

122. They have increased?—Yes.

123. Have you ever had any complaint about the increase of work from the Post Office officials?—No; it is all in the day's work, and as business increases the staff is increased. When you come to divide the business over so large a number of offices—the chief offices excepted—the extent of work at each office is not unduly heavy.

124. Do these miscellaneous expenses apply only to Post Office work?—To nearly every department. We do not make payments for the Railway Department; but nearly every payment for other departments, not exceeding 10s., is paid by the Post Office, provided the payment is expressly approved.

125. *Mr. Duthie.*] You mentioned that your accounts close on the 31st December, whereas the accounts of the colony close on the 31st March, and that you thereby had to meet payments on account of other departments for which you were not recouped. Would it not be more convenient to close on the 31st March, the same as the others do?—Our yearly transactions close on the 31st December, for the reason that if they closed at the end of the financial year there would be a difficulty in getting the returns, &c., ready for Parliament, which meets a couple or three months afterwards. The accounts are made up to the 31st December because the Savings-Bank year ends on that date.

126. Is there any reason why the Savings-Bank should not close on the 31st March—the colony's year closes on the 31st March?—Yes; the Savings-Bank interest has to be calculated, the accounts balanced, and the balance-sheet sent to the Audit Department to be audited; and you will observe that the Auditor did not affix his certificate to last year's balance-sheet until the 11th May, nearly five months after the close of the year.

127. You must recognise the importance of the Audit Department, and it very much disturbs the accounts of the colony to have your accounts closed on a different date?—I do not think that. Our Savings-Bank yearly accounts close on the 31st December, and I do not think it would be so convenient to close them on the 31st March as on the 31st December.

128. Do you think there is any difficulty for members of the House and the public to understand the accounts?—These accounts are very plain.

129. But the dates are very awkward?—I do not think there would be any difficulty in understanding them.

130. There are the different securities to be followed up, and when we get your statement there is difficulty in reconciling it with the other accounts. In justice to Mr. Warburton, as he left your department in 1891, he might not have known there was an Act in force in regard to this matter?—He knew there was an Act in force.

131. You know of your own knowledge that he knew of this point?—I can only assume that an officer in Mr. Warburton's position would know there was such an Act in force.

132. How long was he Public Trustee?—He left the Post Office for the Public Trust Office in 1891. I think he became Controller and Auditor-General in 1895.

133. In reference to these imprests, you admit there was a slight delay, but there must have been a continuous delay?—No; in 1896 we had a credit balance of £17,000 at the end of the year.

134. What was due the previous year?—In December, 1895, it was £31,000, and in December, 1894, it was £4,000.

135. What was the delay in 1895 due to?—We applied for £32,000 on the 19th December, and it was not paid over until the 8th January.

136. That was before the Christmas holidays. These deficiencies have generally been due to the Treasury?—I think in a general way they were.

137. You put it as mildly as possible for the Treasury?—I think I put it fairly.

138. You treat this matter lightly, but it is a very serious matter as far as the public are concerned. It is all due to the Treasury?—Those I have read out are.

139. Are there any for which you are to blame?—Yes; there was a debit balance of £4,000 at the end of 1894 for which we had not applied for imprest.

140. If the delay was due to the Treasury we should have it cleared up, and you should not excuse them?—I do not excuse them.

141. If it is the Treasury's recurring fault we should know it?—I have given you the items as I have them here. At the end of 1888 we were in credit; in December, 1889, we were in debit £314; in December, 1890, we were in debit £3,407; in December, 1891, 1892, and 1893, we were in credit; in 1894, at the end of the year, we were in debit £4,947; at the end of 1895 we were in debit £31,250; in 1896 we were in credit; and in 1897 we were in debit £39,000.

142. *Right Hon. R. J. Seddon.*] Go back to the £19,000 in 1889: when did you make the requisition for that?—We applied for £23,000 on the 1st April, 1889, and it was paid the same day.

143. How can you blame the Treasury if you only applied for it on the 1st April?—I did not blame the Treasury.

144. What is a reasonable time? The question is whether you could give the Treasury a longer time in which to find the money?—In the last few cases quoted we did. There must generally be about £20,000 floating between Wellington and post-offices. We only requisition the Treasury when the vouchers are actually paid, and when we are brought down to a minimum balance.

145. If you applied for a larger sum, and gave the Treasury a longer time, would it cause any inconvenience?—No, it would not cause any inconvenience to us.

146. It is only when you run down that you put in a requisition?—That is so, as the imprest is reduced to a minimum balance.

147. The longest time from the requisition being made to the Treasury and its being met is from the 17th December to the 10th January?—Yes, so far as I am aware.