

WITNESS: ANTHONY GANT

STATEMENT NUMBER: WITN0148_01

EXHIBITS: 0

DATED: Jan 12, 2022

POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ANTHONY GANT

THIS STATEMENT IS PROVIDED IN RESPONSE TO THE RULE 9 REQUEST OF
THE PUBLIC INQUIRY DATED 29/10/2021 TO ADDRESS THE HUMAN IMPACT OF
THE FAILINGS OF THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM

I, MR ANTHONY GANT Date of Birth , of

will say as follows:-

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

1. I am currently 51 years of age. I am married to my wife , and we have been together for 12 years having married shortly after getting together. has a daughter from a previous relationship her name is and she is currently 14 years old.
2. I have three children from my previous marriage, two daughters aged 32 and 28 and a son aged 29.
3. I am currently employed by Greggs and have been since 2015. I work full time as a store manager.

4. Prior to being appointed as a Sub-postmaster in 2003, I worked in London from 1998 as a dealer on the stock market. I had to take the SSA Stock Broker examinations to work in this role.

POST OFFICE HISTORY

5. In June 2003, my then wife and I decided to move to Wales as she was from the area and was really homesick. I managed to secure the role of Sub-Postmaster of Nantoer Post Office in Newtown, Wales. I worked in this role up until I was suspended following an audit undertaken on the 19th April 2007 which had shown a shortfall.
6. I owned the property that the post office was in; this included a small grocery shop. I also lived at the property. In 2004, I purchased the lease for the local pub which was opposite the Post Office Branch.
7. Prior to taking over at the Post Office as Sub-Postmaster, I received 1 weeks' worth of training at a Post Office headquarters at Bury St. Edmunds, and then some on-site training from the outgoing Sub-Postmistress who I was replacing.
8. I first became aware of other individuals having issues with the Horizon system after watching a Panorama documentary a couple of years ago.

CRIMINAL ALLEGATIONS AND ANY PROCEEDINGS/CONVICTION

9. On the 19th April 2007 an audit was carried out by the Post Office. At the time of the audit, I explained to the auditors that the accounts would be short by around £13,000.00 due to balance shortages which had accrued over the past two years.

10. I was undertaking daily cash declarations and then monthly account balances each month. During these balances I would have to inflate the cash on hand figure to cover the discrepancies. I did this by inflating the cash declarations to reflect what I saw on the daily snapshot from the system. I entered a figure to represent actual losses because, office have losses. I thought that by doing this I was making it look normal. I would then have to declare I had the cash, even though I didn't. I knew what I was doing was wrong, but I was too frightened to tell anyone or do anything about it. I did try calling the help line when the errors were occurring but, I never received any support.
11. When there was a shortfall, I would pay this out of my own money; however, it got to the point where I just had no more money to put in. This was very distressing for me.
12. When the auditors came, I actually felt a sense of relief; someone was there, and things were going to be dealt with.
13. After the audit, I was suspended on 19 April 2007 on a precautionary basis. The Post Office was then closed; however, the following day it was reopened with my former employee, Miss Cennin Griffiths as a relief Sub-Postmaster.
14. On the 7 May 2007, I was interviewed by the Post Office investigators. I was very scared at this time and was not legally represented. I did however have a Post Office Federation Representative present during my interview.
15. I was prosecuted by the Post Office and charged with False Accounting. I was advised by my legal representatives to plead guilty to this charge on the basis that the charge of theft would then be dropped.
16. I attended Shrewsbury and North Shropshire Magistrates Court for my hearing on 26 October 2007. I pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 6 months

imprisonment, suspended for 12 months. I was also ordered to complete 100 hours of community service and pay costs of £960.00 and compensation of £14,500.00 to the Post Office.

17. At the time of my trial, my son had been diagnosed with GRO He had previously been a budding rugby player; however, was at the time in a wheelchair. He was having to go to Birmingham Children's Hospital for injections under general anaesthetic. I told the judge this at my trial and I believe this is why I avoided a prison sentence.

18. My conviction was quashed by the Court of Appeal on 18 November 2021.

THE HUMAN IMPACT

19. The human impact which the failings of the Horizon IT System have had and continue to have upon me, and my family are set out in the remainder of this statement. The section headings follow the particular questions posed by the Inquiry.

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING REQUIRED TO MAKE GOOD APPARENT SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

20. As I had been topping up the shortfalls previously, I did not have any money or anything I could sell. I was lucky in that I was able to find employment; however, I was on a low income, earning just over £1,000.00 a month. Despite this I was still ordered to make repayments in the sum of £500.00 a month to the Post Office.

21. This was a massive struggle and led to me missing payments of other bills. I got into a lot of mess financially and it took me a number of years to get straight again.
22. Due to the financial pressures, we were under, my wife [GRO] decided to return to work on a full-time basis despite having a young child to care for. She wanted to help me out and I felt so grateful that she made this sacrifice for me.
23. Despite [GRO] obtaining work. I was still struggling with the repayments, so I returned to Court and the amount was reduced to £300.00 a month. This made things slightly easier, but it was still a struggle as my income is still low. I cannot recall when this occurred, but I think I was about half way through the repayments.
24. In the end I paid the full £14,500.00 back to the Post Office.

WHAT WERE THE COSTS OF MAKING GOOD ALLEGED SHORTFALLS SHOWN BY HORIZON?

25. As a result of the alleged shortfalls, I paid money out of my own pocket to correct what Horizon was showing to be a discrepancy. I would pay this anyway I could, from taking money from my savings, taking money from the pub where I was the leaseholder and from the shop connected to the Post Office, and from credit cards. Interest was paid on the credit cards to facilitate payment of the alleged shortfalls.

HOW WERE YOU AFFECTED WHEN ALLEGED TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SHORTFALLS OR DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

26. When I was suspended it was devastating. This happened on 19 April 2007. I knew that what I was doing was wrong in declaring the balances and making up the shortfalls; however, I received no help from the Post Office. They would tell me that if there was a shortfall, I would just have to make this back up so I did just this.

27. I felt sick when the auditor came as well as relief that it was going to be sorted.

28. At the time I tried to block out a lot of what was happening to me, this meant that I wasn't really dealing with things. This led to a built up in emotions and a few years ago I suffered a mental breakdown.

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

29. I was suspended from my position as a Sub-Postmaster with immediate effect.

I lived at the Post Office premises and the safe was in the kitchen; because of this we had to move out of the premises straight away as we were not allowed to go into the area because of the safe. I lost the Post Office, the shop and my home.

30. At this time, my then wife and I were in the process of splitting up, so I went to live in a small flat on my own.

31. The leasehold that I held for the pub across the road was also taken off me by the brewery, so I lost that as well. This obviously meant I had no source of income.

32. I used to be a coach for children's rugby, and I would referee matches; however, following the accusation, I made the decision to give this up.

33. I couldn't go back to it after my conviction as you need to be DBS checked to undertake the role and I knew that this would show my conviction. I didn't know if this meant that I wouldn't be able to carry out the role, but I wasn't willing to take the chance.

34. I was also worried about what the parents thought of me and that they would stop sending their children to rugby because of me.

WHAT WERE YOUR FINANCIAL LOSSES CAUSED BY ACTION TAKEN AGAINST YOU IN RELIANCE UPON HORIZON DATA?

35. As stated earlier, I was not permitted to continue living in my home after I was suspended as the safe was located in the kitchen.

36. Without an income, I could no longer afford to pay off the mortgage on the property, so the Post Office closed my Sub-Post Office and the property was repossessed by the lender.

37. When I was a sub-postmaster, I was earning £32,000.00 a year, whereas I now only earn £26,500.00 a year.

WHAT EFFECT DID IT HAVE TO BE ACCUSED OF COMMITTING CRIMINAL OFFENCES AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

38. I was devastated when I found out I was being convicted. I remember going to the Shrewsbury and North Shropshire Magistrates Court for my hearing on 26

October 2007 and thinking I don't know if I am going to walk out of here. It was sickening.

39. In the period leading up to the hearing I had problems sleeping. This situation was always on my mind. I would think about it all the time. I would wake up in the morning thinking about it and go to bed and night thinking about it; it was endless.

WHAT WERE THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING CONVICTED OF A CRIMINAL OFFENCE AS A RESULT OF SHORTFALLS AND DISCREPANCIES SHOWN BY THE HORIZON IT SYSTEM?

40. The conviction was covered by both national and local newspapers. I still have the article that my local newspaper, the Shropshire Star, wrote about me on my phone and I sometimes read this. It says that I took the money for my own gains in order to live a lavish lifestyle. It was devastating.

41. They have since published an article about my conviction being quashed on 18 November 2021 and how wonderful this is; however, the article on my conviction still comes up above the new article in the search engines. I find this really frustrating.

42. There were also details of my conviction placed in the Post Office's own publication. My ex-wife's family, who live in Colchester also worked for the Post Office, so they saw this publication and all the details about what had happened. We previously got on well, but after this, I lost contact with them.

43. Prior to the conviction I was seen as the pillar of the local community. I had the shop; I was the Sub-Postmaster and I ran the local pub. Everyone knew me so my reputation was seriously damaged when details of my conviction came out.

44. I lost my reputation which caused me significant pain and embarrassment.

When I went out people would make comments such as "there is the guy that stole the money from the post office". I remember one time I was sat in a pub beer garden with my three children having a drink when someone said "there's the family that stole from the post office". It was awful. It was worse that comments would be made in front of my children as well.

45. I also lost all my credentials from when I worked in the stock market. I had previously taken the SSA stock broker examination and I lost everything that went with this when I was convicted.

46. Thankfully, from an employment perspective I have been quite lucky. Initially I did some agency work. I then applied to be a maintenance man for a small franchise. After a while the franchisee wanted me to become his assistant manager. I remember saying to him "do you know what I have been charged with?". He said he didn't care and that if I wanted to steal off him, he was happy to watch me try and get off with a load of 1p and 2p coins.

47. He told me he trusted me and had faith in me. This comment has stuck with me to this day. I worked for him for around 7-8 years before applying for a store manager role with Greggs in 2015.

48. I put my conviction on the application to Greggs and at the interview it was discussed. My interviewer advised me that long enough time had passed that I didn't even need to put it on my application form. I have been very lucky in securing these jobs. I know others have not been so fortunate.

49. Even though I have gained employment, I have still suffered a loss of earnings. As mentioned above, when I was a sub-postmaster, I was earning £32,000.00 a year, whereas I now only earn £26,500.00 a year.

50. I still get comments and sly looks to this day. I think it will always be with me and there will always be people who say 'there is the guy that robbed the post office'.

WHAT EFFECT DID THESE ISSUES HAVE UPON YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, COLLEAGUES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY?

51. My ex-wife and I divorced from a 20 year marriage following the stresses of the Post Office. We did have other stresses as at the time and I wouldn't say that the accusations and conviction alone destroyed my marriage, but it did have a huge impact on it.

52. Thankfully I have managed to enjoy a good relationship with all my children, and they have always been supportive of me.

53. The conviction caused me to lose most of my friends. I have one close friend who has stuck by me through it all. He has always stuck up for me if people make comments and he continues to do so until this day.

54. I feel that I have had to rebuild my life from scratch, and I've had to regain the trust of those in the community.

55. I am very weary of who I make friends with now as so many turned their back on me. I do feel that I have now made some good friends.

56. Despite all of this, I have still not lost my faith in people. I think this has been helped by the fact that I have been responsible in helping to raise money for the Ronald McDonald Children's hospital. I have raised about £8,000.00 for this charity.

57. At Christmas, I dress up as Father Christmas and send messages to the children of my family and friends for a small donation. I don't raise much, around

£150.00. Last year I raised money for cancer and this year I am raising money for Joe's Buddy Line, which is a phone advice line for children suffering from mental health issues.

58. My wife, **GRO** has continued to support me; however, I have continued to block things out. It was a couple of years ago when I saw a Panorama programme that I realised that the issues with shortfalls and convictions for the same had happened to others and not just me.

59. I decided to look into matters further and when the investigations started, and all the old memories started to be dug up, I was really hit hard by all the emotions I had been blocking out and suppressing and I suffered a mental breakdown.

60. I remember being so low that I felt I wanted to end my life. I told my wife this, was an awful experience for both of us.

61. My wife told my mother-in-law and although we have a bit of a love/hate relationship, she came round and put her arms around me and didn't let go. I ended up crying for about half an hour, it was the release I needed.

62. I didn't receive any medical support, but the support of my family has helped me to get through.

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT WHICH THESE ISSUES HAD UPON THE MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY?

63. Due to what happened my children did receive some backlash as people would make comments in the community.

64. My children suffered issues at school with comments being made. My youngest daughter is quite fiery and would defend me and give some verbal abuse back.

I'm not sure if she had got to the point that she had just had enough so she just started to fight back.

65. The children never received any support from the school. At the time I didn't really see how much they were affected as I was so busy dealing with things for myself and worrying. It is only now that I can look back and see the impact it has had on them. I feel really bad about this.

66. They are all very strong people, but my youngest daughter does struggle with anxiety. I am not sure what has caused this and if the situation with the Post Office has affected her more than the others or not. She has received support for this and is doing well.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

67. I feel as though this will always be hanging over me and there will always be people who make comments and say "oh there's Anthony who robbed the post office"; however, I feel that people can kick me as hard as they want, but I will not stay lying down.

Statement Of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed:

GRO
Anthony Gant, 2022-19:28 GMT

Position Or

Office Held:

Print Full

Name: ANTHONY GANT

Date of signature: Jan 12, 2022

FILE REFERENCE: **GRO**

