

which the late County Clerk now stands committed for trial. One of these frauds dated back to April, 1884, and a general scrutiny of the accounts led me to the conclusion that irregularities had commenced at an even earlier date. This conclusion, strengthened by circumstances connected with the absence of the rate-book of the years 1880–81 to 1883–84, determined me to extend my examination to the accounts of the financial year commencing on the 1st April, 1880. In view also of the absence of almost the whole of the revenue vouchers since that date, and of the fact that the county offices were practically open day and night to any one who chose to enter, I determined at once to obtain possession of the whole of the county books and papers, so as to prevent any further removal of documents or possible tampering with the books of account. I made known my wishes to the Chairman, who most readily assented to my wish, and at once placed the keys of the strong-room in my hands. I assured Mr. Boyes of my perfect confidence in himself and in the present County Clerk, Mr. Black. I now desire to repeat that assurance, and to add that the circumstances which led to the adoption of the course which appeared to me to be necessary in this matter, in no way, and at no stage of my inquiry, had any reference to either of those gentlemen.

5. In treating of the accounts of the period covered by this report, it appears desirable to divide the subject into two parts, viz. :—

- (1.) The period embraced by the six financial years 1880–81 to 1885–86, during which the accounts of the county were in the hands of the late Clerk, P. B. Boulton; and
- (2.) That for the half-year 1st April to 30th September, 1886, during which the accounts have been managed by the present County Clerk and Engineer, Mr. John Black.

6. The county books of the period 1880–81 to 1885–86 comprise: “Rate-books,” “Rate-collector’s Sheets,” “Rate-collector’s Book,” an “Accounts-book,” “Petty-cash-book,” “Cash-book,” “Journal,” and “Ledger.”

7. The “Rate-books” of the years 1880–81 to 1883–84 were bound in one volume, and the rate-books of the years 1884–85 and 1885–86 in another. The first of these volumes, containing particulars, in the form prescribed by the Rating Act, of the rates for four years, has disappeared.

8. The first intimation of the disappearance of this book seems to have been given by the County Auditor (Mr. Livingston), who, in a letter addressed to the County Chairman, under date the 14th June, 1886 (Appendix A), informed him of the circumstance. In his report, dated the 1st July, 1886, on the accounts of the year ended on the 31st March, 1886, the County Auditor again referred to the matter in the following terms: “There is a matter occurring during the half-year to which I must specially refer—viz., the disappearance of the rate-book for 1880–81, 1881–82, 1882–83, and 1883–84. In my last report I called your attention to the fact that uncollected rates, 1881–82 and 1882–83, amounting to a very large sum, had been written off by minute, and expressed a hope that before doing this the Council had taken certain precautions which I had several times previously recommended. I find that during the past half-year the uncollected rate 1883–84 has also been written off, and, so far as I could learn, without any steps having been taken to discover whether the total correctly represented the items then unpaid. I regret to say that, on asking for the rate-book on my recent visit, your Clerk (Mr. Black), after diligent search, assisted by the late Clerk (Boulton), was obliged to admit that it had never been in his custody, and was not to be found.”

9. The first reference to the missing rate-book which appears in the minutes of the Council occurs on the 5th July, 1886, in connection with the Auditor’s report above referred to, then under consideration. The minute is as follows: “Missing Rate-book.—Mr. Boulton, who was in attendance, explained that he had not had the rate-book for at least a year. It is possible that it had been burnt when clearing out the office of old papers. . . . Mr. Douglas thought that the disappearance of the rate-book was a very serious matter, and one that should be sifted to the bottom. Messrs. Jenkins, Butement, McDougall, and Aspinall having expressed themselves similarly on the subject, Mr. McDougall moved, and Mr. Jenkins seconded, ‘That Mr. Boulton be requested to find the lost rate-book, 1881–82 to 1883–84, with a view to having it placed on the Council table at its next meeting; failing which, this Council then consider what further steps shall be taken for its recovery.’ Mr. Daniel did not altogether agree to Mr. McDougall’s resolution, as Boulton had admitted that he had no hopes of finding the book, as he had already looked in every likely place; and he contended that under the circumstances it would be better to deal at once in the matter. After further discussion the motion as put was carried.”

10. A meeting of the Council was held on the 2nd August following, when, as stated in the minute-book, “The following resolution with reference to the missing rate-book was carried, on the motion of Messrs. Douglas and Jenkins: ‘That, seeing our late Clerk, Mr. Boulton, has failed to produce the lost rate-book, and has not explained in any way satisfactorily for its disappearance, this Council take the opinion of Mr. Turton [the County Solicitor] as to its power to proceed criminally against Mr. Boulton, or in what other way it can act.’ Mr. Turton having been requested to give his opinion, he subsequently attended, and stated that he had gone into the matter, and in his opinion Mr. Boulton should be asked to hand over the missing rate-book within a given time, failing which he could be prosecuted for doing away with it. The Council having unanimously agreed to act on Mr. Turton’s opinion, the following resolution was then passed, on the motion of Messrs. McDougall and Aspinall: ‘That Mr. Turton’s opinion *re* lost rate-book be acted upon, and that Mr. Boulton be informed that, unless said rate-book is returned to our present Clerk (Mr. Black), within twenty days from this date, Mr. Turton will be instructed to proceed against him criminally.’”

11. At a meeting of the Council held on the 6th September, as is reported in the minute-book, “A letter from the late Clerk was also considered, in which he stated that he could not, after further search, find the missing book, and had no knowledge of its whereabouts. It was resolved, on the motion of Messrs. Douglas and Aspinall, ‘That it be left to the Chairman and Mr. Turton to carry out the resolution of Messrs. McDougall and Aspinall passed at the meeting held on August 2nd, 1886, with reference to lost rate-book, and to do everything necessary in connection therewith.’”