| 1 | Monday, 14 February 2022 |
| :---: | :---: |
| 2 | (11.00 am) |
| 3 | (Proceedings delayed) |
| 4 | (11.25 am) |
| 5 | Opening statement by SIR WYN WILLIAMS |
| 6 | SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, perhaps I should have foreseen |
| 7 | it, but the one thing I didn't foresee was that |
| 8 | I would be apologising to you for a late start. |
| 9 | However, if we were going to be having a technological |
| 10 | glitch, much better that we had it on Day 1 so that we |
| 11 | can repair it and go forward efficiently, I hope. |
| 12 | So a very good morning to all of you who are |
| 13 | present in the room and also those who are following |
| 14 | today's proceedings either by live feed or on YouTube. |
| 15 | This is the first of many days in the coming weeks in |
| 16 | which I will be taking oral evidence from persons who |
| 17 | have been, or in many instances continue to be |
| 18 | adversely effected by the Horizon IT system and by the |
| 19 | decisions that were taken as a consequence of |
| 20 | information which was generated by that system. |
| 21 | You will see that I am flanked by my two |
| 22 | assessors, Ms Erika Eliasson-Norris and Mr David Page. |
| 23 | As you are no doubt aware, Mr Page and I have been |
| 24 | working together now for very many months, |
| 25 | Ms Eliasson-Norris is a more recent arrival, but the 1 |
| 1 | completing the work of the Inquiry within the sort of |
| 2 | timescale l've indicated previously. |
| 3 | Accordingly, I have decided to take oral |
| 4 | evidence from between 50 and 60 people. You will note |
| 5 | that I have not provided you with a precise number of |
| 6 | witnesses. That is because witness statements have |
| 7 | been coming in right up until last week and, for all |
| 8 | I know, may continue to be presented to the Inquiry |
| 9 | and, in these circumstances, I wish to retain a degree |
| 10 | of flexibility. |
| 11 | The particular circumstances of each individual |
| 12 | affected by Horizon and the adverse consequences |
| 13 | suffered by that individual are, of course, unique to |
| 14 | that person. In making decisions about which of the |
| 15 | persons who had made witness statements should be |
| 16 | asked to give oral evidence the Inquiry's legal team |
| 17 | and I have sought to ensure that an appropriate number |
| 18 | of witnesses speak to themes which are common to all |
| 19 | or at least many of those affected by Horizon, and |
| 20 | that the remaining witnesses are able to provide |
| 21 | evidence of some of the more unusual adverse impacts |
| 22 | which have occurred. |
| 23 | I cannot stress enough the importance of me |
| 24 | understanding the scale and nature of the harm which |
| 25 | has been caused to so very many individuals. Of |

three of us have quickly developed good, efficient and professional working practices.

I would like to say at the outset how grateful I am that many people have taken the trouble to make signed witness statements which detail their adverse experiences. The Inquiry have received such statements from well over 100 people. The making of a detailed witness statement in which very personal details about the author are disclosed is no doubt a daunting prospect. Making such a statement knowing that it will then be made public and scrutinised by many different sets of eyes, often line by line, requires courage and determination.

Let me assure all those who have supplied the Inquiry with signed statements that I regard the statements as an invaluable source of evidence, which will allow me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature and extent of the suffering and hardship endured by so many people.

Those who will give oral evidence to me over the coming weeks have all made written statements. In an ideal world, every single person who has made a written witness statement would have been afforded the opportunity to give oral evidence. However, that is simply not possible if I am to have any hope of 2
course, much has been written and spoken about this already. However, my belief is that the written statements to which I have referred, and the oral evidence which will be adduced over the coming month or so, will produce a detailed and coherent body of evidence, from which it will be possible for me to draw clear and considered conclusions about the scale and nature of the harm caused by information generated by Horizon and the decisions made by those who seem to have treated that information as infallible.

Let me now explain how I see the next weeks unfolding. This week and next, the Inquiry will be based here in London. There will be hearings every day and many of the persons who have accepted invitations to give evidence orally will be heard.

In the week commencing 28 February, there will be hearings in Cardiff. The following week, that is the week commencing 7 March, there will be hearings in Leeds. The numbers of witnesses who have elected to give evidence in Leeds and Cardiff are fewer and so it is likely that we will hear evidence at each of those centres over two days. If necessary, the Inquiry will return to London in the week commencing 14 March to hear from any witnesses whose oral evidence remains outstanding.

Those of you who follow my public statements will know that I was most anxious that witnesses had a choice about whether to give evidence in person at a hearing centre or remotely, either from their own home or at some other suitable location. A majority of the witnesses have opted to give evidence at a hearing centre. However, a significant minority will give evidence remotely. I am very pleased that the Inquiry has been able to accommodate the wishes of those witnesses in that way.

I am sitting today in the same location as the persons who will give their oral evidence. More often than not, however, in the next two weeks I will not be present here in London but will be visible on a screen but sitting in my home in Wales. That way of working is, I fear, dictated by personal circumstances but I'm satisfied that my being remote from London will not interfere in any way with my understanding of the evidence. That is a way of working with which I have become very familiar.

When the Inquiry moves to Cardiff, perhaps not surprisingly, I will be present but I will also be present in Leeds because I want everybody to know that I am prepared to go to every part of the country in order to hear what they have to say. Some of the 5
subpostmasters and subpostmistresses who are Core Participants and who have provided witness statements to the Inquiry live in Scotland and Northern Ireland. I have not invited any of those persons to give oral evidence in the coming weeks. That is because it is very important that this Inquiry goes to them in order to receive their oral evidence. I will issue a public statement in due course explaining arrangements for visits to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Everyone should also know that I have kept well in mind the possibility that some of those who had been adversely affected would have been very reluctant to provide witness statements or give oral evidence and, at the same time, reveal their identity. For that reason, I issued a protocol explaining the circumstances in which I would consider a restriction order. To date, I have made restriction orders in respect of 12 persons who have provided witness statements to the Inquiry. At least two of those persons are due to provide oral evidence and, whenever a witness who is the subject of a restriction order gives oral evidence, appropriate measures will be in place to conceal the identities of those individuals.

Let me conclude these brief opening remarks as
I began, with thanks. It has been no mean feat to 6
start these hearings on time. We would not have achieved our aim of a start to this phase of the Inquiry today without the very considerable efforts of the Inquiry secretariat, the Inquiry's legal team, and all the lawyers and their support staff who have assisted those who have made witness statements and agreed to give oral evidence. I would like to record publicly my thanks to them all.

However, I cannot emphasise too strongly what is, of course, obvious, namely that these hearings would not be taking place at all were it not for the witnesses who have agreed to give up their valuable time and publicly relive what must be very distressing memories and events. My heart-felt thanks goes out to them for all their willingness to co-operate with the Inquiry and to make a very significant contribution to the Inquiry's work.

That's as much as I have to say in opening and it's very likely that you won't hear me speak again today, other than to say it's time for a break or something like that.

I'm now going to ask Mr Beer, Queen's Counsel, Counsel to the Inquiry, to make his opening statement. Thank you, Mr Beer.

## Opening statement by MR BEER, QC

MR BEER: On Friday, 23 April last year, the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) quashed the convictions of 39 men and women who had worked for the Post Office Limited or its predecessors, which I'm going to call POL today, as subpostmasters, subpostmistresses, managers and counter assistants. All of the appellants had been charged with offences of theft, fraud, false accounting and were prosecuted by the publicly owned company POL on which they relied for their livelihoods.

They had all been convicted of crimes allegedly committed during the period 2000 to 2012. Those who pleaded guilty or who were convicted following a trial had grim punishments imposed upon them, including, in some cases, immediate sentences of imprisonment. Lives were ruined, families were torn apart, families were made homeless and destitute, reputations were destroyed, not least because the crimes of which the men and women were convicted, theft, fraud and false accounting, all involved acting dishonestly.

People who were an important, respected and integral part of the local communities that they served were, in some cases, shunned. A number of men and women sadly died before the state publicly
$\qquad$
recognised that they were wrongly convicted. Their prosecutions were founded upon an assertion that the computerised accounting system, Horizon, which was used in branch Post Offices and operated by Fujitsu was reliable when, in fact, it was not. What's more, the publicly-owned company responsible for bringing the prosecutions, POL, knew that it was not.

In what you may, in due course, conclude is the worst miscarriage of justice in recent British legal history, these convictions were based on failures of investigation and failures of disclosure. The Court of Appeal described these as:
"... so egregious as to make the prosecution an affront to the conscience of the court."

Since then, other convictions which relied upon the integrity of Horizon have been quashed and continue to be quashed. This Inquiry has been established to understand and to acknowledge what went wrong in relation to Horizon. It will build upon the findings that have already been made by the courts, in particular by seeking to establish who knew what and when. It will assess whether the commitments made by POL within the subsequent mediation settlement have been properly delivered and assess whether the processes and information provided by POL to
postmasters are sufficient. It will examine the historic and current governance and whistle-blowing controls.

Along with Julian Blake, Catriona Hodge and Ruth Kennedy, I act as Counsel to the Inquiry. As you may know but others may not, our role is to assist you in the conduct of your investigation. We are entirely independent and impartial and do not represent the interests of any of the Core Participants in the Inquiry or, indeed, of any other person. Also appearing today are the following representatives of Core Participants: Chris Jacobs, instructed by Howe \& Co, for a large number of subpostmasters and mistresses; and Angela Patrick, instructed by Hudgell Solicitors, also for a large number of subpostmasters and subpostmistresses.

The representatives of other Core Participants have been provided with a live link to these proceedings to enable them to follow them, including: the legal representatives of POL; Fujitsu; the Department for Business, Energy \& Industrial Strategy; UK Government Investments; the Metropolitan Police Service; and Paula Vennells, the former CEO of POL; and the representatives of the National Federation of SubPostmasters and the Communication Workers Union, at 10
the current hearings.
In this first phase of the Inquiry, we are focusing on the human impact of the adoption, implementation, operation and continued use of the Horizon system and the human impact of the approach taken by POL to subpostmasters and mistresses when the system showed shortfalls, including their suspension, the termination of their contracts, the closure of branches, proceedings for the recovery of the so-called shortfalls, bankruptcy proceedings, criminal investigations and, ultimately, criminal proceedings.

As you know, the Inquiry has published a detailed List of Issues setting out how it proposes to carry its Terms of Reference into effect. There are 218 issues on that list. In this phase of the Inquiry, we are addressing issues 215 to 218 , which read as follows: human impact.

What impact, past and present, have the failings of the Horizon IT system had upon affected SPMs, managers and assistants? What physical, psychological, emotional, financial and reputational consequences have resulted from SPMs, managers and assistants being: required to make good apparent shortfalls, as shown by the Horizon IT system; alleged to be responsible for shortfalls and discrepancies
shown by the Horizon IT system; accused of committing criminal offences, as a result of shorffalls and discrepancies shown by the Horizon IT system; convicted of criminal offences as a result of shortfalls and discrepancies shown by the Horizon IT system?

What impact, both past and present, have the failings of the Horizon IT system had upon the families of affected SPMs, managers and assistants?

How have POL, its predecessors, Fujitsu, the National Federation of SubPostmasters, the Communication Workers Union, UK Government Investments, and the Government, responded to that human impact?

The reason why we have commenced the hearings of the Inquiry by listening to the accounts of those who were and continue to be affected by the flaws in Horizon and the flaws in POL's approach to it is that they must be front and centre of this Inquiry.

Although the underlying subject matter of the Inquiry is information technology, this Inquiry is not and will not become a dry, technical investigation into an IT project gone wrong. That is because it is an Inquiry that is actually about people. It's about people whose mental and physical health has been

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impacted, about people whose marriages and partnerships have deteriorated or failed, about people who thought about taking their own lives and, in some cases, who took their own lives.

Everyone listening to this opening should be aware that the evidence we're about to hear is the tip of a very large iceberg but it is a representative tip. The Inquiry has amassed a large volume of witnesses and other evidence from affected subpostmasters and mistresses, and their families, and has sought to bring before you and the public a range of witnesses that cover the following classes:

First, SPMs whose convictions were quashed, who had been convicted of theft following a trial and sentenced to a term of imprisonment.

SPMs whose convictions were quashed who had accepted a plea bargain in the hope of avoiding an immediate prison sentence.

SPMs who were prosecuted but acquitted at either the Crown Court or the Magistrates' Court, especially those who had been offered plea deals and who had rejected them.

Acquitted SPMs who were subsequently made bankrupt.

SPMs who suffered shortfalls, who were dismissed 13
but not prosecuted, especially where the shortfalls were large, ie $£ 10,000$ or more.

SPMs who were not prosecuted but were dismissed and were made bankrupt.

SPMs who were dismissed, not prosecuted, but against whom successful claims were made in civil proceedings.

SPMs who are currently in a contractual relationship with POL and who have suffered shorffalls in the recent past, ie since the litigation was settled.

SPMs who have made a claim under the Historic Shortfall Scheme, known as the HSS.

SPMs who have received compensation, either by virtue of the group litigation that I will describe in a moment or by reason of any other scheme, ie the Second Sight scheme, the HSS or a Government-backed interim payment scheme.

SPMs, lastly, who suffered extreme or unusual consequences or who come from a particular ethnic or religious background.

Reflecting the personal and sensitive nature of the evidence that is going to be given and the purpose of hearing directly from those who have suffered most, only Counsel to the Inquiry will ask questions of the 14
witnesses in the human impact phase of the Inquiry.
They will not be asked questions, less still
cross-examined, by the legal representatives of other Core Participants.

In due course, we, as your counsel, will open the issues and the evidence going to the other 214 issues on the List of Issues. That's very likely to be a much more substantial opening than this short one, explaining in great detail the operation of the Horizon system, the knowledge that POL and others had as to the existence of errors, bugs, and defects in Horizon and the propriety of basing investigations, suspensions, terminations and prosecutions on the axiom that Horizon was reliable, and also opening the conduct of POL and others in the criminal and civil litigation that followed.

At that time, you will hear all of the Core Participants address not only the other 214 issues on the list but also the central themes that we will be looking at over the next four weeks. They are not making opening statements at this stage of the Inquiry.

It's necessary, however, that I should introduce, in very outline terms, a short history of the key events in this dreadful tragedy and also
introduce the individuals from whom you will be hearing evidence over the next few weeks.

So a short history of key events and concepts.
Horizon: as you explained in your progress update of September 2021, the Inquiry has adopted, as a working definition for use in this Inquiry, the definition that the parties used in the group litigation to explain what they meant by the Horizon system; namely:
"The Horizon computer system hardware and software, communications equipment in branch, and central data centres where records of transactions made in branch were processed."

Following a pilot that appears to have been run from 1996, in 2000 POL introduced Horizon across all of its branches. It communicated initially via a telephone line. That was changed in 2010 to an online version called Horizon Online or HNG-X. The former version is commonly referred to as Legacy Horizon.

That second version was itself replaced in 2017 by a third version, known as HNG-A, also an online system. Horizon was used in over 11,000 branches and processed millions of transactions on a daily basis, as it does to this day.

Although Horizon is an electronic point of sale system, or EPOS system, it is much more than that, most particularly it is also an accounting system. In respect of its first use as an EPOS it was utilised to conduct retail transactions, for example buying a book of first class stamps. In this respect, Horizon allowed the SPM to record that goods have been provided to a customer, compute the price of those goods and allow the customer to pay the money required for all of their purchased goods, using either cash or a credit or debit card.

Often, as you will hear later today, a branch will be a retail outlet too, selling non-Post Office goods like food, drink, sweets or newspapers. If a customer wished to buy goods of those kinds and Post Office goods, like stamps, the customer would have to settle their payment in two parts.

The second way in which Horizon was used was in order to conduct and reconcile transactions undertaken by POL with a customer on behalf of a third party supplier of goods or services, such as a Vehicle Excise Licence provided by the DVLA, services from a gas or electricity company, a utility company or the DWP, in respect of benefit payments.

Horizon records all transactions relating to POL 17
activities undertaken at each branch and maintains a balance of the value of POL cash and stock that is held at a branch. Once Horizon was installed at a branch, the SPM in charge of the branch became contractually obliged to use it for all transactions as I have described. Further, the SPM was obliged to make declarations as to the amount of cash held at a branch over a trading period. From 2005, the SPM was obliged to complete a branch trading statement at the end of a trading period. Until such a statement was completed, the branch could not roll over into a new period.

Data about branch transactions relating to POL was transmitted by Horizon and stored so that employees of POL may use the data to review branch accounts and to check for discrepancies.

## Concerns about Horizon.

Prior to 2005 it appears that SPMs had the facility to place disputed shortfalls into a local suspense account and to carry these losses into the next trading period. However, the SPMs' use of the local suspense account was subject to the approval of their retail network manager. Moreover, it appears that this facility was withdrawn in 2005 upon the introduction of the branch trading statement.

Thereafter, SPMs had no facility within Horizon to dispute the figures that it produced. They were required, instead, to contact the helpline. If at tend of a trading period there was a discrepancy or shortfall between the cash on hand and the figures generated by Horizon, the SPM was required to make good any shorffall, either by putting in his or her own money, known as settling in branch, or by asking for the sum to be deducted from his or her future income, known as settling centrally.

POL had a contractual right to seek recovery from SPMs for losses relating to branch accounts. The approach adopted in practice by POL was that if Horizon showed a shortfall, however inexplicable to the SPM, the SPM was required to make it good at the end of the trading period. Some SPMs did so using their own funds or borrowing to make good a loss for which they did not, in fact, accept responsibility.

Fujitsu held audit data known as ARQ data, which contained a complete and accurate record of all transactions and events which had occurred on the branch counter. It was, therefore, possible to refer to this audit data to track every transaction recorded on Horizon. In the civil proceedings which followed, it emerged that Fujitsu also had the ability to amend

Horizon data in relation to a branch, without the knowledge of the SPM concerned. Fujitsu recorded bugs, errors and defects in two types of document. If an SPM phoned the helpline and was referred to the section of Fujitsu which investigated such matters, a document known as a "PEAK" would be created. Those PEAKs would be fed into a higher level document, known as a Known Error Log or KEL.

Criminal prosecutions.
From the first roll out of Horizon -- and, by that, I mean within weeks of it first being installed -- SPMs began to notice errors in the accounts generated by Horizon, errors which the SPMs attributed to the operation of Horizon.

In particular, it was suggested that the system had overstated the amount of cash or stock which should be held at a particular time, thereby causing an apparent and unexplained shortfall in branch accounts. These problems were reported via the helpline the SPMs were instructed to use.

POL resisted the SPMs' claims that there were faults in the system and insisted instead that SPMs made up any shortfall and, when asked, denied that other SPMs had reported the same or similar problems. In short, POL maintained that Horizon was reliable and 20

| 1 | that it established that money was missing, ie that |
| :---: | :---: |
| 2 | there was an actual shortfall of cash held in the |
| 3 | branch, not merely an apparent shortfall generated by |
| 4 | Horizon itself. |
| 5 | POL treated the shortfall as having been caused |
| 6 | by dishonesty or, at best, carelessness on the part of |
| 7 | the SPM and demanded repayment by the SPM. POL's |
| 8 | stance was that it was up to an individual SPM to |
| 9 | prove that a shortfall was not his or her |
| 10 | responsibility. If the SPM could not do so, he or she |
| 11 | would have to make good the shortfall. |
| 12 | Acting as a private prosecutor, POL commenced |
| 13 | criminal proceedings against many SPMs for theft, |
| 14 | fraud and false accounting. Data available to the |
| 15 | Inquiry suggests that, before the Crown Prosecution |
| 16 | Service, the CPS, took over prosecutorial functions |
| 17 | from POL in 2015, POL brought a total of |
| 18 | 844 prosecutions between 2000 and 2015 that were |
| 19 | based, entirely or in part, on the evidence from |
| 20 | Horizon. |
| 21 | This resulted in 705 criminal convictions. Once |
| 22 | POL had secured a criminal conviction, it would |
| 23 | sometimes attempt to secure a Proceeds of Crime Act |
| 24 | order against the convicted SPM, allowing it to seize |
| 25 | their assets and to bankrupt them. $21$ |
| 1 | POL's response to those failings, each of which was |
| 2 | relevant to the safety of their convictions. |
| 3 | A Group Litigation. |
| 4 | Proceedings were commenced in April 2016 against |
| 5 | POL by a group of SPMs in the High Court, alleging |
| 6 | that Horizon changed the way that they could both |
| 7 | account for and interrogate and investigate the |
| 8 | numerous financial transactions that were made in the |
| 9 | relevant branches every working day and that the |
| 10 | Horizon system had a large number of software coding |
| 11 | errors, bugs and defects. |
| 12 | POL disputed the entire basis of the SPMs' civil |
| 13 | claim, arguing that there were large numbers of |
| 14 | subpostmasters who knowingly submitted false accounts |
| 15 | under the previous system and maintaining that Horizon |
| 16 | worked perfectly adequately. On 22 March 2017, |
| 17 | a Group Litigation order was made. The trial judge, |
| 18 | Mr Justice Fraser, was subsequently to describe the |
| 19 | Group Litigation as "bitterly fought". |
| 20 | Indeed, before the litigation was conducted, he |
| 21 | delivered six written judgments on procedural and |
| 22 | substantive issues, the two main judgments being |
| 23 | numbers 3 and 6, the common issues judgment and the |
| 24 | Horizon Issues judgment. These analysed in very |
| 25 | considerable detail a series of contractual issues |

In the middle of this period in 2009, Computer Weekly published a report referring to the problems with the Horizon system and, in the same year, two MPs reported their constituents' concerns about Horizon to the then Minister of Postal Affairs and Employment Relations, who, in turn, forwarded the letters to the managing director of POL.

The next year, POL produced an internal report in response to the questions that had been raised. This report concluded that money recorded as missing on Horizon was due to theft in the relevant branch office and it, the report, recommended that no independent review be conducted of either the system or the prosecutions which had been founded upon it.

However, in July 2012, POL appointed Second Sight Support Services Limited, Second Sight, to conduct a review into problems with Horizon. Second Sight concluded that, in some circumstances, Horizon could be systemically flawed from a user's perspective and that POL had not necessarily provided an appropriate level of support.

From about March 2015 onwards, convicted SPMs began to make applications to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, the CCRC, arguing that evidence was available concerning both failings in Horizon and 22
between SPMs and POL in judgment number 3, and very many technical issues relating to Horizon in judgment number 6.

These claims were settled at a mediation in December 2019. POL accepting that it had:
"... got things wrong in its dealings with a number of postmasters and agreeing to pay $£ 57.75$ million in damages."

The Group Litigation Claimants each received a share of some $£ 12$ million after legal fees were paid from the balance.

The Court of Appeal (Criminal Division).
As I've said, on 23 April 2021, the Criminal Division of the Court of Appeal quashed the convictions of 39 SPMs. They had all been convicted in Crown Courts in England and Wales between 2001 and 2013 for offences that were said to have been committed during the course of their work in branch offices in England and Wales. There were two principal grounds of appeal:

Ground 1 was that the reliability of the Horizon data was essential to the prosecution and, in the light of all the evidence, including the High Court judge Mr Justice Fraser's findings in judgments 3 and 6 , it was not possible for the criminal trial process

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to have been fair.
Ground 2 was that the evidence, together with Mr Justice Fraser's findings, showed that it was an affront to the public conscience for the appellants to have faced prosecution.

For its part in those appeal proceedings, POL accepted Mr Justice Fraser's findings that there are about 30 bugs, errors and defects in the Horizon system which did not operate simultaneously and which affected both Legacy Horizon and Horizon Online; that there was a significant and material risk on occasions of branch accounts being affected in the way alleged by the appellants by bugs, errors and defects; that POL had failed to disclose to SPMs and to the courts the full and accurate position in relation to the reliability of Horizon; and that, in cases where the reliability of the ARQ data was essential to the prosecution, it had a duty to assess that data.

It accepted that, in view of the limitations on the extent to which SPMs could investigate discrepancies in Horizon, POL had a duty to investigate, to ensure that the evidence was accurate and to pursue reasonable lines of enquiry raised by SPMs; and it accepted that Fujitsu had the ability to insert, inject, edit or delete transaction data or 25
refusing to countenance any suggestion to the contrary, POL effectively sought to reverse the burden of proof. It treated what was no more than a shortfall, shown by an unreliable accounting system, as an incontrovertible loss and proceeded as if it were for the accused to prove that no such loss had occurred. Denied any disclosure of material capable of undermining the prosecution case, defendants were inevitably unable to discharge that improper burden. As each prosecution proceeded to its successful conclusion, the asserted reliability of Horizon was, on the face of it, reinforced. Defendants were prosecuted, convicted and sentenced on the basis that the Horizon data must be correct and cash must, therefore, be missing, when, in fact, there could be no confidence as to that foundation."

With that very brief overview, I turn to the evidence that we're about to hear in phase 1 of this Inquiry.

The number of people directly affected is vast. They stretch far beyond those who faced criminal prosecution. Those who were suspended or had their contracts terminated, those who were pursued for lost money, those who kept balancing the accounts by pouring money that they could not afford into POL , the 27
data in branch accounts, and had the ability to implement fixes in Horizon that had the potential to affect transaction data or data in branch accounts, and that it had the ability to rebuild branch data.

POL, therefore, accepted that, in cases where the reliability of Horizon data was essential to the prosecution and conviction of an appellant and where Mr Justice Fraser's findings showed that there was an inadequate investigation and/or full and accurate disclosure had not been made, the conviction could be held by the Court of Appeal to be unsafe. In such cases, POL did not, therefore, resist the appeals on ground 1.

POL did not, however, accept that these same failures of investigation and disclosure were sufficient to justify a finding that it was an affront to the public conscience for the appellants to face prosecution. The Court of Appeal disagreed and allowed the appeals on ground 2 also, holding in summary that POL's failures of investigation and disclosure were so egregious as to make the prosecution of any of the Horizon cases an affront to the conscience of the court, saying at paragraph 137 of its judgment:
"By representing Horizon as reliable and 26

555 who brought a group action that we refer to as the Bates and others case, this Inquiry could never hope to hear all of their stories, all of their suffering, but it will provide a snapshot.

You will hear, Chair, from witnesses who experienced the pilot and roll-out of the Horizon IT system.

Our first witness, Mr Baljit Sethi, together with his wife Anjana Sethi, had run a Post Office in Kent since 1983 using a paper ledger. They had no problems with their accounts until they were encouraged by POL to take up and run a second Post Office in Essex in 2001. About a year later, now relying on Horizon, they suffered their first shortfalls of about $£ 1,000$ a week. This grew to about $£ 17,000$ and their contract was terminated.

You will hear, at one stage, they even experienced a surplus of $£ 40,000$ but continued to be pursued for the apparent deficit, losing their Post Offices and becoming insolvent. You will hear that Mr Sethi contemplated suicide.

Other witnesses will also give evidence as to the transfer from paper based or other accounting systems to Horizon and they will explain how their lives were changed. That's including but not limited 28

of the arrival of both the audit team and the fraud investigation team on the same day, with the investigation team carrying out an interview under caution, searching his home, and querying his personal and business bank accounts.

Susan Hazzleton was questioned on her own by two men for four hours and was told by them that she could go to prison. Siobhan Sayer's newborn baby was crying at her home and whilst it was searched for evidence of stolen money. You will hear from Harjinder Butoy about five auditors attending his branch before he was taken and held at a police station to be interviewed.

Others will give evidence of similar experiences. Many will speak about their attempts to raise concerns with POL. Wendy Martin will give evidence of closing her Post Office and raising press attention until a POL executive came to visit her branch. Jennifer O'Dell similarly met with that POL executive and will give evidence as to her experience of mediation with POL. Others will tell you about what happened when they wrote to the POL chief executive, Paula Vennells, and to their MPs and ministers.

A large number of witnesses, from whom you will hear, faced criminal prosecution. You will hear from 30
imprisonment; Parmod Kalia who was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

Others received community orders or suspended sentences, such as Pauline Thomson, Margery Williams and Oyeteju Adedayo, who together with others will give their accounts. You will hear from Suzanne Palmer, one of a small number who were found not guilty after a jury trial but who were still terminated -- had their contracts terminated, and suffered extreme financial hardship, including bankruptcy. Indeed, bankruptcy and losing one's home is a common theme throughout the evidence you'll hear over the next few weeks.

You will hear from Lisa Brennan, who was spared prison, being sentenced to a suspended sentence, only for her, and her six-year-old daughter to lose their home and to have to rely on the Salvation Army for food and clothing.

You will hear from Rita Threlfall, whose case reached the Crown Court but the prosecution was stopped because of her ill health. She was still forced, however, into bankruptcy and became reliant on her daughter to financial support.

Over the coming weeks you will hear evidence of a wide range of personal tragedies, like Gillian

Howard who learned that she would be prosecuted on the day of her daughter's wedding.

The witnesses you will hear from come from all walks of life: an anonymous witness, who was a former prison officer; Timothy Burgess, who had been in the Royal Air Force; John Dickson, who had previously worked for Rolls Royce for 23 years.

Many of them had long-standing affiliations with POL: Damian Owens' parents ran a Post Office; Guy Vinall's father ran a post office for 20 years; Brent Whybro's wife received a long service award from the Post Office for 20 years, and his father had been an SPM for 40 years; William Graham had actually previously been a training manager who had trained SPMs on how to use Horizon.

A common theme amongst many of these witnesses, whatever their background, is a sense of the community within which each Post Office existed and how the actions of POL led to their ostracisation, to lost friendships and to worse.

Finally, there are those who did not live to see their convictions quashed or who did not know that their names would be cleared. Karen Wilson will give evidence about her husband, Julian, who was convicted of false accounting and sadly died before his 33
conviction was overturned by the Court of Appeal in April 2021.

Marion Holmes has provided a witness statement detailing the case of her husband, Peter Holmes, a former police officer who became an SPM and whose conviction for false accounting was also posthumously quashed in April last year.

As you said, sir, we'll begin hearing these stories today here at the IDRC in London and, as you said, we'll continue to hear these narratives, these accounts, these tragedies for the next two weeks here. We'll then travel to Leeds in the week commencing 28 February and to Cardiff in the week commencing 7 March to hear about different experiences from around this country. As you said, further human impact hearings will take place in due course in Northern Ireland and in Scotland.

However, it should be borne in mind that hearing about human impact will no doubt be a theme throughout this Inquiry and is not confined simply to these human impact hearings. Additionally, there are focus groups running from next month and as you, Chair, investigate what went wrong at each stage, the Inquiry's very likely to hear how these problems impacted upon and indeed, in some cases, tore apart people's lives. 34

Sir, that's all I say in opening at the moment. We're going to hear from Mr Sethi next but I think there's going to be a short break whilst the room is reconfigured or some technical arrangements are put in place. So can we have ten minutes please, sir?
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Of course. Thank you, Mr Beer. We will depart for ten minutes.
( 12.16 pm )

## (A short break)

( 12.27 pm )

## MR BALJIT SETHI (sworn)

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mr Sethi, thank you very much for coming. As it happens, we've only got about half-an-hour, or thereabouts, before lunch but if at any time during the proceedings you feel like a break just let me know and you'll have one, all right?
A. Thank you, sir.

## Questioned by MR BEER

MR BEER: Mr Sethi, good afternoon.
As you know, by name is Jason Beer and I ask questions on behalf of the Inquiry. Can you give us your full name, please?
A. My full name is Baljit Singh Sethi.
Q. I think you made two witness statements and I think they are in front of you. The first of them is dated

11 January 2022. Can you take that one up, please.
Thank you. Then look at the last page of the statement itself; do you see your signature there?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. When you made that statement and now, were the contents of it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. Yes, they are true and to the best of my belief.
Q. Thank you very much. Then the second witness statement, please. That should be dated 2 February 2022. Again, if you turn to the last page of that, do you see your signature?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Are the contents of that statement true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Thank you.

Now, I think after you made your first witness statement it was shown to your wife Anjana Sethi, who sits alongside you; is that right?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Did she confirm the accuracy of it?
A. Yes, sir, she did.
Q. Sir, I think you know that we've got a witness
statement from Anjana Sethi, confirming the accuracy 36
of that first witness statement.
Can I ask you how old are you now?
A. I'm 69 , sir.
Q. How old is your wife?
A. She's 67 .
Q. I think you met your wife, is this right, after you first came to the United Kingdom in 1976 --
A. Yes, sir.
Q. -- she having already arrived ten years earlier in '66?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Do you have children?
A. Yes, I have two sons and one daughter.
Q. How old are they now?
A. My son is 38 , another one is 34 and our daughter 25 . Sorry.
Q. Just take a moment. We've got no rush at all, Mr Sethi --
A. Yeah, okay.
Q. -- and please don't apologise.

I think before you came to the UK in '76 you qualified in law in Bombay; is that right?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Then after you arrived in the UK you studied at college; is that right?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You worked in a variety of banks after that?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. With that background in mind, can we turn to your first contact with the Post Office. How did it come about that you and your wife ran the first Post Office?
A. In 1983 , since my wife already was running a Post Office with her father, she used to look after his Post Office, she said "This is a good investment, so let's buy a Post Office where we will be our own bosses", and plus, you know, in those days, the Post Office used to be in the house. So she said that, "Look, you'll have to give up your job in the beginning", because we had a small son who was only about two years old.

So I said, "okay, that's fine", and I'll run the side of the business of the Post Office and she will run the Post Office and we could give attention to our son also at the same time. So we purchased a small Post Office in 1983 and we ran it for 22 years.
Q. Where was that first Post Office in ' 83 ?
A. It was in a place called Harold Park Post Office, near Harold Road, near Romford in Essex.
Q. I think in the answer you gave before, your said that 38
your wife's father before that ran a Post Office.
Where was that?
A. Her father ran a Post Office in Gillingham in Kent and we also ran it for 20 years. Actually, he passed away while he was on duty.
Q. So you said that you ran the Harold Park Post Office for about 20 years. So that would be about until 2002/2003?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Was that a successful or an unsuccessful business?
A. No, it was a very successful Post Office. We never had any problems. Of course, we had seven armed robberies but my wife was very brave and they didn't take a single penny from the Post Office. She put her life above everything and, today, I'm sitting in front of you, saying that we stole from the Post Office -we had ample opportunity, seven attempts if we wanted, we could have taken as much money and we could have said, sorry, when the money was paid in the armed robber struck and they took all the money, but we never let them take a single penny. We got commended many times, for which they gave us certificates and other things but, unfortunately, after all this, we got nothing to show to that.
Q. So you say in your statement that there were seven
attempted armed robberies and they were attempts because the robbers got away with nothing?
A. Yes, sir, and they came with guns, I don't know that they came with knives or something; they came with real guns.
Q. Was this at the Harold Park Post Office?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. At the Harold Park Post Office, what system did you run for accounting?
A. We had a manual system which we ran, we had to balance at the end of the week. In the beginning it used to be on a Wednesday and, later on, it was changed to a Friday. That was we could only balance once we closed the Post Office and then we had to balance everything, the stock, the money, whatever was with us, and we never had any problem because my wife already had experience and then I also started learning from her, so that if she's not there or if there's a problem, I can run it.

So we both ran it and we were very happy leading a good life, only son at that time, and we were very happy, we were doing well. The community we represented, you won't believe it, it was like a family community because people who lived around there either had a brother, or a sister, or a father, 40
or mother living there, and the community loved us because we looked after them. If they had problems they would come to my wife to discuss, she used to offer them cup of tea or coffee, talk to them. If, say, you did not turn up on a certain day to collect your pension, she made sure she sent a message to the neighbour, could you please go and check that customer.

So the community just loved us. We didn't have to worry. My children when they started to grow up, we never had a problem to take them to school or leave the Post Office. The community people said "We will take them, we will pick them up, don't worry, Anjana, we will look after your child".

So we never had any problem and we were so loved and respected by the community that we were so happy. I think it was the best time of our lives.
Q. At that time, you said that you were using a manual system?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Was that a paper-based ledger?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. If you noticed a discrepancy, what would you do?
A. We would go all over the stock again, check it, sometimes we would take another half hour or maybe 41
except, of course, the money, which you have to arrange for yourself". So we actually -- which place, when we bought the place, because we knew the Post Office was so good, we signed a 14-year lease, because we thought in 14 years we'll run this Post Office and then we can settle down and retire peacefully, and we'll have a good life. So we signed a 14 -year lease with the Post Office and we were quite happy running the business day-to-day.
Q. Before you took over the new lease, in respect of the old Post Office, the one at Harold Park, were you ever audited by the Post Office?
A. Yes, every two or three years, two auditors used to come unannounced, in the morning, say around about 8.30 or 8.15 , and then you usually had to put a sign telling the customers that we shall be opening a bit late because the audit is being carried and they would carry out the audit, try to finish it by 9 o'clock and then once they found everything was in order they would tell us to open the Post Office.
Q. Did they find that everything was in order?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. On those audits, over that $19 / 20$-year period, were any problems over found by the Post Office?
A. No, we were very lucky, I must say this in favour of

15 minutes because it was only me or Anjana running the Post Office, there wasn't any outsider who was running, so we knew each other how we were working and we had to check.

And, luckily, you won't believe it, for 22 years we never a problem with the Post Office. We always balanced the books.
Q. If there was a minor discrepancy, you would iron that out, you would balance the books?
A. Yes, because the discrepancy would be like $£ 2$, or $£ 3$, or $£ 4$, so for that we would just put it in, or whatever had to be done, so that we carry on trading the next day in the morning.
Q. Now, is it right that in about 2001 the Post Office approached you, and asked you to take up another franchise?
A. Yes. We didn't want to buy because we didn't have the funds, so I said to the Post Office "Sorry, we are not interested", and they said, "No, Mr Sethi, this is a very good Post Office, we can't find anybody to run it and we don't want to close it because it's a budding Post Office with a lot of funds coming in, a lot of customers, so please buy it".

In the end, we gave in the pressure to them and they said "We'll help you in every possible way,
the Post Office, that our area manager was very good. If you ever had a problem all we needed was pick up the phone and ring him and he would be there within a few hours. So we never had any problem. We got maximum help from the Post Office, for which we were thankful to them.
Q. Just winding forwards a little, taking things out of order, when you were subsequently investigated by the Post Office, in respect the second Post Office, do you know whether any reference was made back by then to the audits that had been conducted in the 20 years when you were using the paper-based ledgers?
A. No, they didn't because they were not even interested. Because this Post Office in Brentwood came under Chelmsford and the one I ran in Harold Park came under Romford. Of course, they knew the whole history of us because when we took over -- when we started having shortages, you won't believe it, I used to send them a fax every day because, in those days, emails were not common thing.

So I used to fax them, I used to ring them up, say, "I've got a problem, please come and help me". And all response I used to get is: the manager is in a meeting, he is on the telephone, he is off sick today, he's on holiday; but nobody ever bothered to 44
come back to me, not even once. It was never audited, never -- nothing was done during my period.
Q. Okay. We'll come back to those in a moment. It's my fault for taking you out of order. But your recollection is, when things got bad in relation to the second Post Office, nobody looked back at how you had run the first Post Office?
A. No, sir. They just didn't want to know. When we told them that this is what happened with us in that Post Office, we had armed robberies, we never had a problem in the system; they just didn't want to know. They never even bothered responding or ever ringing us.
Q. But you are telling the Chairman that, for near two decades, on a paper-based system, you ran a Post Office with no shortfalls, despite being audited unannounced regularly?
A. Yes, we ran it very successfully. We never had any problems and my wife just loved the place, she loved the job and she was very happy and we were happy, content people.
Q. Now, the second Post Office you told us you were approached, I think, in about 2001. Was that at 99 Kings Road, Brentwood?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Do you know why they approached you to run that second Post Office?
A. Because they had seen that we had experience, we had been running the Post Office in Harold Road so successfully that they contacted us because this Post Office was a very busy Post Office. We used to do about 120 Special Deliveries a day. So they needed people who could undertake the pressure, who could do the job properly, so that there wouldn't be a queue and people would be moaning that this Post Office is useless, that people can't do the job properly.

So we kept the customers happy, we kept the Post Office happy and, because of this, the Post Office said you are the ideal choice we want you to buy this place.
Q. Now, you took up their offer. Who was the subpostmaster on the contract with the Post Office?
A. At that time it was my wife, Mrs Sethi, because when we had my daughter, we got Harold Park Post Office transferred on my name, because she said she'll be busy with the baby. So I said, "Okay, I'll take over at that time". So the Post Office called me for interview, the usual things they have to do and then transferred it to my name, and when we went to buy Kings Road, I said to them, "Look, now that my wife is 46
available, I would rather have that Post Office on her name", and they said, "Oh, yes, we are fine because she has the experience, she actually has more experience than you, so yeah we are quite happy if you buy it", because what the Post Office looks at is -they don't care who buys the Post Office, who does it, as long as the Post Office runs and if there's a problem, the subpostmaster is liable for it at the end of the day.

So you can buy ten Post Offices and give it to ten different people to run it.
Q. So the second Post Office, the contract was in your wife's name; is that right?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Did you have to invest in order to take up the contract with the Post Office for the second Post Office?
A. Yes, sir, I had to invest very heavily. I had to pay to the person who was running the Post Office to buy the Post Office from there. I had to pay for my lease, because the owner wasn't interested in selling freehold. And then, when I took over, I invest a lot of money in the business also, because I saw it was a very viable business. So I invested heavily in the business also and I set up everything there. I ran
newspapers and everything, confectionary, every item possible which I could sell in my business.
Q. When you started running the 99 Kings Road Post Office in Brentwood, did you carry on with the Harold Park one?
A. Yes. My wife was running that and I was running this because, as this was away from my house, I used to leave my house at 6.00 in the morning to run this Post Office. And I just want to highlight one point here, sir, if you would let me please.
Q. Of course.
A. I was the only man who ran the Post Office seven days a week. They did not pay me that Saturday/Sunday. I used to open the Post Office at 8 o'clock in the morning and shut at $8 o^{\prime}$ clock at night. Of course, I had permission of the Post Office. Because it was such a budding business, I said I'll work seven days a week and I was the only Post Office in the country which was running all seven days.
Q. When you took over the Post Office at 99 Kings Road, was that running a paper-based system or was it already on Horizon?
A. No. At that time, the Horizon system was just coming in. So when I took over, there was already Horizon system there because we had to go for training but, 48
unfortunately, the training was very weak and I told them when they gave the training I don't understand. They said, "Don't worry. When you start doing it, everything will fall into place", which it never did.
Q. How long did the training last?
A. It lasted for two days.
Q. Did you attend it with your wife or was --
A. No, l just went on my own and she went on her own.
Q. Was the paper-based system back at Harold Park replaced by Horizon too?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Can you remember when that was?
A. I think it all started in about 2000 or 2001.
Q. Did there come a time when at Kings Road you started to notice shortfalls being reported on the Horizon system?
A. Yes, sir. After about one and a half year -- one
year -- I don't know -- I had a shock that the first time was $£ 1,000$ and I was quite shocked. I spent about four hours that night. I was there until 11.00 but I couldn't trace it. I thought, okay, maybe I made a mistake. I might find it next week. The following week when I did the balance, it shot up to £2,000.

I had rung the Post Office, I sent them a fax. 49

I said, "There seems to be a problem in the Horizon system. Would somebody please come and guide us". Nobody bothered, nobody turned up. These shortages lasted for 17 weeks when they ran up to $£ 17,000$.
Q. Now, I just want to examine, because you're our first witness, some of the terminology about shorffalls, discrepancies and balancing, okay?
A. Yes.
Q. Apologies for using you to do this. It's in your second statement, Mr Sethi, and I'm working from paragraph 3.1 in your second statement.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Where we asked you the question: what do you understand by the terms "shortfall" and "discrepancy". You tell us that when you were a subpostmaster, once a week you would have to balance the books. This means to review the stock held by the subpostmaster, all the payments and receipts from that week's trading, details of which are sent to the Post Office. This was originally done on a Wednesday but later undertaken on a Friday.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You tell us in paragraph 3.2 a discrepancy is where you find a difference between what has been paid in 50
and out and what has been received, or a difference between the stock held and the stock recorded as being held, yes?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. A discrepancy, as you tell us in paragraph 3.3 , will naturally occur in any business which is handling many cash transactions. This can be due to human error or mis-keying, i.e. entering the wrong number in a cash register or computer terminal, for example, yes?
A. Yes.
Q. You tell us in paragraph 3.4 what you've told us already, that previously you used a manual paper-based system which was time-consuming. However, when you went back through having found a discrepancy, you could identify in the records the cause of the discrepancy, yes?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You tell us in paragraph 3.6 what a shortfall is: where a subpostmaster has been paid out more than has been received, and the numbers do not balance as they should and there is a deficit in the accounts.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. The reverse of a shortfall, you tell us in paragraph 3.7, is a surplus. That is if you are holding more stock or cash than the accounts, in fact,
record.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. So a discrepancy is either a shorffall or a surplus.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Thank you.

What did you -- when did you first discover a shorffall at Kings Road?
A. I think it was in September I discovered it was $£ 1,000$ short.
Q. In September is that 2002?
A. 2001, I think.
Q. 2001.
A. Yes, because they closed it by 2002.
Q. How much was the system showing as a shorffall? A thousand pounds for that week?
A. A thousand pounds every week.
Q. What did you do when you noticed that first $£ 1,000$ shorffall?
A. Well, the weekend I called one of my family friends, who was also a subpostmaster, and asked him to go through it. He went through also. He spent about five hours with me but he didn't find anything. Then we surely knew there was something wrong with the Horizon.
Q. Sorry, did you say "he said" or "you said"?
A. No, I said to him -- I said, "I'm sure there's a problem in the Horizon system because two of us have done it. You're an experienced man, so am I". Now, if he can't find a fault, then let me ask the Post Office, "Please come, you have a look and find out what's wrong" but they just refused to come. They didn't even bother.
Q. Now, who's the "they" in that?
A. The Chelmsford head office where we had to report everything. They were the people who were responsible. We sent them faxes, I tried to phone them but without any luck.
Q. So the part of the Post Office you contacted was your head office in Chelmsford?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You say in your statement that you asked them to come to the branch to inspect the terminals because you thought there was a problem with the Horizon terminals; is that right?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Did they say "No, we're not coming out" or did they just not respond?
A. They just did not bother to respond.
Q. You said that you sent faxes, which takes me back too. Why were you sending faxes?
A. Because I wanted some proof because if I will ring them, there would be no proof that I rang them. So I sent a fax and I kept a copy of that fax so that tomorrow they can't turn back to me and say, "Oh, you never rang. When did you ring? Whom did you ring? Whom did you speak to?" So I made sure I sent a fax and I retained a copy in my office which I did every week.
Q. So you were asking the Post Office to come and look at the operation of their system in your branch?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. And that you didn't receive any response at all?
A. No, sir.
Q. I think you told us that the shorffalls didn't stay static; they grew?
A. Yes. Yes, sir.
Q. Up to about $£ 17,000$ ?
A. Yes. That was about four months.
Q. When they reached that level, did you receive some contact from the Post Office?
A. Yes. Then we got a letter from them saying, "Please make this good" -- "make good" means paying the 17,000
-- "and at the same time, as per your contract with us, we are giving you three months' notice we shall be terminating your contract". 54
illegal. So why is this showing that -- there surely has to be something wrong in the system but, at that stage, the Post Office didn't want to know that.
Q. Did you eventually get a response to your communications saying it's unfair that you're terminating or proposing to terminate my contract?
A. No, I didn't get any response but, you know, they say whom nobody helps, God helps. After that week, after we got the letter, it started showing a surplus balance and this went up to 38,900 where I've said there were the figure.
Q. Yes.
A. And I got back to the Post Office and I say surely there's a problem in the system because it was showing 17,000 deficit. Now it's going up every week into surplus balance. Please come and have a look, but they still did not turn up. And on the day they came to do the audit -- and I knew that there was surplus. If I wanted to be dishonest, I could have taken out the money every week.
Q. Hold on. Under your contract, were you allowed to take out surpluses?
A. The contract does state this but I'm not 100 per cent sure. It does say that anything short you make good, anything surplus you withdraw. But whether it's in 56
the contract or not, it's such a long time, I don't know, but I'm sure it does say that. If you're willing to take money from me you should have the same thing to give it to me when it comes to but --
Q. But, in any event, you said that you didn't think it was right?
A. It was not right and, we being honest, we said, "No, there's no way this money belongs to us and we're not going to withdraw this money". So we let it there and when they came and did the audit, there were two officers from the Post Office, they did the audit and showed a surplus of nearly $£ 40,000$ and I said to them, "What happens?" and they said, "We will write to you".
Q. Just before we come on to the audit, I think before the audit you knew that the Horizon system was showing a surplus of just shy of $£ 40,000$ ?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you think the Horizon system was accurate in showing the surplus?
A. No because --
Q. $£ 40,000$ ?
A. -- what is good for the goose is good for the gander.

The thing is when there's a shortage where I'm telling you it is short, how can I be dishonest and tell you tomorrow because it's in my favour? Sorry, sir, no, 57
no, no, this is something good now because it's giving me money. It doesn't work that way.
Q. Now, you've told us that a three-month letter proposing to terminate your contract had been sent and did that expire, that three-month period, on 19 June 2002?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. On that day, as you have just told us, did some auditors arrive?
A. Yes, they came that day to audit the Post Office because that's what is usually done when they are closing a Post Office. They come to audit it and then they keep a copy and they give you one copy, and one copy was given to us but, unfortunately, in the 20 years I don't have a copy of that. But the Post Office has agreed that there was a surplus. They wrote to my MP and we have a copy of a letter from my MP also.
Q. Did you participate in the audit?
A. No. You can't do anything. You just stand there and they do everything in front of you. They count the stock, they count the money, they count everything, and then they do everything, and then they tell you this is a statement, this is what is surplus now, and you have to sign agreeing with them. And I agreed 58
with them, I signed the document, they signed, and they gave me a copy of one of the documents.
Q. What were you signing for?
A. For that, whatever this statement is, is true -- the statement with the auditor's date is true.
Q. And that said that there was a just shy of $£ 40,000$ surplus?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. And they were terminating your contract --
A. In spite of this.
Q. In spite of that. Did that make any sense to you?
A. It didn't because I said -- in fact, they put up an audit -- they wanted me to put a notice in my window saying that my wife was no more subpostmistress and they are looking for a new subpostmaster or subpostmistress in my Post Office, and I refused to do that because what would the community think? They would think these people are thieves, they've been robbing from the Post Office and that's why. It's not only that. It wasn't true, so why would I do such a thing? I refused to do it.
Q. Did you ask the auditors what would happen to the balance?
A. Yes, they said the Post Office will write to you.
Q. Did they?
A. Yes.
Q. Did they write to you?
A. No, they never wrote to me. One and a half years passed. Then I contacted my MP and then they wrote back to my MP.
Q. What did they say that you owed them?
A. Well, they wrote back to my MP saying that when we took the computers away -- now, this is the Post Office, whom we loved and we cared and we were so honest to them, is doing an audit without me present or any independent person present, and l've seen one of the statements where they wrote missed balance $£ 41,000$. How are you going to justify that missed balance? I could put tomorrow missed balance $£ 100,000$ in my favour. Will you accept that, sir?

So they sent me a statement and they're telling my MP, "Oh, Mr Sethi was actually 55,000 short, so he still owes us 17,000 because that 38,000 is compensated against that". So then I told my MP, "Why are they not pursuing me or taking me to court or saying we'll send you to prison" like they've done to others? Still never got a responding letter.
Q. So they didn't pursue you for that sum and they didn't criminally prosecute or investigate you?
A. No.
Q. But they terminated your contract?
A. Yes, but they know that there is this: when they don't leave you for a single penny, how would they leave you for 17,000 ? Am I the son-in-law of the Post Office?
Q. On that note, Mr Sethi, we will break now, if that's a convenient moment, and come back after lunch to turn more directly to the human impact of all of this.
A. Thank you, sir.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mr Beer, normally in a situation where a witness is giving sworn evidence a judge or a chair might say something about speaking about your evidence. I'm not really disposed to do that in these circumstances because people have been talking about this for 20 years; so it seems somewhat superfluous to say that you can't speak about it for quarter of an hour over your lunch.

See you after lunch, Mr Sethi, at 2.00.
( 1.00 pm )

## (Luncheon Adjournment)

( 2.00 pm )
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, Mr Beer.
MR BEER: Thank you. Mr Sethi, we just left at the point at which your contract was terminated. Can I ask, did the Post Office terminate the contract for Harold Park too?
A. No, sir, only for Kings Road, Brentford.
Q. Only the 99 Kings Road one?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. So you carried on, you and your wife, working at that one?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. How long did you carry on working at the Harold Park one?
A. Another one year, or so, because then they said that the Post Office is shutting down Post Offices because Harold Park was not a very busy Post Office and, plus, we had lost businesses by that time so they decided to shut it.
Q. So the closure of Harold Park wasn't anything to do with allegations against you, so far as you knew?
A. No, sir.
Q. Okay. That was just the normal course of business?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. In terms of the impact that the closure of 99 Kings Road had on you, you say in your statement that you had invested nearly $£ 150,000$ to lease the property and the shop, plus thousands of pounds more on stock levels and setting up the shop; is that right?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Did that include improvements to the shop?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You have told us already that you had a 14 -year lease?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Did you have to surrender that lease?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. What was your salary at the Kings Road Post Office?
A. 35,000 per annum.
Q. Did you lose that salary?
A. In addition to the shop takings also.
Q. What was roughly the shop takings.
A. We were doing about 50,000 per annum.
Q. Was that takings or profit?
A. Well, you could say 20 per cent profit, at the most, and we also had a flat on the top, which we had let out, so we lost that flat's income also, on the top of Kings Road Post Office.
Q. What were your intentions if this hadn't happened, in terms of hanging on to 99 Kings Road?
A. We would have run it and after 14 years, God willing, me and my wife would be well and happy, we would have had enough savings for our old age and, plus, we would be able to educate our children and everything, because both children went to university and we couldn't help them in any way.

They were working and studying at university. We felt so let down. We feel like as parents we are a failure to our children because we could not do anything to help them in any way. They helped themselves and, by God's grace, they got very good jobs in leading banks, and we are grateful to God, but we lost utterly everything. This was all thanks to the Post Office.
Q. So if this hadn't have happened it would have been your intention to carry on running the Post Office until retirement?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You would have used the income to help provide for your children as they passed through education?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. By the last answers you've given the Chair, are you referring to the broader financial impact that this has on families, as well as those directly affected by it?
A. Yes, sir, we had to go into IVA and we were on the verge of bankruptcy, of losing everything we had worked for the last 20/25 years.
Q. So when did you go into an IVA?
A. Within one year, we went into IVA, sir.
Q. So within a year of the end of $2012-2002$ rather?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. What was the effect of entering an IVA, in terms of your ability to get work?
A. It affected it in lots of ways. Number 1, I could not open a bank account for six years. I could not get a loan. My son had applied for a job in a bank, that was his first job and he was worried because, if they did a credit search, he would not get that job thinking that his parents are thieves, because a report would be on the credit report saying these people have been -- their Post Office has been shut down because of them stealing the money from the Post Office.
Q. What did you do in terms of getting work?
A. To tell the truth, I was somewhat down and out that, at one stage, I was thinking of contemplating suicide but then I thought, no, this is the easy way out, what about my family, my children. No, l'm going to do something. I can't fight the Post Office because I went to a barrister in London. He charged me $£ 500$ and he said to me "Mr Sethi, if I were you, you're just waiting your time, because the Post Office contract is so heavily weighed in favour of the Post Office you cannot win, you cannot win, so my advice to you was, I have to charge you money because you have 65
come to me, but for you it's to go and find another job".

I was nearly 54 at that time and, at 54 , who's going to give you a job because wherever I went and, say, if I wanted to go back into banking, they didn't want to say you're too old, they will just say "Sorry, you've got too much experience and we don't have that kind of vacancy".

So, in the end, I got into security where I got minimum wage.
Q. So you were a security guard?
A. Yes, and I was doing night shift, which I'd never done in my life. So, once again, no time with the children because during nighttime I was away doing my shift because I was doing a 12 -hour shift, sometimes even more because you are being paid hourly. The more work you do, the more money you can get but, you know, with minimum wage, it doesn't matter how many hours you put in, there's not much return at the end of the day.
Q. In your answer before last, you said you went off to see a barrister was that a direct access barrister in 2004?
A. One of my friends he said to me that best thing is we should go to a barrister because they're going to terminate your contract and let's see what he says. 66
Q. Was that in 2004?
A. Much earlier, sir, because, by the time they closed the Post Office, so I was seeking if I could do anything to redress the situation.
Q. What, if any, impact did this have on your reputation within the community, ie what happened to you?
A. Our reputation was in shreds. People who used to hold us in high esteem thought we were thieves, we were robbing from the Post Office. People who used to stop us in the street to say hello turned their face the other way thinking "These people run a Post Office and look the Post Office has shut them down because they've been robbing from the Post Office", and we had no way to prove it or tell anybody that this is wrong. We tried our best to highlight -- there's a cutting also of the newspaper.
Q. Which we're just coming to.
A. Okay. It had a very bad impact on us in every aspect of life psychologically, financially, reputation-wise. The community who loved us didn't want to know us.
Q. You mentioned that you gave an interview to a newspaper. Was that a local newspaper?
A. Yes, sir, because I had a Post Office in Brentford, I asked the local newspaper if they would like to come down and let me give my side of the story and they 67
said yes, and they came to interview me and they published by interview in Brentford Gazette.
Q. I think we've got the Article from the Brentford Gazette. I think that can be displayed. Whilst that's being done, Mr Sethi, if you look at your witness statement, at the end of the first one there is a copy of that article; can you see it?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Is this the article you're referring to?
A. Yes, sir and, in this, I highlighted at that time, not now, that the fault lies not with us, it lies with the Horizon system, which the Post Office has refused to come on numerous occasions when they have been told. So I highlighted at that time saying there's a problem with the Horizon system. But we were told: you are the only Post Office in the country that has the problem, nobody else has that.
Q. There's a lot packed into those answers there. Let's take it in stages.
A. Sorry, sir.
Q. That's all right. I think we've dated this at about spring 2012, is that about right? Sorry, 2002 -I keep saying 2012.
A. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.
Q. It's in the Brentford Gazette.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You can see the heading "Post chiefs tell shopkeeper he must advertise to replace wife". That's what you told us about before lunch. They wanted you to put up an advert in the shop for a replacement position to the one that your wife occupied in the Post Office?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. If we look at it together, it reads:
"A Brentwood shopkeeper has been faced with an impossible dilemma after postal chiefs asked him to advertise for a replacement for his wife.
"Anjana Sethi, sub post office mistress at Kings Road Post Office, has been told her contract will be terminated in June due to a dispute over alleged cash and business statement irregularities.
"Her husband Baljit runs the shop where the post office is based and is fighting the decision, claiming the problem is due to a faulty computer system installed by Post Office Ltd."

Is that what you were just referring to, that paragraph there?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You were saying it's not just me saying in 2021 that it was -- the fault was with Horizon, I was saying that in 2002 and saying it publicly?
A. Yes, sir. I highlighted at that stage -- it was not that I highlighted in 2012, or when the Post Office -I highlighted as soon as my Post Office was running into problems. I highlighted that the fault lies not with us, not with us, but what they have put the system -- the fault lies with the system, sir.
Q. We can see, if you look at the third column, in the first paragraph, so third column, first paragraph, there's a further reference to that:
"Mr Sethi argues the system is faulty but Post Office ... has totally refuted this and claims it has sent experts down to check it twice."
A. This is not true, sir. They never sent anybody ever to check it. They're saying they sent people twice. How come they didn't send the people when it was shortage? They didn't send anybody when it was short, they didn't send anybody when it was surplus. This is a false statement. I am sorry to say the Post Office, whom we love, has been telling lies, and lies, and lies. There's no truth in this statement, sir.
Q. Did this newspaper article have any effect on how people viewed you in the local community? You said you wanted to get your side of the story across?
A. Sir, at the end of the day, the thing is this,
newspapers are going to publish both sides of the 70
because we have not done anything wrong, we didn't want to hide from the people, but people still are not going to believe your words because they are going to believe what the Post Office says.

You cannot convince everybody. Maybe one or two people might have agreed with you but, at the end of the day, there was nothing we could do to prove that we had done nothing wrong.
Q. You have told us about the financial impact that this had on you. The broader consequences of that financial impact, the impact on your health and how you felt, on the harm it did to you in the community and amongst friends and family; did there come a time when you went to a mediation?
A. Yes. I can't remember the year but we did go in 2012 or something, or 2014, I don't know the exact --
Q. In your statement you pick the middle year, you said approximately 2013 in your statement.
A. I'm sorry, because it's been such a long time and we went there. We had actually given up all hope, and I'm a person who's keeps all the records but my wife said to me, look, your cupboard is full of this rubbish, nothing is going to happen, why don't you chuck it away. So I had to throw away everything.

When we went for this mediation, they offered me 72
$\qquad$
a paltry sum of $£ 1,000$. I said to them: are you joking? $£ 1,000$ for the last 15 years of the scandalous thing we have gone through, our lives have been turned upside down, our children have suffered, we have suffered. You know about me and my wife a diabetic, I'm actually on insulin. It's not hereditary, we never had any sickness, we never took a single day off closing the Post Office ever. In all these 25 or 30 years we ran the Post Office, we never rang up the Post Office saying "Oh, today my wife is sick, she can't run the Post Office", because we were more worried about the community.

We used to think we're providing a service and people are going to like you for that, for doing -like I said to you, I show up on seven days a week in Brentwood. In Harold Park, I never used to open the Post Office at 9 o'clock, I used to open at 8.30 because I used to see snow is falling, people are standing outside, I would say, "no, no, no, please come in, don't stand outside, come inside, stand here but come in a queue, as you all have lined up, but please don't stand outside", because we used to open it early, so that people could --

There were people who couldn't -- there were people who used to like come to take money, say like
you want to withdraw $£ 2,000$, and a lady who used to walk up to us and say to me "Mr Sethi, you know, I feel a bit uneasy because there's a man standing there I think he looks dubious to me, can I leave my book with you, I've got ten weeks pension money there, can you please drop it to me after you close the Post Office".

And this is what I'm telling you, with heart on my hand, you won't believe it. I said to her "I will bring it after 5.30", because I closed the Post Office at 5.30 . It was raining cats and dogs and my wife said "Where are you going", I said "You know my customer, she's left $£ 500$ with me, if I don't go at 5.30 she might get a heart attack thinking I have runaway with the money". So I said, no, I got drenched and she said to me "You could have waited", I said "No, that's not the question, the question is you trust me and if didn't come I was worried more about you than myself".

So this how you work with the community and that's why the community loved us because we cared for the community. If we saw somebody standing at a bus stop we used to give them a lift. We didn't used to just drive past, we used to say, no, let's give a lift and we say, oh, I live across the road. I said that 74
doesn't matter, this will take me only a minute.
So we did everything to get Post Office the
business. I went to different pubs, charities, where they started banking with me, who were not even near me where I had my Post Office but because I gave them very good service, they came and banked with me. We used to get deposits of $£ 100,000$ a week.
Q. Just going back to the mediation, you said that they offered --
A. $£ 1,000$.
Q. Did you settle, in the end, for a different amount?
A. Yes, in the end they told me, "look, we have wasted enough time, we'll give you 5,000 , that is our final offer; do you want take it, take it or leave it". I talked to my wife, I said to her "Look, we're not getting anything, if we don't take this 5,000 we won't even get that, so we might as well take that 5,000 because, at the end of the day, if you don't accept that 5,000, we are going to get nothing".
Q. Did it represent the actual losses that you had suffered?
A. No, sir. It was nowhere near the actual losses.
Q. More recently, have you made an application to the Post Office's Historic Shortfall Scheme?
A. Yes, sir. I've made -- to this historical shortfall,
which I wish to highlight, sir, if you give me an opportunity.

Can I say something about this historical shortfall?
Q. Let's just take it in stages --

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Let Mr Beer ask the questions. I'm sure he's going to get to the relevant parts.
A. Yes, I have applied for --

MR BEER: So under the HSS, as we are calling it?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. When did you make the application?
A. Two years back, sir, in February 2020.
Q. February 2020?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. When did you receive a reply of substance from the Post Office?
A. Unfortunately, sir, I have not received a single substantial reply. Every three months, I write to my MP. She writes to the Post Office and they come with a stereotype statement "Mr and Mrs Sethi, we got 2,500 applications, so you're not the only one, please have patience and we will come back to you". This is the only reply l've received in the last two years.

But just last Thursday, after sitting on that for two years, now they have come back to me saying we 76
want you to answer these 100 questions.
I mean, I've suffered for 20 years. I need help from my children. I'm nearing 70 . I will not live long. I ask my children to help me. They got their own lives, they got their own children. Now, they want me to fill 100 questions to answer. Do you think this is fair, sir?
Q. Just getting back to the chronology then, you have had holding replies every three months or so for the last two years?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Then on 10 February --
A. Yes, sir.
Q. -- you received a letter, which I think has actually got 68 questions in it, but if you count the sub-questions, it comes out to over 100; is that right?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Is that the first time they have asked you for that information?
A. Yes, sir, but before that whatever information, when we put in for Historical Shortfall, they have asked me so many questions which we have answered and they keep repeating the same questions. The last time I wrote to them and I said, "You know, these questions, which 77
that you or your wife will die before you achieve any form of justice or meaningful compensation; is that the case?
A. Yes, sir.
Q. What do you want from the Post Office?
A. I want two or three things from the Post Office: number 1, we want an apology from the Post Office saying they're sorry what they have done to us. We have not -- haven't received a single letter today saying they were wrong, they apologise, they are sorry. They haven't done that.

The impact that they had on us -- the people who did this, they should be investigated, not a single person has been brought to charge until today. They've gone scot-free, and the answer would be, sorry, they have left the organisation or they retired. Yeah, but they are the people who did it and this is not one person. This goes right to the top.

So I can't say, "Oh, my manager did it or my sub-manager did it", I'm sorry right up to the chief executive or the director of the Post Office everybody knew what exactly was happening. So I want that to be done.

Thirdly, no amount of compensation can return us the 20 years of hell we have gone through. Only my
you have asked me now again after six months, I already sent you this six months back", and then they came back to me saying, "Oh, sorry, there are lots of people dealing with this, so that person was dealing has mislaid it, the case has come to me new, so I need now reply from you".

This like passing the buck from you to him, him to her, which will be never ending. Even if I answer these 100 questions tomorrow, some bright geezer might get up tomorrow and say, "Oh, Mr Sethi, you know what, now people have changed, could you please answer those 100 questions again".
Q. Looking at the questions generally, I'm not going to go through them, are you in a position now 20 years on to answer lots of them?
A. Not really, sir, because the questions they are asking me: when you bought the Post Office, they know it, those are some of the typical questions; how much you invested; when you bought it; how much was the surplus; how much was the shortage. I mean, all this information is held by the Post Office. They are just wasting time, just to prolong the things and if this goes on, I think I'll be dead and gone and we'll never get anything from the Post Office.
Q. You say in your statement that you are deeply worried 78
wife and I know it, how we have struggled in these 20 years. We have worked so many hours for a petty amount of money but we didn't want handouts, we didn't go to the state to give us unemployment benefit or anything. We said, no, we'll make a life, we'll work hard.

As I said earlier, the Post Office took her again and made her a manager, which clearly shows that in one place you are saying she is dishonest, another place you are again making her a manager of a Post Office. How can you justify this?

So I want a good compensation not only for my -but for my colleagues, there are people who are worse off than me who suffered, they went to prison. I must say I consider myself lucky that didn't go because mine turned to a surplus. What if had not turned to a surplus? My wife would have to go to prison not me, because she was the subpostmistress. They would have charged her and who would have looked after my children. Our family would have been broken, the children would have not been educated, they wouldn't be what they are today.

I'm so proud today of my children. I can, hold my head up and say they worked so hard and I'm such a proud -- we are so proud parents of our children.

They've helped us in every aspect, instead of we helping them.

So I hope, sir, that the Post Office looks into this and gives us our due, which should have been done long time back. I don't want them to keep postponing and saying "It will happen in three months' time, six months' time, down the year". No, give us something now, so that we have something. We want to get something now, some compensation should be given now and then they can decide about other things later on.

But all they do is, "Sorry, Mr Sethi, there are 2,500 people". Yes, I know there are 2,500 people. You see in the papers I've been reading -- this is what Mr Scully said, he said 98 per cent of the subpostmasters have got the money. Then another place they say, no, 95 per cent have got. Another place they said 33 per cent. So where are my, I'm nowhere in those 98 per cent, or 95 per cent, or 33 per cent.

You're not giving exact figure. What we want is for you to come out and tell us that we have got this, we are doing this; they are doing exactly what they did when they closed me down. They believed that if they don't answer that is the end of the story. That's what they did when we were running shortage, they never came back, and now when we apply for 81

Historical Shortfall, they are doing exactly the same story.

I also wanted to ask you, sir, if tomorrow me and my wife pass away, will my children be able to get some compensation or will the matter just die along as we die?
Q. Mr Sethi, thank you very much for the evidence you have given.
A. Thank you, sir.
Q. I haven't got any other questions for you. Is there anything else that you feel that you want to say that we haven't through this process of question and answers covered?
A. No, sir, l've said everything. I hope now that me and my family gets justice, which is overdue to us and to other subpostmasters, and my colleagues. God willing, I hope that will happen.

Thank you very much, sir, and I'm so very, very grateful to you for giving me an opportunity to put my case. That's the first time in 20 years. You know everything has been blocking up and today I feel that most of it has come out and I feel a bit relaxed and I'm happy and I'm grateful to you.

Thank you very much, sir.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Well, thank you very much, and also 82
thank you Mrs Sethi, not just for supporting your husband with your statement but for coming to sit by him and supporting him today. Thank you.
A. Thank you, sir.

MR BEER: Thank you very much, Mr Sethi, if you return to your seats now, we will move on to the next witness. Thank you indeed.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mr Beer, while the preparations are going on, if you think there is a need for a break during the course of Mrs Hamilton's evidence you just take that break.
MR BEER: Thank you, sir. Although she won't like being called by this name, Josephine Hamilton, please.

## JOSEPHINE HAMILTON (sworn) <br> Questioned by MR BEER

MR BEER: Thank you for bringing your own Bible. Can you give us your full name, please.
A. Josephine Hamilton. Done it again.
Q. In front of you, there should be two witness statements.

I should have said I ask questions on behalf of the Chair of the Inquiry Sir Wyn Williams, my name is Jason Beer.

There should be two witness statements in front of you. The first is dated 13 January and, if you
personnel research?
A. Yes.
Q. As a care assistant?
A. Yes.
Q. You ran a pub, you ran a haulage business, you drove a tipper truck?
A. Yes.
Q. Having got an HGV licence, you were a long distance lorry driver?
A. Yes.
Q. So those six jobs preceded your work in the Post Office?
A. Yes.
Q. So how did it come about that you took over the Post Office in South Warnborough?
A. Well, we were struggling to make haulage pay because the cost of fuel was such a lot of money and so somebody in the village -- because we'd been there for 15 years before that -- somebody suggested that I took over the village shop because it had been run by volunteers and it needed someone to, kind of, bring it together. So they said "Why don't you take over the lease on the shop", and, yeah, it had a Post Office in it and there was somebody working in the Post Office. So I took a 40-year lease on the business. 85
Q. $4-0$ ?
A. 4-0, yes.
Q. So can you just describe the Post Office? I called it South Warnborough, whereabouts is that?
A. It's in Hampshire between Odiham and Alton, and a quintessentially Hampshire village, it was a lovely little shop and it was just a local community store, really, with a Post Office in the back of it.
Q. So it was run as a co-operative or a local community?
A. Yes.
Q. With a Post Office inside it?
A. Yes, yeah.
Q. People were concerned that if the shop closed the Post Office would close?
A. Yes, the Post Office was really important because, at that time, we had lots of elderly people in the village, who really needed it.
Q. Did you have to pay any money to take over the 40-year lease?
A. Well, they said -- they knew I didn't have a lot of money so they said if you take it on, you can pay us rent every year plus lease premium. So I was buying it over the term of the lease.
Q. So the "they" in that, is that that landlord, rather than Post Office? 86
A. Yes, that's the Village Shop Association. They owned it or everyone had debentures in it.
Q. So I think you say in your statement the price of the lease was $£ 36,000$ ?
A. Yes.
Q. You didn't have capital to pay it upfront?
A. No.
Q. So you were planning to clear it as you went along --
A. Yes.
Q. -- expecting to clear it eventually?
A. Yes. Well, the plan was to clear it in about five years but it didn't pan out like that because of the Post Office.
Q. Were you lent some money to purchase the shop's standing stock?
A. Yes. Yes, I was lent $£ 10,000$ by the store.
Q. What happened when you, in October 2001, took over the shop and the Post Office?
A. Well, it was just a bare shell, really, and we realised that the road was really useful and we kind of turned it in -- we realised that with fresh produce and a coffee machine, you could actually turn it into a bit of a café, you know, a takeaway, on the way through to work. We captured lots of builders because we were open at 7.00 in the morning and that kind of 87
started to grow the business, really. And then the lady who was running the Post Office, she decided she wanted to leave at Christmas that year, and so --
Q. This is still 2001?
A. This is still 2001, yes, and the subpostmaster, who was subpostmaster in name only, he approached me and said "Would you consider running it?" So I thought, well, you know -- I mean, back in the day, it was a tiny little Post Office. It was all paper-based, although it had the Horizon system, everything -there was no chip and PIN, so it was easy to balance, easy to work. It was just cheque and cash, and that was it.
Q. So when did you take over as manager of the Post Office then?
A. Christmas 2001. She left Christmas Eve, and I started in between Christmas and New Year.
Q. When did you officially become the postmistress?
A. Eventually in 2003, the subpostmaster was terminally ill and they asked me -- well, we had to apply for the position but nobody else came forward, so I went and was interviewed in Basingstoke and I got the job and took it over as subpostmistress.
Q. When you took over or when you joined in October 2001, then when you were manager in December 2001 and then, 88
by the time you took over as the subpostmistress in 2003, were you aware of any issues with the accounts or balances of the Post Office?
A. I knew they had had a $£ 270$ discrepancy, and I knew that the subpostmaster had paid it but I just -- you know, it was before my time, before I even took the shop over. I knew that -- I had heard that Sue had had a problem with the $£ 270$, so didn't really give it another thought.
Q. Was there any discussion over what had caused the discrepancy?
A. No.
Q. When you joined in October 2001 what were the systems that were in place?
A. We had, like, the basic Horizon system but because you could match everything at the end of the day, it was like double entry bookkeeping, you could see little piles of paper with the pension dockets and things like that. If you had made a mistake and you finished something to cheque or cash and you had finished it to cash and it should have been cheque, you could see, because you had a pile of cheques and a pile of bits and pieces that you could add up and see straight away where you had made a mistake. So it was easy.
Q. Were you running parallel systems then?
Q. There were very few customers in the Post Office.
A. There were no customers.
Q. The trainer, therefore, gave you limited training. What was that training about?
A. It was about basically what envelopes to put what in at the end of the day and what to despatch to where. He did a pretend balance and, I mean, we didn't have any figures to play with because the Post Office wasn't busy between Christmas and New Year. So he basically pinned everything on the wall because there actually wasn't a balance between Christmas and New Year, he pretended to do one, showed me what would be done, and then left me to it.
Q. You said that when chip and PIN was installed, everything started to go haywire?
A. Yes. I mean, you just couldn't -- once discrepancies started happening, you couldn't actually find out where it was -- what had gone wrong.
Q. You say in your statement that:
"This is when I started to experience significant unexplained shortfalls."
A. Yes.
Q. The first discrepancy occurred on 2 December 2003 when a shortfall showed up in the sum of $£ 2,082$, which the Post Office had put into the suspense account?
A. Just at the end of the day, if there was ever anything wrong, you could spread everything out and have a look at it would be there, and so you could sort it out.
Q. You mentioned the introduction of chip and PIN. When did that come in, in your branch?
A. It came in in late 2003. I cannot remember exactly when but it was just about around the time I became subpostmaster and it all went haywire from then on.
Q. Did you receive any training for the introduction of the chip and PIN system?
A. No. They literally screwed it onto the counter, a Fujitsu guy came, screwed it onto the counter and I said "What's that". He said, "That's chip and PIN". He said "It will be going live in a little while", and that was it. That was the training.
Q. Did you receive any training in the wider Horizon system?
A. No. I had had four half days training between Christmas and New Year when I took it over, when it was paper-based, but the chip and PIN hadn't been invented then, so nothing related to it.
Q. You describe in your statement between

25 December 2001 and 1 January 2002 you were visited by a trainer from the Post Office.
A. Yes.

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A. Yes.
Q. Is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. Was that almost immediately after the chip and PIN was installed?
A. Yes, it was within a month or so. I can't be exactly sure what date but it was around that time.
Q. What was the suspense account, so far as you knew?
A. Well, something -- if you had something wrong it would just be parked over there but it was when I went to bring it out of suspense that the whole thing went -it doubled in front of my eyes. They told me what to do and the discrepancy doubled, and I demanded -well, they said "You have got to make it good" and I said, "Well, I'm not accepting that". I said "I want the area manager to come down" and he came down and couldn't --
Q. Can we just slow it down a little bit, if we may.
A. Yes.
Q. So you got this discrepancy that showed up on 2 December 2003 --
A. Yes.
Q. -- of $£ 2,082$. You said you contacted them. Who did you contact?
A. The help desk.
Q. So did you phone the help desk, the helpline?
A. Yes, I phoned the helpline.
Q. You said, I think, that you wanted to know how to take that money out of the suspense account?
A. Yes, because they -- I can't remember the exact process but you kind of take the suspense account out to zero -- when they find out what's wrong, they take it out and it becomes zero and whatever I did made it minus 4,000 not 2,000 .
Q. So were you given --
A. I didn't owe the 2,000 .
Q. Were you given some instructions by the helpline and did you carry those out?
A. Yes, I carried them out on 31 December, I think it was.
Q. In your statement you said 24 December?
A. 24 December, yes.
Q. So Christmas Eve rather than New Year's Eve?
A. Yes.
Q. It doubled to about $4,188.53$, you say, in your statement?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you speak to the help desk again?
A. Yes.
Q. What did they say?
A. Well, I ranted for about a week trying to get it sorted out because they just kept saying "Well, you've got to make it good", and it's like, well, I didn't owe 2,000 let alone 4,000. So I said, "Well, I want the area manager to come down". So they knew about the amount and allowed me to keep rolling it over and the area manager came down some time in January and he couldn't find it either but he said "Oh, I think an error notice will be generated because I can't work out what's gone on either", and the error notice never came.

So they said we managed to get it down to about 3,100 and something, and they sent me a letter saying we'd like you to send that by return of post and it's like, well, I don't have that. So they said, well, that's fine we'll keep your remuneration until it's paid for.
Q. You mentioned about somebody from Fujitsu, I think, coming out to install the chip and PIN system?
A. Yes.
Q. Did anyone come out from Fujitsu after this complaint was made by you in December 2003?
A. I'd had a couple of times engineers would come out and change the base unit under the counter, and they said "We're just changing that because it's not recording 94
Q. They deducted some of your wages?
A. They were deducting two lots of wages, one straight after the other, and then it kept going wrong and I kept having deficits. And so I remortgaged the house because I had a $£ 9,000$ one and I put $£ 9,000$ in the safe to make that up and then I borrowed $£ 3,000$ from a friend and then I put that in, and I just gave up because -- and that's when I didn't flag up that there was money -- that the accounts didn't balance, because it would come up with a figure that you should have in your safe and if you didn't have it --

Well, you couldn't actually open the next day, unless you agreed the figure and it would generate the figure, so you just go, yeah, I've got that, because I didn't know where else to go, because l'd already tried to get them to come and sort it out but they didn't.
Q. So the system was showing deficits?
A. Yes.
Q. You were seeking to make those deficits up from your own private money and the money of others --
A. Yes.
Q. -- by putting cash in the safe?
A. In the safe, yes, yes, yes. Yes.
Q. But you knew that you hadn't taken any money?
A. I know. And I just backed myself into a corner. I didn't know where else to go because I knew I couldn't get any help from the Post Office and every time I said "This isn't right", they just said "Well, you've got to pay it".
Q. I think things came to a head at the beginning of 2006?
A. Yes.
Q. You say in your statement that, by that time, you were becoming very worried and stressed about the continuous shorffalls and discrepancy on Horizon?
A. Yes, well, I had had chest pains and I went to the doctor and they gave me an ECG but they thought it was just stress and -- well, that period that last year, when the amount was growing and growing and $I$ just didn't know -- I didn't know where to go for help and they rang and said "We want you to remit $£ 25,000$ tomorrow because we're concerned about the amount of cash you're holding", and I knew I didn't have it. And a friend came past and saw the light on about 10 o'clock, and she came in and it was the friend that lent me the money and she said "Whatever's the matter", and I said "I don't know what I'm going to do, where can I find 25 grand". She said "You've just got to stop this because", you know, she said, 97
"you're going to be really ill if -- you've got to -whatever happens, you've got to draw a line under it". So she said "You're going to phone the Federation in the morning, and ask for help".
Q. Did you phone the Federation, and by "the Federation" you mean the National Federation of SubPostmasters?
A. Yes, and I phoned them in the morning and I said "I haven't got -- l've got a big discrepancy in my office". I said "I've got no idea how it's happened, I've had problems with the computer system, I've been putting money". And she said, "Well, you go find yourself a good criminal lawyer and we'll arrange an audit", and that was the sum total of their help.
Q. Did you go and find yourself a good criminal lawyer?
A. Well, fortunately, one of my customers was a criminal lawyer and she lived right opposite the shop. So I went and literally poured my heart out to her and I don't think she could really quite believe what was going on because she knew me.
Q. You told us that you went to see your GP?
A. Yes.
Q. Did your GP sign you off from work?
A. Yes, with stress.
Q. For how long?
A. They signed me off for a month with stress but 98

I couldn't take any time off because the shop -- I was the shop. It was me and one or two part-time others and I couldn't not be there.
Q. So even though you were signed off you carried on working?
A. Yes.
Q. You said that an audit was going to be arranged by the National Federation of SubPostmasters?
A. Yes, they arranged it for -- like, I rang them on the Monday evening and they came Wednesday morning.
Q. How many auditors arrived?
A. There were two that came round to my house and I think they left one in the office, as well, while they were round at my house.
Q. What did the auditor say, as a result of the audit?
A. They said "There's a large discrepancy in your office, what have you done with it, what have you done with the money?" I said, "I don't even know -- I don't know what's going on". I said "I can't -- I cannot get to grips with the computer system", and I said "I've absolutely no idea". And he said "Well, you're the only one that's ever had problems with Horizon", and I -- you know, at the time, I believed him because we didn't know.
Q. So they told you that you were the only person that
had had problems with Horizon?
A. That it had ever happened to, yeah, yeah. And, I mean, I really did think I was going mental. I just -- because, I mean, I'm not that unintelligent. If I put everything out there, you should have been able to find it. I couldn't get them to help me find it and it was just crazy. I used to literally just sit there like a mad woman with paperwork everywhere, all over the floor, just thinking, it's got to be here, you know.

But it wasn't. I couldn't find it because they had all the information the other end. I only had a screen and they wouldn't give it to you.
Q. You said that in your statement:
"I began to feel like I was going mad and that it was entirely my fault."
A. Yes.
Q. Is that how you felt?
A. Yes, that's how I felt. When he said I was the only one, that's how I did feel. I mean, it really -I thought, oh God, I must be -- you know, I just thought it was me.
Q. Did you operate under that mistaken belief, that you were the only one that had problems with Horizon --
A. Yes. February 2008?
A. Yeah, yeah. Yes, I mean, when I actually got sentenced, it was almost like, although you don't want yourself in the national papers as being a thief, actually people started phoning me and it's like "I know someone this happened to, I know someone this happened to", and it's like, oh my God, you know, I'm not the only one.

It wasn't until that and then the penny started to drop, and then we started to -- because, I mean, back then I didn't really use the internet that much and a group of villagers who had been in court with me, they literally started trawling the internet and we found all these other people all over the country.
Q. We're getting ahead of ourselves.
A. Sorry.
Q. At the moment, we're dealing with the visit of the auditors in early 2006 and them telling you that you were the only person that had experienced problems with Horizon. I think you were suspended, is that right?
A. Yes, they suspended me at that point.
Q. We've got a date of 9 March 2006 ?
A. Yes.
Q. You say in your statement that the investigators also started looking around the room as if to value your items.
A. Yes.
Q. "It was horrible".
A. It was and my Mum, bless her, she stepped -- I mean, she was standing at the door and I can see her now, she's stood there and she said "This my house too, you know", because we owned the house jointly, and she said "This is my house", and they stopped then. They kind of backed off and they basically finished up and left. I mean, thank goodness, because if it hadn't been owned by my parents, as well, I'd have ended up down the route that a lot of others have ended up.
Q. When you went back to the Post Office, what did you find had happened in Post Office?
A. They'd taken everything away. Obviously, I couldn't get into -- they'd taken all the keys, so I couldn't get into the safe, or anything like that, and they'd -- pretty much, I was locked out of my own Post Office.
Q. Had they taken away the paperwork?
A. Yes, they'd taken the paperwork away.
Q. You mentioned in your statement, however, that $£ 500$ worth on vehicle tax stamps and a pile of 102
commemorative stamps had been left behind?
A. We found them on a shelf later on. They had just left them up on a shelf and they'd been in the safe, so ...
Q. Were you allowed to go back into the Post Office after that?
A. I had to go into there to lock the door but it wasn't a Post Office and when -- there was an alarm in there, so I had to set that. But they -- then the new subpostmaster from Hook, he came in and took it over temporarily, so I kept it running. He came the following week.
Q. I think the next month, on 12 April, you received a letter from the Post Office asking you to attend for an interview; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. By that time, you had spoken with and instructed the criminal lawyer?
A. Yes.
Q. They prepared with you a written statement?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you read that statement out?
A. No, the lawyer read it out.
Q. Did you answer questions or give no comment?
A. No, I -- yeah, no comment for two tapes. That was horrible.
Q. How did you feel when you were being interviewed?
A. Awful. I couldn't look at him, I kept looking at the desk, and he was -- he kept poking stuff underneath so that I could read it and saying "Is this your bank statement, is this your bank statement, what have you done with this, where is it?" And it was just awful.
Q. Did you subsequently receive a letter on 23 May saying that the Post Office was considering terminating your contract?
A. Yes.
Q. On 6 June did you receive a letter from the Post Office saying that the audit had revealed a shortfall in the sum of $£ 36,600$-odd?
A. Yes.
Q. Was a breakdown given for that sum or not?
A. No.
Q. On 16 June 2006, was your contract with the Post Office terminated?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you then receive a summons to appear before a criminal court?
A. Yes.
Q. Was that for a single count of theft --
A. Yes.
Q. -- for the 36,000 ?
A. For the 36,600 and something, yes.
Q. Did you then attend firstly Aldershot Magistrates' Court?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you plead not guilty to the charge of theft?
A. Yes.
Q. Was your case sent up to the Crown Court at Winchester?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you attend on three occasions?
A. Yes. I pleaded not guilty the first time and then, as we got closer to the trial, they did the plea bargain.
Q. Tell us about the plea bargain. How did that come about?
A. Well, they said if you plead guilty to false accounting, to --
Q. The "they" there, is that your solicitor or is that the Post Office?
A. No, Post Office. Yeah, post Office offered a plea bargain, "If you plead guilty to 14 counts of false accounting, don't mention Horizon on sentencing and repay all the money, we'll drop the theft". And my lawyer -- I can remember her opening a file and saying, "Did you know the money wasn't there when you said it was?" I mean, basically you had to say it was 105
to be able to serve customers the next day and you just said, yeah.

And I said "Yeah", and she said "Well, they're going to get you for false accounting, so you'd better just plead guilty because then you are less likely to go to prison".

So prison absolutely terrified me, so I would have almost said yes to anything. So I pleaded guilty.
Q. Did you do those three things, plead guilty --
A. 14 times.
Q. 14 counts of false accounting?
A. Yes, they made me stand -- it was -- it took about half-an-hour to read it all out because they read out every day "You said 14 times". I mean, it was just -I just had to say it 14 times that I was guilty and it just felt like just rubbing my nose in it.
Q. When you said that you were guilty, did you, in fact, know that you'd done nothing wrong?
A. Yes. I knew I'd done nothing wrong but I couldn't explain it, and I kind of felt guilty because I thought I actually did say the money was there when it wasn't, because every time I'd said it isn't they'd taken the money off me and threatened me with the sack. So I actually felt a little bit guilty as well, 106
so ...
Q. Even now, you say that you still feel guilty?
A. Yes, because I kind of lied, not for any other reason than I didn't know what to do.
Q. You came up for sentencing before the judge on 4 February 2008 ?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you think you were going to go to prison?
A. Yes, I had my bag packed. I went for my pre-sentence report and she said "You are 75 per cent likely to go to prison for this", and l'd been told, you know, I probably wouldn't go to prison but I didn't realise the odds were 75 per cent. It was just -- and I'd been told to look remorseful, and I sat there and thought -- I said "75 per cent?" And she said "Yeah, you'd better take your bag packed, you have got to prepare your shop to be without you, make sure it runs because you will be unemployable if you got to prison". And she said "This is a really serious offence", and I said "I know". So I looked -- well, I was sad I was terrified actually.
Q. So you packed a bag --
A. Yes.
Q. -- just in case?
A. I didn't come home and I hugged by Mum and Dad goodbye
and my husband and my boys.
Q. One of the things that you had agreed to do was to raise the $£ 36,000$-odd and pay it back?
A. Yes.
Q. "Back" in inverted commas?
A. Yes.
Q. How did you raise that?
A. Well, we remortgaged but, because I had already remortgaged to shovel money into the Post Office, I could only get 30,000 , so we had to have a village meeting and I literally had to stand up in front of everybody and tell them what had happened.
Q. Of the 36 , you remortgaged again and got 30 ?
A. I remortgaged again and got 30 but I was $£ 6,000$ or 6,600 short and Izzy, my lawyer, she came along and we had a village meeting in the village hall and I had to tell everybody that I was $£ 6,000$ short and, although I hadn't done anything wrong, I was short. So literally people would drop money through a letter box and cheques and the money made up. So when I went to court we had the money to pay them.
Q. So there was essentially a village whip round?
A. Yes, yes. Said that in all of the papers: "Village whip round saves fallen subpostmistress".
Q. I've read the article.
A. Yes. seemed? it saved me.
A. I was given a supervision order. involved?
A. Going to the probation officer.
Q. Attending weekly meetings?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. Did the appearance of the village, including the vicar, have an effect on the sentence, or so it
A. I'm quite sure it did because I know, like Noel over there, a lot of us have been up for the same thing and other people went to prison, and I didn't. So I think
Q. You were given a suspended sentence order?
Q. Sorry, supervision order, my mistake, and that
Q. That eventually went down to fortnightly and then monthly meetings with a probation officer?
Q. Then, after a while, six or seven months, I think --
A. They said --
Q. -- you didn't have to attend anymore?
A. No, because I was behaving myself.
Q. You had to pay costs in the sum of $£ 1,000$ ?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you remember what was said to the judge about why you had committed these offences?
A. Well, I mean, they kind of made out that I was sorry for what I'd done and l'd got a bit confused and, you know -- a lot of it on the day was bit of a blur but they said l'd got confused and made mistakes and, you know, but I was really sorry.
Q. Underneath it, you knew that you had taken no money?
A. Yeah. Yeah, yeah because I always went not guilty to theft. And, you know, I hadn't taken any money and I just -- but I just couldn't explain it because it always sounded like there was a big pot of cash in the safe and one day it was there and the next day it had gone and you didn't know where it had gone, and you were the only one with the key, so ...

But it was never like that. It was just a number on a screen. But it kind of -- computers were a little bit magic to me back then. I know better now but back in the day ...
the rest of it as document 13.
So I then emailed the Post Office and I said, "Please could I see document 12. I think you've labelled it wrong" and they said, "Oh, we're looking into it" and I got three replies saying, "We're looking into it". And then eventually I said, "Well, that's all right, I'll get a copy of it from Second Sight" and they then wrote back to me and said, "You will never have that document, it's a legally privileged document" and they don't know why Second Sight quoted it in their report.
Q. Winding forward a long time, by the time you got to the Court of Appeal in 2021 did you get sight of that document?
A. I did, yes.
Q. In summary, did it say exactly what Second Sight had said?
A. Yes, exactly. There was that paragraph "having examined all the Horizon records, I can find no evidence of theft or deliberate cash inflated figures." But it was that piece that just made me so angry when in Second Sight's report -- it was just like why did they do that?
MR BEER: Sir, might that be an appropriate moment to take --

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SIR WYN WILLIAMS: It would be.
May I just ask one question of my own. Can I take you back to the plea bargain and I just want to understand what went on. So were the discussions about you pleading guilty all discussions taking place at court?
A. Between the lawyers, yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Between the lawyers. So it was discussions between the lawyers and then your lawyer would come back and report to you what the Post Office lawyers were prepared to accept?
A. Yes, yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: The Post Office never put any of that in writing as far as you were aware?
A. As far as I was aware, yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Fine. The suggestion that you shouldn't say anything that was adverse about Horizon, that came directly from the Post Office lawyers to your lawyers as far as you are aware?
A. Yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thanks. That's fine.
MR BEER: Shall we say quarter past.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, fine.
( 3.07 pm )

## (A short break)

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## ( 3.17 pm ) <br> MR BEER: Thank you, Chair. <br> Mrs Hamilton I want to move on to the consequences of what we have just discussed for you and try and look at it from a number of angles. Firstly, the direct financial consequences on you; secondly, the indirect financial consequences that it had for you; thirdly, the reputational effect that it had or impact that it had; fourthly, any effect on your health; and then, lastly, the effect on your family. <br> So starting with directly financial issues, you've told us already that you were expected to repay money before your conviction. <br> A. Yes. <br> Q. In your statement I think you say that you repaid in excess of $£ 13,000$ between 2004 and 2005? <br> A. Yes. <br> Q. So was that a combination of actually giving money over and deductions from your salary? <br> A. Yes, yeah. <br> Q. As part of the agreement that had been reached, the bargain that had been drawn, you were to repay $£ 36,000$.

A. Yes.
used and we never used part of the garden. My parents were getting older and they didn't use part of the garden. We'd always decided when we reached retirement or near retirement, we would try and see if we could get planning permission to demolish the garage and put a small house up there and -- but we ended up having to sell the plot to kind of try and give us some running money, because the mortgage interest rate was much higher than it is now back then, and I couldn't pay the mortgage and I thought I was going to lose everything.
Q. Did you split the proceeds --
A. Yes.
Q. -- between you, on the one hand, and your Mum and Dad of the other?
A. Mum and Dad, yes.
Q. What did you use your half of the proceeds for?
A. I chucked mine into the shop and, basically, helped me keep paying the mortgage, because I had racked up my credit cards by that time. So I basically used it until it ran out. Mum and Dad, the only good thing -if there is a good thing that could come out of it was it gave them enough money to go visit my brother who lived in New Zealand a few times. So they managed to go and see him, which was good.
Q. So you paid off some of your debts and maintained the monthly payments on the mortgage?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. What were you working as at this time?
A. Well, the shop ended up -- I realised I couldn't keep the shop going any longer and I then, because of my criminal record, I've ended up cleaning, because people in the village know l'm honest and they've taken me on as a cleaner, dog walker, I look after houses when they're away, and things like that. So, yeah, I've kept myself busy.
Q. So just like you had done before, you worked in the Post Office --
A. Turned my hand to anything --
Q. You've turned your hand to things. Now, since this time, the conviction, is that casual informal labour in the community?
A. Yes.
Q. Had you got a plan to, in fact, work in a different field?
A. Well, we'd always thought eventually we would sell the shop and -- as a going concern and, you know, decide on what our future was. And I'd enjoyed the bit of care work that I did but it took all of that away because you couldn't work in any way. If you needed 117
on the counter and it had $£ 36,000$ postal fraudster and I was the front page, and you just realise then that people might see you and think you're a thief.
Q. Did you think that, notwithstanding the villagers, the close villagers that supported you, there was, nonetheless, gossip about what you had done?
A. Yes, and there will always be people that doubted anyway, even some people in the village probably doubt it, you know. I was very lucky that a lot of people believed in me.
Q. Any other reputational harm or damage that you can think of?
A. Not reputational, it just is a horrible thing to be accused of dishonesty when you're not dishonest.
Q. You have told us about the direct financial impact, the need to sell something that you had planned to use in a different way --
A. Yes.
Q. -- the narrowing of employment opportunities and the harm it caused to your reputation. What effect did it have on your family life?
A. Well, my Mum and Dad both had strokes within three months of each other and they're now sadly -well, they weren't here to see my conviction quashed and I believe it was stress of everything I went
a CRB check, I didn't pass any CRB checks and, in the school I'd been a -- the classroom assistant had --

I'd been to look after my granddaughter and help make Easter bonnets and the classroom assistant had to leave the room and, because they knew I had a criminal record, they had to ask me to leave the room, which was awful. I mean, it was as embarrassing for them as me because we all knew each other and they knew I had a criminal record. It's things like that that you don't realise how far it impacts your life to have a record.
Q. So it narrowed your employment opportunities, having a criminal record?
A. Yes.
Q. You told us about the village turning out in your support --
A. Yes.
Q. -- for the Crown Court sentencing hearing at Winchester. That sounds as if your reputation wasn't harmed.
A. Well, the people that knew me came and supported me.
Q. Yes.
A. Other people that didn't know me would probably read what was on the front of the paper. Because I went to fill the car up the same week, and the local paper was 118
through and the fact that they'd racked their credit cards up to try and keep my shop going. I mean, they'd never been in debt in their lives and they ended up giving me everything to keep me going, so that, you know -- well, we just kept borrowing and using the house, and I used their credit cards to pay shop bills because it was just -- the whole thing was just like a financial nightmare.
Q. Can I ask, when did your parents pass?
A. My Dad was January '16. They both had strokes in 2014, my Dad died in '16 and Mum died in '17.
Q. Was that before the Court of Appeal hearing?
A. Yes. My Dad died just as we got the GLO awarded and my Mum died four days before and I promised her I'd go, but four days before the case management conference for the first trial -- first of the trials.
Q. So they passed without knowing that you --
A. Yes, they knew I'd never stop fighting to prove my innocence but they still weren't there on the day.
Q. You tell us in your statement, if you don't mind discussing it now, this has had an impact on your health, hasn't it?
A. Yes. I've become -- well, I've almost become obsessed by fighting for justice, and l just -- I can't -I can't sleep nights. You know, I just literally it

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goes round and round in my head, I'm so frustrated at where we are now and, although I've got my conviction quashed, I just feel the injustice of all of it for everybody, especially the 555 , who I stood alongside and fought for justice with.

It's just frustration, anger, and I can't ever get it out of my head.
Q. I'm going to come to some of the things that you did as a result, in a moment, but, just dealing with you at the moment, if we may. You tell us in your statement that you have been diagnosed with an adjustment disorder --
A. Yes.
Q. -- and a mixed anxiety and depressive disorder, all consequent upon what happened with Horizon after 2003; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. I'm not going to go into detail but is it right that you're having some treatment for that?
A. Yes.
Q. So you told us -- we ended the narrative of you being sentenced at the Winchester Crown Court, and then you said you got lots of calls from people --
A. Yes.
Q. -- saying "You're not alone, this has happened to me"?
A. Yes. I mean, literally the calls started that I got back to the shop same day, and the very next day someone rang me and she'd been a subpostmistress in Bournemouth and she said "They know exactly what's going on". She said "I proved, I had every docket". She said "They know exactly what's happened because I proved it".

And then I had various phonecalls and the guy in the next village down came and he'd been accused of the same thing. He came to see me and then people started Googling about Post Office and Alan Bates set up PostOfficeVictims.org in 2002, and we kind of gradually got in touch with each other and then we met Noel, and we put the Welsh TV programme together and Computer Weekly did an article on seven of us. They phoned me in 2008 and asked if l'd give my story and that kind of was the beginning, really, of the JFSA because, gradually, it kind of mushroomed out.
Q. So it grew organically from the villagers to meeting Mr Bates?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. Then I think, eventually in November 2009, you met 17 subpostmasters at Fenny Compton village hall?
A. Yes, we had the first JFSA meeting. I'd met Noel by then because there was a Welsh TV programme in 2009, 122

I think it was. They came as well.
Q. BBC Wales?
A. Yeah, BBC Wales. Noel came down to the village and they filmed us in the village. So it was all -I mean, from being told you're the only person it's ever happened to, you suddenly realised there were quite -- our stories were all identical. It was quite a moment in the village hall.
Q. I think you met Kay Linnell?
A. Yes, that was at one of the village dos. She was -I ended up sitting next to her for a pudding course and she --
Q. For a what, sorry?
A. For a pudding course. You had starters in one house, dinner in the another and a pudding in another.
Q. Sorry, I completely misunderstood. I thought you meant a course about puddings! That's my mind, not yours.
A. She was there at the pudding course, which ended up stretching for about four hours because we didn't come home until about 2 o'clock in the morning, because we got deeply engrossed in Post Office conversation. She'd been a customer anyway, and she hadn't really realised what was going on. She then became one of the best friends I've ever had, I think. She's
been -- she stood beside us and helped Alan and she knows her way inside and out of everywhere.
Q. Now, this group, I think, eventually formed up to bring proceedings in the High Court; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. You had to find a legal team, didn't you?
A. Yes.
Q. You were part of the group that went to the High

Court?
A. Yes, yeah.
Q. Can you tell us what the experience was of that litigation? I know, that's a very open question.
A. I'm in total awe of Justice Fraser. It was -I couldn't believe this massive courtroom and all these people in it and it was literally like going into battle.
Q. In what sense was it like going into battle?
A. Well, it was like a small army of our lawyer on that side, matched by an even bigger army on that side and the whole thing was just like a mass theatre, almost, and --
Q. Did you attend court on most days?
A. I did, yes. I became obsessed and it was mind blowing, the whole thing. But Justice Fraser cut through it, you know, he could see -- I mean, 124
sometimes you listen especially in the Horizon trial, some of the arguments that they made and you're like, "Well, I know I'm not legally qualified but, it's like, that's completely bonkers" and he just cut right through it and, yeah, we won -- two trials.
Q. By that, you are referring to the judgment number 3 on common issues and judgment number 6 on Horizon?
A. On Horizon, yes.
Q. Did you participate in the mediation?
A. Yes, I did, yes. Yes, I got to look in the eyes of the CEO and general counsel for Post Office and tell them our stories but, you know, I don't know. It's a job to know how people actually really think. I thought we were, sort of, making a difference by speaking but I doubt that now.
Q. Did you receive money under the mediated agreement?
A. Yes, I did. I received a total of $£ 18,000$ and, yeah.
Q. Was that --
A. It was a life safer.
Q. I was about to say: was that money welcome at the time?
A. Yes, because my husband needed an operation which we ended up paying for because he needed to keep working because, even though he was in his 70s, he was still gardening and we still needed -- Mum and Dad were 125
gone, by that time, and we needed -- he needed to keep working because I didn't want to sell the house until I knew that we'd come out the other side of it, and so we had to pay for an operation for him to patch him up and get him back to work.
Q. So he worked as a gardener?
A. Yes.
Q. I think he had a hernia, is that right?
A. Yes, he had a hernia.
Q. So A hernia repair?
A. A hernia repair, yes.
Q. Now, have you -- was that adequate recompense in monetary terms for the losses that you had suffered?
A. No, because I'd given them 50 , so far. That's without all the rest of it that, you know -- it was nothing really.
Q. Did you sell the business in 2014 ?
A. Yes. I started trying to sell it 2013 but it took about a year to offload because it's not attractive without a Post Office.
Q. Selling the business, did that include all the stock, fixtures and fittings?
A. Yes.
Q. Despite that, was it still necessary for you to carry on working as you were, doing informal casual labour 126
was it? How long?
A. Two or three months. Yes, something like that. It was quite quick.
Q. Can you remember when you made the application and when you got the money?
A. I think I got the money in September.
Q. 2021?
A. 2021, yes.
Q. So about two or three months before then?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you help us with the indirect financial costs of this? Can you give us an example of something that maybe we wouldn't think of naturally as this having an indirect financial impact on you?
A. Well, just that we're still paying the mortgage and -I don't know.
Q. I'm thinking, for example, did you have car insurance?
A. Oh, yes, yes. When I was prosecuted you had to pay -well, it was very difficult to get insurance with someone with a conviction and, even though my Mum insured the house, she had to declare I was on it and they racked up the premium. All of your insurances, business insurance, house insurance, car insurance, everything, carries a premium for someone who's got a fraud conviction.
Q. So those were all inflated because of your conviction?
A. Because of my conviction, yes.
Q. I think you entered a debt plan at some stage, as well?
A. Yes, I entered a debt plan in 2010 because I just couldn't service all the credit cards, but once I got my interim payment I settled them all. So l've got rid -- so the only debt l've got now is my mortgage.
Q. Did you pay off your Mum's debts too, where she had lent you money?
A. We paid them until the day she died and then they were written off.
Q. So what position are you in now then?
A. We've just got a big mortgage and, yeah.
Q. Standing back, are there things that you want to tell us about, as to the human impact that this has had on you, that we haven't covered so far?
A. Well, just that I find it so sad that it's gone on for so many years and literally wiped people. You know, we're all exhausted, we've had almost 20 years of fighting and people aren't with us that should be. People like Julian Wilson, who you will hear from Karen, you know, he's not here and his conviction -there's other people too that have died and not had their names cleared, and I just find it -- I'm so
A. Yes.
Q. Tell us about your relationship with Julian Wilson.
Q. Tell us about your relationship with Julian Wilson.
A. Well, we teamed up with Alan, back in the days of -the beginning days of the JFSA.
Q. So Mr Bates?
A. Mr Bates, yes, and Noel, and we kind of fought beside him and we all of us went on fact-finding missions and gathering people together, and he was -- I went to the statutory -- no, Select Committee hearing in 2015 with him, and he was always there and he was always, like, having someone to run stuff by, and then he got cancer and sadly -- he said "I'm going to be there to the end" and I went to see him just before he died.
Q. How long before he died?
A. About three days before he died. We had a JFSA
meeting and because it was close to where he lived, I went to see him and I promised him I'd never stop until I cleared his name. And it's just -- it's things like that.

And Peter Holmes, he's not here either. You know, people that were there back in the beginning and --
Q. Tell us about what you know and your relationship with Peter Holmes? 131
isn't with us.
angry and I'm so angry about the group that they're refusing to compensate.

They said they've had a full and final settlement and that isn't right because the mediation wasn't right. They knew they'd run us out of money.
Q. Just winding back a couple of things that you said there. You said "They knew they had run out of money"; what do you mean by that?
A. Well, they knew we couldn't fight further.
Q. Who's the "they"?
A. Post Office. Yeah, Post Office knew we couldn't fight further because the funding pot was literally dry. We'd won two court victories and so although -- they limited the disclosure for the mediation and the settlement, and they basically ran us out of road and we were forced to accept the 58 million, which sounds a lot but, if litigation funding isn't covered, when -- if you can't recover the costs of the litigation, then you're up against it.

So there was a point at which the scales would tip and Post Office knew it and, as for the full and final, well, there's people that have lost a whole pile of money and they deserve to be -- they deserve compensation for it.
Q. You said in an answer before last that Julian Wilson 130
A. Well, I just met him at some JFSA meetings. I wasn't as close to him as Julian, but Julian was such team player and he -- it impacts people's health.
Q. You say in your statement:
"I've not been able to stop for one day. I'm drained and tired. I've lost the best years of my life. These years have been stolen from me and from my family. I feel worn down. I'm so angry about what happened."
A. I'm really angry about what happened, yes. And I am tired. It's like I've had today here and then I've got to go and work like the clappers to make up for the fact that I haven't been at work today tomorrow, and it shouldn't be -- I should be able to take a week off, or something like that, but I can't.
Q. What about the time that it's allowed you to devote to your family?
A. Well, my eldest son went through uni and I couldn't help him. I haven't had the time with the grandchildren, I haven't been able to, sort of, take a week off and take them away and do things that normal grandparents do and probably, much as I was at home with my Mum, I was always in and out and I'd say "I'll be back in an hour, back in two hours", doing all these little jobs. You know, it's things like 132
that you realise you can't get back.
Q. You conclude your statement by saying that:
"The Post Office has blood on their hands.
They've destroyed thousands of lives and I believe the web of lies and deceit spans much further than the Post Office to Government and beyond and, after all of that, I know I'm lucky, lucky to have had a criminal conviction."

Why do you feel lucky to have had a criminal conviction?
A. Because I've got a chance of getting compensation and they haven't, they've been refused it. The Government keep on flatly refusing. They say: no, you have had a full and final settlement. That's not right. I was at the Select Committee with a guy --I think it was Christmas time or just after Christmas, or just before, I can't remember.
Q. This is the BEIS Select Committee?
A. Yes, the BEIS Select Committee, and he's given Post Office over $£ 100,000$ and he's had $£ 20,000$ back and it's just not right.
Q. What you are referring to is feeling lucky to have had a criminal conviction, is that that's a gateway to receiving compensation under the scheme that the Post Office is operating?
A. Yes.
Q. You're comparing that to those who haven't been criminally convicted but who were part of the 555 ?
A. Yes, and have lost everything, including homes, marriages. I mean, I know a really good friend of mine, she lost her home because of it and she didn't -- they got her to the court steps and said it's not in the public interest. I mean, it's wrong.
Q. Mrs Hamilton, they are the only questions that I want to ask of you today.

Chair, do you have questions for Mrs Hamilton?
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, I don't have any questions. I'm sorry that you have had to put yourself through this but I am very grateful for you doing it.
A. Thank you.

MR BEER: Thank you very much. Please do return to your seat.

Chair, I'm in your hands as to whether we proceed with Mr Blake to ask questions of the next witness now.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Whatis the time?
MR BEER: 3.45.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: 3.45 .
How do you feel, first of all, Mr Thomas? You are next up. Would you like to start this afternoon?
Q. Do you see your signature at the end of that statement?
A. Yes.
Q. When you made it, was it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. True to the best, yes.
Q. The second witness statement, I think, is dated 10 February?
A. Yes.
Q. Again, do you see your signature at the end of that?
A. Yes, Ido.
Q. When you made that, was it true to the best of your knowledge and belief?
A. Yes.
Q. I'm going to begin by asking you a few questions about your background.
A. Yes.
Q. How old are you now?
A. 75 .
Q. Where were you born and where did you grow up?
A. I grew up in a little village called Malltraeth on the Isle of Anglesey.
Q. I wasn't going to try and pronounce it myself, perhaps Sir Wyn can.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I'm not going to put myself to that 136
test.
MR BLAKE: One of your first jobs was as a postman.
A. Yes.
Q. Can you tell us a little bit about that?
A. Yes. I started in 1965, 6 June, as a postman in a place -- l'll challenge you again -- a place called Bodorgan. I used to get up at 4.00 in the morning, go to the sorting office, meet the railway train -- the mail train in those days, take the bags to the sorting office and then go on a 17 -mile round trip delivering the post.
Q. I think after that job, you worked with your wife for a little bit, is that right?
A. Yes. In 1974, my wife and I-- sorry, before that, decimalisation 1972, my mother had a grocery shop. She bought it in 1964, that's why I came to work -help her out, I was an only child. She bought the shop for the grand sum of $£ 1,600$. My father thought she was mad but, anyway, we bought the shop and I came into the business and I married in 1969, and my wife and I took over in about 1972/73, because my mother couldn't get her head round the decimalisation. She'd been used to her 1.11 and her 3 pence, and whatever, and when it came to the new money -- as she used to call it, the silly money -- she just couldn't
get on with it.
Q. In 1981, you bought your first Post Office.
A. Yes.
Q. Where was that?
A. That was in a village called Gaerwen on the old A5, about three miles from Llanfairpwllgwyngyll. I won't say the whole name but perhaps Sir Wyn can.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: I've had more challenges this afternoon with Mr Thomas than I normally get in a week!
A. Yes, it's the short one is Llanfair PG.

MR BLAKE: Then in 1984 you took over as subpostmaster?
A. Yes.
Q. Up until 1999/2000 did you enjoy the job?
A. Yes, I did. It was all done on paper and I used to help my wife because, in those days, I used to start at 5.00 in the morning, I used to finish delivering the mail by about 11.30/12.00 and I used to do the afternoon shift and my wife got on with the housework and looking after our three children.
Q. I'm going to move on now to the problems that you experienced. Horizon was installed in about '99/2000, and you said that you used a paper-based system before Horizon; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you receive training?
A. Yes, I had a day and a half in the Victoria Hotel in Llanberis, with five other people who, at the time, were older than me because I was quite spritely in those days, and we had a day and a half. But unfortunately Horizon didn't arrive in my office until about getting on for about nine months afterwards. So really it was quite a challenge.
Q. How soon was it that you noticed problems with Horizon?
A. I first had -- according to my statement, I first had one in about 2003 when I found a discrepancy of $£ 6,000$. I contacted head office and we sorted it out in the statement. The area manager came, who l'd worked with in the Post Office before and a lady called Mrs van den Bogerd came. She was the area manager for Wales and the Marches at that time, and we sat in our lounge and we had a cup of coffee and she said "If you pay 3,000 , we'll wipe off the other 3,000 ", so that's what happened then.
Q. So I think that was a specific problem in 2003.
A. Yes.
Q. Is that right? In general terms, did you experience other problems with Horizon?
A. Yes. There was things we kept putting money in but, unfortunately, I haven't got the records. We started 139
putting about 100/200, maybe 500 quid in sometimes and, of course, in 2004, I think, I had an audit, which was clear, everybody was happy.
Q. We'll get to the audit in a minute.
A. Yes, sorry.
Q. But before the audit happened, did you use the helpline at all?
A. Yes, I did.
Q. Did you find that useful or --
A. No.
Q. Why not?
A. Well, to be quite honest with you, I think everything had come in a rush because I had colleagues I had who I'd worked with in the Post Office, because the Post Office and the counter staff were all one at one time, before the Post Office was split, and I was getting friends coming and checking with me and, honestly, I felt that they didn't have the experience that was needed.
Q. You didn't find them helpful?
A. No.
Q. Apart from noticing shorffalls, did you experience other problems with the system?
A. Yes, what do you call it, we had a busy road, outside the old A5, before the A55 and we had a problem with 140
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electricity going off, and having to back up, and that was taking time and then, sometimes, when you put the Horizon on in the morning, it wouldn't come on or in the middle of a transaction it would go off.
Q. Let's move on to that audit and the investigation. So you said that you had an audit in 2004 and 2005, or thereabouts?
A. Yes.
Q. That one went okay?
A. Yes.
Q. Then you had another in October 2005?
A. Yes, 13 October.
Q. How did that come about?
A. I had a knock on the door at 7.30 in the morning and two auditors came in. I gave them a figure of what I was losing and, about two hours after they completed their audits, they came to me and said that they agreed with me and they had to phone head office and, at the time, head office was in Chester. But, in the meantime, I had phoned the helpline on more than a dozen occasions. I'd kept a record on a calendar that the Post Office gave us and I kept a record on there, and I was phoning helpline up and they were telling me just to carry on, and I carried on, and that was the biggest mistake I ever did, I think.
Q. So were you expecting the auditors when they arrived?
A. I was expecting them some time but they didn't come and then, all of a sudden, 13 October 2005, they're in the door, 7.30 in the morning.
Q. You have said that you kept records. What did you do with them, did you manage to keep them.
A. The Post Office took them. They hoovered my office, I didn't have a shred of paper left, even my council work went. Everything went.
Q. So when you say even your council work, you were a local councillor at that time?
A. Yes.
Q. How did you feel when they arrived and were carrying out --
A. Well, you know, I expected the worst, to be quite honest, and it did become the worst and, as I said, the worst thing was afterwards, in about a week, they cleared my office, they took the keys of the shop, my wife ran a small business selling cards, stationery and knickknacks, and we weren't allowed to go in at all because we didn't have the keys.
Q. They told you that there was a shortfall of around £48,000 --
A. Yes.
Q. -- and a cheque discrepancy of nearly $£ 2,000$; is that 142
right?
A. Yes.
Q. I think you were aware of that kind of a figure --
A. Yes.
Q. -- in advance?
A. Yes. I gave that figure of around 50,000 to the auditors when they came that morning.
Q. At some stage, the police became involved as well. Can you tell us a little bit about that?
A. Yes, the lady auditor said to me that she had to report it to head office and about an hour/hour and a half after she told me that, two investigators came.
Q. Is this the same day as the auditors?
A. Yes. A lady came in, and a gentlemen with her, the lady was quite robust. She wanted to interview me on my own. I refused. At the time, the Post Office had arranged for another postmaster to come and run the office and I said, well, l'll have an interview with Mr Jim Evans sitting there and she wouldn't have that.

So that conversation finished and she said they had to go outside and make a couple of telephone calls and within half-an-hour two policemen arrived. She walked through the door and she said "Cuff him, he's a thief".
Q. You went away with the police to the police station?
A. No, I didn't because the two policemen knew me and I knew them and one of them said, "No, I'm not going to cuff him". He said "Noel will find his way to Holyhead Police Station for an interview". And she was quite aggressive, actually, but I followed with my daughter and my sister-in-law and I went to Holyhead Police Station for an interview.
Q. How many people were interviewing you?
A. Two.
Q. Were they from the Post Office?
A. Yes.
Q. How long did that interview last?
A. Six hours.
Q. How do you feel you were treated during that interview?
A. Oh, terrible. She wanted me -- she was -- the lady was quite aggressive with the sergeant in charge, wanting me to be put in a cell and when I walked in, first of all, she wanted me cuffed and, thankfully again, I knew one of the policemen and he said no and I got a cup of tea, and I waited for a solicitor to call and a solicitor, Mr lan Williams came and I was interviewed alongside him.
Q. After that interview, you were suspended; is that right?

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A. Yes.
Q. You had your contract terminated?
A. Yes.
Q. I'm going to move on to the criminal proceedings that were brought. Approximately how long after that were you charged with a criminal offence?
A. I was charged about February the following year. The 1st, I think. I went to Llangefni Magistrates' Court to be charged and then I was passed on to the Crown Court and, over the months of leading up to 6 November, when I was charged -- sent to jail I had to go about once a month either to Mold Crown Court or to Caernarfon just to say my name and the what-you-call-it and plead guilty or not guilty at the time, and that's what happened.
Q. What offences were you charged with?
A. I was charged with theft.
Q. You had a trial in November 2006; is that correct?
A. Yes.
Q. You have described in your statement being offered a plea bargain. Can you tell us a little bit about that?
A. Yes. About ten minutes before I went into court, my barrister came, Mr Wynn Williams -- Wyn Jones from Chester came up to me and said, "They're offering you 145
A. Well, awful because I didn't expect it. I'd never been a criminal in my life and I was taken down and eventually landed up in Walton in Liverpool.
Q. Can you remember some of the words that the judge used when he was sentencing you?
A. Yes, he'd had -- well, a lot of letters actually, very powerful ones, from people supporting me and he read some of them out and he said that I was a man of character and l'd fallen down in life having been a councillor and a postmaster all my life and -- but unfortunately I was sent down.
Q. I know it's going to be difficult, but I'm going to ask you a little bit about your time in prison.
A. Yes.
Q. Can you tell us a little bit about your first week in prison in Liverpool?
A. Hell.
Q. What kind of a prison is that?
A. Very old. I arrived there with -- I was taken -- me and a few others, we were taken to Wrexham first and then we landed in Walton in Liverpool. I was unfortunate actually, I was on the wrong side of the van, and I was supposed to go to Altcourse but there was no room. So I landed up in Walton and when I landed up in Walton, I had the indignity of having
a bargain" and I said, "What is it?" and he said, "They're going to drop the theft as long as you take the charge of false accounting and also that you don't mention Horizon". And I said, "Well, what does that mean? Will it keep me out of jail?" and he said, "Well, hopefully". And I think, I can't remember, but I did sign a piece of paper with my barrister to say that I wouldn't mention Horizon, and when I went to court, of course -- well, we know what happened.
Q. So you accepted that bargain?
A. Yes.
Q. And you pleaded guilty?
A. Yes.
Q. And you were sentenced on 6 November?
A. Yes.
Q. To nine months' imprisonment?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you describe for us how you felt on receiving that punishment?
A. Well, he said -- by the way they had changed the judge. I'd had a judge right through and on the day Mr Rodric took over and he sentenced me and he said 9 months, and I expected a suspended sentence but unfortunately he said, "Take him down".
Q. And how did you feel then?
to have a shower in front of a prison warden, taken to a cell. I was there for eight days.
Q. Were you able to contact your family?
A. No. And during that time, I wasn't allowed -- only out for my food. Sorry.
Q. Take your time. If you will like a break at any time?
A. No, it's all right. I had to just go out for food, and 15 minutes about at a time on the landing, about half-an-hour in the evening maybe, and that's how it was for eight days.
Q. Can you remember why you weren't able to contact your family?
A. Because they couldn't process -- they were short-staffed or something and they couldn't process.
And not only that, what hurt me at the time, being
Welsh, I wrote two or three Welsh letters and I got them returned because at the time they didn't have any staff that could translate what I'd written.
Q. There came a time, a week later, I think, you were transferred to an open prison; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. Which prison was that?
A. Kirkham, near -- well, between Preston and Blackpool.
Q. Can you tell us a little hit about your time there?
A. Yes. It was an open prison. It wasn't a place you

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wanted to be. I settled in and I had a job in the greenhouses. It was a big farm. It was run by Lancashire College, I believe, and they were producing a lot of vegetables and all the rest of it, and the greenhouses were quite big. I think there was about somewhere not far short of about 5 acres of glass there. And at the time we were just tidying up, sterilising and what you call it. But at least the days went quicker.
Q. It's right to say you had your 60th birthday in prison?
A. Yes.
Q. On 19 January 2007 you were released from prison.
A. Yes.
Q. And a condition of your release being that you were put on a tag?
A. Yes.
Q. How was that?
A. Not nice because you weren't allowed out of the house before 7 in the morning and you had to be back in at 7 at night. At the time, having lost everything, I went to live with my daughter in Malltraeth.
Q. And was it peaceful at night or were you disturbed?
A. No, disturbed because they couldn't get a signal and it was quite often they used to knock on the door and 149
come and check if I was there.
Q. So the electronic tag had a signal and if it lost that signal, they'd think you may have run --
A. They'd think l'd gone AWOL.
Q. I'm going to move on to the impact on you, financial impact and personal impact. We have time. Would you like a brief break at all?
A. No, I'm all right. Carry on if you like.
Q. I'm going to start with the financial impact. It's right to say that you still had to pay for the shortfall that you owed; is that right?
A. Yes.
Q. How did you afford that?
A. I didn't, to be quite honest. I became bankrupt in 2008-- 2007/2008. I had to. I was very lucky. I sold my house -- well, the house it was then because the business had gone to my youngest son, who is sitting there, and that managed to clear a few debts. But, unfortunately, with what I owed the Post Office and the pressure that they kept sending letters wanting the money, I went bankrupt. And because my wife's name was on some things we had quite a problem actually trying to sort my side of it out and my wife's side and it took about two years for my wife to get her pension, private pensions, back and things 150
like that.
Q. What happened to your pension?
A. I lost it. They took my private pensions. In the Proceeds of Crime in Mold, they -- because I'd worked for the Post Office for 42 years in all, they had the lawyer, the London lawyer, stood on his feet and told the judge that he wanted to stop my pension.
Q. So as part of the sentencing there was a Proceeds of Crime Act application?
A. Yes.
Q. And that led to you losing your pension?
A. It didn't, thank goodness. Thanks to the judge, Mr Nick Parry, he put them right and he said no, because I'd worked for the Post Office for 42 years, paid a pension, and they thought that they could -- if they could stop that, that that would be part of the money that would be paid back.
Q. You did lose your savings?
A. Yes.
Q. And who did you live with at that time?
A. I lived with my daughter until I got a pensioneers bundle that relates that we had our Post Office in Caerwyn.
Q. You told us before that you were a councillor before your conviction?
A. Yes.
Q. What happened to that position?
A. I lost it unfortunately. Between my Post Office salary and my council salary, I was earning somewhere in the region of 45,000 at the time. The Post Office salary was somewhere about 29/30,000 and my council salary was somewhere in the region of about 15.
Q. And you lost that as well?
A. Yes.
Q. What about the shop? What happened to the shop and the money that you --
A. Well, we had to -- my wife had to sell her cards cheap and the shop was empty, and we just couldn't open it because we didn't have the keys. They wouldn't give them back.
Q. What do you do for work now?
A. I used to work in the garden centre up to December -well, my birthday. I did six years in the garden centre, three days a week. Before, that I took on a job with -- I bought -- I managed to buy a van and I used to be a courier for a company called Yodel. I did that for four years, so -- to make ends meet.
Q. Do you still struggle financially?
A. No, it's better. I did get a bit of compensation which I suppose you will mention. So that's helped. 152
A. Yes. My family doctor was very, very good with me in
Q. You can tell us that now if you'd like.
A. Well, the first one was the settlement after the two court cases of, you know, so-called 50-odd million but only about $£ 11$ million was shared out between $500 / 1,000$ of us. I managed to get 11,000 out of that and, about three weeks afterwards, I had a very nice letter saying -- with another $£ 3,000$ in it saying "for the inconvenience of going to jail".
Q. And who was that from?
A. That came from the settlement through Freeths.
Q. I'm going to move on now to the personal impact on you. How did you sleep during the period that we've talked about today?
A. Terrible. I couldn't shut the bedroom door. I found it very hard. That was more anything from the first eight days and I did that in Kirkham as well. I never shut the door. That took a lot out of me, to be quite honest. Or a door slamming, I always used to get very agitated.
Q. So being confined or hearing particular noises reminds you of your time in prison?
A. Yes.
Q. And you've had a formal diagnosis I think of adjustment disorder; is that right?
the beginning. I managed to get some help and also, living in Anglesey, I went for walks. I used to walk four or five miles a day, just being outside, even in the rain.
Q. How would you describe the psychological impact on you of all of this?
A. It was horrible. I'll be honest, and the worst thing about it was I was sent to jail, my family had to face the public.
Q. There's a reputational damage there. How was your reputation before all of this?
A. It was fantastic. Like what you call it, the gentleman in the beginning, you were a pillar of the community. People used to -- not only for Post Office work but they used to come for advice. You used to help them fill forms and stuff like that up. You know, they had confidence in you and, you know, they looked at you for advice.
Q. And how did people treat you after the conviction?
A. A mixture. Living in a small community and having been a postman, I travelled from one end of the island to the other. I think in my time I delivered to about 20 different rounds, Post Office rounds, from Benllech on one side of the island to Rhosneigr, Aberffraw. You knew people and when you went to places like the 154
town centre Llangefni, you have people -- you know, I even had one shout, "Shut the door, the thief's arrived". You know, you expect it.
Q. It was in the paper at the time, I think, in the newspaper?
A. Yes.
Q. What was the impact of that on you and on your family as well?
A. It wasn't very nice to have your family look at pictures of you being led into a van to go away, handcuffed. You know, it's -- it's not nice.
Q. You've spoken about your wife who's visibly upset in court today. What about other members of your family? What was the effect on them?
A. That's my daughter, by the way.
Q. Ah, sorry, your daughter. Sorry.
A. My wife's not a very -- she doesn't like -- she's very quiet, very firm. She's the boss of the house but she's not -- she doesn't like to be in the limelight, if you call it that. My son there and -unfortunately, we lost Arfon two years ago. He was 50.
Q. Mr Beer asked a question of a previous witness, that is: what do you want from the Post Office?
A. Justice. I want to find out who knew because, in my
time -- l've looked back -- there's been four different governments so you can't blame one government. There's been different ministers in charge of ISS, as you call it. I was prosecuted in the Royal Mail one. The Counters and the Royal Mail were together because I think it was 2011 -- maybe you'll correct me -- when they split and, you know, these people knew, quite prominent people when you look back, knew what was going on. They'd gone on their way. They'd gone into greener pastures, if you like. They've gone with their bonuses and their multimillion pound back pocket cheques and all the rest of it and why? Why haven't they -- why didn't they pick it up? Why didn't they sort it out and let it drag on like this?
Q. The final topic l'd like to talk to you about is raising awareness because you've been quite involved in raising awareness and I want to talk to you about 2008 and 2009. In 2008 you were contacted by somebody called Roch Garrard; is that correct?
A. Yes, a colleague of -- a village gentleman that lived in South Warnborough who knew Jo very well.
Q. Can you describe your first contact?
A. Yes, I had a letter off him and at about the same time I was talking to Taro Naw, a Welsh -- a small, Welsh 156
$\qquad$

Panorama programme if you like, and I'd got to know about them through a BBC reporter called Sion Tecwyn, who I'd been quite involved with through my council work. We used to be you we used to talk a lot and if anything happened on the island he would speak to me maybe and Roch wrote a letter and that was the beginning of the matter as far as I was concerned.
Q. I'm going to ask for that letter to be brought up on the screen if we can.
A. Yes.
Q. It may take a moment. It's, I think, your first exhibit. It's on the screen to your right.
A. Yes.
Q. Is that the letter that you received?
A. Yes.
Q. In 2008?
A. Yes.
Q. Can you tell us, on receiving that letter for the first time how did you feel?
A. That I wasn't the only one because, as you heard from Jo and the gentleman at the beginning, the first thing the Post Office were telling you that you were the only one, there was nobody else, and at the time of course there was no way of you finding out.
Q. I think he sent you an article, and we'll move on to
the second of your exhibits.
A. With a young picture of J .
Q. So is this --
A. You haven't changed, Jo.
Q. I think we heard Mrs Hamilton talk about a newspaper article at the time and this is it, is it?
A. Yes.
Q. Again, knowing that you weren't the only person, that had quite an impact on you, didn't it?
A. Yes.
Q. Then we have another letter behind that. That's the third exhibit. I think that confirms a conversation that you had with Mr Garrard.
A. Yes.
Q. So you spoke to him on the telephone?
A. Yes.
Q. You also became involved in the Computer Weekly article; is that right?
A. Yes. The lady rang me up and I think there was about six or seven of us that spoke to her and she ran it in one of her articles -- was it 2009, somewhere like that?
Q. Yes. How did you make contact with them originally?
A. Through Mr Garrett. He came but, as I said, the Taro Naw one was starting as well. So there was quite 158
many, many years.
But l'll put my life in three categories, if you
like. I started in Bodorgan, as I mentioned, going back again, in a place called Paradwys which was -- in English is "paradise". It's a small community in Anglesey and that was my first round. So I have been to paradise and I've been to hell in Walton and I think that will sum it up.
MR BLAKE: Chair, do you have any questions at all?
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: No, I don't have any questions. You will have heard me thank the two witnesses who came before you.
A. Yes.

SIR WYN WILLIAMS: So I'm going to thank you in Welsh: diolch yn fawr iawn yn wir.
A. Croeso. Thank you, sir.

MR BLAKE: That concludes the day. We still start again at 10.00 tomorrow morning.
SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thanks to everyone. Now, we'll depart without people standing again.
( 4.28 pm )
(Adjourned until 10.00 am the following day)

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