busy time. We were
2			2 3		kept going, so we kept busy.
3 4		was although in a village was very busy. It was open from 6.00 in the morning until 6.00 at night, so	4	0	How many staff did you have?
5		he came into the business with me. I was the	4 5		I had three staff on the post office side with me and
				А.	one staff on the retail side as well.
6 7		subpostmistress and he worked on the retail side of the shop.	6 7	0	I think you say in your statement that Horizon came in
8	Q.		8	Q.	during your time as subpostmistress at Robins Lane;
9	Q. A.		9		that right?
10	А.	fine. I wouldn't have gone into my own business if	10	A.	lt did.
10		I hadn't enjoyed working as a part-time assistant in	10		What computer system accounting did you use prior to
12		Wigan. I wouldn't have entertained that, but I took	12	પ.	Horizon coming in?
13		to the job so well and I enjoyed it so much, that's	12	Δ	Well, at first I used to just use a normal adding
14		why I ventured into my own business as	13	Π.	machine, like we all did, to add up all the pension
15		a subpostmistress.	15		dockets. It was pension books at that time. And then
16	0	How long did you run that particular post office for?	16		later on I purchased my own computer system, the
17	Q. A.		17		Edward Jackson system for sub-post offices and
18	Q.	Which post office did you go to next?	18		I worked on that one.
19		I moved on then back towards back in the Wigan area	19	0	What training did you receive on Horizon when it was
20	,	and I took a bigger post office then and I moved into	20	ч.	introduced?
21		St Helens, Robins Lane Post Office.	21	Α.	I remember going to a local hotel with some other
22	0	Can you describe that business that you had at	22		subpostmasters and we had roughly around two and
	ч.	Robins Lane?	23		a half days.
23					
23 24	Α.	It was very busy. It was a three counter position.	24	Q.	How useful did you find that training?

(1) Pages 1 - 4

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1		lacking. The concentration was more on the running of	1	Α.	Some weeks I would be lucky and it wasn't very much,
2		the computer, how to install paper rolls, and things	2		say about £20, £30. Other weeks it would go into
3		like that, you know, like the technical side of it,	3		£100, £150. I could never we would never know how
4		you could say. The actual training on the system	4		much it was going to be.
5		itself was very lacking.	5	Q.	What would you do to correct the shortfalls, or to
6	Q.	How did you find Horizon to use in comparison to the	6		remove them from the system?
7		previous systems?	7	Α.	We had to make them good, as was put down in by the
8	Α.	More complicated. I don't think it had been designed	8		Post Office in the wording and when the Horizon System
9		by anyone that had stood behind a post office counter.	9		was put into operation. And shortfalls were to be
10	Q.	How soon after the installation of Horizon did you	10		made good.
11		start to notice shortfalls?	11	Q.	How much money do you estimate that you paid to the
12	Α.	Well, not very long into the system and, of course,	12		Post Office to make good those shortfalls?
13		with being new, I thought "Well, there's something I'm	13	Α.	Over the term that it was in, until I managed to sell
14		doing wrong here".	14		the office in 2010, I've assumed around £30,000.
15	Q.	What use, if any, would you make of the helpline?	15	Q.	Was there anybody else that you reported your
16	Α.	Very little use. We would ring for help Wednesday	16		difficulties with Horizon to, other than the helpline?
17		evenings, when I could see that things weren't right,	17	Α.	Well, at that time I was a Federation member and
18		and it was as if you were just given a time slot	18		I went to Federation meetings and I used to voice the
19		because I mean, little did we know there were so	19		fact that I had had a bad balance the week before, or
20		many people in the same boat. So they gave us a time	20		I was having bad balances and people would comment
21		slot of about five minutes and if it they couldn't	21		that they were the same, but we never found out, even
22		resolve it, which they couldn't, then they left us to	22		in the Federation, a way of help.
23		our own devices.	23	SIR	WYN WILLIAMS: Were these meetings local Federation
24	Q.	What types of sums in terms of discrepancies or	24		meetings, or area meetings, or even national meetings
25	ά.	shortfalls did you start to notice?	25		that you're now talking about?
		5			6
1	Α.	They were local meetings and then we would move on	1		with that at all.
2		then to area meetings as well.	2		I knew if I had had transactions for foreign
3		-			· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
-	SIF	R WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you.	3		currency in that particular trading week. I knew on
4		R WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you. Thank you.	3 4		currency in that particular trading week, I knew on the Wednesday night that the system would be faulting
4 5	Α.	Thank you.	4		the Wednesday night that the system would be faulting
5	Α.	Thank you. KENNEDY: What was your experience of audits?	4 5		the Wednesday night that the system would be faulting and I would be probably down and having to put money
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1	A. Well, I found that there were many weeks that	1	possibly be other things. So after tests, and the
2	I couldn't take a wage for myself because, over the	2	results came back that it was chronic IBS, brought on
3	period of time, having to sustain putting the	3	by stress.
4	shortfalls the shortages in, it was chipping away	4	Q. What about the impact that all of this has had on your
5	at any profit that had been made on the shop. Of	5	relationship with your husband?
6	course, I had wages to pay for the girls, but	6	A. We separated three years into moving to Hindley.
7	l couldn't pay myself.	7	Q. What would you like from the Post Office now?
8	I was living with my elderly father was	8	A. I would like recognition of the fact that this is just
9	living with me at the time and, unfortunately, there	9	not a one-off situation, that there are other people,
10	were times when regularly I had to go to him for help,	10	so many other subpostmasters who have experienced the
11	which I didn't like doing. It was embarrassing. At	11	same problems at the time, though we were all meant to
12	my time of life, I should have been helping him, not	12	believe that we were alone in this.
13	him resorting to having to help me to carry on.	13	We were all led to believe it was just us, it
14	Q. What impact did that have on your family?	14	was something we were doing wrong on a regular basis
15	A. Well, of course, there was a spin off on my son and	15	and it could not possibly be this infallible, super
16	daughter who were still living with me then. It was	16	duper system that they had put in for us that was at
17	just causing stress within the family. The fact that	17	fault.
18	I was so worried about the situation all the time.	18	I would like the recognition regarding that from
19	Q. What about the impact on your health?	19	the Post Office. I would like people to realise what
20	A. I became really, really stressed over the situation	20	subpostmasters have gone through and I would like the
21	and I developed very bad IBS symptoms. Wednesday	21	path of justice to be taken so that the truth will win
22	night I would my stomach would be churning and, so	22	out in the end for all those who have suffered.
23	much so, the pain that I that was involved	23	That's all we're asking for: the truth.
24	I finished up being sent to a consultant at Wigan	24	Q. Is there anything else you would like to say to the
25	Infirmary because it was suspected that it could	25	Chair?
	9		10
1	A Luculd just like to only thenks for being able to size	1	A lineway and to that the lineway act to that
1	A. I would just like to say thanks for being able to give this witness statement. I would like to be able to	1	 A. I never got to that, no. I never got to that. SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you very much.
2 3	move forward with justice and this is what we all look	2	
4	for. We don't want anything else but for justice in	4	A. Thank you. SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Ms Edmondson, thank you very much the second
4 5	this and the truth and so that every subpostmaster can	5	taking the time and trouble to come and give evidence
6	be repaid what we rightfully deserve and what they	6	to us this morning. Many people will have heard me
7	have lost over time, and that's all we're asking.	7	thank people in your position for doing that and
8	Q. Thank you. I don't have any more questions for you.	8	I extend my thanks personally to you.
		9	
9 10	Chair, do you have any questions? Questions from SIR WYN WILLIAMS	9 10	A. Thank you. Thank you, Sir Wyn.
	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Just one. In your witness statement	10	MS KENNEDY: Chair, I think we're now going to have some
11 12	you mentioned that you took part in a mediation in	12	witness statement summaries read by Ms Patrick.
12		12	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes. Do you want us to disappear for a minute or two to get yourself ready, or are you
13 14	2013, but nothing came of that. Could you just tell	13	actually ready, Ms Patrick?
14	me a bit about that process, please? A. Well, it was just an enquiry as to what had happened	14	MS PATRICK: (Inaudible).
16	and how I had felt over the Horizon System and then it	15	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Fine, great. Thank you.
17	moved on to the Post Office just just questions,	10	I think in total, I think you have 15
		18	-
18 19	similar to how the Horizon System had worked and the impact. It was just	10	summaries to read in, so in order to break up the process perhaps I would suggest that you read seven or
20	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: But did it get to the point in time	20	eight of them and then I think it is your client who
20 21		20	
	where, for example not the point in time. Did it	21	is giving evidence next, so we could take that
22	get to the point where, for example, you set out what		evidence and see where we go from there.
23	losses you thought Horizon had caused you? A. No, I never got to that.	23 24	MS PATRICK: Sir. Thank you for that guidance. My name is Angela Patrick, I read summaries on behalf of the
04		24	is Angela Patrick, I read summaries on denait of the
24 25	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: You never got even to that point?	25	clients represented as core participants in the

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 Inquiry by Hudgell solicitors and the full state we understand, sir, are with the Inquiry and summaries are only a brief snippet of their their experiences. SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes. MS PATPICK: We start with a summary of the 	the 2	Mr Harding tried to keep the business going but the shortfalls continued to rise dramatically. He and
 3 summaries are only a brief snippet of their 4 their experiences. 5 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes. 		the shortfalls continued to rise dramatically. He and
 4 their experiences. 5 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes. 	story and 3	
5 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes.	,	his wife decided to remortgage the house with the hope
	4	of making some improvements to the home, but instead
6 MS DATPICK: We start with a summary of th	5	the majority of this money was used to meet
6 MS PATRICK: We start with a summary of th	evidence of 6	shortfalls.
7 Mr Gregory Charles Harding.	7	He subsequently remembers settling two further
8 Summary of witness statement of GREGORY C	ARLES HARDING 8	shortfalls of at least £2,500 each.
9 (read)	9	On 30 September 2009, an audit was conducted and
10 MS PATRICK: Mr Harding and his wife bough		it identified a shortfall in the region of £20,000.
11 Hipperholme Post Office and he was subp		Following that audit, he was suspended. He says:
12 between 2004 and 2009. When Mr Hardir		"I couldn't believe it. I had to keep pinching
13 shortfalls they were small at first, perhaps	ve quid 13	myself. I told the auditors I hadn't taken the money.
14 here or there. He was just topping up with	his 14	It was beyond belief. I couldn't even describe to
15 takings from the retail side of the business	15	anyone what it was really like."
16 The shortfalls then increased to 10	quid here or 16	He says now:
17 there, which then increased further.	17	"I still get stressed now thinking about it all.
18 When the total shortfall reached £1	000, 18	I'm used to that stress. I don't class it as
19 Mr Harding called the helpline. He says:	19	an illness. It was just part of my life and had
20 "They told me not to worry and that	they would 20	become normal."
21 put it in the suspense account and allow m	e to 21	He goes on to explain he was charged with theft
22 balance."	22	following his suspension. He was interviewed on
23 The following month Horizon was c	own £2,000. 23	6 October 2009 and there were two members of the
24 Mr Harding phoned the helpline again but	his time 24	National Federation of SubPostmasters present at the
25 they told him that he should pay this himse	f. 25	interview. Of the interview, he says:
13		14
1 "They tried to grind me down and t	p me up, 1	names. He recalls people threw eggs at his car.
2 which they couldn't because I was telling the	e truth. 2	He wants the Inquiry to know that he and his
3 I had no idea where that money could have	gone." 3	wife are very close and helped each other through the
4 Mr Harding recalls he received his	ourt summons 4	tough times but he says:
5 on his wife's birthday. After his suspension	, his 5	"For a time after my conviction I struggled to
6 former post office was ram raided and peo	ble locally 6	enjoy family occasions like birthdays and Christmas.
7 thought he was responsible. He remember	s they shouted 7	l didn't feel happy."
8 at him saying "Haven't you stolen enough?	'He says it 8	Revisiting that time for Mr Harding, he says, is
9 was horrible. He found himself constantly	iving with 9	still very difficult and he says he suffered from
10 a bitter feeling and a feeling of "What have	I done 10	periods of depression. He wants to say to the Inquiry
11 wrong?"	11	that he will never forget what happened to him and to
12 He says:	12	his family.
13 "I really didn't know who I could tru	t. My 13	Chair, next we have a summary of the evidence of
14 mental health was really suffering at this til	ne." 14	Ms Alison Hall and Ms Hall is actually present here
15 Ultimately, he was offered a plea d	al by the 15	today Sir Wyn.
16 Post Office and, on the advice of his legal	eam, 16	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Don't worry about me. Nice to see that
17 pleaded guilty and was given a suspended	sentence and 17	you are present.
18 ordered to undertake 200 hours of unpaid	vork. 18	Summary of witness statement of ALISON HALL (read)
19 He had to sell the post office and the	e retail 19	MS PATRICK: Alison Hall began working for the Post Office
20 business to pay the shortfall prior to his co	viction. 20	as a subpostmaster at the Hightown branch on
21 After a period of unemployment po	t-conviction, 21	16 February 2005. In April 2010 she applied for and
22 he secured a job doing welding and he felt	doing this, 22	was approved to take over a second disused branch in
23 he says, like he was a "fish out of water."	lis 23	Roberttown.
24 reputation in the community was lost and h	e recalls, 24	The plan had been for her daughter to run that
25 while shopping at the supermarket, he would	ld be called 25	branch with Ms Hall, splitting her time between the
15	I	16

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	1		
1	two. On 28 August 2010 Ms Hall had a visit from	1	community service. She was subject to a confiscation
2	a member of staff from the Post Office, coming to	2	order for £14,842.57 and ordered to pay costs in the
3	update the Horizon System.	3	sum of £1,000.
4	Ms Hall then told that agent she had received	4	Ms Hall's conviction was overturned on
5	approximately 36 transaction correction slips and that	5	23 April 2021.
6	the system was showing a shortfall of £13,000.	6	She no longer felt, following her conviction,
7	Ms Hall was relieved that someone had come who	7	that she could be an active member of her community.
8	could help her to rectify the system. Instead Ms Hall	8	She withdrew from all community activities. She wants
9	was told to close the post office immediately. She	9	to say her daughter suffered financially too, as she
10	was audited in September 2010 and suspended. She	10	was going to be running that new branch at Roberttown.
11	appealed her suspension but was terminated on	11	Ms Hall has suffered problems with her mental
12	Christmas Eve 2010. She was then summoned to appear	12	health because of this injustice and she has recently
13	at Batley and Dewsbury Magistrates' Court charged with	13	been assessed by a counsellor and recommended to have
14	theft, and then to appear at the Leeds Crown Court.	14	15 sessions of cognitive behavioural therapy.
15	Ms Hall says she had evidence to prove there was	15	She adds that she had employed family members
16	no shortfall and says she was frustrated and angry at	16	and friends to work in her post office and her shop.
17	every step because no one was prepared to look at her	17	She was no longer able to work there and she could not
18	evidence.	18	keep all of her team working there as they had
19	At court Ms Hall was told that if she pleaded	19	previously. She was forced to reduce hours or let
20	guilty to a lesser charge she would avoid prison. She	20	people go. Relationships became very strained and
20	felt pressure to accept the advice of her legal team.	20	this was extremely stressful. The experience changed
22	She pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of false	22	who she was. She says this was very difficult. She
23	accounting to avoid a full trial and the probability	23	wants the Inquiry to know, she says, she always felt
23	of a custodial sentence.	23	as though she was:
24	Ms Hall was ordered to perform 120 hours of	24 25	" an important member of our local community
	17	25	18
1	and enjoyed helping wherever possible."	1	He had a number of issues from the very start
2	She adds:	2	with Horizon. Each time he found an error or
3	"I had lived in the area for most of my life and	3	a shortfall he would contact the helpline to let them
4	spent the last well, more than ten years actively	4	know. Each time he says he would have the amount
5	participating in that community life."	5	taken out of his salary to cover the cost.
6	She goes on:	6	The Post Office undertook a formal audit on
7	"My mother died in September 2020 and she died	7	8 February 2011. The shortfall amount identified was
8	without knowing that I was not a criminal and that	8	£21,168.64. Mr Ishaq disputed these figures. He was
9	I had done nothing wrong."	9	prosecuted by the Post Office for theft and he was
10	She wants the Inquiry to know:	10	told by his barrister he would be unable to raise
11	"Nothing can undo what me and my family have	11	Horizon in his defence. Mr Ishaq recalls the judge
12	been subjected to. I can only hope that this Inquiry	12	also told him Horizon could not be discussed.
13	makes findings and recommendations that are taken	13	Mr Ishaq felt he had no option other than to
14	on board and organisations like the Post Office learn	14	plead guilty.
15	lessons to ensure that law abiding citizens, such as	15	On 22 April 2013 he was sentenced to 54 weeks
16	me, do not have to face such an injustice again."	16	immediate imprisonment for theft. By the time of his
17	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you.	17	conviction he had not been able to pay back the
18	Again, thank you for coming, Ms Hall.	18	shortfall. He was in Armley prison for three months.
19	MS PATRICK: Next, Chair, we move to a summary of the	19	He says he knew he was in the same prison as rapists
20	evidence of Mr Khayyam Ishaq.	20	and murderers. He remembers feeling watched by other
21	Summary of witness statement of KHAYYAM ISHAQ (read)	20	people and he says he did not know who they were, or
22	MS PATRICK: Khayyam Ishaq began work as a subpostmaster	22	why they were there.
23	of the Birkenshaw branch of the Post Office on	23	In prison he saw acts of violence and did not
23	15 July 2008. His contract terminated on	23 24	sleep properly. He says:
24	14 February 2011.	24 25	"I did not know if I would wake up."
20	19	20	20

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2 Following his release, Mr Ishaq says he 2 Next, we move to the summary of the 3 struggled to find work. He says: 3 Mr Nicholas Cark. 4 "My whole personality changed as a result of my 5 5 conviction." 5 6 He says he has been diagnosed as suffering 6 7 a depressive disorder and is told that it is likely to 7 8 be something that will affect thim for the rest of his 8 9 life. He says publicity around his conviction brought 9 and his mum ran the shop and the post offic 10 shame on his family as a whole. Due to the stigm, he 10 effectively together as partners. He became 11 stopped going to pray and only prayed at home. 11 subpostmaster himself in Norembre 2005. 12 His children were aged 3, 5 and 7 at the time of 12 He startad to use the helpine less as 13 his conviction and heir thanily told them that he had 13 by because they couldn't help him resolve th 14 just gone on holiday to protect them from the truth. 14 he was experiencing. Hed do nat continue to 15 modifies and accepted that as they happen make them good and h		forgive the Post Office.	1	His conviction was overturned on 23 April 2021.	1
3 struggled to find work. He says: 3 Mr Nicholas Clark. 4 "My whole personality changed as a result of my 5 5 conviction." 4 6 He says he has been diagnosed as suffering 6 7 a depressive disorder and is told that it is likely to 7 8 be something that will affect him for the rest of his 8 9 Iffe. He says publicity around his conviction trought 9 10 shame on his family as a whole. Due to the stigma, he 10 11 stopped going to pay and only prayed at home. 11 12 His children were aged 3, 5 and 7 at the time of 12 13 his conviction and their family told them that he had 13 14 just gone on holiday to protect them from the truth. 14 15 Mr Ishaf staher became il whilst he was in 15 16 mix wort there for him. I felt like I had let 18 17 says: 19 the says his father bocame was an eligious man, and he passed away in 2018 12 before Mr Ishag's conviction was overtured. 22 14 the unreliability of Horizon. He says after the audit 1 </td <td>the evidence of</td> <td>Next, we move to the summary of the evid</td> <td>2</td> <td>-</td> <td>2</td>	the evidence of	Next, we move to the summary of the evid	2	-	2
5 conviction." 5 MS PATRICK: Before he became a subpostma 6 He says he has been diagnosed as suffering 6 Nicholas Clark had been a postman for ten y 7 a depressive disorder and is told that it is likely to 7 mum was the subpostmistress at Barrow-up 8 be something that will affect him for the rest of his 8 branch and he took on a role as a counter of 9 life. He says publicity around his conviction brought 9 and his mum ran the shop and the post offic 10 shame on his family as a whole. Due to the stigma, he 10 effectively together as partners. He became 11 stopped going to pray and only prayed at home. 11 subpostmaster himself in November 2005. 12 His children were aged 3.5 and 7 at the time of 13 his conviction and their family told them that he had 13 13 his conviction and their family told them that he had 13 by because they couldn't help him resolve th 16 mprison and had to have his leg amputated. Mr Ishaq 16 he was netigious man, and he pased away in 2018 5 19 him down massively." 19 the says he stather took the conviction very hard 20 he says he was told he was the only		-			3
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15 Mr Ishaq's father became ill whilst he was in 15 shortfalls and accepted that as they happen 16 prison and had to have his leg amputated. Mr Ishaq 16 make them good and he was under the belie 17 says: 17 be caused by human error. 18 "I wasn't there for him. I felt like I had let 18 Following an audit in March 2009, a: 19 him down massively." 19 the sum of around £7,500 was found. Durin 20 He says his father took the conviction very hard 20 he says he personally covered an estimated 21 as he was a religious man, and he passed away in 2018 21 shortfall. 22 22 Mr Ishaq also wants the Inquiry to know his 23 had ever come across who had had an issu 24 brother gave up time and effort to help him and his 24 Horizon. Mr Clark suspected that there mus 25 family. He wants to say he will never be able to 25 an issue with the IT system and immediately 24 brother gave up time and effort to help him and his 24 Horizon. Mr Clark says his mental health has 3 summer of 2009. He says "it felt surreal". 3 Mr Clark says his mental health has 4	e the issues	by because they couldn't help him resolve the iss	13	his conviction and their family told them that he had	13
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17 says: 17 be caused by human error. 18 "I wasn't there for him. I felt like I had let 18 Following an audit in March 2009, a state	-	shortfalls and accepted that as they happened he	15		15
17 says: 17 be caused by human error. 18 "I wasn't there for him. I felt like I had let 18 Following an audit in March 2009, a significant history of was found. Durin him down massively." 20 He says his father took the conviction very hard 20 he says he personally covered an estimated shortfall. 21 as he was a religious man, and he passed away in 2018 21 shortfall. 22 before Mr Ishaq's conviction was overturned. 22 He says he was told he was the only had ever come across who had had an issue to brother gave up time and effort to help him and his 24 Horizon. Mr Clark suspected that there muse an issue with the IT system and immediately 21 25 family. He wants to say he will never be able to 21 25 an issue with the IT system and immediately 21 20 he burst into tears when he received a summons in the 2 media and he was prescribed medication for 3 3 summer of 2009. He says "it felt surreal". 3 Mr Clark says his mental health has 1 4 He was charged with theft towards the end of 5 that year and, prior to his trial, Mr Clark's legal 5 this, he was a fairly reserved person who so 6 6 team informed him that the Post Office wanted to offer 6 lacked confidence, but he had a well paid joi 0 7 him a plea	elief they must	make them good and he was under the belief the	16	prison and had to have his leg amputated. Mr Ishaq	16
18 "I wasn't there for him. I felt like I had let 18 Following an audit in March 2009, a : 19 him down massively." 19 the sum of around £7,500 was found. Durin 20 He says his father took the conviction very hard 20 he says he personally covered an estimated 21 as he was a religious man, and he passed away in 2018 21 shortfall. 22 before Mr Ishaq's conviction was overturned. 22 He says he was told he was the only 23 Mr Ishaq also wants the Inquiry to know his 23 had ever come across who had had an issue 24 brother gave up time and effort to help him and his 24 Horizon. Mr Clark suspected that there mus 25 family. He wants to say he will never be able to 25 an issue with the IT system and immediately 21 22 22 22 22 1 the unreliability of Horizon. He says after the audit 1 often inaccurate way he was being portrayer 2 he burst into tears when he received a summons in the 2 media and he was prescribed medication for 3 summer of 2009. He says "it felt surreal". 3 Mr Clark says his mental health has 4 He was charged with theft			17	says:	17
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9Having advised this would likely result in him9says he suffered suicidal thoughts and twice10being less likely to receive a custodial sentence,10considered taking his own life. To this day, I11Mr Clark opted to plead guilty. It was a difficult11suffers from anxiety when appearing in his lo12decision at the time because he wanted to fight to12community. He has been diagnosed with P13prove his innocence but, at the same time, the hope of13depression and severe anxiety and it has be		significant history of mental health issues.	7	him a plea bargain. He was told theft would be	7
10being less likely to receive a custodial sentence, 1110considered taking his own life. To this day, I suffers from anxiety when appearing in his lo 1211Mr Clark opted to plead guilty. It was a difficult decision at the time because he wanted to fight to 1311suffers from anxiety when appearing in his lo community. He has been diagnosed with P 	ummons, he	When Mr Clark first received his summons	8	dropped if he pleaded guilty to false accounting.	8
11Mr Clark opted to plead guilty. It was a difficult11suffers from anxiety when appearing in his lo12decision at the time because he wanted to fight to12community. He has been diagnosed with P ⁻¹ 13prove his innocence but, at the same time, the hope of13depression and severe anxiety and it has been	rice	says he suffered suicidal thoughts and twice	9	Having advised this would likely result in him	9
12decision at the time because he wanted to fight to12community. He has been diagnosed with P13prove his innocence but, at the same time, the hope of13depression and severe anxiety and it has been diagnosed with P	y, he still	considered taking his own life. To this day, he sti	10	being less likely to receive a custodial sentence,	10
13prove his innocence but, at the same time, the hope of13depression and severe anxiety and it has be	s local	suffers from anxiety when appearing in his local	11	Mr Clark opted to plead guilty. It was a difficult	11
	I PTSD, severe	community. He has been diagnosed with PTSD,	12	decision at the time because he wanted to fight to	12
14 not going to prison was such that he really had no 14 recommended that he undergo a course of c	been	depression and severe anxiety and it has been	13	prove his innocence but, at the same time, the hope of	13
	of counselling.	recommended that he undergo a course of couns	14	not going to prison was such that he really had no	14
15 choice. 15 He would like the Inquiry to know his	his	He would like the Inquiry to know his	15	choice.	15
16 On 23 February 2010, he was given a six-month 16 relationship with his brother has also deterio	priorated to	relationship with his brother has also deteriorated	16	On 23 February 2010, he was given a six-month	16
17 sentence, suspended for two years and 150 hours of 17 the point they have not spoken since.		the point they have not spoken since.	17	sentence, suspended for two years and 150 hours of	17
18 community service. Since his conviction, Mr Clark has 18 Mr Clark says he thought that he ruir	ruined	Mr Clark says he thought that he ruined	18	community service. Since his conviction, Mr Clark has	18
19 become a recluse and does not wish to be seen in the 19 everyone's lives as well as his own.			19	-	19
	ry of the	The next statement is the summary of the	20	local community.	20
21 Whenever he goes out he ensures it is either at 21 statement of Mohammad Rasul.		-	21	-	21
	MAD RASUL (read)	Summary of witness statement of MOHAMMAD RA	22	-	22
	in Pakistan and	MS PATRICK: Mohammad Rasul was born in Pakis	23		23
	in 1977 and	emigrated to the UK in 1964. He married in 1977	24		24
			25	struggling with the renergy science of the negative and	25
25 struggling with the repercussions of the negative and 25 has three daughters and a son.		has three daughters and a son.	20	struggling with the repercussions of the negative and	20

(6) Pages 21 - 24

1	In 1985 he was offered the position of postal	1	concentrate significantly declined. He says he found
2	officer working behind a counter at the Post Office.	2	himself feeling worthless and hopeless and wishing he
3	In 1990 he moved from the counter to the back office.	3	was dead.
4	In 1997 an area manager asked if he would like	4	Following a brief suspension, his contract was
5	to run the local sub-post office. He became	5	terminated and he was charged with theft and false
6	subpostmaster of the Tootal Drive Post Office	6	accounting in 2006. He was summoned to Salford
7	in March 1997. He initially experienced some small,	7	Magistrates' Court in July 2006 and he pleaded not
8	unexplained shortfalls, which he would cover with his	8	guilty, he says "as I had done nothing wrong". His
9	own money, but by 2004 those shortfalls had grown much	9	case was transferred to Manchester Crown Court and
10	larger.	10	an initial hearing was adjourned on 8 May 2007, and he
11	In late 2004, he experienced a large shortfall	11	was charged with an additional 40 offences of theft
12	of around £12,000. He could not afford to pay this.	12	and false accounting.
13	He called the helpline but they were not helpful.	13	He wants the Inquiry to know he could not
14	In March 2005 there was an audit carried out	14	imagine having to leave his family and to go to
15	along with his area manager present. Mr Rasul was	15	prison. After receiving legal advice and
16	suspended on the spot and says he was shocked and	16	an assessment from a psychologist, he decided to plead
17	horrified. He had been given the impression he was	17	guilty to 22 counts of theft. He was sentenced at
18	the only subpostmaster having issues with the	18	Manchester Crown Court and received 100-hour commun
19	Horizon System.	19	service order, a three-month curfew and was required
20	Mr Rasul approached his union, who we	20	to wear an electronic tag and ordered to pay £500 in
20	understand, to explain, was the National Federation of	20	court costs.
22	SubPostmasters, but he was told that if Horizon said	21	He was also forced to pay all unexplained
23	the money was missing, then the money was missing.	22	shortfalls back to the Post Office.
23		23 24	
24 25	He had to visit his GP as he was struggling to	24 25	Mr Rasul wants to tell the Inquiry that he had to submit a request for his curfew hours to be varied
25	sleep due to the situation, and his ability to 25	25	26
1	as the curfew would have included the three months	1	Mr Rasul talks about his wife and the impact
2	which coincided with Ramadan. This was agreed and	2	upon her. He gives detail of some impacts on her
3	varied to allow him to attend the mosque for prayer,	3	health and Mr Rasul says that he believes that these
4	but it meant that his curfew was then extended by	4	impacts on her were due to the stress that she was
5	a further three months.	5	under, all caused by his conviction. He says it was
6	In July 2007, Mr Rasul was diagnosed with	6	horrible having to tell his loved ones about the
7	depression and PTSD and, at worst, he felt feelings of	7	dreadful experiences he went through. He says his
8	suicide. He wants the Inquiry to know that thoughts	8	youngest daughter struggled at university because she
9	of his family and his religion stopped him going	9	was so worried about him and her mum while he was
3 10	through with that.	10	going through the court proceedings. He had to ask
11	-	10	
12	He says he felt constant guilt and if anything		his eldest daughter to fund his youngest daughter's
	went wrong he immediately accepted responsibility.	12	law degree which he now carries tremendous guilt
	Lie clean continued to be disturbed with vivid drooms	10	about
13	His sleep continued to be disturbed with vivid dreams	13	about.
13 14	and nightmares three or four times every month	14	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had
13 14 15	and nightmares three or four times every month following his conviction.	14 15	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had a triple heart bypass and he has also, since his
13 14 15 16	and nightmares three or four times every month following his conviction. As to financial impact, he was unable to obtain	14 15 16	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had a triple heart bypass and he has also, since his conviction, developed asthma. In his view, he thinks
13 14 15 16 17	and nightmares three or four times every month following his conviction. As to financial impact, he was unable to obtain a loan, could not open a bank account and his	14 15 16 17	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had a triple heart bypass and he has also, since his conviction, developed asthma. In his view, he thinks these impacts were in part due to the stress of the
13 14 15 16 17 18	and nightmares three or four times every month following his conviction. As to financial impact, he was unable to obtain a loan, could not open a bank account and his insurance premiums increased.	14 15 16 17 18	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had a triple heart bypass and he has also, since his conviction, developed asthma. In his view, he thinks these impacts were in part due to the stress of the situation with the Post Office.
13 14 15 16 17 18 19	and nightmares three or four times every month following his conviction. As to financial impact, he was unable to obtain a loan, could not open a bank account and his insurance premiums increased. He recounts one particular issue for the	14 15 16 17 18 19	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had a triple heart bypass and he has also, since his conviction, developed asthma. In his view, he thinks these impacts were in part due to the stress of the situation with the Post Office. Finally, Mr Rasul's mum passed away in 2018
13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20	and nightmares three or four times every month following his conviction. As to financial impact, he was unable to obtain a loan, could not open a bank account and his insurance premiums increased. He recounts one particular issue for the Inquiry. His curfew was due to be over on	14 15 16 17 18 19 20	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had a triple heart bypass and he has also, since his conviction, developed asthma. In his view, he thinks these impacts were in part due to the stress of the situation with the Post Office. Finally, Mr Rasul's mum passed away in 2018 before he could tell her his conviction had been
13 14 15 16 17 18 19	and nightmares three or four times every month following his conviction. As to financial impact, he was unable to obtain a loan, could not open a bank account and his insurance premiums increased. He recounts one particular issue for the	14 15 16 17 18 19	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had a triple heart bypass and he has also, since his conviction, developed asthma. In his view, he thinks these impacts were in part due to the stress of the situation with the Post Office. Finally, Mr Rasul's mum passed away in 2018
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13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	and nightmares three or four times every month following his conviction. As to financial impact, he was unable to obtain a loan, could not open a bank account and his insurance premiums increased. He recounts one particular issue for the Inquiry. His curfew was due to be over on 19 February 2008. His father passed away on	14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had a triple heart bypass and he has also, since his conviction, developed asthma. In his view, he thinks these impacts were in part due to the stress of the situation with the Post Office. Finally, Mr Rasul's mum passed away in 2018 before he could tell her his conviction had been overturned. His conviction was quashed by the
13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	and nightmares three or four times every month following his conviction. As to financial impact, he was unable to obtain a loan, could not open a bank account and his insurance premiums increased. He recounts one particular issue for the Inquiry. His curfew was due to be over on 19 February 2008. His father passed away on 13 February 2008. He was not able to see his father	14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	Of his own health, he says in 2015 he had a triple heart bypass and he has also, since his conviction, developed asthma. In his view, he thinks these impacts were in part due to the stress of the situation with the Post Office. Finally, Mr Rasul's mum passed away in 2018 before he could tell her his conviction had been overturned. His conviction was quashed by the Court of Appeal on 23 April 2021.

1	Summary of witness statement of JACQUELINE McDONALD (read)	1	contract was terminated a month later and she
2	MS PATRICK: Mrs McDonald was brought up in Preston but	2	describes being devastated.
3	lived in America for 21 years. Her husband is a US	3	Her husband and three children all worked in the
4	citizen who worked for the military and Presidential	4	shop so lost their livelihoods when it closed.
5	Guard. She moved back to England with her family in	5	Mrs McDonald subsequently had to declare herself
6	2005 and became subpostmistress of the Broughton	6	bankrupt, as did her husband. She was prosecuted for
7	Post Office in 2006.	7	theft and false accounting.
8	She first experienced a shortfall on the	8	Whilst waiting for her case to go to the Crown
9	Horizon System of 2,000 euros and was made to pay back	9	Court she experienced stress, anger and problems
10	that shortfall. This was after the installation of	10	sleeping. She was terrified at the prospect of going
11	a second Horizon System at her branch.	11	to prison. She says:
12	Mrs McDonald says she would sometimes telephone	12	"The Post Office just seemed focused on getting
13	the system helpline up to five times a week, but	13	a conviction and did not even agree to a forensic
14	ultimately found this was unhelpful. The usual	14	accountant being instructed."
15	response she says was "it will work itself out".	15	Mrs McDonald attended the trial of another
16	By the end of September 2008 Horizon was showing	16	subpostmistress who had pleaded not guilty but who had
17	an excess cash amount at her branch of £50,000.	17	been found guilty after trial and was sentenced to
18	Mrs McDonald was suspended following an audit on	18	imprisonment. Mrs McDonald was deeply disturbed by
19	1 October 2008 and she says she was relieved when	19	that experience and so then pleaded guilty to theft
20	auditors arrived because she thought they would help.	20	and false accounting.
21	She says "but then the mood quickly changed".	21	She says the whole situation significantly
22	Following the audit, Mrs McDonald was asked to	22	impacted her mental health and she did consider
23	repay a total of £93,947.93. Investigators attended	23	suicide at one stage. Mrs McDonald has now been
24	and searched their home. She says this was horrible.	24	diagnosed as having suffered with an adjustment
25	She attended an interview in October 2008. Her	25	disorder in the form of mixed anxiety and depression.
	29		30
1	Following conviction, the Post Office commenced	1	Tragically, her daughter died in November 2011 and
2	Proceeds of Crime Act proceedings. She says they took	2	Mrs McDonald wants the Inquiry to know that she was
3	her car and, after a second hearing, it was agreed she	3	unable to spend her daughter's last birthday with her
4	could repay their debt to them for £1 as she was by	4	because she was in prison.
5	then bankrupt.	5	Whilst her conviction was quashed in April 2021,
6	In January 2011, Mrs McDonald was sentenced to	6	she says:
7	18 months imprisonment, with the judge telling her	7	"I honestly don't know if my family will ever be
8	that she "had breached the community and the	8	the same again. I know I certainly won't be."
9	Post Office's trust". She was shocked and couldn't	9	Her relationship with her mum, her dad and her
10	believe it. She describes being taken away from her	10	sister has never been the same. On returning to
11	family as the worst form of punishment. She says she	11	England and the prospect of doing so, Mrs McDonald
12	never felt so lonely in her life. She tried to be	12	states:
13	brave but was petrified.	13	"The thought of going back to England makes me
14	She spent parts of her imprisonment with violent	14	feel sick because every time I have to come back to
15	offenders and says she witnessed fights. She was in	15	the States I have been taken into the interrogation
16	prison for four and a half months and spent another	16	room because my conviction is attached to my
17	four and a half months on curfew with a tag.	17	passport."
18	When she and her family decided to go back to	18	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Ms Patrick, will you read two more and
19	America, her application for a green card was	19	then we will give your voice a rest.
20	initially refused because of her conviction. The	20	MS PATRICK: Sir, I'm very sure everybody will be, by that
21	US Embassy allowed her second application but only on	21	time, very full of hearing from me.
22	notice that she had to travel to America within	22	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That's fine.
23	a week.	23	MS PATRICK: We next move to a summary of the evidence of
24	She wants the Inquiry to know her first	24	Abiodun Omotoso.
25	grandchild was born while she was in prison.	25	

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1	Summary of witness statement of ABIODUN OMOTOSO (read)	1	that if he was to comply then everything would be
2	MS PATRICK: Before working for the Post Office Abiodun	2	fine. He had no idea others were going through the
3	Omotoso was a management consultant. He has	3	same things as him. His contract was terminated and
4	an economics degree and began working as	4	he was charged with theft.
5	a subpostmaster at the Walsworth Post Office at	5	Mr Omotoso says:
6	around August 2005.	6	"I was told that if I complied I would 'get
7	On 26 October 2006 the branch was audited and	7	a slap on the wrist'."
8	£50,000 was alleged to have been short. He had always	8	However, he told them he was not pleading guilty
9	paid smaller shortfalls when they were worth £40 or	9	for something he did not do. On 28 August 2008, he
10	£50 but as they got larger, he could not afford to pay	10	was found guilty of theft at Luton Crown Court. He
11	and so rolled it over. He was spending hours counting	11	was sentenced to 28 months in prison, which was
12	money and, at the end, the figure was still not right.	12	a complete shock to him. He says:
13	Mr Omotoso says:	13	"It was heartbreaking to lose everything."
14	"During this time my mood was very low and	14	At his sentencing, the judge accused him, he
15	I even contemplated taking my own life. I was ashamed	15	says, of trying to malign the integrity of
16	and angry."	16	professionals. He wants the Inquiry to know his
17	He says investigators visited his house but he	17	health has suffered massively in prison, where his
18	refused to let them search his house. He says he was	18	eyesight deteriorated and his blood pressure shot up.
19	told that if he tried to get a solicitor they would	19	He says he has been diagnosed since with adjustment
20	make things difficult for him. He says investigators	20	disorder, mixed anxiety and depressed mood. He has
21	even tried to speak to his neighbours to ask them	21	been told that his glaucoma, hypertension and diabetes
22	questions about him. He says of this:	22	may have been caused by prolonged acute stress.
23	"I felt degraded."	23	His wife left him when he was in prison and
24	He attended his interview with the Post Office	24	they're now divorced.
25	without legal representation. He says he was informed	25	Following his conviction, he was prevented from
	33		34
1	seeing his children. This absolutely devastated him.	1	summary of the statement of Mr Ian Warren.
2	He had been a very hands-on father, doing school runs	2	Summary of witness statement of IAN WARREN (rea
3	and accompanying both children on sporting activities.	3	MS PATRICK: Ian Warren qualified as a chartered
4	He says not being able to do this "broke my heart".	4	accountant in the early 1970s and he had worked as
5	He says that before his conviction he used to go	5	a financial controller and he had also worked in
6	out of his way to help people in the community but he	6	management.
7	says "now the local community is wary of me". He says	7	In 2004, after the death of his father, this
8	"They think I am a thief".	8	presented an opportunity for him to reappraise his
9	Mr Omotoso says:	9	career. He and his partner bought a village shop with
10	"To think people thought these things about me	10	a post office branch in a village they both loved. He
11	brought me deep shame."	11	began work as a subpostmaster of the St James' Street
12	Before his conviction he had been asked to	12	branch in Essex in October 2004.
12	consider becoming a school governor. This was no	12	Shortly after taking over, he was trying to
14	longer an option afterwards. He was subject to	14	balance the account and could not get the figures to
15	a confiscation order to pay back the entire shortfall	14	match. The figure was short by £1,800. He called the
	of over £50,000. He was forced to sell the family	16	
16	-		helpline who wrote this off as "human error" as he was
		17 18	new.
17	home, his business and to declare bankruptcy.	18	It happened again several months later with
16 17 18	He found it difficult to get another job		a figure of around 00,400. He had to man within f
17 18 19	He found it difficult to get another job following conviction and he says he suffered terribly	19	a figure of around £2,400. He had to repay this from
17 18 19 20	He found it difficult to get another job following conviction and he says he suffered terribly financially.	19 20	his salary.
17 18 19 20 21	He found it difficult to get another job following conviction and he says he suffered terribly financially. He says now he feels vindicated but he wants the	19 20 21	his salary. The Post Office never explained why this
17 18 19 20 21 22	He found it difficult to get another job following conviction and he says he suffered terribly financially. He says now he feels vindicated but he wants the Inquiry to know, he says:	19 20 21 22	his salary. The Post Office never explained why this happened.
17 18 19 20 21 22 23	He found it difficult to get another job following conviction and he says he suffered terribly financially. He says now he feels vindicated but he wants the Inquiry to know, he says: "I will have to live with this harrowing	19 20 21 22 23	his salary. The Post Office never explained why this happened. In 2007, an error appeared on Horizon with
17	He found it difficult to get another job following conviction and he says he suffered terribly financially. He says now he feels vindicated but he wants the Inquiry to know, he says:	19 20 21 22	his salary. The Post Office never explained why this happened.

(9) Pages 33 - 36

1	He contacted the helpline and they told him to	1		He felt like he was committing perjury when he
2	keep an eye on it. He made various requests through	2		pleaded guilty. He had to go on to notify the
3	the helpline and the area manager for more training	3		Institute of Chartered Accountants and he was stripped
4	but says these fell on deaf ears. He says it was	4		of his membership. This conviction prevented him from
5	infuriating.	5		reverting to that old career.
6	In April 2008 he was audited. He says he was	6		He was sentenced to nine months imprisonment,
7	more than happy to allow them to conduct an audit. It	7		suspended for 18 months and was subject to a community
8	was discovered there was a shortfall of £24,520.45 and	8		service order of 75 hours.
9	it was later said he owed £18,412.50.	9		He became depressed and has since taken various
10	Of the investigation, Mr Warren says	10		anti-depressants. He had a previous diagnosis of
11	investigators arrived at the house and treated him	11		alcohol abuse, which worsened with stress and being
12	like a criminal. He felt they had already made their	12		charged with an offence, he says "charged with
13	minds up. He agreed to them searching his house but	13		an offence I knew I had not committed".
14	he said he felt so degraded. He was suspended on the	14		There was a newspaper article about him
15	same day and the Post Office sought to prosecute him	15		published in 2009 and he had to sell papers in his
16	for theft and false accounting. His contract was	16		shop which labelled him as a criminal and he says
17	terminated on 4 June 2008 but it took effect earlier,	17		"This was so hurtful".
18	from April of that year.	18		He wants the Inquiry to know he is particularly
19		19		concerned that he is no longer able to practice as
	A restraining order was placed on his assets and			
20	he paid back the shortfall with an inheritance. He	20		an accountant. He no longer has a problem with
21	pleaded guilty to theft after being informed if he did	21		alcohol. After his conviction he required therapy.
22	so he may avoid a custodial sentence. He wants the	22		After his conviction he did what he could to advise
23	Inquiry to know he was particularly concerned he may	23		local people and local organisations that he had been
24	receive a higher sentence because he was a qualified	24		wronged. He told them he would be challenging the
25	accountant. 37	25		outcome. However, he says he found this very 38
1	draining, both emotionally and physically.	1	A.	Yes, Pauline Ann Stonehouse.
2	In 2014 he was diagnosed with bowel cancer and	2	Q.	Have you got a copy of your witness statement there?
3	after several months of chemotherapy and radiotherapy	3	Α.	I have, yes.
4	this resulted in the need for a stoma and	4	Q.	I think it should be dated 13 January 2022?
5	catheterisation. He thinks the stress of the	5	Α.	Yes.
6	Post Office scandal has contributed to his health	6	Q.	Is that your signature on page 9, the last page of the
7	outcomes.	7		statement?
8	He wants the Inquiry to know he remains in	8	Α.	It is, yes.
9	a state of disbelief at what happened and for the	9	Q.	Have you read this statement through recently?
10	events for which he was not responsible.	10	Α.	I have.
11	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you very much.	11	Q.	Is it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
12	MS PATRICK: Thank you, Chair.	12	Α.	Yes.
13	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So I think we will have a shortish	13	Q.	I'm going to start by asking you a couple of
14	break and then we will hear the two next witnesses	14		introductory questions about you. How old are you
15	back-to-back so to speak, yes? Fine.	15		now?
16	(11.02 am)	16	Α.	49.
17	(Short Break)	17	Q.	How long have you been married?
18	(11.16 am)	18	A.	This year it will be 28 years.
19	MS KENNEDY: Chair, our next witness is Mrs Pauline	19	Q.	How many children do you have?
20	Stonehouse.	20	а. А.	Two.
21	PAULINE STONEHOUSE (affirmed)	21	Q.	When did you start working for the Post Office?
22	Questioned by MS KENNEDY	22	Q. A.	I first started working for them oh, God, 1993-ish.
22	MS KENNEDY: My name is Ruth Kennedy and I ask questions	22	<i>.</i>	I think before me and Chris got married. We first
23 24	on behalf of the Inquiry.	23 24		met, I think I was still with him, worked for
25	Could you confirm your name, please?	25		a franchise Post Office for Ryman stationers. Started

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1 of in their Holloom branch, not far from the Chancery 1 a business of our own. 2 abs courts and them moved around a bit to various 2 3 other branches and illumbely endel up a branch 3 4 analger of lower Regent Strete, a busy six counter 4 6 0. What role ddy ou sant in initially? 6 7 A. Just trade of fas a counter assistant. 8 0. 8 We moved from London up to Sunderland. 1 A 9 A. We moved from London up to Sunderland. 1 A 9 A. We moved from London up to Sunderland. 1 A 11 A. We moved from London up to Sunderland. 1 A 12 for freewal and. Decause of those conserves. we any health 1 A 13 and I got dismised before my yearly contract was up 1 1 C an you just describe in a bit more decause if the counters. 14 ab courter we first conserves. 1 C an you just describe in a bit more decause if the counters. 15 for intereval and. Decause of those conserves. 1 C an you just describe in a bit more decause if those conseque anyobla. 16				I		
3 other branches and ultimately ended up as branch 3 down the post office real indue. We searched a few and then decided upon the one that we eventually products and the indecide upon the one that we eventually products and post as counter assistant. 3 down the post office real indue. We searched a few and then decide upon the one that we eventually products and post as counter assistant. 6 Q. Why ddi you want to then become a subpostmistres? A Net was Seabur Post Office in Sunderland. 7 A. Just stated of as a counter assistant. C With role duby us and to then become a subpostmistres? 8 Q. Why ddi you want to then become a subpostmistres? A L Ithrik you say in your statement that was around Nevenber 2004 9 A. We moved from London up to Sunderland whee and I got dismissed before my yearly contract was up for reneared and, because of thes consequences, we could no longer keep our house in London. 1 A Ithrik was and 80,000 for the busines as whole. 10 So we chese to elocate back to Sunderland whee myhusband is from and, at that point, our daughter myhusband is thoma, a bath while later, to acot mer mail post office at that time? A It was an ob advertised for a small post office real elocy of them pou had mad there (Ches and there week) the searchers. </td <td>1</td> <td></td> <td>off in their Holborn branch, not far from the Chancery</td> <td>1</td> <td></td> <td>a business of our own.</td>	1		off in their Holborn branch, not far from the Chancery	1		a business of our own.
4 and then decide upon the one that we eventually purchased. 5 0. What role do you start in initially? 6. Which one was that? 7 A. Just started of as a counter assistant. 7 A. That was Seeburn Post Office in Sunderland. 80 Why do you want to the become a subpostinistress? 7 A. That was Seeburn Post Office in Sunderland. 9 A. We moved from London up to Sunderland. I had left the Post Office thare because I fail Loudon't go any thir and took a job temporshiv with the London. 0. Lithnik you say in your statement that was around November 2004 – 10 A. Yes. 0. Lithnik you say in your statement that was around in the statement wastatement was and state down may statif down was in that down or th	2		law courts and then moved around a bit to various	2		We toyed with a few ideas and we decided to go
5 office 5 purchased. 6 Q. What role did you start in initially? 6 Q. Which one was that? 7 A. Just started off as a counter assistant. 7 A. That was Seabum Post Office in Sunderland. 8 Q. Why did you want to then become a subpostmistres? 8 Q. That was Seabum Post Office in Sunderland. 9 A. We moved from London up to Sunderland. 10 A. Ves 11 Post Office hare because 1 fell couldn'tip any turb the bond 11 Q would that be about right? How much did you pay for that? 13 at the time wasn't too great, with ladies problems, could no longer keep our house in London. 13 A. It was an old style post office counter, so behind gins at the back, when we first purchased it, with a real with weak about input the start, so behind gins at the back, when we first purchase it, with a real with weak about the out the start weak about the start, so behind gins at the back, when we first purchase it, with a real with weak about the out the start weak about the start was an old style post office counter, so behind gins at the back, when we first purchase it, with a real with weak about the start was a post office inside a small convenience store, book 21 working for the Post Office inside a small convenience store, book 21 put a stuch machine in, but weils in, we gins a store backment while was a not the busines. 23 moved there - from there, a short while kater, fo 24 A. We, Chits and twou would use that the? 24 <t< td=""><td>3</td><td></td><td>other branches and ultimately ended up as branch</td><td>3</td><td></td><td>down the post office retail route. We searched a few</td></t<>	3		other branches and ultimately ended up as branch	3		down the post office retail route. We searched a few
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7 A. Just started off as a counter assistant. 7 A. That was Seabum Post Office in Sunderland. 8 We moved from London up to Sunderland. I had left the work office here because 1 felt Louidh't go any thread took a job temporarily with the London 1 1 10 Post Office there because 1 felt Louidh't go any thread took a job temporarily with the London 2 - would that be about right? How much did you pay for that? 11 and the did work out for me as my health 10 A. Yes. - would that be about right? How much did you pay for that? 12 Underground. That didn't work out for me as my health 13 A. I think we paid 80.000 for the business as a whole. 13 at the time wasn't too great, with haldes problems, and the did did singet before my verif contract was up too the business as a whole. 14 C. any oug tat decemies a whole. 14 Do we choes to rolocate back to Sunderland when the my husband is from and, at that point, our daughter my husband is from and, at that point, our daughter my sol, and we got about. 16 A. It was an old-ship south souths and we got about. 17 gas at the back, when we first purchase it, with a vert and up out a south south and we got about. 17 gas at the back, when we first purchase it, was a good it business. 21 three, Laupone. I any out starter thing in and it was a good it business. 10 D. How many staff di	5		office.	5		purchased.
8 Q. Why did you want to then become a subpostmistess? 8 Q. I think you say in your statement that was around November 2004 - 9 A. We moved from London up to Sunderland. I had left the Post Office ther because I felt locabit (9 any 10 there are may health 11 the result was to took job temporarily with the London 11 the dist problems, and 1 gad dismissed before my varity contract was up to that? 9	6	Q.	What role did you start in initially?	6	Q.	Which one was that?
9 A. We moved from London up D Sunderland. I had left the Post Office there baceuse I fail I could'it go any further and took a job temporarily with the London Underground. That dicht work out for me as my health at the time wasn't too great, with lades' problems, if and 1 got dismissed before my very contract was up for that? A. Yes. 11 at the time wasn't too great, with lades' problems, if and 1 got dismissed before my very contract was up for ranewal and, because of those consequences, we could no longrek expo un house in London. A. I think we paid 80,000 for the business as a whole. 12 A. I think we paid 80,000 for the business as a whole. C. Can you just describe in a bit more detail that business? 16 C. Lan you just describe in a bit more detail that post office inside a small office inside a small convenience store, look I. twas an old-style post office counter, so behind glass at the back, when we first purchased it, with a retail und at the fornt han put new tills in, we post office inside a small convenience store, look 21 post office inside a small convenience store, look 21 was a good tille business. 23 moved there – from there, a short while later, to denore – from there, a short while later, to denore – from there, a short was while lwas there that we came up with the idea of starting detail 24 A. Me, Chris and than ur working a subpostimistress and detail 24 A. I was excited. It was a new challenge, more detail 25 A. How did you reave on Horizon? 3 3 A.	7	Α.	Just started off as a counter assistant.	7	Α.	That was Seaburn Post Office in Sunderland.
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13 at the time wasn't too great, with ladies' problems, 13 A I think we paid 80,000 for the business as a whole. 14 C Can you just describe and I got dismissed before my yearly contract was up 16 for reneval and, because of those consequences, we 16 A I twas an old-style post office counter, so behind 17 So we chose to relocate back to Sunderland where 17 glass at the back, where this twe first purchased it, with 18 my husband is form and, at tha point, our daughter 18 A I twas an old-style post office counter, so behind 19 was 11 months old and we got about – she was about 19 rock, usual typical seaside little store, off licence, 20 there, is suppose. I saw a job advertised for a small 20 that sort of thing. We do then une with lis in, we 21 post office indies and then it was while later, to 23 C. How many staff do you have? 24 A Mec, This and No or three – three others. 24 25 there that we came up with the idea of starting 25 C. How many staff do you have? 3 realy any set hours. You still had a back small, this was snee hold you realy any set hours. You still had a back small, this was snee hold point weashold. 42 </td <td>11</td> <td></td> <td>further and took a job temporarily with the London</td> <td>11</td> <td>Q.</td> <td> would that be about right? How much did you pay</td>	11		further and took a job temporarily with the London	11	Q.	would that be about right? How much did you pay
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9to do that, but basic counter you know, and my own stock then at the end of the week, but not as in office balance. It wasn't until, obviously, we got our own that then it became more involved.9roughly?10stock then at the end of the week, but not as in our own that then it became more involved.10A. Youngest daughter was born 2006, so it was while that was being installed it wasn't long after that that12our own that then it became more involved.12I discovered I was pregnant after five hard years of13Q.When you took over your own what training did you receive then?13trying for a second child, and it was it was while14receive then?14I was pregnant. So it would have been 2005 that the15A. Next to nothing. They just presumed I knew what I was15issues started happening, as in the bigger16doing. I think it was a short short instructions.16differences.17It might have been a day, probably, if that, to show 					0	
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25 counter, so it had the shop till as well as the 25 10 o'clock in the evening searching through						
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1 2		everything, counting everything back and never finding it.	1 2	Q.	I think you say in your statement you spoke to a Post Office business manager around 29 May 2007;
3	Q.	How did that make you feel?	3		that right?
4	Α.	Frustrated, incompetent, like I didn't know what I was	4	Α.	Yes.
5		doing. Sought help and didn't get any satisfaction	5	Q.	What did you say to that person?
6		from them.	6	Α.	I was it was at a meeting in the hotel just down
7	Q.	Did you make use of the helpline?	7		the road. It was like a monthly it may not have
8	Α.	Yes, jokingly, laughingly, yes. They weren't very	8		been monthly. It was just a meeting that had been
9		helpful. It was always "Oh, it will" you know,	9		arranged for postmasters and I basically told her
10		"a transaction correction will come back", and it	10		that, over the last period of time, I had been showing
11		never did. They always reassured working in	11		the figures as being correct when they weren't becaus
12		previous post offices, it had happened, you would get	12		I could no longer keep the money no, put the money
13		shortages and they would come back. It may take	13		in, and I told her how stressed out I was over it, and
14		a couple of weeks but they would come back. But none	14		she says, "You do know that I will have to suspend
15		of mine ever did, none of them ever came back.	15		you". And I said "I understand that", I said
16	Q.	What did you do in order to get these shortfalls or	16		you know, "until I investigate". And then the
17		discrepancies to go away?	17		following morning I think it was the following
18	Α.	Initially, it was putting money in from our own shop	18		morning, the auditors came in and basically threw me
19		takings and they would go in, and it was getting to	19		out.
20		the point where it was just too much money. There's	20	Q.	How did you feel at that time before the audit?
21		no way you can run a business and be taking out of	21	Α.	Worried, but I honestly thought they would find
22		your till every week £200 or £300. You add that up	22		something to find the money, to find where it had
23		over a month, that's a lot of money that's not going	23		gone. They're meant to be the experts and they're
24		into my bank account, that's not buying more stock,	24		supposed to know what they're doing and they would
25		that's not feeding my children.	25		find where my problems arised, but they didn't. They
		45			46
1		just ended up showing more money than what I expected.	1		were then interviewed by the Post Office; is that
2	Q.	When you spoke to the Post Office business manager	2		right?
3		what did you expect her to say?	3	Α.	
4	Α.	I don't know, to be honest. I think reassurance that	4	Q.	Who were you interviewed by?
5		they could solve the problem, the fact that I had	5	Α.	It was a woman, that's all I can tell you. I don't
6		sought out their help previously, the fact that they	6		remember her name. It was just a woman, as part of
7		sent a trainer in and they confirmed that everything	7		the Post Office investigation team. I think my
8		I was doing was correct and that I was an experienced	8		husband informed me it was in Gateshead, I think, no
9		postmistress and that I was doing nothing wrong. So	9		that I remember that. I could have sworn it was
10		if I was doing everything correctly then how could	10		somewhere else, but I could be anywhere. And I was
11		I be having all of these shortages and there was no	11		there for hours, hours, and hours, and hours, and she
12		explanation for that.	12		kept repeating the same questions all the time.
13	Q.	What was the alleged shortfall at that time, do you	13	Q.	
14		remember, roughly?	14	Α.	Always "What have you done with the money? Are yo
15	Α.	I think initially, I think I thought it was about	15		sure you haven't stolen it?" And I said "If I had
		14,000 but I think when the audit was done it was over	16		stolen the money, why would I be seeking your help,
16		15.	17		why would I be asking all the questions of the
17		What were the auditors like?	18		helpline, why would I be pleading if I was stealing
17 18	Q.	I honestly can't remember. I think it was two men,	19		the money? I would be trying to hide my misdoings,
17 18 19		-	20		not confessing to them. So, yes, I had false
17 18 19 20		I think, but I honestly don't remember. I think I was			
17 18 19 20 21		I think, but I honestly don't remember. I think I was in shock and denial, I think, that they were there,	21		accounted but there's no way I would have stolen it".
17 18 19 20 21 22		I think, but I honestly don't remember. I think I was in shock and denial, I think, that they were there, and once they were there they told me they	21 22		And then she went on from there then to try to
17 18 19 20 21 22 23		I think, but I honestly don't remember. I think I was in shock and denial, I think, that they were there, and once they were there they told me they basically grabbed my keys off me and that was it,	21 22 23		And then she went on from there then to try to accuse my husband of taking it instead and lying to m
17 18 19 20 21 22	A.	I think, but I honestly don't remember. I think I was in shock and denial, I think, that they were there, and once they were there they told me they	21 22		accounted but there's no way I would have stolen it". And then she went on from there then to try to accuse my husband of taking it instead and lying to m and taking she said the shop couldn't have been doing well and how do I know he wasn't taking the

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1		money to inflate the shop till. I said, "Well, he	1		going to prison. I was made to feel like it was the
2		wouldn't do that", but she kept on going on about that	2		only option. My eldest daughter was only, at the
3		as well.	3		time, eight coming up to nine, youngest daughter was
4	Q.	What representation or support did you have at that	4		only two. I wasn't going to leave them. I couldn't
5		interview?	5		have coped without my girls.
6	Α.	I think I took a member of the Federation with me,	6	Q.	What were you sentenced to?
7		I think. But I honestly can't remember his name	7	Α.	A six-month suspended sentence.
8		either. I think I had I had somebody with me	8	Q.	How did that feel?
9		definitely. It wasn't a solicitor or anything like	9	Α.	Awful, because they made me feel like I said
10		that.	10		before, like I was some horrible, master criminal and
11	Q.	How did you feel after that interview?	11		I had done nothing wrong, apart from probably being
12	Α.	Shocked, more than anything, at the way I had been	12		slightly naive and not understanding the full
13		treated. I felt like I was they made me feel like	13		consequences of my actions but I felt like I had no
14		I was some master criminal and, to quote the words	14		other choice.
15		that she said, "I have to prosecute you to set	15	Q.	Your conviction was recently overturned; is that
16		an example so others so others won't do it because	16		right?
17		you are essentially the first", which obviously we now	17	Α.	Yes.
18		know that was a complete pack of lies.	18	Q.	I'm going to now ask you some questions about the
19	Q.	What were you charged with at that interview?	19		impact that all of this has had on you. What happened
20	Α.	I was charged with false accounting. It went on to be	20		to you financially as a result of all of this?
21		six counts of false accounting.	21	Α.	We had to declare ourselves bankrupt, so we lost our
22	Q.	What did you plead?	22		business. We could no longer pay the mortgage. So we
23	Α.	I pled guilty.	23		lost our home too. Luckily I mean, the mortgage
24	Q.	Why did you plead guilty?	24		company went after us to get us out of the house but
25		I felt like I had no choice. I think I was fearful of	25		we had to go to we had to go to court and the
		49			50
1		judge, luckily, wouldn't grant them permission to	1	A.	Yes.
2		throw us out. He gave us time to find somewhere else,	2	Q.	What was that?
3		with the children being still small.	3	Α.	He trained to be a bus driver for Go North East.
4	SIF	R WYN WILLIAMS: When you say "we", do I take it both	4		Within two weeks, I think it was, of the bankruptcy he
5		your husband and you declared bankruptcy?	5		managed to find a job.
6	Α.	Yes, we both went bankrupt, yes. It was a joint	6	Q.	You mention in your statement that your story was
7		business, so we were both as much impacted.	7		covered in the local paper; is that right?
8	MS	KENNEDY: Who did you ask for financial help?	8	Α.	
9	Α.		9	Q.	Could you tell us a bit about that?
10		parents were able to help out with bits and bobs.	10	Α.	They caught me leaving the court at Newcastle Crown
11		I think, once we did get rehomed, my father paid for	11		Court. Never spoke to me but they tried to speak to
12		flooring. We had no flooring we had no carpet on	12		me but I refused to speak. But they caught my
13		the floor for, oh, a good three/four months. I'm	13		picture, took my picture and put it on the front page
14		asthmatic, I've got eczema, I can't cope with all that	14		of the Sunderland Echo, "Local postmistress charged
15		dust. My father said he used to call me "Chick",	15		and found guilty of false accounting", and gave
16		he said "Come on Chick", he says "I'll buy you the	16		numerous details about myself and my family, and it
17		floor", and I'm like, "No, Dad, you can't do that".	17		was horrible.
18		He says "No, I'm not having you ill, either, I will	18	Q.	How did it feel to see yourself on the front page of
19		buy you the floor", and he paid for the flooring for	19	<u>~</u> .	a newspaper?
20		US.	20	Α.	Awful because people people read a story and they
21		It was little things like that, and without them	20		judge you accordingly, and no one knew the story. My
22		I don't know how we would have coped. Even buying us	22		friends did and my family did, yes, but not anybody
23		groceries and we didn't know what else to do.	23		else who would have known me through coming into the
23 24	0	I think you mention in your statement your husband got	23		shop. Ex-customers, and so on, will look at that and
	હ.	another job.	24		be judge, jury and executioner, wouldn't they, and
25					

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1		they basically just presume that what's reported in	1		mind, that I knew I hadn't took it and, if I hadn't
2		that paper was correct.	2		took it, then who did? And if it wasn't the computer
3	Q.	Did you feel an impact on your reputation in the	3		thing and it was theft, then who else do you blame,
4		community because of that?	4		apart from your own member of staff.
5	Α.	Not really, nothing was ever said to my face. I think	5		And that could have ended my marriage. But,
6		I shied away from going out as much. It was taking	6		luckily, we're strong and, as I said, this year is
7		the girls to school and back home again, or being with	7		28 years marriage. We have been together 30 and
8		my parents, but I was never I never went down the	8		I don't know what I would do without him.
9		seafront to where the shop was for ages. Chris never	9	Q.	What about the impact on your children? Did you feel
10		went down there for a good six, seven years. He	10		it had an impact on them or your relationship with
11		refused to even walk past the shop. It was too	11		them?
12		hurtful for us.	12	Α.	The youngest one, no. She was too young to know what
13	Q.	What was the impact of all of this on your husband?	13		was going on. It's only in the last it was since
14	Α.	It's hard to say. He is a quiet man. He speaks when	14		November when the conviction was overturned that she
15		he has to. But yes, it hurt him as well. It knocked	15		is old enough now at 15 to understand and ask
16		his confidence just as much as mine. I think the fact	16		questions and ask questions she did. God, did she ask
17		that we've got each other was enough to get us through	17		questions! And I think she was very understanding and
18		but it hurt us both so much.	18		I was more worried about, with it being raised in the
19	Q.	Did it impact on your marriage as well?	19		paper again and me being on the local news, that it
20		No. Luckily, we have a really strong marriage.	20		would have some impact on her, in case anybody said
21		I think the accusations that the investigators threw	21		anything to her and it didn't, thankfully.
22		at him was enough to make me question him myself, and	22		As for the oldest one, so 2008 she would have
23		I mulled over it for a couple of days and, eventually,	23		been coming up to nine. We had to move her school, so
24		I asked the question "Did you steal the money?" and	24		she lost her friends and that had a big impact.
25		I knew he didn't, but they put so much doubt into my	25		I don't remember her being an anxious child before
		53			54
1		that. She was quite confident. After that, I think	1		our in talking to you here.
2		it did knock her, having to move and lose everything	2		What I would like to say is I used to be such
3		really, lose our home and lose her friends and have to	3		a really confident woman and I never expected my life
4		restart in a new school and be bullied and picked on	4		to take the turn it did and, since all this has
5		because she was the new girl, and I don't think she	5		happened, I have lost both my parents, my father
6		ever recovered from that, I don't think, to be honest.	6		through cancer, my mother through a heart attack, so
8 7	Q.	What would you like from the Post Office now?	7		they never saw me have my name cleared. And then,
8	A.	I would like somebody to hold their hands up and say	8		since then, gone on to be diagnosed with breast
9	7	"I'm sorry". Someone has had to have made whoever	9		cancer. It has been three years, and I'm alive to
10		that first person was that made that decision has	10		tell the tale and that was life altering in itself,
11		ruined so many lives and that person had a knock-on	10		but what the Post Office did, no, I will never forget
12		effect to everybody else's decisions after that, and	12		that.
13		someone's got to be held accountable for that, someone	12		I will never forget what they did to me and my
13		has to be.	13		family and the rest of us as well. So yes, I hope
		I mean, an apology is never going to be enough.			
15 16			15		that all of us postmasters and branch managers,
16 17		Compensation is never going to be enough because none	16		whoever else has been affected by this, get the
17		of us are ever going to get over this, ever. But	17		compensation and the rightful acknowledgement that
18 10	0	somebody has to be held accountable.	18		we're all innocent and that we need something done and
19 20	Q.	Is there anything else you would like to say to the	19		be held accountable for it.
20		Chair?	20		And thank you for listening to me.
21	Α.	ö ,1	21	010	Thank you, Sir Wyn.
22		down here in the car and I had a cry reading it to my	22	2IK	R WYN WILLIAMS: Well, thank you for coming. It is very
23		husband reading it out. It is fine typing something	23		difficult to sit there and do what you have done, so
24 25		but, once you read it out you get overly emotional. But, no, I think we have covered most of that in	24 25		thank you very much. You're welcome.
		BUT TO I TRIPK WO POVO COVOROD MOST OF that IN	1 25	Λ	

(14) Pages 53 - 56

1	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you for introducing me to your	1	_	should be dated 8 February 2022; is that right?
2	husband.	2	Α.	
3	A. He is my rock.	3	Q.	If you turn to the last page, which I think is
4	MS KENNEDY: Thank you, Chair. Our next witness is	4		page 11, is that your signature?
5	Ms Marion Holmes.	5	Α.	That's my signature.
6	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. Take your time, there's no	6	Q.	Have you read there you this statement recently?
7	rush.	7	A.	Yes.
8	(Pause)	8	Q.	Is it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
9	MS KENNEDY: Sorry. Yes, our next witness is Mrs Marion	9	Α.	Yes. The only slight difference is at one point it
10	Holmes.	10		says the his conviction was on the front page of
11	MARION HOLMES (sworn)	11		the paper and it wasn't, it was further inside but
12	Questioned by MS KENNEDY	12	0	other than that I think it's right.
13	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mrs Holmes, before Ms Kennedy asks you	13	Q.	Thank you. Turning then to your second statement, it
14	questions, I can see you've got a photograph and I can	14		is dated 8 March 2022?
15	suspect who it is, so will you show us, please?	15	A.	Yes.
16	Thank you.	16	Q.	It runs to two pages?
17	MS KENNEDY: My name is Ruth Kennedy and I ask questions	17	A.	Yes.
18	on behalf of the Inquiry. Could you confirm your full	18	Q.	Is that your signature there?
19	name please?	19	A.	That is.
20	A. Marion Holmes.	20	Q.	Have you read through this recently?
21	Q. Have you got I think you've got two witness	21	Α.	Yes.
22	statements. Have you got a copy of both of those	22	Q.	Is it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
23	there?	23	A.	Yes.
24	A. Yes.	24	Q.	I'm going to ask a couple of introductory questions
25	Q. Looking first at the first statement, I think it 57	25		about you. How old are you now? 58
1	∆ Still 79	1		hotels do
1 2	 A. Still 79. Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband 	1 2	0	hotels do. Why did he want to work for the Post Office?
2	 A. Still 79. Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? 	2	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office?
2 3	Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name?	2 3	Q. A.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been
2 3 4	Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband.What was his name?A. Peter Anthony Holmes.	2 3 4	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he
2 3 4 5	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? 	2 3 4 5	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make
2 3 4	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. 	2 3 4	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel
2 3 4 5 6 7	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 - nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? 	2 3 4 5 6	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but
2 3 4 5 6	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. 	2 3 4 5 6 7	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 - nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	_	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	Α.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else.
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	Α.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else. When Horizon was introduced he was already working in
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be a subpostmaster for I don't I can't remember 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	Α.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else.
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be a subpostmaster for I don't I can't remember when he came out of being a subpostmaster, when we 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15	A. Q.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else. When Horizon was introduced he was already working in Jesmond; is that right? Yes.
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be a subpostmaster for I don't I can't remember 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16	A. Q. A.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else. When Horizon was introduced he was already working in Jesmond; is that right?
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be a subpostmaster for I don't I can't remember when he came out of being a subpostmaster, when we sold it, but then he went as relief postmaster when 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17	A. Q. A. Q.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else. When Horizon was introduced he was already working in Jesmond; is that right? Yes. Do you know what training he received at that time?
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be a subpostmaster for I don't I can't remember when he came out of being a subpostmaster, when we sold it, but then he went as relief postmaster when people went on holiday or when the Post Office wanted somebody to run an office. And then he was offered 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18	A. Q. A. Q.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else. When Horizon was introduced he was already working in Jesmond; is that right? Yes. Do you know what training he received at that time? According to his letter, he had two days, which he
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be a subpostmaster for I don't I can't remember when he came out of being a subpostmaster, when we sold it, but then he went as relief postmaster when people went on holiday or when the Post Office wanted 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19	A. Q. A. Q. A.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else. When Horizon was introduced he was already working in Jesmond; is that right? Yes. Do you know what training he received at that time? According to his letter, he had two days, which he wrote and said was not adequate and nobody really knew what they were talking about.
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be a subpostmaster for I don't I can't remember when he came out of being a subpostmaster, when we sold it, but then he went as relief postmaster when people went on holiday or when the Post Office wanted somebody to run an office. And then he was offered in 1996, he was offered a job as manager of the Jesmond Post Office. 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20	A. Q. A. Q. A.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else. When Horizon was introduced he was already working in Jesmond; is that right? Yes. Do you know what training he received at that time? According to his letter, he had two days, which he wrote and said was not adequate and nobody really knew
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be a subpostmaster for I don't I can't remember when he came out of being a subpostmaster, when we sold it, but then he went as relief postmaster when people went on holiday or when the Post Office wanted somebody to run an office. And then he was offered in 1996, he was offered a job as manager of the Jesmond Post Office. 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	A. Q. A. Q. A. Q.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else. When Horizon was introduced he was already working in Jesmond; is that right? Yes. Do you know what training he received at that time? According to his letter, he had two days, which he wrote and said was not adequate and nobody really knew what they were talking about. You have mentioned a letter, could you just explain
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	 Q. You talk in your statement about your late husband. What was his name? A. Peter Anthony Holmes. Q. How long were you married before he died? A. 50 nearly 52 years. Q. How many children do you have? A. Three. Q. What jobs did Peter have before he became a subpostmaster and went on to work for the Post Office? A. He was a policeman for 12 years and then we went his parent's hotel, when they retired, and we were there for nearly 20 years and then he went in to be a subpostmaster for I don't I can't remember when he came out of being a subpostmaster, when we sold it, but then he went as relief postmaster when people went on holiday or when the Post Office wanted somebody to run an office. And then he was offered in 1996, he was offered a job as manager of the Jesmond Post Office. Q. Where was the hotel that he ran for many years? 	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	A. Q. A. Q. A. Q.	Why did he want to work for the Post Office? When we came out of the hotel I mean he had been self-employed for best part of his working life, so he wanted to be self-employed but he also wanted to make sure that there was a steady income and in the hotel we had always I mean, we say we ran it, but basically people came and stayed with us. So we were involved with the people and he wanted to continue that and in a post office you are, you're very much involved with the people. And so I think that was probably the biggest motivation for taking a post office as opposed to anything else. When Horizon was introduced he was already working in Jesmond; is that right? Yes. Do you know what training he received at that time? According to his letter, he had two days, which he wrote and said was not adequate and nobody really knew what they were talking about. You have mentioned a letter, could you just explain a bit about that?

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1		different kinds of post office, there's the	1		discrepancies?
2		sub-post offices but then there's the Crown Offices,	2	Α.	No, no.
3		and a lot of the work that was done was on what	3	Q.	Do you know what he would do, did he ever tell you
4		a subpostmaster would never come across, but Crown	4		about what he would do when he noticed shortfalls or
5		Offices would, but they lumped it all together. So,	5		discrepancies?
6		obviously, the training was biased towards the Crown	6	Α.	Yes. It is hard to remember what he told me at the
7		Offices and I think he states that it didn't touch on	7		time and what I have found out after we had got into
8		how to balance, which is a major part of the	8		the process of, you know, after he had been sacked,
9		post office and, really, when he asked questions,	9		but I did know that when he had his own post office
10		nobody knew what the answers were. He felt as if the	10		they had a system and I went with him to the we did
11		trainers were training as they went along.	11		a day's interview, I think, and I before he got
12	Q.	Do you remember him talking about how he found using	12		a post office and I went with him and the one thing
13		Horizon at the time?	13		I can remember them saying was "Any shortfalls you are
14	Α.	Not really, because I had just set up my own business.	14		responsible for".
15		For the first time in our lives, you know, we were	15		So Peter had a separate account which he had
16		running separate businesses, so yes, he I remember	16		kept and if the weekend balance said $\pounds 50$ down, then he
17		him coming home I think it was the second day,	17		would put it in out of that account because he knew
18		I think it was a short he was home earlier than we	18		that maybe in two weeks' time that would come back.
19		had expected, and he says "Oh", he says "It's not	19		And, evidently, he was waiting for error notices to
20		none of them know what they're doing". It had been	20		come back, but I didn't know this until afterwards.
21		a waste and this must have been when the	21	Q.	You mention in your statement that Peter's post office
22		Horizon System was actually on trial because I think	22		was subjected to an audit, I think in 2008. Do you
23		it didn't actually go into live stream until into the	23		remember what they found?
24		19 2000s, yes I get mixed up. Yes.	24	Α.	Yes. They found that there was 46,000, so many
25	Q.	Did he ever talk to you about noticing shortfalls or	25		hundred and so many pence short. Again, you know,
		61			62
1		I knew nothing of it until he came to the shop and	1		when I was on the stairs, and I said "They don't
2		called me out and said "I have just been kicked out of	2		seriously think you took that money?" and he said,
3		the post office", and that was yeah.	3		"Yeah, they do". Yes, and they did.
4	Q.	How did that make you feel?	4	Q.	How did it feel to have people like that in your home?
5	Α.	Dazed. You know, and I yes, my assistant said	5	Α.	Awful. You know, you just can't you can't
6		"Look, Marion, get yourself home, you're needed more	6		comprehend it because, again, you know, the last
7		at home than you are here". So she took over the	7		person who would ever take anything was Peter,
8		shop, cancelled the class that I was supposed to be	8		you know. It wasn't I remember I mean, we were
9		taking that night, but we always thought that, well,	9		in Lincoln once and we had all gone out for a carvery
10		he was innocent so, you know, I don't think we really	10		and there was a mix-up in the bill. When we got back
11		believed.	11		Peter realised that they had missed one of the meals
12		And I remember the next day I came back from	12		off. He drove 20 minutes back to that pub and paid
13		I used to keep a lot of spare equipment in the garage	13		them, you know. That's somebody who would take money
14		and I came back and the door was unlocked, and I said,	14		from his own post office? But they believed him.
15		"Oh, where's your car", and he said, "Oh, they have	15	Q.	What did they accuse him of doing? What crime?
16		brought me home". I said "Who", and he said "Oh,	16	A.	To start with, it was theft of 46,000 and it wasn't,
17		they're upstairs", and three of the Post Office people	17		you know, "Have you taken it?" but "What have you done
18		had come to the brought him home and were going	18		with it?" Nobody said "Have you taken it?" They said
19		through everything in his office. And Peter, being	19		"What have you done with it?" There was his he
20		Peter, had said "Anybody fancy a brew?" which was his	20		worked for the father and the two sons, and there were
		first words, whether it was a workman or anything,	21		the three of them and the three Post Office,
21		you know, "Anybody fancy a brew?"	22		evidently, in the room.
21 22					
22			23		-
22 23		"No". He said "I'm going to have one". So one	23 24		Fortunately, I heard a lot of them were taken to
22			23 24 25		-

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			1		
1		bought this, have you bought that? What have you done	1		post office, so you had to balance, so the advice was
2		with it? Where is the money?" It must have been	2		balance it and it will sort itself out, and it didn't.
3		awful, you know.	3	Q.	What sentence did he receive?
4	Q.	What was he convicted of, I think you say, in the	4	Α.	Three months curfew. He was supposed to be tagged but
5		beginning of 2010?	5		as one of our friends who had been
6	Α.	Yes. I think it was December 2009. We had two	6		a probation officer, he spoke to the defence
7		appearances at the Crown Court and at the first one we	7		barrister the prosecuting barrister, sorry, and he
8		were called in to the barrister's office before and he	8		had said "It's the first time I have been in court
9		said, "Oh, the Post Office have said if you admit	9		when the prosecuting barrister, the judge and the
10		false accounting we will drop the theft charge".	10		defence barrister are all on the same side". The
11		Well, as an ex-policeman, a 67-year old with diabetes,	11		judge he basically said "I've got to give you
12		he did not want to go to the prison. I mean, he knew	12		a sentence", and that was he didn't want to give
13		what ex-policemen's lives were like if it they ever	13		him community service, so he tagged him for
14		went into prison and naively, unfortunately, we	14		three months curfew for from 7 o'clock at night
15		were we didn't think if he pleaded guilty to false	15		until 7.00 the next morning. But they never did put
16		accounting plus, as he said, he knew he had because	16		a tag on him. They just trusted him to do it and he
17		the advice was always "Well, if you balance up, it	17		did.
18		will right itself", so you write in a false number.	18	Q.	What was that curfew like? How did you find it?
19		That's the way the system was taught. So that's what	19	Α.	It was difficult. I mean one of the first problems
20		he did.	20		was that the first meeting we went to for the JFSA was
21		So he knew, basically, yes, once you have done	21		in Bedford, and so Peter said to Alan Bates, "If
22		that you have false accounted, but one of the problems	22		I come down, can I see somebody straightaway because
23		was that balances were always on the Wednesday and	23		I can just about get from Newcastle to Bedford, see
24		pension day and benefits day was on a Thursday. Well,	24		somebody and get back within the 12 hours that I'm
25		if you didn't balance, you couldn't open the	25		allowed", and, you know, things like that.
		65			66
1		Friday night, we used to go and deliver I did	1		is his sense of humour", and I said to my daughter,
2		wedding cakes as part of my business, so we would	2		I said "The sad thing is, I had forgotten he had got
3		deliver them on a Friday night, and then stop for	3		one", and that really sums up what happened to him.
4		a meal and spend the profit on the way back and we	4	Q.	You have mentioned your cake shop business, which you
5		couldn't do that, you know. There was lots of	5		owned at the time that Peter was being investigated
6		little my youngest daughter was going visiting	6		and I think you mention in your statement that you
7		universities but, if Peter took her, he had to make	7		paid money into a joint account. Could you tell us
8		sure that he could get back for 7 o'clock.	8		a bit about that?
9		Yes, little things, you know, compared with what	9	Α.	Yes, I mean it was a perfect storm. The way my
10		a lot of them did. We were lucky, but it was it	10		business worked, I banked I think it was Santander
11		was things that just sort of impact on your life that	11		and I could pay as many cheques in it was before
12		you don't realise, until you have lost your freedom,	12		the days of cards. Very few people used cards and
13		what it's like to be able to come and go as you want.	13		I could pay as many cheques in as I wanted free of
14	Q.	How was Peter after his conviction?	14		charge, but cash I could only pay a certain amount in
15	A.		15		and then I got charged. So we would put the cash into
16		nothing happened overnight and, really, it was only	16		the joint account. Our accountant just took the whole
17		when you're looking back. I would think a simple way	17		lot and sorted it out at the end. And it was just
18		of saying it was he shut down. I was I took on	18		unfortunate that almost the exact amount that went in
19		extra work so that we could keep our heads above the	19		in that year was the amount that went missing from the
20		water, so really we didn't see much of each other.	20		Post Office.
21		I mean, three days a week I was going out at 8.00 in	21		And, of course, Peter was one that he was
22		the morning and coming back at 10 o'clock at night	22		always, always, early for anywhere, so when he was at
23		and, really, he had nothing to do but sit around.	23		work he was there by the time the shop the
24		So, yes, I it was only when he died and most	24		post office was in the back of a Medicentre, so he was
25		of the letters that I got said "The thing I will miss	25		there when Sunil came to open up and he was in and he
-*		67			68

1		got everything sorted out, including paying my money	1		took me down to London because I don't think I would
2		into the bank, because of Barclays bank with the	2		have gone on my own, but it was lovely just to hear
3		post office, so he could do it there and then, all	3		somebody say "He is innocent". But I just wish he
4		paid in, everything out, "Right, I'm ready for	4		had he will know one day.
5		starting".	5	0	I'm going to ask you some questions about the impact
6		And afterwards they said that that was why he	6	α.	that all of this has had on you. In your statement
7		had gone in early, was to pinch money.	7		you mention the loss of his salary. Is there anything
8		Looked at from the outside, yes, you can see	8		else you wanted to mention in terms of the financial
9		where they were coming from, but it was just the way	9		impact that you have suffered?
10		he worked and it was just what he was like, you know.	10	٨	No. I mean, as I say, the one thing I could do extra
11		He knew that he did a lot of foreign currency, so	10	А.	was teaching and it was the one profitable bit of my
12			12		
		he knew that once there was a travel agent in the			business, so we were lucky because (a) we were on a
13		street and so he knew once that door opened, it was	13		the end of our mortgage and it was an interest-only
14		heads down and often he didn't look up until the door	14		mortgage, so it actually matured just after Peter
15		closed. So, you know, he was ready for it, but no,	15		died. So I was then able to sell the house, buy
16	•	that was why he went in early, was to pinch money.	16		a small bungalow, take equity out, and that's what I'm
17	Q.	You mention in your statement that his conviction was	17		living on now. I couldn't have done it in the house
18		overturned after he died; is that right?	18		but I was able to do it by selling down.
19		How does it feel to know that he wouldn't get to	19		And, other than that, it's really well, you
20		see that?	20		just think about everything you spend, you know. Can
21	Α.	Bitter sweet. I never thought I would become	21		I afford this? Can I afford that? It's something
22		a campaigner, but once he had died I thought "There's	22		that is permanently on your mind, but, as I say, we
23		nothing I'm going to stop until everybody gets what	23		didn't go under. We didn't lose our house. We were
24		they want, what they deserve". And, yes, it my son	24		lucky. Lots of them weren't.
25		took me down I shall be forever grateful that he 69	25	Q.	You mention in your statement that Peter's story was 70
1		covered in the local press. Can you just tell us	1		wanted.
2		a bit about that?	2	Q.	What impact did that have on his reputation in the
3	A.	I think that was the bit that hurt him most because	3		community?
4		a friend rang us up the following day and said	4	Α.	The people who knew us and a lot of people who he
5		I mean, one of our friends who had had a son who was	5		hadn't seen and had forgotten about, you know,
6		killed in a car accident, and she said "Beware of	6		ex-colleagues from the Police Force, got in touch and
7		doorstep press". And Peter said "Right" well, the	7		said "This is wrong, there's no way you have stolen
8		doorbell went, Helen answered it, and she said "Oh,	8		any money". I mean, they all knew he was the last
9		Dad, it's for you". You know, you think you're ready	9		person to ever steal money. How many people thought
10		and you're not. And this person who was obviously	10		that there was no smoke without fire, I don't know.
11		press and said, you know, could he speak to him, and	10		They're the ones you never know but, certainly, the
12		he said no. And our next door neighbour said "You	12		people that we knew, nobody even began to believe that
13		realise when that person was at your door, there was	13	0	he was guilty.
14		somebody across the road taking a photograph"	14	Q.	You mention in your statement that he wanted to
15		So the next morning, friends said "Have you seen	15		volunteer for Daft as a Brush, a charity. Can you
16		the Journal this morning?" and there is a big awful	16		tell us a bit about that?
17		photograph of Peter, with a full page "Ex-policeman	17	Α.	Yes, I mean, it's a charity that somebody set up and
18		guilty of false accounting", and a full page about it,	18		they go around and pick anybody up that's going for
19		and I think that was the bit that really hurt him and	19		chemotherapy to the local hospital and they have these
20		he always said, really, all he wanted was his name	20		blue vans with the yellow brushes all over. Daft as
21		cleared and an article in the paper the size of the	21		a Brush. Where the name came from, but it's lovely,
22		one when he was convicted. And bless them, Sam Stein	22		and they're run by volunteer drivers with a volunteer
23		and crew, I just throwaway remark, but they	23		helper, and they will take somebody to chemo and sit
24		arranged for the paper to come down and his name has	24		with them, if they want, and then bring them home.
25		been cleared in the local paper, which was what he 71	25		And he said, you know the one thing he loved was 72

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			1		
1		driving and it was the one job he could have done was	1		27, yes, but he had lived with that and lived with it
2		driving for that, and he said "I can't because I will	2		well, but you get to your 70s and you think, well, is
3		have to do a CRB check and they will find out I've got	3		it just old age creeping in or is there something
4		a conviction", so he never even did that.	4		wrong. Yes, it's difficult to quantify really.
5	Q.	Do you know how that made him feel?	5	Q.	What about the impact on your health?
6	Α.	Yes, he felt helpless and hopeless, you know, and	6	Α.	Well, again I had to have a mastectomy eight years
7		worthless, I suppose, because I mean the only thing	7		ago. Again, some studies say stress causes that, but
8		that kept him going, really, was the JFSA because it	8		I I'm a Yorkshire girl and a Yorkshire farmer's
9		was something he could get involved in. Other than	9		daughter and I suppose our ethos is, well, you just
10		that, he had nothing. I mean, his love was driving.	10		keep going and yes, I have come through it. Just.
11		Well, you can't drive without money. He had to sell	11	Q.	Was there an impact on your marriage?
12		his beloved Subaru, his Scooby, and that was it, yes.	12	Α.	Yes. I mean, I think I was thinking the other day
13	Q.	What was the impact of all of this on his health?	13		and, really, you know, you start off married life and
14		Well, it didn't do it any good. I mean, he died of	14		then the children come along and then when they have
15		a brain tumour, and there's a lot of experiments,	15		gone you join together. We never got that last bit.
16		a lot of statements done, a lot of work done saying	16		It just we just chugged along together and, yes,
17		that stress is a big part of cancer. It's easy how	17		we I mean, I didn't retire until 2012 and he died
18		long is a piece of string? We don't know why he got	18		in 2015 and, in that time, basically, we had no money
19		cancer of the brain but it certainly didn't help him	19		to do anything anyway, you know. You have lost a lot
20		and, yes, it we used to tease him that he hasn't	20		of life that you don't realise at the time, until you
21		got two legs, he's got four wheels. But I think	20		look back and see what you have gone along, yeah.
22		because we couldn't go out, he hadn't anything to do,	22	0	Did it have an impact on your children?
23		so he did just sit around and, yes, it didn't do his	23	а. А.	They had to go to work the two older ones were at
23 24		health any good whatsoever.	23	Π.	work. They had both left home, but they had to go to
24 25		I mean he had been diabetic since he was 27	24		work the next day knowing that their father's
20		73	25		74
1		picture and Pete was always it wasn't as if they	1		l want.
2		didn't know who was I mean, Fiona was married, so		0	
			2	Q.	Is there anything else you would like to say to the Chair?
3		she didn't have the name Holmes, but people knew that	3		
4		he was her dad because he was always involved in their	4	А.	I'm on my soap box now. I mean, one of the things
5		life.	5		I would like is everybody, whether it is Post Office,
6		Helen, the younger one, she was actually sitting	6		Fujitsu or the Government, that either had a hand in
7		an A-level exam the day he was convicted, or	7		this or knew about it, to be made to sit in a room and
8		a AS-level or something, and she was hoping to go on	8		see all these witness statements. They're harrowing
9		to go to university, although as a mature student, and	9		and, maybe at the end of that, they will realise that
10		she said she wasn't going because we couldn't she	10		we weren't just subpostmasters, we were people whose
11		would have to get she was going to get a job to	11		lives they actually devastated and there's nothing
12		help support us.	12		that can really bring that back.
13		And we had a big job persuading her to go, but	13		They say they're sorry. Words are cheap. We
14		she went. She went to Huddersfield but, bless her,	14		couldn't stand up in court and say "I'm ever so sorry"
15		every Friday night she drove home and she worked as	15		and then walk out and carry on as if nothing had
16		a dog groomer on a Saturday and a kennel maid on	16		happened. We had consequences to pay and so should
17		a Sunday and she drove back so that she could support	17		anybody who was involved in this, you know. It was
18		herself, because we weren't able to, and she nearly	18		awful.
19		didn't she is now a successful pharmacist but she	19		The other thing they say was, "Well, everybody
20		very nearly wasn't.	20		is getting compensation"; they're not. They're still
21	Q.	What would you like from the Post Office now?	21		fighting compensation. You know, they have hired
22		Fairness, you know. I want them to acknowledge what	22		a top law firm and they have if Mr Loophole isn't
23		they have done. They're still fighting it. They're	23		one of them, he is a very close cousin, because they
		not they're not now, you know, accepting that what	24		are looking into every single thing, every single
24		not any remotion, you mow, decepting that what			
24 25		they did was so wrong and I think that's mostly what	25		case. They're doing basically what the Post Office

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1	are very good at: spending money, other people's	1	of it being a public company, although they deny it is
2	money, to try and dig themselves out of a hole.	2	a public company, is that we can get backers because
3	I think I heard one lady say that she had been	3	they can't go bust. The disadvantage is they've got
4	turned down because it wasn't the Horizon System.	4	a bottomless pit to pay with and we haven't, and they
5	I was turned down because I hadn't got the right	5	knew that and they priced us out of court then.
6	probate. The JFSA are turned down, they're frightened	6	And, you know, I have been lucky. I don't know
7	that the backers will want more money. They're just	7	whether everybody has, but David and his colleagues
8	finding loopholes. I mean, it's I think David said	8	from Howe & Co are doing this, what is it called,
9	it was 1 September 2021 that they put my application	9	pro bono, but we shouldn't because we couldn't even
10	for compensation in.	10	apply for compensation if we didn't have any money.
11	It's now March and they keep saying, oh, yes,	11	We shouldn't have to do that, you know. That's the
12	I can get it. Bless David, he they only said that	12	Post Office should they blithely say, "Oh, yes
13	I could have compensation because he said I was coming	13	everybody is getting compensation", but they're not
14	here today and I would be talking about it and,	14	and I think, you know, everybody should immediately
15	suddenly, oh, I'm getting compensation. But that was	15	get a temporary you know, I have forgotten the
16	two weeks, nearly three weeks ago, and I still	16	word. What's compensation, is it, we're getting
17	you know, they're just fighting it and they shouldn't	17	before they send it out, before they decide
18	be, you know.	18	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Do you mean interim compensation?
19	We shouldn't have to apply for compensation.	19	A. Interim, thank you very much. I have lost my words.
20	The problem at the beginning was we had no money to	20	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Don't worry
21	fight them, it was this great big wall and we had got	21	A. Interim compensation, yes. Because we're all getting
22	no money to fight them, so they just thought that they	22	old. I mean, I was in my 60s and working when this
23	could walk all over us.	23	started. I'm 80 next month and a widow, and there's
24	I remember James Hartley saying, when we were	24	more people like them and, really, you know, it's as
25	going for joint litigation, and he said the advantage	25	David said, we have to be like Oliver Twist, keep
	77		78
1	asking for this and asking for that. We have proved	1	But there was I think at that particular
2	that we were right and they were wrong and we	2	meeting there were two, if not three, people who said
3	shouldn't have to keep fighting for them.	3	that they had actually found a buyer for their
4	Compensation won't take away what's happened,	4	post office, but they were turned down by the
5	but at least it will help us pay our bills, you know.	5	Post Office as being unsuitable. One even had his own
6	There's energy bills and everything, and I just look	6	post office already but he was classed as unsuitable.
7	at I saw a bit of a clip of a thing that Peter	7	Now, it is easy to say, "Oh, well you have lost your
8	made, a programme that Peter made and it started off	8	village post office, it's not our fault, postmaster
9	with one of the early JFSA meetings and I just	9	was pinching money and we can't get anybody else to
10	thought, you know, I have just seen most of those	10	run it". You know, or was it because they wanted to
11	people. Those people have aged more than ten years in	11	show profit and therefore it was helped their
12	the last ten years. They all looked so young compared	12	bonuses?
13	with what they do now and it's because we have spent	13	I don't know but I want to know why they did it
14	our time battling, and we're all tired of it,	14	because they knew, and Peter's letter proves that they
15	you know. Yes.	15	knew, so why did they keep on doing it? Why did they
16	The other thing I want to know is why they did	16	not stop?
17	it. Was it because they wanted to make more profit?	17	I think I hope I haven't left anything out,
18	I mean, I came we used to drive down to	18	but I think, apart from saying I mean, there's
19	Warwickshire and you've got four hours in the car	19	a lot of people helped me on my way. They all know
20	coming home, we used to, you know, go over what we had	20	who they are and I thank them greatly. David is here
21	talked about and there was one week I said "Do you	21	and David and co are here today and, without them,
22	know, I think it's a bit of a conspiracy", because it	22	I wouldn't be here, but also I would like to say thank
23	was at a time when they were trying to close	23	you, Sir Wyn, because I feel that you're not just
24	post offices down and there were protests from	24	listening to us, you're hearing us and that makes
25	everybody.	25	a big difference.
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1	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I'm supposed to say thank you to you,	1	Summary of witness statement of MALCOLM WATKINS (read)
2	it's the other way around. So thank you for coming.	2	MS PATRICK: Mr Watkins was appointed as subpostmaster of
3	Thank you for explaining your own experiences but,	3	the Great Gransden branch in St Neots
4	perhaps mostly, thank you for being such an effective	4	in December 2000.
5	advocate on behalf of your late husband.	5	He first experienced small shortfalls such as
6	Right, we're going to take a five-minute break.	6	£60 or £65 and he would pay the shortfalls from his
7	Then I'm going to invite Ms Patrick to read a few more	7	own pocket. He accepted that there was always going
8	statements, she has got her hand up, and then at	8	to be some element of shortfalls.
9	around 12.45, we will have lunch, and then we will	9	An audit occurred on 12 September 2003 and he
10	have our final witness at about 1.30, if that's all	10	was advised that £65,000 was missing. He tried to
11	right with everyone. Thank you very much.	11	tell the auditor that there must be something wrong
12	(12.20 pm)	12	with the system. A couple of weeks later he was told
13	(Short Break)	13	that there had been a mistake and the shortfall was
14	(12.29 pm)	14	actually £50,000.
15	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: By the machine in front of me it is	15	After the shortfall was alleged, his area
16	well, let's go by the clock. It is nearly 12.30, and	16	manager arrived. He suspended Mr Watkins and took all
17	by the machine. So we will stop again at 12.45.	17	the money and anything of value. He was charged with
18	Don't rush it, just do as many as you can in that	18	theft.
19	period, okay.	19	He pleaded guilty. His contract was terminated
20	MS PATRICK: Thank you, Chair.	20	and he paid the value of the shortfall shortly
21	I will continue reading the summaries of the	21	afterwards. He was sentenced to an 18-month prison
22	evidence of statements by Core Participants who are	22	sentence, suspended for 18 months.
23	represented by Hudgells Solicitors.	23	Mr Watkins was told by a solicitor that to stay
24	I begin with a summary of the evidence of	24	out of prison he had to bite the bullet and pay the
25	Mr Malcolm Watkins.	25	money back and put the shortages down to his lack of
	81		82
1	experience. He then instructed a different solicitor	1	absolutely nothing wrong."
2	and they told him the same thing.	2	He feels the Post Office employees were
2	He was also told this by the National Federation	2	blinkered and he wants to say to the Inquiry:
4	of SubPostmasters.	4	"They thought because [he] earned money and
- 5	To repay the shortfall, Mr Watkins had to	4 5	drove a nice car it must come from the money I had
6	remortgage his home. His payments went up. He	6	taken. It never occurred to them that I worked seven
7	suffered anxiety and depression. When he was	7	days a week and started at 5.00 am in the morning."
8	prosecuted, he felt alone because no one believed him	8	He says to the Inquiry he cannot put a price on
9	and everyone assumed he was guilty.	9	his life being destroyed.
10	He told his wife that he had thought about	10	Next we turn to a summary of the evidence of
10	killing himself. There were occasions when he wanted	10	Mr Tahir Mahmood.
12	to end it and says he was in a "horrendously dark	12	Summary of witness statement of TAHIR MAHMOOD (read
12	place".	13	MS PATRICK: Mr Mahmood is married and a father of four.
13 14	As a result of the events with the Post Office		He was appointed subpostmaster at the Ten Acre branch
14		14 15	
16	he suffered anxiety and depression and took	16	in Selly Oak in May 1999. He liked the idea of
17	anti-depressants. He tried and struggled to sleep.	17	serving the community.
	After his conviction was publicised in the press		After Horizon was installed in 2000, he received
18 10	his family experienced abuse. He says he went from	18 10	about two weeks' very basic training. During that
19 20	being totally mortgage free to being on a debt	19 20	training, a shortfall of around £4,000 to £6,000 was
20 21	management plan. The situation led to his divorce.	20 21	showing on Horizon. The trainer told him to put it in
21 22	He wants the Inquiry to know he went from being	21	a suspense account and this would eventually correct
22	respected in the community to being a social outcast.	22	itself.
22	On 19 July 2021 his conviction was overturned.	23	Mr Mahmood says of the helpline, "it was very
23		04	and a lock of the standing of a standing of the standing of th
23 24 25	He says: "I was put through hell and I did nothing,	24 25	unhelpful". They indicated to him that the system was not at fault and that the shortfall would eventually

		1	
1	resolve itself. He was eventually forced to pay the	1	SubPostmasters who was not very helpful.
2	shortfall in full.	2	Investigators suggested he was the only person to have
3	He tells the Inquiry that he experienced two	3	experienced problems with Horizon.
4	robberies at the branch, which saw him and his sister	4	When the Post Office demanded payment of the
5	both held at gunpoint. Throughout 2003 and 2004	5	shortfall, he didn't have the money to pay. On
6	shortfalls continued to occur, but the levels were	6	18 July 2005 he pleaded not guilty to false
7	increasing. He continued to put his own cash in to	7	accounting. On transfer to Birmingham Crown Court and
8	pay shortfalls but, by January 2005, Horizon was	8	on legal advice, he pleaded guilty in order to avoid
9	showing a shortfall of approximately £25,000.	9	a custodial sentence.
10	He says "I knew I needed help", and he asked his	10	At the time, he had two young children and his
11	father to help pay. This really hurt Mr Mahmood	11	wife was pregnant.
12	because he did not want to tell his family and he did	12	Mr Mahmood was sentenced to nine months'
13	not want to let them down.	13	imprisonment and spent time at Winson Green and
14	On 30 April he was audited. The shortfall was	14	Sudbury prisons. He did not expect a custodial
15	around £33,000 and the Post Office investigators	15	sentence and had attended court without his diabetes
16	interviewed him. He recalls an investigator saying	16	medication.
17	things like "You're a criminal, this was a criminal	17	Of Winson Green prison, he says:
18	act and you took that money". He says of that day:	18	"You were kept in your cell for most of the day
19	"I was so ashamed when I went home. I broke	19	and only allowed out to shower in the morning, to eat
20	down and told my family about what happened. I felt	20	and for very short exercise breaks."
21	like I had let them down. I also felt like I had let	21	He refused his wife and children requests to
22	my community down. It was one of the worst days of my	22	visit him as he was ashamed. His third child was born
23	life."	23	while he was in prison and he wants the Inquiry to
24	He was interviewed again on 3 May 2005 with	24	know this left him absolutely devastated.
25	a representative from the National Federation of	25	He was released in February 2006 and wore a tag
	85		86
1	for another six months.	1	Summary of witness statement of JOHN ARMSTRONG (read)
2	Once prospective employees find out about his	2	MS PATRICK: In 1996 Mr Armstrong bought Weston
2	conviction, they no longer wish to employ him. The	3	Post Office and became subpostmaster there. He then
4	family home was sold because he could no longer afford	4	later purchased Woolston Post Office in February 2003.
5	to pay the mortgage. He sold the post office branch	5	He had been encouraged to buy Woolston by the
6	at a loss of around \pounds 35,000. He and his family were	6	Post Office, which he felt demonstrated that the
7	homeless and had to rely on homeless hostels for	7	management had confidence in his ability to increase
8	around eight months.	8	its business successfully.
9	His parents returned to Pakistan and his brother	9	For a short period he was running both
9 10	and sister moved away because he could no longer	10	post offices. When shortfalls started appearing, the
10		10	help desk told him how to adjust the shortfall and
12	afford to support them.	12	
	Mr Mahmood is currently unemployed and reliant		told him it would work itself out the next day. It
13	on benefits. He wants the Inquiry to know about the	13	never did.
14	impact within his wider family. At family gatherings	14	This had also happened previously at the Weston
15	he would hear people gossipping about him and staring	15	branch. At that time he repaid a shortfall of
16	at him. He found this difficult as he thought some of	16	approximately £3,000.
17	them may have believed he did take the money.	17	By the time the auditors visited his second
18	He had not previously told his children about	18	branch, the shortfalls had risen to almost £10,000.
19 00	his conviction and only told them following its	19	Two auditors visited the Woolston branch on
	quashing by the Court of Appeal. Mr Mahmood says:	20	28 June 2004, very early in the morning, at 8.10. He
20		21	told them they would find a £10,000 shortfall. He was
21	"Nothing can undo what I have been subjected to		-
21 22	and the impact that this has had upon myself and my	22	suspended on 28 June 2005. He was told he would have
21 22 23	and the impact that this has had upon myself and my family."	22 23	suspended on 28 June 2005. He was told he would have to pay the shortfall after the audit. This left him
21 22	and the impact that this has had upon myself and my	22	suspended on 28 June 2005. He was told he would have

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1	around £10,000 and also £2,000 in costs.	1	finds it difficult to have conversations with
2	On 30 June 2005 he was interviewed and accused	2	strangers. He says:
3	of misusing his finances by having large boats and	3	"Thankfully, my wife stood by me."
4	cars, of which he says "This was all incorrect and	4	It devastates him to think about the effect this
5	quite upsetting". He was charged with theft and, on	5	has had on his wife. He said she became depressed and
6	advice from his barrister, reluctantly agreed to plead	6	that their lives are very different now. He describes
7	guilty in order to secure a lesser sentence. He could	7	being exonerated as wonderful but he wants
8	not risk going to prison. He was sentenced at	8	an explanation. He wants to tell the Inquiry he can't
9	Southampton Crown Court on 19 May 2006, given	9	remember what it feels like to be normal, although he
10	200 hours of community service and paid costs in the	10	tries. He does not think anything will erase the
11	region of £2,000.	11	stress of the past few years.
12	His conviction was overturned on 19 July 2021.	12	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I think we're quite close to 12.45, so
13	Of the impact upon him, Mr Armstrong says he has	13	you've got four summaries left?
14	been recently seen by a psychologist who recommended	14	MS PATRICK: Yes, sir.
15	psychological support. He says that after his	15	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Were you intending to be here this
16	conviction he became an introvert. He wouldn't speak	16	afternoon? I'm not asking you to be, just
17	to anyone, he wouldn't trust anyone. It was very	17	MS PATRICK: No, sir, I'm very much intending to stay to
18	lonely and he became, as he puts it, "completely the	18	the end of the day.
19	opposite to the extrovert I used to be". He said:	19	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right, well, if you're doing that and
20	"I had never had a problem speaking in public	20	you don't mind doing it, what I suggest is we start
21	before."	21	again at 1.30 with the witness and, depending how long
22	And during a previous marriage he had even been	22	that witness takes, there may be time for you to
23	a district and a parish councillor. He said he would	23	finish. But, as it happens, I do have to finish
24	also swim, training youngsters at a local swimming	24	earlier than normal today, so there's an outside
25	club. He wants the Inquiry to know that he still now	25	chance that you would be left hanging over and then
	89	20	90
4		4	
1	you would come to London next week, yes? Are you	1	 Q. Do you have a copy of that before you? A. I do.
2	happy with that?	2	
3	MS PATRICK: Sir, that is perfect as I understand it, we have other summaries to read in London, in any	3	Q. Can I ask you please to turn to the final page of your
4	· · · · ·	4	statement. Can you see your signature there? A. That's correct.
5	event, so I think that if we keep to a timetable	5	
6	that's appropriate for you and for the Inquiry	6	Q. Have you had a chance to re-read this statement since
7	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, as I say, if we have time this	7	you made it
8	afternoon, we will hear you, since you're good enough	8	A. Yes.
9	to stay, but otherwise it will be London next week.	9	Q at the beginning of February? Is its content true
10	Fine, great. See you at 1.30.	10	to the best of your
11	(12.44 pm)	11	A. It is, but I would just like to make a few corrections
12	(The luncheon adjournment)	12	and it is my fault for not spotting them earlier, but
13	(1.30 pm)	13	having re-read and re-read, and I was so may I,
14	MS HODGE: Good afternoon, sir. Our final witness for	14	sir, ask
15	today is Mrs Sally Stringer.	15	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Of course.
16	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes.	16	A. Point 2, the year should be 2021, not 2020.
17	SALLY MARY KATHLEEN STRINGER (sworn)	17	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Fine.
18	Questioned by MS HODGE	18	A. Point 48, it should add 2021, after the audits of
19	MS HODGE: Mrs Stringer, as you know, my name is Catriona	19	2012.
20	Hodge and I ask questions on behalf of the Inquiry.	20	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes.
21	Please can you state your full name?	21	A. Point 94, it should be 2013 not 2016.
22	A. Sally Mary Kathleen Stringer.	22	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes.
23	Q. Thank you. You made a witness statement on 1 February	23	A. Point 120, it should have "after 4 January 2021".
24	of this year; is that right?	24	And 136 should delete "Post Office Limited". It
25	A. That's correct.	25	should just be "the group litigants".
	91		92

1	SIF	WYN WILLIAMS: Yes.	1		So we bought a deli in Cheltenham with a short
2	MS	HODGE: Is your statement of 1 February otherwise true	2		seven-year lease that was very successful. I had my
3		to the best of your knowledge and belief?	3		chemotherapy and we worked hard at making that
4	Α.	Yes. Sorry.	4		business work and then in 1995 my dear mother died,
5	Q.	Not at all, thank you.	5		which wasn't conducive to, you know, good health, but
6		I'm going to begin, Mrs Stringer, by asking you	6		that's how it was.
7		a few questions about your background. Are you	7		And our lease expired in 2002, so we thought we
8		married?	8		would move. We sold our house and moved to buy
9	A.	Yes, I am.	9		a trusted brand of a post office and village shop.
10	Q.	For how long have you been married?	10	Q.	You have mentioned a trusted brand, what attracted you
11	A.	A long time. 30-plus years.	11		to working for the Post Office?
12	Q.	You currently live in Lincolnshire?	12	Α.	Post Office, in my mind then, was a trusted brand.
13	A.		13		I had a savings book when I was a child, which was
14	Q.	When did you move there?	14		always something that, you know, you would take to
15	A.	I beg your pardon?	15		your post office, they would write down how much
16	Q.		16		you've got saved. It's something a generation doesn't
17	A.		17		do any more, but it was always there for communities
18		Before working in the Post Office you worked in the	18		too and it seemed to be, you know, quite a nice idea
19	-	travel and airline industry; is that right?	19		to have a village shop with a community around it and
20	Α.	Yes. I had a variety of jobs. I was a nurse and then	20		that's where we were at that particular time.
21	7.1	I worked in the airline business. I worked in the	21	0	You have mentioned that you ran several businesses
22		wine trade for ten years and then in 1994 I got breast	22	ч.	before you took on a post office and you worked in the
23		cancer, and I was 38 then, and we made a decision that	23		wine trade. When you were doing that, who was
24		we would buy a business and if I died it gave my	24		responsible for managing the accounts?
25		husband something to fall back on.	25	Δ.	I was. I managed two shops with a substantial income
		93			94
1		going through the company every week and, of course,	1		We got confirmation a week later that the
2		large stocks held on shelves. We had stocktaking	2		appointment was fine and we actually moved into the
3		every month, which I had to be accountable for, and	3		shop on 30 June 2002.
4		I carried a large staff with me as well. So,	4	0	Where was the shop located?
5		you know, it was very much a hands on, trust your	5		It was in a little village between Cheltenham and
6		staff if they did something wrong, they were fired.	6		Evesham, a little village called Beckford.
7		But it was an interesting business to be in at the	7	Q.	Can you describe the village, please?
8		time.	8	а. А.	Yes, in those days it was mainly farming community,
9	0	You have mentioned a date of 2002. Is that when you	9	7.1	farm workers who lived in tied cottages. The rich and
10	α.	applied to become a subpostmistress?	10		affluent lived in their bit and the poor lived in
11	Δ	Yes, that's when I suddenly realised we had sold	10		their bit, but the twain always got on. They were
12	7	our house in Cheltenham in the January of 2002 and we	12		never in each other's pockets, per se. Things changed
13		had seen the post office and shop it was a rundown	13		as the years went on but it was a small community
14		post office and shop and we had expressed an interest	14		which helped each other.
15		in that, so when our house had been sold, we moved in	15	0	You have mentioned selling your home before moving.
16		with my mother-in-law because that sold quite quickly	16	α.	Is that how you purchased
17		and then one had to apply to the Post Office for	10	A.	Yes.
18		an interview.	18	Q.	how you funded the purchase?
10		We started that process in February 2002 and it	10	Q. A.	We sold our home and we took out a small business loan
20		took them until June well, May, because when	20	А.	to top that up because we knew we had to buy stock and
20 21		I finally got an interview, I had to actually go	20		we wanted to change the rundown shop to have a deli
21		through the process and I got an interview in	21		counter, and bits and pieces, and the post office cage
					was alongside, then, our deli counter.
23		Chippenham on 21 May 2002, but my area manager was too busy to interview me on that day, so I was interviewed	23 24	0	Please can you describe the property that you
24			24	Q.	I IEASE CAILYOU DESCRIPT LIFE PROPERTY LITER YOU
24 25		by his boss, which is fine.	25		purchased?

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			1		
1	A.	Yes. It was a large village shop with a post office.	1		earning, when I was in the wine trade, about £25,000
2		The flat was above it. We had a three-bedroom flat	2		to £30,000 a year, so I took a pay cut of well,
3		above it, and it was actually attached to another	3		I went down to about 11 just over £11,000 for the
4		house, which was separate from our business and in the	4		Post Office. It is done on products, and the previous
5		courtyard we had an old stable block which we	5		postmistress hadn't done very much because they were
6		converted into holiday cottages, eventually, which,	6		divorcing. So the salary was quite low, so we thought
7		during the last few years was our saving grace, except	7		we could build that up a bit and then I discovered,
8		for COVID, but I mean that moves on 20 years. But	8		out of the salary game, that everybody has different
9		yes, we had plans to do all sorts of different things.	9		levels and if you're a Federation member you got extra
10	Q.	How did the business perform in the first few years?	10		products.
11	A.		11		So you could have DVLA stuff, or bureau de
12		community and we actually won rural retailer of the	12		change on demand, but if you were an ordinary rural
13		year in 2005, which was quite prestigious. It was	13		office and you weren't part of that conglomerate, you
14		a prestigious award to have at that time for supplying	13		stayed on the basic salaries and that went down over
15		local goods and dealing with local suppliers,	14		-
16		et cetera, and the shop we kept independent until	16	0	the years. Was the Horizon System installed in your branch before
17		2012, when we needed to go into a brand, because		Q.	
		-	17		you purchased it?
18		retailing changes and you have to adapt retailing to	18	-	Yes, it was.
19		change with the way things progress through the years.	19	Q.	Did you receive any training on this system before you
20		And so in 2012 13 I think, we joined Londis	20		took over?
21		as a brand but, prior to that, we stayed fairly	21	Α.	No. They couldn't arrange training. I was supposed
22		independent.	22		to go to Cheltenham for training at the main
23	Q.	What salary did you receive from the Post Office for	23		post office prior to us buying the business at the end
24		your work as a subpostmistress?	24		of June and no, that wasn't part of Post Office's
25	Α.	Yes, they're interesting, they paid me I was 97	25		remit to manage that. So I had no training at all on 98
1		their computer system. I know how to work a EPOS	1		So after the trainer left, I sat there and felt
		their computer system. I knew how to work a EPOS system because I had worked that for ten years in the			like an incompetent idiot because I couldn't
2		wine trade. We had a state-of-the-art EPOS system	2		actually I couldn't function with it. I didn't
3 4		-	3		•
4		with all the stock on and things, but no, I had not	4		know what to do with it. Luckily, in those days, the
5		one iota of training before I set foot in that cage on	5		pensioners because Thursday is pension day still
6	•	3 July.	6		had the pension books so you could tear a bit out of
7	Q.	What training did you then receive upon opening the	7		the pension book and "Okay, you're owed 50 quid",
8		branch?	8		that's fine 50 quid, and then you tap it into the
9	Α.	Well, none, really. I had when we opened the shop	9		machine. But when it got to the stage where it was
10		at the end of June we obviously filled the shop	10		all cards, that was a different ball game altogether.
11		shelves up with everything, but I couldn't go into the	11		But no, my training was non-existent really.
12		post office because the previous postmistress had to	12	Q.	Did you retain any paper records alongside using the
13		run it until they could sort out an audit and that	13		Horizon System?
14		audit wasn't until 3 July, so I didn't actually go	14	Α.	You well, no. I mean, well, in the early days you
15		into the post office until 3 July and my trainer	15		did but when you had to start balancing monthly, no,
16		arrived on 4 July and was there for a day and a half.	16		because it was all on the computer.
17		She arrived on the Thursday morning and she left at	17	Q.	Did you experience problems using the Horizon System
18		lunchtime on the Friday, and that was it.	18	Α.	Sorry?
		I was left with a computer screen that I had no	19	Q.	Did you experience problems using the Horizon System
19		idea how to navigate. I really had no idea because	20	A.	Oh, it was an absolute nightmare. I mean, from day
		you had to push a button here and push a button there,	21		one everything about it was convoluted, you know.
20					
20 21			22		There was no simplicity to it at all and I had errors
20 21 22		and whatever. It wasn't simple, per se. It wasn't	22 23		There was no simplicity to it at all and I had errors
20 21 22 23		and whatever. It wasn't simple, per se. It wasn't too bad once you got to know it but you couldn't	23		over the years amounting to thousands. Some I got
20 21 22		and whatever. It wasn't simple, per se. It wasn't			

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1 2055 with that performance – 1 Linew that there might be posal orders and things. 2 0. Yes, I was ging to – 2 Anywey he sid, ''m going to point a minute''. 4 0. Wind the served size is start occurring to you in the bonn? 6 and is ad' 'm fait size is start occurring to you in the bonn? 6 7 A. Wolf, the day of the audi was an interesting one in the bonn? 7 me, and a the then had to leave. And he said ''ust is add ''tune is start, what here, I was lowed a difference of paper'. 9 and I refe to my office now as a rat dage bocase 9 is add ''Enter you say here and way office to start. 11 incarcorated in a cape. So lapologies for that but 11 gave in and he had to al there. And to eventually gave in and here shows, all the bocks, all there shows, all the bocks, all the money, down to the list bag of pennies and, eventually, ighard for the stocks are stock. 13 The day of my audit, which was the first day. 10 the money, down to the list bag of pennies and, eventually dawn 14 I vas alowed to set food in there, the previous 14 the money, down to the list bag of pennies and, eventually, dawn 15 postimates was in there show and in day of paper', and I said ''Instituwe show method and they what it was the dawn and they dawn and way of the was allowed to set food in there, the previous and, what we day ou sign this piseod of paper', and I said ''				1		
3 A. But with egard to the general operation of the computer in the early days, it was just avhil. 3 and I said, "I'm that case I'm on signing your piece of paper, if's quite simple". And its also 'I'm sill working of apper'. 4 We life to my office now as an tacage because 9 I said 'Tim not signing the piece of paper'. 9 and I refer to my office now as a rat cage because 9 I said 'Tim not signing the piece of paper'. 11 inscremated in a cage. So I appolicies for that but in a sart cage. 12 took hown, hown, all the simps, all the books, all the money, down to the state ago paper and the we should be a stock of the stock as a true stock in a streage of paper', and it said 'Tim at just alarm 12 Took day of my audit, which was the first day 13 The day of my audit, which was the first day 13 The tage of paper' and the side ago paper', and it said 'Tim at just alarm 13 The day of my audit, which was the first day 13 The tage of paper', and tage because and the was table of paper', and tage because and the was table of paper', and tage because and the was table ador to tage because and the was table ador tooks, all the books, all the money, down to the state ago paper and the paper', and tage because ador took as a true stock in a streage because ador that my table ador took ador thand table stock ador took ador the stock is a streage be	1		2005 with that performance	1		I knew that there might be postal orders and things.
4 computer in the early days, it was just avhil 4 of paper, if suptice simple*, And he said "Too know, 5 Q. When did these issues first stat accurning to you in 5 this is what we've get", and I said "I'm sill wanding 7 A. Well, the day of the audit was an interesting one 7 me, and she them had to leave. And he said 'Usat 'Bob workal', and he paper'. 9 and I refer to my office now as a rat cage because 9 I said 'Ether you stay here and we go through this them. And I counted - It is as said 'List as a ventage. 12 11 intercented in a cage. So lapologies to that but 11 inter and he had to stab bap of pennies and. 14 I was allowed to sat foot in there, the provious 14 invas allowed to sat foot in there, the provious 14 invas allowed to sat foot in there, the provious 14 invas allowed to sat foot in there, the provious 14 eventually, i signed for the slock as a true stock to be count it, which the show ith my but and. 16 because 1 had counted it, bink - was quite happy for the slock as a true show at the show ith my but and. 17 you know, what area of my may as and it and this. 17 you know, what was allowed to sat foot in there as a prove of paper. 19 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10	2	Q.	Yes, I was going to	2		Anyway he said, "I'm going to go in a minute",
5 Q. When did heas issues first start occurring to you in the branch? 5 this is what we's opt''. and it and to leave. And he said 'Uset and and then had to leave. And he said 'Uset isgm' – I and ''m not sigming the price of paper'. 8 boccause that was my vary first day load/d get in – and if then how offs now as ard cage. 6 10 that is exactly what it was. I was like a rait incarcerated in a cage. So I apologise for that but incarcerated in a cage. So I apologise for that but incarcerates was in here so her audit took place, and is a day of my audit, which was the first day incarcerates was in here so her audit took place, and is a solewed to set tool in there, the previous postmistress was in here so her audit took place, and is work was used audit. "Right, just sign is a sole of paper' and is add is with me from day one, which is faily avuli is and way and the law as called in and this man said to me, who was the audit. Took place, and is because I had counted it, but here was called in and this man said one, who was the audit. Took place, and is because I day one, which is faily avuli is and anything else oy used to alse. I day is a carbon is a sole of paper'. 9 11 forward with this new system that hey were introducing which involve got to give. I day is about", because I ddm' throw was taking on, ioi 100 1 12 forward with this new system that hey were introducing which involve got to give. I day what we do, you sign the place of paper'. 1 1 13 forward with this new system that hey were introducing which involve got to give. I day what we do, you sign the place of paper'. 2 A	3	Α.	But with regard to the general operation of the	3		and I said, "In that case I'm not signing your piece
6 the branch? 6 because that was mixer stime resting one 7 A. Well, the day of the audit was an interesting one 7 8 because that was mixer my very first day localing tin - 7 9 and infer to my office now as a rat cage because 9 11 incaccerated in a cage. So I apologies for that but 11 12 tis easier brefer to it as a rat cage. 12 13 The day of my audit, which was the first day 13 the money, dawn to the last bag of penniss and. 14 Lwas allowed to set fort in there, the previous 14 eventually, ligited for the stock all 15 postmistress was in there so the raulitot kipkon, and 15 because I had counted. Lith the was guile happ for 16 Lwas allowed to set fort in there, the previous 14 eventually, ligited for the stock as a true stock 19 postmistress was in there so the raulitot regit, the said This is 20 1 belaw with me from day one, which is fairly awull 11 man asid to me, who was the auditor. This is 20 20 20 fortward with this new system that they were 1 21 forward with this new system hat they were 1 taking about".	4		computer in the early days, it was just awful.	4		of paper, it's quite simple". And he said "You know,
7 A. Well, the day of the audit was initensing one because that was my very first day locuid get in - 9 7 me, and shift han to lo save. And he said 'Lust signt' - I said 'Thm not signing the pice of paper'. 9 and refer to my office now as art cage. 9 I said 'Thm not signing the pice of paper'. 10 that is exactly what it was. I was like ar rat incaccertated in a cage. So I apologies for that but incaccertated in a cage. So I apologies for that but incaccertated in a cage. So I apologies for that but incaccertated in a cage. So I apologies for that but incaccertated in a cage. So I apologies for that but is easier to refer to it as a rat cage. 12 tho hours, hours, all the stamps, all the books, all the money, down the last mag of permiss and, eventually. I signed for the stock as a true stock because I had counted it, but have any like happy for me not to count it, which I think - that put atam the pice of paper', and I said in the signed of paper' and I said in the signe apper' and I said in the signe apper'. Q. You have mentioned in your statement that an issue arose in 2005 following the installation of new software. 21 forward with this new system that they were introducing which involved update in the software. introducing which	5	Q.	When did these issues first start occurring to you in	5		this is what we've got", and I said "I'm still wanting
8 because that was my very first day locut(get in - 8 sign ⁻¹ - latel "Im not signing below of paper". 9 and I refer to my office now as a rat cage because 9 I said "Ether you stay here and we go through this 11 incarcented in a cage. So I apologies for that but 11 gave in and he had to sit there. And he eventually 13 The day of my audit, which was the first day 13 the money. down to the last bag of pennies and, 14 I vas allowed to set foot in there, the previous 14 eventually, l signed for the stock, all 15 postimistress wain in there is other audit to kipao, and 16 menorey. down to the last bag of pennies and, 16 I vas faifing anything withing this sign 17 because 1 had counded it, but he was guite hampy for 17 you know, whatever, and thes allow Chago, and 16 menorey. down, with is fairly avful 18 maid to me, who was the auditor, "Right, lust sign 18 realy. 10 19 this piece of paper" and he gave ma piece of paper. 19 1 You have mentioned in your statement that an issue archive were tool paper and the gave were tool paper. 1 21 "Actalaly, fn not signing anything unti	6		the branch?	6		to count it", and the previous postmistress looked at
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1	moving to monthly accounting, whereas before it was	1	da-di-da-di-da, and he said, "Okay, well, you've got
2	weekly. And, on a weekly basis, you've got a fairly	2	to reverse all the transactions you have done and get
3	good idea of what you're doing week on week. Month on	3	back to square one". So I spent all day reversing
4	month, with no paperwork, it's a problem.	4	transactions on the telephone. Meanwhile, people are
5	And so we decided that we wouldn't have any	5	in for their pensions, "Sorry, shut".
6	stock in we wouldn't take any cash deliveries we	6	We took it back to square one and I, actually
7	wouldn't order any cash for that month, we wouldn't	7	to go forward, I actually met Alan in 2020 when I went
8	take any stamps in, so we would have a starting point	8	up to Chesterfield, and I explain that later, and
9	of transactions and, at the end of the first month, we	9	I did thank him for his help then because he actually
10	went through the training manual how to balance and it	10	knew what the problem was and was able to get me back
10	was out. It was out by double the stock and so I knew	10	to where I was. But I think that was an exception to
12	that there was a problem then and because we we	12	the rule because I was pedantic about it, I wasn't
			-
13	were so sure of what we had, with the transactions	13	going to rollover until this had happened, so that's
14	that we had done, we knew we hadn't had large sums in	14	where we were with that 2005.
15	and we hadn't paid much out. Our cash was, you know,	15	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Before we move on, can I just ask you
16	as it was but there was no way the stock stamps	16	in your statement when you are describing this, you
17	could be out.	17	use the word "I rang the Chesterfield helpline"?
18	So I rang the helpline and this is probably the	18	A. Yes.
19	only time the helpline was actually helpful. I spoke	19	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Is that to be distinguished from the
20	to a chap called Alan and I explained the problem and	20	helpline, or is this a different team or what?
21	I had shut because there's clearly an issue because	21	A. So when I I assumed, but until I started to
22	I wasn't going to rollover, because if I had rolled	22	look into Post Office properly, I assumed that
23	over I would have to accept the errors. So I stayed	23	Chesterfield was the head office.
24	in that particular accounting period and I rang this	24	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Right.
25	chap Alan and I said "Look, this is what's happened", 105	25	A. Because that was the number I had got on a piece of 106
1	nonce. It was siven to me by this women who trained	4	20 years I mat an area manager after I had
1	paper. It was given to me by this woman who trained	1	20 years I met an area manager after I had
2	me for two days well, a day and a half, "Just ring	2	been to Chesterfield for this reconciliation thing in
3	this number", so I assumed that was the helpline.	3	2020. When I said to the new bunch that are there,
4	I later discovered later on in my time with	4	"Oh, I haven't had an area manager in my office for
5	Post Office that they have various offices all over	5	19 years", or 20 years, whatever it was, and the next
6	the place, which I didn't have any well, I didn't	6	morning when I got back to the office, I had
7	have much to do with any of them, except for written	7	a phonecall from the new "I'm your new I'm your
8	warnings, but that's another story. But there were	8	area manager".
9	bases all over the place but Chesterfield was my port	9	"Oh, great."
10	of call.	10	"Can I come and see you?"
11	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That was your port of call. Thank you.	11	"Well, yes, it would be a real joy to see
12	Yes, Ms Hodge.	12	a representative from" but no, he didn't come
13	MS HODGE: Thank you. You have mentioned your contact	13	anywhere near and he was only in Chippenham. It's not
14	with the helpline in 2005, or a contact at	14	exactly 100 miles away.
15	Chesterfield, in any event. Did you receive any help	15	Q. You have described issues arising in relation to
16	or support from your area manager?	16	discrepancies and error notices, which pre-dated you
17	A. Well, that's a bit of a joke as well, because he he	17	taking over the branch.
18	was too busy to interview me in 2002. He didn't sign	18	A. Mm-hm.
19	my letter of appointment in 2002. That was signed,	19	Q. How were those resolved with the Post Office?
20	obviously, by his secretary, "C Williams", from	20	A. Well, they kept appearing and I kept saying "Well, I'm
21	memory, and in the 20 years I was a postmistress he	21	not paying it, sort it out", and I would ring
22	never set foot in the office. He never rang me. He	22	Chesterfield and they would say, "Oh, well, it's on
23	was never available for help, and that is a sad	23	your office".
24	indictment of how an organisation runs itself, or	24	"Well, it's not my stock, it's not my stuff".
25	attempts to.	25	So eventually I think they probably got rid of it,
	107		108

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1		event for the uset rid of it because then	1		take it out of my colony it will be 610 a month
1		except for no, they got rid of it because then	1		take it out of my salary it will be £10 a month
2		I had error notices of my own, which took time to get	2		because until you resolve this", and I had an
3		rid of too, but I think they got rid of those because	3		argument with somebody, I think, at HR, and eventually
4		the auditor in 2003 was told quite clearly that they	4		we whittled that because I had to pay the £1,000
5		were not my errors. So I and I didn't get any	5		eventually and that came out of the shop profits.
6		paperwork back from her so I assume that they	6		Eventually, it came back to be an error of £26
7		disappeared. Where? I don't know.	7		and you're thinking "How do they manage it?"
8	Q.	You have mentioned two other shortfalls in your	8		Different things were put together and I it still
9		statement, one in 2008 and one in 2012. Did you make	9		haunts, it still haunts.
10		those sums good yourself?	10	Q.	Over the 20-odd years that you ran the branch, how
11		Yes.	11		much do you think you paid in to make good?
12	Q.	How did you do that?	12	Α.	The business probably backed the Post Office to
13	Α.	The one in 2008, that was the one that appeared on	13		probably £10,000, £15,000, over a period of time. It
14		1 April, I thought it was April Fools Day. They used	14		would be up one day, one month, and it would be down
15		to just appear, you know, you would have this error	15		so you have a little bag of stuff, you put it back in,
16		it was sent through the post. They had two ways of	16		if you hadn't got it then you had to make it up from
17		doing it. They would send you an error notice through	17		the shop takings. It was not a good way to exist,
18		the post, and I got one for £1,048, and I said, "Well,	18		really.
19		I don't know where that is, I have no idea what it	19	Q.	You mentioned already two audits of your account: one
20		is".	20		on the day you took over the branch, a second one in
21		"Well, you've got to pay it."	21		2003.
22		"Well, I can't afford to pay it, you don't pay	22	Α.	Yes.
23		me enough to pay that sort of stuff out". That was	23	Q.	You had a third audit in 2012; is that right?
24		more than a month's salary. And they said "Well, we	24	Α.	Yes, that was an interesting one. Prior to that,
25		will take it out of your salary", and I said "If you	25		I had been a bit of a nuisance. I had complained to
		109			110
1		my MP about the separation of Royal Mail and	1		20 per cent discount off your postage is quite
2		Post Office. So letters were flying from my MP to	2		substantial if you're posting, you know, 100 parcels
3		BEIS and to Post Office senior management about	3		a day. My salary was cut by about £400 a month on
4		business was being stolen from the post offices by	4		that alone, a loss of income.
5		Royal Mail. They were basically targeting	5		So I started to write letters to MPs who then
6		Quite easy for Royal Mail, really, because when	6		started to write letters to BEIS, who then started to
7		they segregated the two businesses they separated the	7		write letters to ministers and I then had an audit in
8		retail arm from the distribution arm because,	8		2013. I had had a written warning prior to that for
9		basically, the Post Office was losing a fortune and	9		not opening on a Wednesday afternoon and the office
9 10			10		had not opened on a Wednesday afternoon ever, from
		when they segregated those, Royal Mail had the			
11		wonderful opportunity to get extra customers from the	11		somebody in London at some London head office.
12		Post Office by going through the mail bags. They knew	12		So it was quite clear that they were going to
13		exactly who posted what from where and, as a small	13		have a target of a small office to seriously annoy and
14		rural business, I had a good customer base locally	14		these two auditors, they arrived again before
15		of you know, we had a silk mill and a saddlers and	15		8 o'clock in the morning and we were busy, you know,
16		a guy who used he was wonderful, he used to do	16		papers, people collecting this, and my rat cage was
17		coconut shells for compost and back in 2011, and	17		probably just slightly bigger than this table really,
18		all three of those businesses were targeted directly	18		not that much bigger than that, and a door there,
19		by Royal Mail offering them a 20 per cent discount off	19		a re-enforced door there, and a glass counter here,
20		Post Office counter's prices.	20		which didn't open.
21		And one of them well, all three of them,	21		There was a sort of slit there, and there were
22		actually, mentioned it to me, but one of them said	22		three of us in this cage and, actually, it was you
23		"You know, we have said we won't do it because we are	23		couldn't move in there. You were congested. So made
24		loyal to Post Office", and that eventually when	24		them a coffee, left the door open, and she is
25		that when they all did move eventually, because	25		scratching away.
		111			112

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1		I got a written warning from that audit for	1		the night. We had had a few incidents before then
2		well, first of all, I couldn't find the security	2		with broken windows and stuff and we had a cash snatch
3		manual and I asked them which security manual because	3		as well. That was in the early days. And that cash
4		when I took on the post office, I didn't actually have	4		snatch we had to pay back but, actually, Colin
5		much paperwork. That had all gone, and my contract of	5		Burston, who interviewed me, came down and discussed
6		employment didn't appear until 2011 because they	6		with me that, you know, we had had money taken out of
7		couldn't be bothered to get me a contract of	7		the post office till, it was my money, I had to pay it
8		employment before then, so that appeared as a result	8		back.
9		of my letters going to the MPs, because I was	9		And he discussed this with me when we had
10		disputing why a paperwork machine was removed because	10		a queue of customers waiting for their pensions. They
11		I hadn't signed a disclaimer for this and	11		were all local villagers. So he went away pleased
12		So the auditors were in, basically, to, I think,	12		with the fact that he had done what he had to do and
13		shift me sideways, and so it was a question of finding	13		the next day we had donations in from the people in
14		fault, "Well, where is the security manual?" "Which	14		the village, £500 of the £700 that was removed from
15		one?" was the comment, because I remember them asking	15		the till from the drawer. Because it wasn't
16		me, and I said "Which one do you want? I've got this	16		a proper lockable drawer, it was just a wooden slide
17		great big thick file here or I've got this piece of	17		out drawer. It wasn't secure at all really but that's
18		paper here". So I couldn't provide the relevant piece	18		by the by. So they gave us 500 quid towards the 700
19		of paper so I had a written warning for that and also	19		we had to pay back, which was extremely generous of
20		not shutting the door for the post office.	20		them.
21	Q.	Can you please describe the circumstances in which	21		But going I have lost my train of thought.
22		your appointment as a subpostmistress ultimately came	22		Back to yes, the
23		to an end?	23	Q.	That was an incident in 2004, is that right, the
24	Α.	Yes, that's quite an interesting one too. They we	24		robbery?
25		had an armed robbery in the July of 2020, middle of	25	Α.	Yes, yes. So we're now back to the final audit, yes.
		113			114
1		We had the rabbancia the luby where they, three	4		over the place", and he esid "Of source you are
1		We had the robbery in the July, where they three guys with a sledgehammer, an axe and something else,	1 2		over the place", and he said "Of course, you are
2 3		they smashed the shop door, which our shop alarm went	2 3		responsible for the Post Office door". I said, "You've got to be joking, there's no way I'm putting
4		off with, and we were asleep. We then heard more	4		re-enforced glass in that. That is Post Office
5		banging so they obviously smashed the other windows	4 5		property, they can pay for it."
6		and then the post office door alarm went off so	6		"Oh, well, we won't be paying for that". I said
7		I then I was trying to put my contact lenses in and	7		"Actually, post office doesn't open, it's quite
8		there was this phonecall at 1 o'clock in the morning	8		simple. If that cage is not re-enforced as it was,
9		"Oh, your alarm has gone off", this is Grapevine	9		then my insurance won't cover that". We had this
10		Security. "Yes, I know it's gone off. I'm just	10		discussion. Anyway he ticked his boxes and then he
10		trying to put my contact lenses in". And my first	10		disappeared. And that was probably the final straw in
12		"Can you please ring the police because we've got	12		the July where we had both had enough.
13		criminals on the premises?"	12		And then I got macular degeneration, so it was
14		"Oh, I can't do that until they get into the	13		difficult, the computer screen used to wobble and we
15		safe". I thought, "You are joking". There's not an	15		made a we had put the business up for sale, it took
16		important I was, "Okay fine". So I put the phone	16		us six years to sell that business but we put the
17		down, put my contact lenses in and, meanwhile, these	10		business up for sale in we thought we might this
18		guys couldn't they broke the cage door down but	18		is the middle of COVID have a purchaser and I said
19		they couldn't actually get into the safe, which was	19		"Let's just if we haven't got a purchaser and we're
20		basically stuffed into it was, you know, built into	20		going to be destitute, let's just get out of this".
20		the floor, and the next morning this blokey arrived	20		So I decided I would ring my area manager, and
21		from Post Office, "I'm head of security".	21		said "I'm going to resign". He said "You can't do
22		"Oh, really?" Piece of paper, and he said "Oh,	22		that, you have to give three months notice". I said
23 24		you have had the windows done".	23 24		"I can and I will", so I left it at that. So that was
24		"Well, we've got windows, we've got glass all	24 25		probably September-ish, October-ish, and so we made
20		115	20		116

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			1		
1		provision to sort of clear the shop of some stuff.	1		was empty, they had their computer, which had been
2		I said to him "We might as well just shut".	2		switched off to save electricity because I wasn't
3		So end of November, I counted I did the same	3		going to pay the electricity on it any more and I got
4		thing I did when I started, I counted all the stock	4		out of it that way.
5		and we used to get a cash collection every fortnight	5	Q.	How did you feel about working for the Post Office by
6		and I said "Right, it's coming up to Christmas", it	6		the time you took this decision to resign?
7		was becoming tortuous. So I counted all the stock and	7	Α.	Do you know, it's an interesting one that, because the
8		the cash guy came in, and I shan't forget his face,	8		Post Office is a toxic organisation and it became more
9		"Oh, I can't take all that much cash", I said "You	9		and more toxic as time went on and the relief when
10		will take what I've got because we're shutting".	10		I drove from Gloucestershire to Lincolnshire was quite
11		"Okay, all right", so he went out with hundreds	11		extraordinary, of getting away from an environment
12		of bags because each thing had to be bagged up	12		where you're enclosed and captured it's like being
13		separately with what was in it on a piece of paper.	13		a prisoner of war in some ways, whatever that must be
14		It was not an easy task. So that all went back and so	14		for people. You can't get out of the situation you're
15		Post Office had all their money, so we shut on,	15		in and the last year has given me that chance to
16		I think, 6 December 2020.	16		actually breathe again.
17		I then get an email from the area manager	10		Post Office is a brand that I think is
18			17		
		saying, "You can't shut", I said "Aha, I can, you have			completely, now, utterly toxic and they have
19 00		had all your stock back".	19		you know, you have had a series of managers, CEOs,
20		"Well, you have to have an audit". I said "You	20		administrative staff that just do as they're told.
21		can send an auditor if you like but there's nothing	21		The current lot are ex-john Lewis, and they took great
22		there to audit". And they couldn't organise that	22		pleasure telling me "John Lewis, la la la", but then
23		until 4 January and we actually sold the property on	23		out comes the statement, "Well, we will only want
24		12 January, so by that stage in the game, when the	24		5,000 post offices", I thought "Well, hang on
25		auditor did appear, there was nothing there. The safe 117	25		a second, you've got an estate of 11,500 post offices 118
1		here" and this is in 2020.	1		can't do this, or do that I mean, I had a written
2		You're now looking at 5,000, so how are you	2		warning for not providing a certificate of postage for
3		going to get rid of those because you have clearly got	3		somebody that had pre-printed a label. We didn't get
4		rid of quite a considerable amount previous, by making	4		paid for these certificates of postage.
5		people prisoners, by ruining households, et cetera,	5		When Royal Mail was segregated, you know, the
6		and, as a brand, I seriously believe that it's not	6		parcel trade and all the rest of it, you can do all
7		worth the paper it's written on any more, and that's	7		this online now, which is fine, and then you go to
8		awful. 350 years of history is straight down the pan	8		a post office and then the postmaster or postmistress
9 10		for 20 years of total and utter maladministration.	9		has to sit there with all of these parcels that
10		It's awful.	10		they're not going to get a penny for, printing you a
11		They treat their postmasters postmasters fund	11		certificate of postage to prove that you had taken it
12		the post offices that they live in, you know. They	12		to the post office to print, and it wears you down to
13		keep them up-to-date. But Post Office, if you ever	13		the absolute core.
14		want new equipment from them, it costs you double if	14		I mean, I had a guy who used to come in to me,
15		not triple than it would on the open market, if you	15		even up to the sort of final few months that we were
16		want a basic piece of equipment. So you don't bother	16		there, 100 parcels would completely occupy an entire
17		because you can't afford it, and it's awful really.	17		aisle of our shop, all wanting certificates of
18	Q.	What effect has your experience with the Post Office	18		postage, all of which had to be produced for time and
19		had on your health?	19		date, and which I get absolutely nothing for.
20	Α.	Yeah, I suppose I I became more well, I'm quite	20		I would then have to help the postman put them
21		extrovert I was. I became quite introverted,	21		in his van and the postman would then complain that he
22		really. I didn't want to see people on a day-to-day	22		hadn't got enough room in his van to put all these
23		basis. It was a toil going down to my rat cage and,	23		wretched parcels and the whole thing is dysfunctional
24		you know, you your temper gets slightly less	24		to the core and, boy, am I pleased to be away from
25		tolerant as things progress, you know. You know, you	25		something like that.
		119	I		120

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2 husband. You have mentioned him working in the retail 2 Limited. 3 side I think? 3 And I feld as if I had a noose round my those years too, slowly being strangled to extir 6 Q. You have mentioned him working in the retail side; is the trip if if the trip if t	1	Q.	You described purchasing your branch with your	1		rather than being under a noose of Post Office
3 side I think? 3 And I fet as if I had a nose round my those years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight? 4 A. Sorry? 4 Incase years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight? 7 A. Yes. 6 but if short one here and still speet to but if shore years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight? 7 A. Yes. 7 C. Have you sought any compensation from the fight one years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight one years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight one years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight one years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight one years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight one years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight one years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight one years a fight one years too, slowly being stranged to exit a fight one years and year you know, the lass of wears the bacame wear you know, year you know, the lass of years and his 16 11 he had done all sorts of different things, but he wass 11 In here always support the SS. S. and 1 had 12 and you know, doing bac aprices. The became weary 17 In here always support the SS. S. and 1 had 13 and you know, doing bac aprices. The became weary 18 46 million quid work of costs. 14 introverted, bies him and he became weary 17 Is again in the show and		-				-
4 A. Sorry? 4 these years too, slowly being strangled to exit 5 Q. You have mentioned him working in the retail aide, is 5 and, luckly, I can come here and still speek to built is no the eme asy. 7 A. Yas. 7 Q. How was he affected by what happened? 8 A. Well, Geoff stated – we have been together a long 9 10 the stand done all sorts of different things, but he was 10 the stand done all sorts of different things, but he was 10 the stand done all sorts of different things, but he was 10 the stand all sorts of different things, but he was 11 the stand done all sorts of different things, but he was 11 the stand all sorts of different things, but he was 11 the stand stand he because we work seven days a week and to all sorts of different things, but he was 15 the time Post Office had screwed them for the 16 16 confidence went, you know. 16 desizons, you know. You look to where you are and 19 deserve as much accompanisation as that can but where the hell are weigning to do?" and since we have moved he 21 the stand to come back his in - Harve Stand to the stand ho to come solt has - Harve look and has be an way forward for those people. 1 the stand to come shot have look and this yet. 21 with this April when I'm 66, and then I get a state 1 our Londis because of Taecon, not pas			-			And I felt as if I had a noose round my neck for
5 Q. You have mentioned him working in the retail side; is that right? and, luckily, I can come here and sill speak to but it's not been easy. 7 A Yes. 7 C Have you sought any compensation from the I 8 Q. How was he affected by what happened? 8 M. Well, Gard statter - we have been togetogether a long 9 A. Well, Gard statter - we have been togetogether a long 9 of the 555. I nerver went to any of the 555 meeting were and to any out now, doing bits and please. He became very 13 introvered, bless him and he became sick. He became 14 compensation of 2700 out the lingiator for the lingis for the lingiator for the lingiator for the lingiator		Α.				-
6 that right? 6 but it's not been easy. 7 A. Yes. 7 0. Have you sought any compensation from the f 9 A. Well, Geoff started - we have been together a long 9 of the 555. Inever went hour interesting one. I - I'm pa 10 time, you know. He was a civil servant for a bit and 10 because we work seven days a week and to d 11 a quiet, unassuming thep, you know, that liked cycling 12 meetings were wasn't part of - loudin't doi: 13 and, you know, doing bits and pieces. He became very 13 I have always supported the 555. and I had 14 intorverted, biess him and he becames very 16 definition Strutt from the f 16 conflece went, you know. 16 definition Strutt from the f 17 We would jointly make decisions, you know, and, after a while, we were both unable to make sensible 18 deserve as much compensation as that can b 20 you think "Well, where the hell are we going to go? 20 of this organisation. I had 700 quid. I'm probation for the sets earth 100 21 hwat are we going to do?" and since we have moved he 21 over Londis because of Tesco, not particularly 1 22 you think. Yue know, we have a			•			
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8 Q. How was he affected by what happened? 8 A. Well, that's another interesting one. I Imp a of the 555. In ever want to any of the 555 and the 555. In ever want to any of the 555 and the 555. In ever want by any other 555 mesh and the bocame was a will aver was a child server was a child aver was a child server was a child aver was a child server was child servere was a child server was child server was		Δ.	-		Q	-
9 A. Weil, Geoff started we have been together a long time, you know. He was a civil servant for a bit and 10 10 because we work serve and bay a week and to dip because it work serve and serve and the serve and serve and the serve and se						
10 time, you know. He was a civil servant for a bit and 10 because we work seven days a week and to d 11 he had done all sorts of different things, but he was 11 for a Sunday morning to Dorset where some of 13 and, you know, doing bits and pieces. He became very 13 I have always supported the 555, and I had 14 introverted, biess him and he became sick. He became very 13 I have always supported the 555, and I had 16 diabetic, he has high blood pressure and his 16 46 million quids' worth of costs. 17 We would jointly make decisions, you know, and, 17 I say in my statement that money is no 19 decisions, you know. You look to where you are and 19 decisions, you know. You look to where you are and 19 20 you think 'Well, where the hell are we going to go? 20 of this organisation. Thad 700 quid. The probe 21 What are we going to do?" and since we have moved he 21 owed between £10,000 and £15,000. If liget in 22 has stated to come back to his - I haven't seen that 22 it. If I don't. I don't. As I say, I can breadth 23 old self of Geoff for 20 years nearly. 15 years. He 23 again in fresh, clean ail can exist - I don 24 <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>7.0</td> <td></td>					7.0	
11 he had done all sorts of different things, but he was 11 for a Sunday morning to Dorset where some to meetings were warn part of - I couldn't dot to the some of a quiet, unassuming chap, you know, what liked cycling 12 meetings were warn part of - I couldn't dot to the some of 2700 out of the litigation for the compensation of 2700 out of the litigation for the compensation and screwed them for the file confidence went, you know, what it is a different where some and the compensation and screwed them for the decisions, you know. You look to where you are and 19 compensation of 2700 out of the litigation for the disclosens, you know. You know, where you are and 19 18 after a while, we were both unable to make sensible 18 everything. The people that have lost everything the part of - I couldn't dot. The probation of 2700 out of the litigation for the disclosens, you know. You look to where you are and 19 20 you think "Weil, where the hell are we going to go? 20 of this organisation. I had 700 quid. I'm probation of states to come back to his - I haven't seen that 22 21 What are we going to do? and since we have moved he sates that bo back to his - I haven't seen that 22 it. If I dot't, dot't. As i say, I can breache 23 oid self of Geoff for 20 years nearly. 15 years. He 23 again in fresh, clean air and I can exist - I don you know, when we have for his organisation. I had some one sate and back to his - I haven't seen had 24 24 until this April when I'm 66, and then I get a state 1 our Londis because of Tesco, not patricularly i						
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14used against me. I mean, I actually do think that14so sorry this has happened to the postmasters15they're quite a vindictive company, as well, but15blah, blah", and Amanda James let slip "Well,16that's another story. So I went up to Chesterfield,16course we will only have 5,000 offices when w17it was about two and a half hours from where I lived,17mutualise". And I looked at her and said "Rea18got there and you go to a meeting, you (a) expect18You've got 11,000 offices now, so you're going19a coffee of some sort. We had to ask for coffee,19reduce by 6,000 offices to 5, through your20"Please can we have a cup of coffee?"20mutualisation, but when you mutualise you are21And then they were sitting round they were21to be making a profit and Post Office has not re22all introduced "Oh, I'm from John Lewis" and I22a profit in 20 years and had billions of pounds'23thought I actually I said "That's not really23of government money but they have not made24a credible comment". And the head of security was24And this guy went "duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-	12		happily go", because I knew then I was probably going	12		a sad organisation". It was
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16that's another story. So I went up to Chesterfield, it was about two and a half hours from where I lived, 1716course we will only have 5,000 offices when w mutualise". And I looked at her and said "Rea 1818got there and you go to a meeting, you (a) expect18You've got 11,000 offices now, so you're going reduce by 6,000 offices to 5, through your19a coffee of some sort. We had to ask for coffee, 2019reduce by 6,000 offices to 5, through your20"Please can we have a cup of coffee?"20mutualisation, but when you mutualise you are 2121And then they were sitting round they were 2221to be making a profit and Post Office has not re 2223thought I actually I said "That's not really 2423of government money but they have not made 2424a credible comment". And the head of security was24And this guy went "duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-	14		used against me. I mean, I actually do think that	14		so sorry this has happened to the postmasters, blah,
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20"Please can we have a cup of coffee?"20mutualisation, but when you mutualise you are21And then they were sitting round they were21to be making a profit and Post Office has not re22all introduced "Oh, I'm from John Lewis" and I22a profit in 20 years and had billions of pounds'23thought I actually I said "That's not really23of government money but they have not made24a credible comment". And the head of security was24And this guy went "duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-						
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24 a credible comment". And the head of security was 24 And this guy went "duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-duh-						of government money but they have not made a profit".
						And this guy went "duh-duh-duh-duh-duh", and
	25		from Tesco, "Okay, Tesco, took over Londis, we lost	25		I went "Okay", and I believe I don't know, but
123				l .		

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1	I believe that's the next game to play and I sincerely	1	concerned, totally toxic, and so are the MPs that
2	hope that questions are asked of the current	2	oversaw this. Absolutely appalling.
3	hierarchy: what happened in 1997 when the	3	Q. My final question for you, Mrs Stringer. You have
4	Horizon System was bought by I think it was the	4	mentioned compensation already. What does justice
5	Blair/Brown government for 800 million quid? It never	5	require, in your view, now?
6	worked for the Department of Work and Pensions. It	6	A. What does?
7	was designed by ICL in the '80s for the Department of	7	Q. What does justice now require, in your view?
8	Work and Pensions. It never worked for them.	8	A. What does justice?
9	So the Government of the day, "Post Office can	9	Q. Yes, how will justice be achieved for subpostmasters?
10	have it for 800 million quid", it's a lot of money and	10	A. Oh, yes. I personally would like to see the
11	they have had substantial sums of money over the years	11	Post Office closed as a brand. 350 years of serving
12	that have not gone into the network. They have	12	the public is not there any more. That's a personal
13	butchered the network across the board and, cynical as	13	opinion. It will upset livelihoods but I don't
14	I am now, current money, well, you know, "If we get	14	believe that there is a future for it, but that's
15	rid of 5,000 offices or whatever, I will get a nice	15	that.
16	big fat bonus, can move on to somewhere else", and	16	Justice. I would like to see I would like to
17	I hope, Sir Wyn, that you can stop that happening.	17	be able to can I do this as part of my final bit?
18	I hope and pray that you can stop that happening	18	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, please. If you have something you
19	because it is fundamentally and utterly wrong.	19	would like to say at the end.
20	You know, there has been a huge miscarriage of	20	A. I would like to say to you, please, I would like you
21	justice for the postmasters, postmistresses. 555	21	to interrogate the following: Tony Blair,
22	how Alan Bates and the JFSA have continued for this	22	Gordon Brown, because they were complicit and they
23	long he deserves a medal, frankly, because they	23	nearly bankrupted the country by flogging off the gold
24	wear you down to the extent that you can't think	24	at half price this is when this problem started
25	properly any more. But they're toxic, as far as I'm	25	Vince Cable, Ed Davey, Jo Swinson. The pawns in this
	125	20	126
1	are the Daule Vennelle and providue CEOa. They did as	1	postmosters post and present because the open in the
1 2	are the Paula Vennells and previous CEOs. They did as	1 2	postmasters, past and present, because the ones in the present have no idea what's ahead of them and it
2	they were told by BEIS, or BEIS, there are two different conglomerates that have been there over the		•
	-	3	worries me, you know.
4	years. They are all dysfunctional to the core, the	4	My local post office now is part of the Co-op
5	whole lot, and they need to be accountable.	5	which I understand, you know, Co-operatives are fine,
6	But what I wanted to read to you was a comment	6	but those staff are still only paid minimum wage.
7	from it's in the Sunday Times, 20 February 2022,	7	It's wrong, totally wrong, and when they tried the
8	from Sir Vince Cable, who was Business Secretary 2010	8	Network Transformation with me, back in 2013, I earned
9	to 2015, along with Jo Swinson. She says:	9	£11,000 a year or thereabouts, it was considerably
10	"Lessons must be learned about the worst	10	less when I left.
11	miscarriage of justice."	11	But this woman came in with this new network
12	Well, that's true. Cable said he and other	12	change and said, "Ah, we have done a spreadsheet and
13	ministers had no reason to get involved more than they	13	we would like to offer you this, if you open your
14	did. Well, they clearly didn't do very much. Then he	14	counter up to the local and let anybody steal anything
15	says:	15	from you". And she said "Your salary is £4,000",
16	"This is a legal matter dealt with in	16	I looked at her and said "What a year or a month? A
17	the courts. It is nothing to do with ministers."	17	month, that would be great!" She said "No, it's
18	Really?	18	£4,000 a year". I said "You are joking". So my 11
19	"So we didn't have any responsibility in the	19	goes down to 4 and I said to her, you know she got
20	sense of anything we could have done about it. Purely	20	this pretty little spreadsheet out, I said "Would you
	in a formal sense all ministers have ultimate	21	work for £4,000 a year, 40 hours a week, in that
21			a
21 22	responsibility."	22	cage?" and she looked at me and she said "Well no".
		22 23	cage?" and she looked at me and she said "Well no". I said "Well, don't expect me to then. I will not go
22	responsibility."		-

1	stupid new system".	1	the legal back up now, postmasters wouldn't have their
2	And that system closed post offices because you	2	say and I do fundamentally believe that you will get
3	were then responsible, if you did that system, as	3	answers to some really, really, really difficult
4	a local, you were responsible if you had a village	4	questions and that will be some way forward in helping
5	shop on the sideline for providing it with cash, so	5	people to heal.
6	the cash out of your till shop side would go into	6	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right.
7	Post Office to do the pensions, which is fine, but	7	A. Thank you.
8	they wouldn't Post Office wouldn't pay you for	8	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, I'm determined to have the last
9	48 hours, so and if you hadn't got the cash you	9	thank you. So now thank you very much, Mrs Stringer,
10	couldn't do the transaction. There is no logic in	10	for your evidence this afternoon.
11	that, no logic at all.	11	A. Thank you.
12	And offices closed because (a) they couldn't	12	MS HODGE: Sir, that concludes our
13	afford to do it, and (b) the cash hadn't arrived so	13	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: That concludes the oral evidence.
14	people went elsewhere. So whatever concoctions they	14	If we allow Mrs Stringer to leave in her time,
15	come up with in the future are not going to be	15	so to speak Ms Patrick, do you think we will
16	anywhere near what should happen, so it should go.	16	complete your four statements in about ten minutes?
17	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right.	17	MS PATRICK: They are relatively short.
18	A. May I finally thank you?	18	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Okay, well, then we will let the
19	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, no, the final thing is for me to	19	witness get herself together and leave and then we
20	thank you.	20	will read your four statements and that will very
21	A. But I would like to finally thank you for having to	21	nicely conclude the proceedings for the day.
22	sit through the torture and all the people that sit	22	(Pause)
23	with you because it is the most harrowing time for you	23	MS PATRICK: Sir, again to repeat, I appear will read
24	all, for David Howe and David Enright and	24	summaries of the evidence. I appear on behalf of the
25	Howe & Co. They have been absolute stars and, without	25	Core Participants that are represented by Hudgells
	129		130
1	Solicitors and we begin this afternoon with a summary	1	eventually.
2	of the evidence of Mrs Julie Cleife.	2	She had been suffering sleepless nights leading
3	Summary of witness statement of JULIE CLEIFE (read)	3	up to the audit and she was not sure what was
4	MS PATRICK: Prior to becoming a subpostmistress,	4	happening and where the money was.
5	Julie Cleife was employed by the Post Office as	5	Following the audit, a shortfall in the sum of
6	a counter clerk for two years. She became	6	£25,614.45 was found. On 4 June 2010 she was
7	subpostmistress of Over Wallop branch of the	7	interviewed by Post Office investigators. She says
8	Post Office in April 1995.	8	that she thought "the Post Office would treat me
9	She was asked to take on this role by her then	9	fairly, especially as I had no representation".
10	manager and she became, ultimately, subpostmistress at	10	At the interview, she says it seemed "as if the
11	two branches.	11	Post Office had already assumed that I was guilty".
12	After Horizon was installed in Over Wallop in	12	Mrs Cleife told them she did not know and could not
13	2000 unexplained shortfalls began. She called the	13	explain the shortfalls.
14	helpline but they were not helpful. They told her she	14	Following the audit she was suspended
15	would have to make good the shortfalls.	15	immediately and she resigned ultimately from both
16	To resolve the shortfalls, Mrs Cleife had to put	16	branches. She says the stress and the way the
10		10	investigators made her feel was just too much. The
	her own money into the branch.		-
18 10	The Post Office did carry out a few audits	18 10	investigators searched her home and she was left under
19 20	during her time at the Over Wallop branch but they	19 20	the impression that they had the same powers as
20	never raised any issue, until a final audit	20	the police.
21	in June 2010. Prior to that audit, the unexplained	21	To pay back the shortfall, she had to borrow
22	shortfalls were getting larger and she could no longer	22	money from a friend and cash in her and her husband's
23	afford to keep paying. She felt pressurised to keep	23	endowment.
24	the branch open for the community and kept thinking	24	In order to avoid prosecution, she paid the
25	the balance problems would correct themselves 131	25	alleged shortfall. Mrs Cleife had to take a course of 132

1	medication then for high blood pressure, but in	1	about it, he felt he wasn't given the opportunity.
2	September 2010 she received a summons stating the	2	After her sentencing, she says he was physically
3	Post Office was prosecuting her for fraud by false	3	sick from all the stress.
4	representation.	4	Next we turn to a summary of the evidence of
5	Following a plea bargain and on advice, and to	5	Balbir Singh Grewal.
6	avoid a custodial sentence, she pleaded guilty on	6	Summary of witness statement of BALBIR SINGH GREWAL (read
7	26 October 2010.	7	MS PATRICK: Mr Balbir Singh Grewal was the subpostmaster
8	In November 2010 she was sentenced to a 12-month	8	of Hockwell Ring Post Office in Luton between 2000 and
9	community order with 100 hours of unpaid work. She	9	2001. He was previously an accountant and then ran
10	paid costs in the sum of £500. She says her	10	an Exxon franchise in Florida.
11	conviction was reported in the local press. This	11	He sold that business, returning to the UK in
12	impacted on her previously very good reputation in the	12	1998. He purchased Hockwell Ring Post Office for
13	community and made her feel anxious. She believed her	13	around £150,000 from a combination of life savings and
14	community was supportive of her. Her conviction was	14	loans. As a result of an audit at his post office and
15	later overturned.	15	a large shortfall being found, he was subsequently
16	She wants the Inquiry to know that she says	16	charged with the offence of false accounting.
17	applying for benefits was one of the worst things that	17	On the advice of lawyers, he pleaded guilty to
18	she has ever had to do. She was then ultimately	18	the offence and received a suspended sentence and
19	offered a job in the community shop. She still does	19	a community service order. He was also ordered to
20	this job today but her salary is not what it was and	20	repay the shortfall to the Post Office.
21	what she would have received as a subpostmistress.	21	To make that repayment he had to borrow money
22	She said there were some tensions in her	22	from family and friends. He was forced to sell the
23	relationship after the audit was conducted because,	23	post office under value and subsequently lost the life
24	she says, her husband wished he could have supported	24	savings he used to buy it.
25	her through this but because she couldn't tell him	25	He was unable to get a job in accountancy due to
	133		134
1	his conviction. He was unable to find any work for	1	Summary of witness statement of SUSAN PUDKIN (read
1	his conviction. He was unable to find any work for	1	-
2	around seven to eight months and borrowed money from	2	MS PATRICK: Susan Rudkin begins her statement by saying
2 3	around seven to eight months and borrowed money from friends to help with living costs and to support his	2 3	MS PATRICK: Susan Rudkin begins her statement by saying "running a post office has been a part of our family
2 3 4	around seven to eight months and borrowed money from friends to help with living costs and to support his wife and three children.	2 3 4	MS PATRICK: Susan Rudkin begins her statement by saying "running a post office has been a part of our family life". She and her husband ran the Stairfoot Post
2 3 4 5	around seven to eight months and borrowed money from friends to help with living costs and to support his wife and three children. He subsequently worked as a self-employed	2 3 4 5	"running a post office has been a part of our family life". She and her husband ran the Stairfoot Post Office in Barnsley from 1995 to 2004. She and her
2 3 4 5 6	around seven to eight months and borrowed money from friends to help with living costs and to support his wife and three children. He subsequently worked as a self-employed minicab driver.	2 3 4 5 6	MS PATRICK: Susan Rudkin begins her statement by saying "running a post office has been a part of our family life". She and her husband ran the Stairfoot Post Office in Barnsley from 1995 to 2004. She and her husband then bought the Ibstock post office in
2 3 4 5 6 7	around seven to eight months and borrowed money from friends to help with living costs and to support his wife and three children. He subsequently worked as a self-employed minicab driver. He describes the stress he suffered at that time	2 3 4 5 6 7	MS PATRICK: Susan Rudkin begins her statement by saying "running a post office has been a part of our family life". She and her husband ran the Stairfoot Post Office in Barnsley from 1995 to 2004. She and her husband then bought the Ibstock post office in Leicestershire in October 2000. Her husband was the
2 3 4 5 6 7 8	around seven to eight months and borrowed money from friends to help with living costs and to support his wife and three children. He subsequently worked as a self-employed minicab driver. He describes the stress he suffered at that time as a living nightmare. His personality changed. He	2 3 4 5 6 7 8	MS PATRICK: Susan Rudkin begins her statement by saying "running a post office has been a part of our family life". She and her husband ran the Stairfoot Post Office in Barnsley from 1995 to 2004. She and her husband then bought the Ibstock post office in Leicestershire in October 2000. Her husband was the subpostmaster there and she works in the branch.
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	around seven to eight months and borrowed money from friends to help with living costs and to support his wife and three children. He subsequently worked as a self-employed minicab driver. He describes the stress he suffered at that time as a living nightmare. His personality changed. He became an introvert and he says his marriage was	2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	MS PATRICK: Susan Rudkin begins her statement by saying "running a post office has been a part of our family life". She and her husband ran the Stairfoot Post Office in Barnsley from 1995 to 2004. She and her husband then bought the Ibstock post office in Leicestershire in October 2000. Her husband was the subpostmaster there and she works in the branch. Mrs Rudkin experienced shortfalls and paid these from
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1	was around 20 August 2008.	1	She says her GP and her family were very
2	She was summonsed at around the end of February	2	concerned about her and her husband at the time took
3	or March 2009 and pleaded guilty to theft on	3	responsibility for her medication, due to concern over
4	6 April 2009. She says, to avoid a custodial	4	her suicide risk.
5	sentence, she felt pressured to accept that guilty	5	She says of her husband "He has been my rock".
6	plea. She was sentenced on 1 May 2009 to a 12-month	6	She says to the Inquiry "It was horrendous for me and
7	suspended custodial sentence, 300 hours of community	7	my family when we were out within the community". She
8	service and a curfew for six months. She received	8	says there were incidents in the shop where the
9	an electronic tag the following day at home.	9	customers would say "Why is she still in the shop?"
10	A confiscation order was made on 19 August 2009.	10	and she says there were fingers and finger pointing.
11	Her husband was dismissed by the Post Office in	11	Mrs Rudkin and her husband were living a life
12	2010.	12	they both enjoyed tremendously and she says this was
13	Mrs Rudkin's conviction was later overturned.	13	ripped apart in the blink of an eye.
14	After her conviction she says:	14	Finally she wants to say to the Inquiry:
15	"I became a shrinking violet. I just kept	15	"Nothing can undo what I have been subject to.
16	myself to myself. I lost all my self-confidence."	16	Nothing can undo the impact this has had on my family.
17	She wants to say to the Inquiry she still gets	17	It will stay with us for the rest of our lives."
18	flashbacks about her court appearances and says they	18	There is one final statement.
19	were "The most painful days of my life". The	19	SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes.
20	successful appeal, she says:	20	MS PATRICK: The final summary is the summary of the
21	" has made no difference to my mental state.	21	evidence of Mrs Lynette Hutchings.
22	I'm still sad about it all because no one would listen	22	Summary of witness statement of LYNETTE HUTCHINGS (rea
23	to me at the time. No one would believe me. Those	23	MS PATRICK: After working as a primary school teacher,
24	feelings don't just go away. I still feel isolated	24	Mrs Lynette Hutchings bought Crookham Village
25	and alone now."	25	Post Office in 2002. She first noted shortfalls
20	137	20	138
1	following the installation of Horizon in 2004 and was	1	and a community order. Mrs Hutchings and her family
2	suspended in relation to a £7,000 shortfall.	2	were forced to sell their home as they could no longer
3	She says she was threatened with legal action if	3	afford to pay the mortgage. She felt humiliated and
4	she did not pay the money and then decided to sell the	4	unable to speak about the situation. Her mental
5	branch. She resigned in September 2005 with the sale	5	health deteriorated.
6	going through in December 2005.	6	Throughout the criminal investigation she
7	She moved and became subpostmaster of the	3 7	suffered depressive episodes. She struggled to sleep
8	Rowlands Castle Post Office on 29 August 2006.	8	and didn't feel like she could speak with anyone. At
9	Horizon Online was installed in 2010. This was faster	9	one point she says she was in such a dark place she
10	and things seemed to be fine. However, it again	10	had thoughts of taking her own life. She says she is
10	started to throw up discrepancies and Mrs Hutchings	10	left scarred and frightened.
		12	Mrs Hutchings and her husband, after her
12	worried she would have the same problems.		-
13	Following an audit in March 2011 she was told	13	conviction, were then unable to gain employment and
14	there was a shortfall of over £10,000. She was	14 4 F	debts mounted. She could not return to work as
15	suspended and her contract terminated on	15	a teacher. She is no longer in good health. She was
16	14 April 2011. She was summoned to Portsmouth	16	diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2014 and says after
17	Magistrates' Court on 19 April 2012 and charged with	17	surgery at least 50 per cent of that tumour remains
18	false accounting. After a plea bargain and on the	18	and cannot be operated on.
19	advice of her barrister, she pleaded guilty to one	19	She lost her son in 2018 when he was living in
20	count of false accounting on 30 July 2012. She says:	20	Cambodia. There was an incident which incurred large
21	"I cannot even begin to explain how it feels to	21	hospital bills and they were unable to help
22	plead guilty to an offence you did not commit. I had	22	financially. She says that because they couldn't
23	no faith in the system, but I knew the outcome could	23	afford to pay the bills and he couldn't afford to pay
24	be more serious if the case had gone to a full trial."	24	or return home, he took his own life.
25	She was sentenced to 120 hours of unpaid work 139	25	They couldn't afford for his body to be returned 140

5 Mrs Hutchings says: 5 Summary of gitters Affetting and sad about how I was 6 Their very titter and sad about how I was 6 7 Summary of gitters Affetting and gitters and sad about how I was 6 8 difficult to trust people in authority." 8 9 And she warts to say to be inouriny: 9 10 "I continue to suffer waves of anxiety at any 10 11 Thank you, 3 Summary of gitters Affetting at (read) 13 SIR WTW WILLIAMS: And thank you, Ms Patrick, and 13 16 MS PATRICK: Sir, I hink there are sone that are reserved 16 16 SIR WTW WILLIAMS: And thank you, and hank you 17 17 SIR WTW WILLIAMS: Thank you vary much. So that complete 19 18 Sir WTW WILLIAMS: Thank you vary much. So that complete 19 19 SIR WTW WILLIAMS: Stochard and Wales, but Stochard 19 21 meak rate at least in Engling and Will Stochard 20 23 urbaing adjourned until Wednesday, 16 March 2022) 10 24 Summary of will State State Tealing 21 23 Summary of will State State Tealing 23 24 Summary of will State State Tealing 24 25 Summary of will State State Tealing 23					
3 functil Mis Hutchings says this was very 3 Questioned by MS KENNEDY 4 humilating. Of her ordeal with the Post Office, 4 Questioned by MS KENNEDY 6 Theel way bitter and sad about how Iwas 5 Summary of <u>MUESPAPEGENEL SATERNAS</u> (Face) 7 Interest of by the Post Office. 5 Summary of <u>MUESPAPEGENELS</u> (Face) 8 and ab wants to say to the inquiry: 9 Summary of <u>MUESPAPEGENELS</u> (Face) 9 And ab wants to say to the inquiry: 9 Summary of <u>MUESPAPEGENELS</u> (Face) 11 mention of the Post Office.* 11 12 Thank you, it. 12 13 SIR WYW WILLIAMS: And thank you, sit of summaries 15 14 I balieve that concludes the reading in of summaries 15 15 or the sings in Leeds. We will exame to Londor next 16 16 MS PATICK: St, I think there are some that are reserved 16 17 MS PATICK: St, I think there are some that are reserved 16 18 Sir WYW WILLAMS: Thank you way much. So that complete 10 19 Sir WYW WILLAMS: Thank you way much. So that complete 10 10 Week when we will complete the public hearings about 21 21 week when we will complete the public hearings about 21	1	home and he was cremated locally. The family had to	1		
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6 '' Teal way titter and sad bout how i was 6 Checkorn Charles E Anderway 7 treated by the Post Office. I now find it very 7 Summary of Witters Effect of Checkorn 9 And she wants to say to the inquiry: 9 Summary of Witters Effect of Checkorn 11 mention of the Post Office." 11 Summary of Witters Effect of Checkorn 12 Think you, sin 11 Summary of Witters Effect of Checkorn 13 SIR WYW WILLAMS: And thank you, MS Patrick, and 13 14 Libelieve that concludes the reading in of summaries 10 15 Summary of Witters Effect of Checkorn 13 16 MS PATRICK: Sir, I think there are some that are reserved 16 17 for London, but for today, thank you, and thank you 17 19 SIR WYW WILLAMS: Thank you vay much. Sch tat completes 19 10 Summary of Witters Effect of Checkorn 20 21 Summary of Witters Effect of Checkorn 21 22 week when we will complete the public hearings about on tool ways. 21 23 and Northern Ireland is to come. Thank you: 23 24 (245 pm) 23 25 Summary of Witters Effect of Checkorn 13 3 Summary of Witters Effect of Checkorn	4	_			
6 The investige is authority investige is authority." 8 8 Summary of withes statement of wither statem				Summary of witness statement of GREGORY CHARLES HARDING (read)	
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