

Witness Name: Ms Pamela Lock
Statement No: WITN0232_01
Exhibits: None
Dated: 14/1/2022

IN THE POST OFFICE HORIZON IT INQUIRY

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF MS PAMELA LOCK

I, MS PAMELA LOCK, WILL SAY as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. I am grateful to the Chair to be invited to provide a "human impact" statement, concerning the physical, psychological, emotional, reputational and financial consequences to me and my family of being held responsible for shortfalls shown by the Horizon IT system and Post Office Limited's actions toward me and my family. The initial paragraphs below provide a brief summary of my background, and provide context to the detail of the human impact of the Horizon scandal on me and my family. This statement does not reflect a full account of my experiences or those of my family and if necessary or required I will provide further witness statement evidence.

BACKGROUND

2. I am now 73 years old. I am widowed and I live on my own. I have two children and I have six grandchildren.
3. Before I became an subpostmaster I had completed teacher training to become a primary school teacher. However I met my husband who was going into business with a bakery and Post Office attached, as such I went into business with him.

4. Sadly in 1993 my son had a serious motor bike accident. It was two days before his wedding. His head became detached from his spine. This caused him to be paralysed from the chest down. He was only twenty four. As such, my husband and I had a very heavy burden of responsibility for him, as well as running our business.
5. He is still with us, and I am very proud of how he has continued forward in his life.

DECISION TO BECOME A SPM

6. I was a subpostmaster at a post office branch in Cwmdau Post Office, 187 Middle Road, Swansea SA5 8EZ, from September 1974 until my suspension in July 2000, a month after which I was terminated.
7. The Post Office was part of my husband's bakery and had always been, and we lived on the premises. In becoming a subpostmaster, we envisioned secure and stable lifestyle.
8. I used to start work in the bakery at 1.30 am and would work through till 5.30pm, with support from some part time staff. We would be in bed by 8pm. We had no social life because we were working so hard. Indeed, we never had a holiday, because we felt there was too much responsibility to pass on to anyone else even for a short break.
9. However the business was successful. Our bakery business was very successful with order for schools, local hospitals and other local shops. The post office was also very busy and successful.
10. My husband and I worked so very hard, because we wanted a good life for our children and ourselves. We also took huge pride from serving the community. I knew everyone in the area and they knew me.

11. As I say, we ran the post office from 1974. This was 25 years before the Horizon System came in. I was informed by letter from the Post Office that they would be installing the Horizon system in January 2000.
12. I was very apprehensive. I had no experience or knowledge of computers.

TRAINING

13. I recall that I received 2.5 days of training, at a hotel local to me in Fforestfach in Swansea. The training was not one-to-one, and my recollection is that there were 8 to 10 other delegates, from different post office branches.
14. During the training, we had access to a computer which had Horizon loaded on it, and we were told to practice the various transactions which the system was designed to conduct. The training staff would circulate around the room, and check on the delegates to check on our progress.
15. I thought at the time, as I do now, that the training I received was insufficient. Horizon was a complex system, which represented a big shift in the way that we conducted our business and operated our branches.
16. I had been using a paper ledger system for more than 25 years, during which time we had never had a serious discrepancy. Indeed, whenever there was a discrepancy, we could easily trace where it had occurred, as we had a full record of transactions and stock.
17. Using Horizon was very different and very difficult. Moreover, I had never used a computer for work purposes. Consequently, I do not think that the training we received was comprehensive, and I did not leave the training confident in my ability to use Horizon.

18. As I say, I never had difficulties with paper ledger system, and if there were ever any shortfalls in the accounting I could trace through records to identify any mistakes. With the Horizon system I suddenly had problems with shortfalls arising that I could not trace to identify the problems. There was no paper trail or ledger trail that I could check.
19. Other than the short training, I do not recall receiving or being offered any further training. I was simply referred to the helpline whenever I raised an issue that I was experiencing with Horizon.

HELPLINE

20. Consequently, I was contacting the helpline 2 – 3 times per week. Those calls almost exclusively related to the shortfalls which the Horizon system displayed. The Helpline were a complete waste of time.
21. The helpline staff would simply tell me to attempt to resolve shortfalls by recording the shortfalls on a sheet, which we had to sign. Helpline staff told me that the shortfalls would 'work themselves out', i.e. that shortages and surpluses would eventually balance toward the true picture. However, the shortages never 'worked themselves out' for me.

SHORTFALLS

22. In this section, I set out in very brief detail my experience of shortfalls arising from deficiencies in the Horizon IT System, and Post Office Limited's actions as a result. This is only a brief introduction to those matters, in order to provide necessary context for the explanation of the human impact which follows.

23. I began to experience shortages in or around January 2000, almost immediately after the introduction of the Horizon System.
24. I remember within the first two weeks there was a shortfall was some hundreds of pounds. I called the helpline and informed them, and they said that it would probably show up within a couple of weeks.
25. However, the shortfalls continued week after week and over the next six months or more, the shortfalls accumulated, and eventually the shortfalls reached £31,000.
26. I was up all night trying to find out what could possibly be the cause.
27. I had been doing this job well for over 25 years without any problems, so I knew the fault could not be with me. I was sure that the computer system was to blame.

AUDITS

28. I had been audited many times over the previous 25 years, and had never had a problem. There might be small discrepancies where my balance would be over or under by as little a £1, on other occasions perhaps £50.
29. I knew that the 'shortfall' was some £31,000. I cashed in an ISA I had in about June 2000, which at the time was worth approximately £5,000. I used that to reduce the shortfalls which had accumulated.
30. In July 2000 Post Office auditors arrived at my post office at about 8.30am. There were two of them.
31. I was very frightened, because I knew that there was such a large shortfall. I hoped that they might be able to find out what the problem was.
32. The auditors found that there was just over £26,000 in shortfall. As I have said, I paid £5,000 into the account not long before having cashed-in an ISA that I had.
33. The auditors asked me where the money was. I said that it must be in the paperwork, as I certainly did not have it.
34. The auditors closed the post office and took the keys.

35. The post office was closed for a long time, and over the months my many customers kept asking why post office was closed. It was so embarrassing.

INVESTIGATION

36. I was interview in approximately September 2000 by Post Office Investigators.

37. They badgered me as to where the money had gone and what could I do to explain it. All I could say was that I did not know where it had gone. I said that I had been running the post office for 25 years, and had never had a problem. I said that there must be a problem with the computer system.

38. The investigators said that I should get a forensic accountant to look at our finances to show we had not taken the money.

39. We went to our accountant who found a forensic accountant. The expert examined all of our finances and concluded that there was no evidence that we had taken or received the so called missing shortfall of over £31,000.

40. I was interviewed again by the Post Office investigators (the same men who had interviewed me before). This was in about March 2001.

41. The Post Office investigators said that the Post Office were going to prosecute me. They made no reference to the forensic accountant's report.

42. I had been suspended since July 2000, without pay. My contract was terminated at that meeting.

43. I received a letter not long after confirming that I was to be prosecuted for theft and false accounting. A date was set for November 2001 in the Magistrates Court

CRIMINAL PROSECUTION

44. As I say, the Post Office prosecuted me for theft and false accounting.

45. I instructed a solicitor and explained everything that had happened to me.

46. My solicitor advised me to plead guilty. However, I refused to plead guilty to theft, I was adamant about this.

47. My solicitor said that if I pleaded guilty to false accounting the theft would probably be dropped. I therefore agree to plead guilty at the Magistrates Court in November 2001. The Magistrates sent the matter to the Crown Court, because the sum was so large.

48. The Crown Court hearing was not long after.

49. I had to stand in the dock. I reconfirmed that I was pleading guilty. I was numb; it was like I was there in person, but not in spirit. I sort of shut myself off, and took nothing in.

50. My husband and daughter were there. I was crying and so was my daughter. My husband was very quiet. My son could not be there as he was (and is) paralysed. But he supported me.

51. I was sentenced to complete 80 hours community service, working in a charity shop.

52. I was also order to 'repay' the balance. The Judge gave me three years to pay off the sum as we had no money, except for the shop premises. He gave us time to sell this.

AFTERMATH

53. My conviction was front page news in the South Wales Evening Post. There was a picture of me on the front page, with a damning headline.

54. The South Wales Evening Post was a widely read paper then. My picture was all over the newsstands across Swansea and elsewhere in South Wales. `
55. I saw my picture on the Newsstands, I felt awful. Indeed, as I described this to my solicitor when giving this statement I wept as I recalled how I felt.
56. We had to sell a property we had (a lock up shop) to 'repay' the Post Office the £26,000.
57. My husband and I retreated into ourselves. We had to make our staff redundant, some of them had been there for 10 – 20 years. They were friends as well as employees. We went to their birthdays, and weddings; and then we had to let them go. This was hard.
58. Customers were regularly commenting on my conviction. People were angry at me because they would no longer get their pensions and benefits locally, and had to travel to get them.
59. The number of customers fell away, because of the loss of the post office and the damage to my reputation.
60. We struggled on for the next 9 years until we were old enough to get our state pension. We then sold the shop to pay the debts. Very little was left from paying the debts.
61. My husband was a very private person. He did not say a lot, but he felt a lot.
62. He held in his feelings about what had happened to us. He had always wanted to have his own business, and had worked so hard at it. We had made a success of it over 25 years. Then Horizon stole all of that away in just 6 months

63. It ate away at him. His health deteriorated. He developed bleeding ulcers from stress. He died just three years after we retired.

64. I am sure that his health was directly affected by the stress and worry caused by the Post Office and their prosecution of me.

HUMAN IMPACT

65. My life and reputation were destroyed by the wrongful prosecution pursued by Post Office Limited. I lost my business, my livelihood, my future, my reputation and my standing in the community. I also lost my quiet enjoyment of life, and my comfortable retirement.

66. Firstly, there was a tremendous financial impact on myself and my family. Losing the Post Office meant that I lost my salary as a subpostmaster, as well as losing an important element of our retail business.

67. I was also forced to sell commercial premises to pay Post Office Ltd for the alleged shortfall of £26,000 in 2003. I had to sell those premises at significant undervalue, owing to the pressure I was under to repay the alleged shortfall. I sold the premises for approximately £34,000, and I estimate that its actual value (in 2003) was £50,000.

68. I was also forced to sell my business in 2010, because (without the post office) the business had become less viable. When we tried to sell the business in 2010, the business was initially valued at £150,000 (however it should have been £190,000 but had fallen into disrepair due to our financial difficulties, directly caused by Post Office action against me).

69. By this time we were in such financial difficulty (directly as a result of Post Office action) that we could not wait to secure a buyer at market value, but were forced to sell by auction. Before our property went to auction, myself and my late Husband had to visit the housing office in Swansea, to ask the Council for housing options as we were unable to afford to buy a property with what we were to be left with financially. We were very close to being left homeless.
70. Having to do this was very distressing. We had worked all of our lives to buy a home and to pay our mortgage, and we had to go to the Council office, and queue alongside drug addicts, to beg to be housed in our old age. Eventually we were offered a 1 bedroom flat in sheltered housing, we had no choice but to accept, as this was all they had available at that time.
71. I lost my salary which was between £22,000 and £25,000 per year, and which I would have had until my retired some 15 years later.
72. We would also have enjoyed the profits from our shop and bakery, which was very profitable when we had the post office.
73. As a result of the decline in our business, it had to be sold at auction for £89,000 in August 2010; again, a substantial undervalue. However, some £67,000 had to go to pay debtors.
74. I emphasise that our business had gone downhill as a direct result of the removal of the post office from our business, as this was a major draw for customers.
75. If this had not happened our business would have continued to flourish, as it had for 25 years before the Post Office took action against me. If it had been allowed to continue, we would have had no debt, and a vibrant business to pass on to our children or to sell.

76. As a result of the decline in the business, we constantly had debt collectors on the phone and at the door, threatening to seize goods from the home to cover unpaid debts and bills that we simply couldn't afford. We were also receiving threats of repossession from our mortgage company.
77. This was particularly severe in the year before we sold up, when we were both in our sixties.
78. What you cannot put a value on is the loss of my reputation, and the damage it did to my marriage my family and my standing in the community.
79. My prosecution and trial was extensively covered by the local newspaper; including a picture of me being published on the front page of the local paper. There was a picture of me on the front page with a headline about my conviction. This was on every news stand in the town.
80. Younger people will not remember newsstands, and the headlines that were displayed. Older people will understand that the impact that something like this had on a person in a tight knit town. It was utterly humiliating.
81. As the subpostmaster I was very well known in the community. I was publicly branded a criminal and a thief in the community. Customers, friends and acquaintances would avoid me and stop coming into the shop because of my conviction. I stopped going out to avoid humiliation and I lost all social life. I would avoid local events like church fetes.
82. It is impossible to fully describe the shame and humiliation I experienced and continue to experience, as even now I am sure that many people in my community continue to see me as a criminal and a thief. I can never get back the years that I lost of being a person of good character and a person of standing in my community.

83. Until my prosecution, I had never even had so much as a speeding ticket, so being branded as a criminal was the worst thing for my family and me.
84. I had to do 80 hours community service in a charity shop in Swansea City Centre. All of my customers and local people in the area knew about it, and would see me. I used to try to stay in the back of the Charity shop sorting out the stock, so that I would not be seen. I am sure that my conviction and this community service affected the way I was seen in the community. I was no longer trusted in my community and this had a devastating effect on my business, my self-worth and my mental health.
85. I became extremely depressed because of my financial ruin and loss of reputation. For over 12 months, I relied on medication to get me through the horrendous times during this awful period in our lives. For months, I was terrified that I would be sent to prison on the basis of untrue allegations.
86. An immense strain was put on my marriage, as my husband and I struggled to deal with the consequences. My husband, despite being very supportive, was not a man to talk of problems. As I have said, he was a man who said little but felt much; and he felt it.
87. We have a disabled son who needed and still needs a lot of our support, but we felt that at the time, we were unable to focus on his needs due to the stresses and strains that were forced upon us.
88. My husband developed severe ulcers from the stress, which impacted directly on him. I am certain that the stress contributed to my husband's early death in 2013.
89. Following the outcome of the Group Litigation (Bates & Others) in 2019 the solicitors who had represented me put me forward the Criminal Cases Review Board.

90. The CCRB considered my case and my case was sent to the Court of Appeal. My conviction was overturned in April 2021.

91. I cannot properly describe was a relief it was to have my conviction overturned, and to get my good name back.

92. However, it cannot make up for what I have suffered over the past 21 years. No one was held to account for the wrongful conviction of me and the scores of other subpostmasters, whose convictions were overturned that day.

CONCLUSION

93. The Post Office took everything from me. I lost financial security for myself and my family. All my plans for retirement were destroyed by the financial ruin caused by losing our post office which caused the decline of our shop.

94. As a result of the Post Office action against me, my life and reputation were destroyed and I have lived in poverty for some 20 years.

95. I ran my post office for 25 years before the Introduction of the Horizon System, without any problems and certainly without any so called 'shortfalls'. Within a few short months of the introduction of Horizon System there were some £31,000 in shortfalls.

96. Anyone with eyes in their heads could have seen that the problem must lie with the new computer system. How could a person work as a subpostmaster for 25 years without accruing discrepancies and shortfalls suddenly change and become dishonest and inept. The only change that occurred was the introduction of Horizon and the Post Office's refusal to entertain the idea that their new system might be at fault.

97. I went from woman who had run a post office for 25 years, with a comfortable lifestyle, to a criminal in poverty in a matter of months.
98. In my view, the Post Office destroyed me and played a big hand in the death of my husband.
99. I want the truth to come out. I want to know when the Post Office first knew that its Horizon System was faulty and unreliable.
100. I want to know why they did not conduct an investigation of their system first, before demanding money from me, prosecuting me and criminalising me.
101. I want to know where the money the Post Office took from me and others went to.
102. I want the Post Office to demonstrate that it is genuinely sorry for what it has done to me, and so many others.
103. I want fair compensation for all that I have lost and the hurt we suffered.
104. However, I also want the Post Office to demonstrate that it genuinely understands the harm it has done to decent people like me and to take steps to make amends.
105. After my conviction was quashed I got a standard letter from the Post Office saying sorry for what had happened to me. It looked like a photocopy. I almost chucked it in the bin, but kept it, because it is all I have to show that the Post Office are sorry.

106. I would like the Post Office to pay for a front page advertisement in the South Wales Evening Post showing a picture of me then and now, with the headline "Pamela Lock was innocent – Post Office apologises!"

107. That would be a proper apology, and that would show that the Post Office is genuinely sorry and takes responsibility for what it did to me and my family.

STATEMENT OF TRUTH

I believe that the facts stated in this Witness Statement are true.

Signed..... **GRO** Dated..... 14.01.2022
Pamela Lock