

challenging the statement, my explanation not having been accepted in the first place. That is my answer to the question put by the member for Ellesmere. I do not wish it to appear to the Committee, with a question so important, that I decline to answer any question on technical grounds. I would rather take a bold and broader view of it.

806. *Hon. Sir J. Hall.*] As you were prevented by sleep from admitting the incorrectness of this statement when first challenged, why did you not take the opportunity during the five days which elapsed between that time and the end of the session?—That is putting the question in another form, and my answer to the previous question will apply; that it was corrected, and corrected copies were circulated amongst members. The matter was well known, and it appeared in *Hansard*, which is of course the correct report of what transpires in the House.

807. You say corrected copies were circulated amongst members? It is desirable we should have that correct. Are you aware Mr. Costall has stated only twenty-five copies were sent up for the use of the House?—Mr. Costall does not know how many copies were obtained and which were given to members.

808. Have you any personal knowledge that members generally obtained corrected copies?—I have the knowledge that several members obtained, I think from myself, corrected copies; and several members spoke to me upon this question, some of them having the two copies.

809. Will you look at that monthly statement of public works expenditure; it is an old one of my own?—Yes.

810. I believe you, as Minister for Public Works, have a similar statement laid before you monthly?—It is somewhat altered—my statement is—to that.

811. Can you supply the Committee with a copy of the statement for August and September, 1892?—I should think they have it in the office.

812. You have this statement laid before you every month, have you not?—Yes; they are supposed to be put before the Minister every month. Sometimes it occurs, as in session time, we do not get them at that time; and in all probability I would not have that one for the month before me. I am pretty sure I am right in saying I had not.

813. You stated it was upon the figures given in the Accountant's memorandum that you framed your Statement?—I did not say that. I asked Mr. Blow if he would, of course, get it.

814. I think your remark was, as to the first part of the concluding paragraph: "On these figures I built the structure?"—I did not say from the Accountant's; I said "those supplied to me."

815. What do you mean by "supplied to me"? Do you mean Exhibit No. 3, which has been shown to us, with pencil memorandum?—I cannot say, Sir John. It is so long since Mr. Blow put these before me. All I know is this: I asked Mr. Blow beforehand, and was supplied with figures. I cannot say they were those; but Mr. Blow has said in his evidence that was what he took the figures from. I cannot remember the circumstance, but I should take what Mr. Blow said to be true.

816. Having this monthly statement before you, were you not aware, when you came to the preparation of this Statement, whether you had spent £300,000 on public works or £400,000 during the course of the year?—If you asked me the question under ordinary circumstances I should have said Yes. But if you ask an officer, whose duty it is to attend to this and nothing else, when you are about preparing a Statement, to supply you with figures, and he gives them to you, that would take away from the Minister for the time being his research or the taxing of his memory. I have no doubt it would do the same with you or any other Minister.

817. Then it did not surprise you when you were told only £300,000 had been spent during the year?—I may say that I kept down expenditure, and it was some new contract that came in—at least some heavy payments—which upset our calculations for the year. I think our ordinary amount per month was put down at £30,000. We had arranged to bring our public works expenditure within certain limits. I think the limit was £30,000 a month; that was the maximum. I am speaking now from memory, but there had been some heavy contracts previously; the final payments fell in, and that, of course, increased the amount considerably. If you ask me the question of keeping down expenditure—?

818. No; I am not asking that?—We had to do it, and did do it.

819. You said in your evidence yesterday that, on these figures supplied to you, you built the structure of the Public Works Statement?—That is so; when I saw these figures for the previous years, the figures that are in the concluding paragraph of the Statement.

820. Wrong figures, in fact?—It includes, of course, several years.

821. When you found that the figures were wrong, did not that make the superstructure wrong?—The very first page shows the expenditure to have been £391,000, and it is also in the tables, and in the Financial Statement.

822. Did it not make the first and concluding paragraph wrong—the concluding paragraph, at any rate—which was built upon these figures? When these figures turned out to be wrong, was not that superstructure, the concluding paragraph, also wrong?—If you read that Statement strictly the superstructure is not wrong. If you compare it with the "few years." If you take a single year it would have been £334,000 as against £295,000, or £334,000 as against £391,000, with the corrected figures. But if you take the superstructure as a whole, and with the whole of these figures supplied at one time, the superstructure is still correct.

823. You refer, in the concluding paragraph, to the expenditure during each of the years mentioned, and the expenditure not of the years generally, but of the expenditure "during each of the years mentioned"?—How could that be, in the face of the figures there.

824. I am quoting from your Statement?—If you look, you will see it is the expenditure of the "past few years as shown in the figures in the paragraph."

825. Yes; the figures in the paragraph, however, are £295,000?—On the face of it, they have to be taken together.