

142. With regard to the value of the property?—Yes.

143. Were these persons supposed to have a knowledge of the value of property there?—Certainly; I went to two gentlemen there who I thought had better information than anybody in Auckland; but, unfortunately, they held me to be absolutely confidential.

144. What was the advice they gave you with regard to the value of the property?—In one case I was told that if the property was put up to auction it would sell for £12,500—that is, a forced sale by auction. In the other case I was told that if we got it anywhere between £15,000 and £16,000 we should do very well. Those were the two principal opinions I took.

145. If the matter had gone into Court would that have been in evidence?—We should have confessed it at once. On our own valuers' evidence it was worth £17,500; and, of course, also the property-tax valuation.

146. *Mr. Peacock.*] I suppose you are aware that a good deal of dissatisfaction and indignation has been expressed in Auckland with regard to the price paid for this property?—I have heard so since the session commenced.

147. In the correspondence it is stated by Mr. O'Connor that it would be judicious if two or three gentlemen of experience were associated with Mr. Brewer in valuing property: can you tell the Committee why that was not done?—That was in view of going into the Compensation Court. If we had done so they would have been appointed.

148. I understand that offers were made for some considerable time before the sale took place to sell at a much lower figure than was paid?—I have not heard of any offer for the whole property. I heard that a reliable offer was made to sell at £7,200, leaving out ten acres of the best part.

149. We have it in evidence that all the property, including buildings, was offered for £3,500, and in another case that it was offered for £4,000: if you had made inquiry of some of the land-agents in Auckland it is probable that you would have heard of this: do you not think so?—I did make considerable inquiry, and the only offer I heard of was £7,200 or £7,400, leaving out what I consider to be the best part of the property.

150. If you had been made aware by any person of experience in Auckland that such an offer had been made a year or eighteen months before for ten acres of the best part of the property, including the house, would you have then considered it advisable to hesitate as to whether you should not take it into the Compensation Court?—I might have made further inquiries into the matter.

151. But, Mr. Brewer's evidence being so strong that the property was worth £17,500, you felt that going into the Compensation Court would have made the Government pay at least that amount, and probably more?—I think that, with our experience of Compensation Courts, if we had gone into Court with this case we should have had to pay £2,000 or £3,000 more, to a certainty.

152. But if you had been made aware of the fact that these offers were made a short time before, when property was higher than at that time, at a price which, if it covered the whole property, would have been less than half the money actually paid, you might have changed your mind about the Compensation Court?—The circumstances did not occur. I do not know what I should have done on the spur of the moment. If such a statement had been made to me—that the property had been offered for £3,500 a year before—I should have been incredulous about it.

153. Assuming that this evidence had been got, you would have felt in a much stronger position to contest the claim?—I should have made further inquiries about it.

154. Do you think now that, if these gentlemen mentioned by Mr. O'Connor had been consulted along with Mr. Brewer, the property might have been got for a great deal less?—No, I do not.

155. *Mr. Barron.*] Did you consult Mr. Allison about the value of the property?—I never heard of him.

156. You say that you consulted your colleagues on the question: have you any objection to say whether your colleagues went into the merits of the case?—No, they did not. They agreed with me that I should not in any case go higher than 10 per cent. above the property-tax valuation without going into Court. If I had not felt that I should be backed up by my colleagues, I should have offered £17,500 instead of £17,100.

157. Had the consultation to be done by telegram to Wellington?—Yes, I think so. I think I mentioned the matter to Sir Julius Vogel at Waiwera on the Saturday before I went to the Waikato; but I do not think any figures were mentioned except Mr. Stark's first demand, for £20,000.

158. Can you say when it was first mentioned that this land would be taken for defence purposes?—I cannot say. I think it was probably mentioned in Major Cautley's report on the defences.

159. What I want to bring out is this: There is a serious discrepancy between the previous property-tax valuation and the last property-tax valuation. Is it possible to put on record when it was known that the Government were going to take the property?—I do not think it was known till May, 1885.

160. You say that you did not look at the previous property-tax valuation or the valuation for local rating when you were taking this matter into consideration?—No; they were not brought under my notice.

161. Have you tried to sell the land since?—No, because it has been stated by Mr. Brewer and others that it is better to hold it for a while.

162. That is, if you tried to sell it, it would not bring anything like the price given?—No. the valuation made now is compared with the price of land in small pieces selling in the district, in Mr. Brewer's letter, and he advises that we had better hold it for a while. Another reason is that some people think that this battery-work will remain very unsightly; and it is better to wait until it is grassed over. Another question was, what was to be done with the house?