

delivered any bracelet at all, and that the only valuable thing amongst the jewellery was, I believe, a gold watch.

4190. You came into the office in 1873?—Yes.

4191. In the same position you still occupy in the Public Trust Office?—Yes.

4192. And you have been purchasing portions of the personalty effects of deceased persons since you came in?—Yes.

4193. Well, now, I see the first date you have given in this return on the subject of purchases made by the officers of the department is June, 1882?—I have said before that I bought three or four watches in the early days at prices varying from £1 10s. to £2 10s. That was before 1882.

4194. The first date you give the Commissioners in this return is June, 1882?—Yes; but I have put in “Former dates unknown.”

4195. You surely bought more than four articles between 1873 and 1882?—I do not think so. If I have I have quite forgotten it.

4196. Have you seen or been asked to see Sir Harry Atkinson since this Commission was sitting?—No; I have not seen him for, I suppose, fully eighteen months.

4197. Nor heard from him?—No. I believe he is in Wellington. Is there any objection to my leaving town now?

4198. I think it would be advisable for you to remain in town, at any rate, during the first half of next week. If you look in about that time the Commissioners may be able to say they have done with you.

Mr. R. C. HAMERTON, Public Trustee, further examined.

4199. *The Chairman.*] Mr. Hamerton, you remember the matter of the Christchurch branch or agency, which the Commissioners were discussing with you the other day?—Yes.

4200. Do you remember a letter that was marked “Private” amongst the papers handed to the Commissioners?—Yes.

4201. You were to have communicated some weeks ago with the author of that letter on the subject of putting the contents before the Commissioners: have you done so?—I did not understand I was to do so by direction of the Commissioners. I understood it was suggested that I should do so.

4202. It comes to somewhat the same thing?—Well, I have not done so.

4203. Then, the Commissioners feel bound now to ask you to open that letter, and put the contents before them?—I cannot do so.

4204. Then I, as Chairman of this Commission, will take the responsibility of opening this letter. I find it amongst the papers, and I will therefore take the responsibility of doing that?—That letter is a confidential letter to myself, and I do not think it is right that that course should be taken.

4205. Very well, I am glad you have given us at last the benefit of your opinion upon that question of privacy. You brought up the papers in connection with the opening of the Christchurch branch a few days ago?—Yes.

4206. Among those papers is a letter marked “Private”?—Yes.

4207. What right had that letter to be there if it was not part and parcel of evidence relating to the change you had made in the agency at Christchurch? What right had that letter to be there if it did not relate to reasons that actuated you in making that change at Christchurch?—It was there for the convenience of reference if I required it.

4208. But if any other officers, or the Colonial Treasurer, or the public required the information, was it not there for convenience of reference?—Well, being a confidential communication, I claim it as my own; I claim that it should not be public property.

4209. Then, you claim to have a right to have evidence in reference to the business of the Public Trust Office—to keep a portion of it if it suits your whim, and you are to be the sole judge yourself?—No.

4210. Now, I ask you, do the contents of that letter, which you look upon as your private letter, contain matter in relation to the Public Trust Office business only?—Yes.

4211. Does it contain matter that guided you in reference to the change you recently made at Christchurch?—Yes.

4212. Then, can you sit there and tell the Commissioners that you alone have the right to that information, and that the Government of the country has not?—I merely say, being marked “Confidential,” it was not intended for any one else.

4213. Why, then, is it among the papers?—For convenience of reference. It was put there for my reference, nobody else’s.

4214. Are not all these documents filed on business relating to the Public Trust Office for the convenience of any authorised officer who has occasion to look at them?—Yes.

4215. Do you think the authority of the Commissioners warranted them in looking through all these papers?—Certainly; all except confidential papers.

4216. Are there any private letters relating in any way to the private business of R. C. Hamerton among these papers?—Not that I am aware of.

4217. Then, that letter you have sealed up is not confidential so far as R. C. Hamerton or his private affairs are concerned?—It may be addressed to R. C. Hamerton, not to the Public Trustee.

4218. Are the contents of that letter referring only to the private affairs of R. C. Hamerton, and not the Public Trust Office?—No.

4219. What do they refer to, then?—To the Christchurch agency.

4220. To affairs solely relating to the Public Trust business? Do not hesitate. Will you be good enough to be explicit to the Commissioners.—It is no use beating about the bush?—I am not beating about the bush.