

on mortgage. In this province the Office holds mortgages numbering 681, valued at £1,604,487, and on these the interest is regularly and promptly paid.

The effects of the influenza epidemic in November last were severely felt here. Many of the staff were prostrated, but fortunately no deaths amongst them occurred. The epidemic had the effect of throwing a very large number of estates into the Office, and during the months of November, December, and January no less than 159 estates from this cause alone were reported, taxing the resources of the staff to the utmost for the following few months.

The present Office building originally provided accommodation for a staff of about a dozen, but has since been enlarged. Even now it is far too small for the requirements of the business done, besides being unsuitable for the proper supervision of a large staff. Temporary arrangements are being made to carry on until improved accommodation can be provided.

DUNEDIN.

The year ending at the 31st March, 1919, marks steady progress.

Each year shows an increase in number of estates administered, and a greater increase in average values.

New estates taken up during the year number 363.

Estates in which administration was closed number 229.

Total number of estates under Local Deputy's administrative control at the 31st March, 1919, 860.

Total number of estates still under administration controlled by Head Office, 208.

The staff increased in twelve months from nineteen to twenty-five.

During the last twelve months the practice of delegating administration has been very much increased, until at the close of the year all estates of whatever nature reported by a Local Deputy were delegated to him for administration. For District Officers who represent the Public Trustee in his relations with beneficiaries this practice of delegation of authority is a boon of inestimable value.

The delegating of new estates was supplemented during the year by a systematic delegation of old estates which had been administered previously by Head Office.

All statements of account in locally administered estates are now prepared and finally examined at the Branch Office, so that it is possible to prepare and examine an account at short notice and distribute an estate without awaiting further authority from Head Office. This is a very great advantage to beneficiaries.

One result of the signing of the armistices has been to create a boom in property values.

During the war people would not buy land or house property unless at a sacrifice. Roofing-iron and building-material generally was at such a high price that owners of old houses pulled them down to sell the material in them. In this way some scores of houses were demolished in Dunedin.

Upon the armistices being arranged and the return of soldiers from active service many people desired to set up housekeeping; it was impossible to obtain houses available, and the cost prevented building of new houses. The inevitable result was a rise in prices, which is likely to remain for some time. The improved market has been largely availed of to quit properties that were previously unsaleable, and sales have been brisk in consequence.

Another result of the armistices and return of soldiers is to close many agencies for soldiers held under powers of attorney. The work done for soldiers—both agencies and deceased estates—has undoubtedly been a good advertisement of the functions of the Office. Knowledge of the Office is now familiar in houses where its very existence was not known before the war.

The extension of the policy of delegation necessitated provision of a competent staff to deal with the increased responsibility.

Most of the younger staff are already studying in their own time—some for law, some for accountancy; and the theory thus learned assists them in their daily practical work, and keeps them interested in the wider aspects of the work.