

The majority of the wills deposited during the war period are those of members of the Expeditionary Force. That the civilian side has nevertheless had its full share in the general result is demonstrated by the following figures :—

SOLDIERS' WILLS.

Number of wills deposited from the 1st April, 1914, to	
the 31st March, 1918	8,867
Less number withdrawn by reason of death ..	840
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Leaving on deposit at 31st March, 1918	8,027

CIVILIANS' WILLS.

Number of wills deposited from the 1st April, 1914, to	
the 31st March, 1918	7,342
Less number withdrawn by reason of death or	
otherwise	746
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Leaving on deposit at 31st March, 1918	6,596

The great bulk of the civilian wills are prepared within the office, which undertakes the preparation of wills free of charge for testators who desire to appoint the Public Trustee executor.

The wills of soldiers come to the office in a variety of ways. Large numbers are prepared by the Chaplains in the camps. At Trentham the Office maintains an office which is attended on two days a week by a member of the legal staff for the purpose of preparing wills. Many soldiers come direct to the Head Office or Branch Offices to prepare their wills before entering camp or during their final leave.

LEGAL DIVISION.

The staff (including the typing staff) numbered thirty-five at the end of the year.

The Office has been fortunate in obtaining several very capable men, most of them qualified solicitors, who have accommodated themselves to the requirements of the work and ably carried it on. The number of temporary officers is nineteen.

The rearrangement of the accommodation has enabled the staff to be disposed in a compact and convenient manner, whereas formerly it was scattered throughout different rooms unconnected with one another. The general result has been to make for greater efficiency and a better standard of discipline.

There has already been a marked benefit from the appointment of District Solicitors at Auckland and Christchurch. As the policy of decentralization develops legal officers will be stationed at other offices where the volume of business transacted warrants their appointment.

Extensive use has been made of standardized forms, the object of which is to reduce the volume of typing. The very large number of probate and administration applications dealt with by the Division affords great scope for this economy, and numerous forms have been introduced and utilized with gratifying results.

The work performed by the Legal Division is of a varied character. There is a very large conveyancing business in connection with the sale and leasing of properties and the completion of beneficiaries' titles. Applications for probate and administration are necessarily an important feature. For the year under review the number of applications to the Supreme Court for probate or orders to administer was 496, and the number of elections to administer filed (in wills estates only, and excluding those in intestacy cases) 805.

The provisions of the Public Trust Office Act, enabling the Public Trustee to deal with estates not exceeding £400 in value by filing an election to administer in lieu of obtaining probate or administration in the ordinary way, have proved of the greatest value in connection with the estates of deceased soldiers. The great bulk of such estates are of small value, and an inexpensive method of obtaining administration is therefore highly desirable.