

60. Then he must have opened the envelope containing the requisition and the original documents?—No. In the ordinary course of business I should have opened the envelope and handed it to Mr. Hickson, who would, in his turn, hand it to the stamper, and after it had been stamped Mr. Hickson would get it again.

61. You admit the possibility that the envelope may have been opened by you?—Yes; I may have received it.

62. Is there any rule in the office that, when a document of this sort comes to be stamped from a branch office, a record is made of it?—The covering letter is recorded.

63. Suppose there is no covering letter, but only a requisition, is there any record made?—Only the entry in the books to certify the issue of a certain stamp.

64. Was this entered in the books?—Yes; but the records we keep would not show the nature of the document as between parties.

65. Then, is the Committee to understand that Mr. Hickson was responsible for the return of all documents to the place from which they came?—Yes.

66. *Mr. Gillies.*] After a document is stamped, it does not come back to you?—No; after a document is stamped by Mr. Howe, it is returned to Mr. Hickson, whose duty it is to send it back again to the place from whence it came.

67. *Mr. Wales.*] Is there anything on the document to show where it ought to be sent to after being stamped?—Yes; there is the Auckland stamp.

68. *Mr. Richmond.*] What is your duty from the time a deed first comes in?—I had at that time (1869) to receive the letters, and keep the cash-book and accounts of the office. The letters are all recorded. The record book was kept by Mr. Hickson, so that if there had been any covering letter with this document it would have been handed to him with the requisition, and would have been recorded.

69. Cannot you inform the Committee how the document got there?—The only way I can suggest is that it must have come without a covering letter. The officer in Auckland might have written the letter but neglected to forward it. I believe that Mr. Crawford, on his way to England, came down here, and my own impression is that he brought the document with him, and handed it in. Mr. Crawford was the Deputy Commissioner of Stamps at Auckland.

70. *The Chairman.*] Do you know the date on which he was in Wellington?—No.

71. Do you not know that it was some weeks after the document was stamped in Wellington that he arrived here?—No, I was not aware of that.

72. How long had you been in this office when these transactions took place?—I have been in the office since the 1st of January, 1867.

73. How long had Mr. Hickson been in the office when the document was stamped?—I do not know; but I should not think he had been there very long.

74. Was he in the office a week?—More than that; probably some months. I could not say.

75. He states, in a note which I have, that he had been in the office for a few days only?—I do not know.

76. Assuming that he had been in the office only a few days, would he have been sufficiently acquainted with the routine not to make this mistake?—I should assume that he would. He was, I have heard, engaged in the Stamp Office in Napier before he came to Wellington, so that Stamp Office work was not entirely new to him.

[*Note by Mr. Brandon.*—I should prefer to be able to place before the Committee the correspondence on this subject. The mere examination as above does not, I humbly suggest, place the Committee in possession of all the facts bearing on the case.—E. BRANDON, 26th September, 1864.]

Mr. C. HICKSON examined.

77. *The Chairman.*] You are an officer of the Stamp Department?—Yes.

78. When did you join the department in Wellington?—In August, 1869, I think.

79. What position did you occupy then in the department?—Counter clerk.

80. What were your duties as counter clerk?—My duties were to receive all deeds presented over the counter for stamping, and pass them into the stamp-room after the requisitions had been examined by Mr. Brandon as chief clerk, and to reissue them after they came out.

81. Suppose that any deed had been sent from any branch office in another province?—I had nothing to do with that. Mr. Brandon had to receive these letters. I believe he had authority. He was the head of the department so far as I was concerned. He was my superior officer. Letters containing documents were opened by Mr. Brandon, who then handed them to me to pass into the stamping room.

82. Was it any part of your duty to make a record of documents received in any books of the department?—No; they were not entered. The requisition was kept as a record.

83. Do you recollect receiving an agreement from Auckland in October, 1869, signed "William Cary to William Swanson"?—I recollect such a document being in the office, but I did not receive it.

84. Who gave it to the stamping officer?—I cannot tell; I dare say it came through my hands. Mr. Brandon himself would sometimes pass through deeds, and cadets would also pass them through.

85. Is the Committee to understand that the whole of these agreements or documents did not pass through your hands?—They were supposed to pass, but many did not.

86. In that case, during your absence, who would pass these documents to the stamping room?—Once or twice Mr. Withers used to take my chair in the office. He was an extra clerk. A cadet named Ewart, and one named Tully—indeed anybody who happened to be in, would take my chair if I had to leave.

87. If these documents were stamped, whose duty was it to return them?—It was commonly done by me. I do not know whose duty it was considered. Mr. Brandon used to write the letters, and I enclosed the documents.

88. Who kept the requisitions?—I kept them for a month until the accounts were sent in, and then they were handed over to Mr. Brandon.