

364. What insight did that give him into matters commercial, of which a large portion of your business seems to consist?—I do not know, I am sure, where he got his knowledge, but I believe he has considerable business aptitude.

365. Tell us what he does specially in a professional way for you? Does he save you from the necessity of employing outside professional advice?—Not altogether.

366. Does he to any extent?—Oh, yes! to a considerable extent.

367. Do you keep any account or record showing to what extent his services in a professional way have been of value to the office?—No; except on the individual estate papers.

368. How long would that take to get at?—It would involve the turning-up of all records since October, 1886.

369. You have never, since you have had the Solicitor in your office, kept an account to show to what extent he has saved the office from going outside for professional advice?—I have never kept special account.

370. Can you give any idea?—All the opinions for which I used to employ a solicitor are now given by the Solicitor in the office; the preparation of affidavits, powers of attorney where wanted for England, and many other legal matters of that kind.

371. Do you think it is desirable, looking at it in a general way, to have a solicitor attached to your office as a part of its staff?—My opinion is, that it is necessary.

372. Why?—For this reason: When I required opinions, there was great delay. I had to wait one day, two days, three days, perhaps more. Now I can obtain an opinion in five minutes.

373. Is an opinion of that kind acquired within five minutes worth the money?—Well, it entirely depends. Some opinions take days; others may be obtained in a very short time. What I say is, that there is a very great saving of delay by having a solicitor on the establishment. All the applications for orders in Court and petitions to Court, lunacy applications, &c., are attended to by Mr. Wilson.

374. Has it never occurred to you that the fact of having a solicitor on your office staff is rather apt to engender a bitter and jealous feeling against the office with the legal profession, from which you might hope to gather a large amount of good and paying business?—That is the only objection.

375. Is it not a very strong objection?—It is a very strong objection.

376. You say it is convenient to have a solicitor on the premises?—Yes.

377. That convenience, I presume, is marked by degree—that is, as to the difference of time it would take to send to a solicitor in any part of your city?—Yes; and on the amount of leisure which at a precise time he may have.

378. Has it not occurred to you that a solicitor tied to and employed on a commercial staff is very apt to get, I may say, out of touch as to what is going on in his profession unless he is in active practice, and that his services therefore in a professional light may not prove to be of that value which you suppose?—No, it has not occurred to me; and a solicitor in such a position would take good care, and does take good care, I believe, to bring himself up to the times by reading.

379. I am merely putting these questions, as doubts on the subject occur to me, for your consideration. I wish to say this: that I, from personal knowledge, have a very high opinion of the gentleman who is with you, as I had much to do with him in early days, when he was managing law-clerk to a large firm, in matters concerning his profession. But let us also look at the appointment under an economical as well as in a useful light. Is it a saving to the working of the office?—In a sense it is, because it is a very great saving to the estates administered.

380. What salary do you pay your solicitor?—Five hundred pounds a year.

381. And he gets no fees otherwise?—No fees whatever.

382. Are you not aware that an office like this could, by asking, get the choice of solicitors' firms in this city to do the whole of that business, so far as consultations and minor matters are concerned, at a fixed sum of certainly not more than £100 a year, on the understanding that where securities and other business had to be prepared and conducted, that business of that kind should go in the way of their firm? I know of the arrangements I have seen made with business houses and solicitors' firms in that way. What is your opinion?—I have not considered that aspect of the case, because I have always endeavoured to put as little expense upon estates as possible.

383. In that respect I quite believe you. The Commissioners have no doubt that that has been your object. But I want you to consider the matter of the appointment of the solicitor in that way, and that is why I ask you whether the business of this office—the ordinary consultations and so forth—should not be done by an actively-engaged practising firm—one of the best firms of your city—if you could get that business done on something like the terms we have just discussed, the solicitors taking other business in the usual way which does not directly concern the office, provided that all business was done as reasonably as it would be done by any solicitors' firm. Would that not be a better arrangement, and cheaper?—It would be cheaper, I believe.

384. Well, if it would be cheaper, would you not have the advantage of getting the advice (I am not alluding to any particular firm) of a firm who would be actively engaged in the midst of the profession; and you would be, as it were, *au courant* with the feeling of the whole profession in the interest of the Public Trust and the profession?—That would be a great thing to gain, no doubt. May I say that I will consider that.

MONDAY, 13TH APRIL, 1891.

Mr. R. C. HAMERTON, Public Trustee, further examined.

385. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Hamerton, I think you left off on Saturday in reference to the appointment of the office Solicitor and the Solicitor's duties in the office, and you said you would consider that point as to whether it is desirable to continue a solicitor on the staff. I do not want