

While the cost of stores—generally those of a bulky nature—has in certain cases shown a decline, this has been due mainly to reduction in freight rates and war-risk insurance. The latter during the war period had been from £3 3s. to £4 4s. per cent., and had occasionally touched £20 per cent. Prices of goods which the Department was forced to procure from America, on the other hand, showed substantial increases on account of fluctuations in the rate of exchange.

Difficulty in procuring adequate supplies to meet the growing requirements of the Department is still experienced, and stocks of many important lines are difficult to maintain. Overseas shipping has shown but slight improvement. As regular services are again established it is hoped that some of the difficulties now experienced, particularly with regard to the receipt of documents, will disappear.

During the year arrangements were completed to transfer to the District Engineers' offices the accounting for engineering-works, telegraph material, and workmen's equipment hitherto done by Postmasters.

The necessity for a district store at Auckland has long been recognized, and for some years past efforts have been made to procure a suitable site. An area of half an acre has now been secured in Mechanics Bay, whereon it is proposed to erect suitable store buildings.

WORKSHOPS.

The ever-increasing volume of work has necessitated larger premises, and these have been provided and occupied during the year.

Exceptional difficulties have been experienced in keeping the motor vehicles in good order. Repair work has largely increased, and the shortage of parts has interfered with the prompt despatch of such work. With additional working-facilities and the prospect of a more regular supply of material it is expected that the work of repairing the vehicles will be expeditiously disposed of in future.

The scope of the work of the motor section has gradually widened, until repair work is now done for almost every Department of the Government Service.

Repairs to telegraph and telephone instruments have been efficiently carried out.

POST OFFICE.

During 1919 Inspectors visited 2,290 offices, and permanent Postmasters inspected 127 non-permanent offices in their vicinity.

The number of post-offices opened was 20, and the number closed 51. The number of post-offices open on the 31st December, 1919, was 2,315. The names of 3 offices were changed.

The number of articles delivered in the Dominion, including those received from places beyond New Zealand, during the year 1919, compared with the number in 1918, was as under:—

| | 1919. | 1918. | Increase. | Decrease. |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Letters and letter-cards .. | 120,633,071 | 118,363,999 | 2,269,072 | .. |
| Post-cards | 3,889,691 | 3,904,316 | .. | 14,625 |
| Other articles | 38,614,420 | 38,413,765 | 200,655 | .. |
| Totals | 163,137,182 | 160,682,080 | 2,455,102 | .. |
| Parcels | 3,180,621 | 3,038,706 | 141,915 | .. |

The letters and letter-cards increased 1·92 per cent., post-cards decreased 0·37 per cent., other articles increased 0·52 per cent., and parcels increased 4·68 per cent.

In 1918, compared with 1917, letters and letter-cards decreased 5·12 per cent., post-cards decreased 8·23 per cent., other articles decreased 11·66 per cent., and parcels increased 0·64 per cent.

The average number of letters and letter-cards posted per unit of population during 1919 is estimated at 108·64. The average in 1918 was 112·02.

The declared value of parcels received from places outside the Dominion in 1919 was £1,450,476, against £945,113 in 1918. The Customs duty amounted to £254,775 15s. 8d. The declared value of parcels despatched to places beyond the Dominion in 1919 was £76,301, against £120,436 in 1918.

The system whereby senders of parcels addressed to certain countries are enabled to pay Customs and other charges ordinarily payable by the addressees was extended to include parcels addressed to and received from the Union of South Africa and Rhodesia.

DEAD AND MISSING LETTERS.

The proportion of dead or unclaimed letters, letter-cards, and post-cards to the total number delivered within the Dominion was 0·64 per cent. 262,126 letters (including letters addressed to soldiers and registered letters) were opened and returned to writers through the Dead Letter Office; 36,269 were returned unopened to other countries; 212,368 (including those addressed to soldiers) were reissued; 32,247 were destroyed; 254,216 were returned by Chief Postmasters to senders within New Zealand; 43,244 were returned by Chief Postmasters to other countries: a total of 840,470, compared with 820,984 in 1918. 5,985 other articles were returned to foreign countries; 2,739 were returned to the senders through the Dead Letter Office, and 87,444 by Chief Postmasters; 16,360 were returned by Chief Postmasters to other countries: a total of 112,528 articles, compared with 122,948 in 1918.

There were 4,656 letters and 1,875 letter-cards posted without addresses; 18,445 letters were wrongly addressed; 61 letters bore libellous addresses and were intercepted; 37 letters were discovered to bear previously used stamps; and 9,436 registered letters were unclaimed. 3,171 newspapers and 4,272 books and other articles were received without addresses. Many of these were subsequently applied for and delivered. 19,991 newspapers were returned to publishers.