

256. We want to know who it was that detected this error?—We can call Mr. Biddell, who usually checks the vouchers, and also Mr. Young, the storekeeper. Probably one or other of them can tell you.

WEDNESDAY, 28TH AUGUST, 1895.—(A. R. GUINNESS, Chairman.)

[Mr. Menteath wished to put in invoice of Jenkins, Hayes and Co., for 30ft. 2½in. lead piping, 1cwt. and 22lb., at £1 2s. 6d.—£1 6s. 8d., and Mr. Skerrett agreeing, the exhibit was put in.]

ROBERT WALLACE sworn and examined.

1. *Mr. Menteath.*] Your name is?—Robert Wallace.
2. And you have been in the ironmongery business for a considerable time?—Yes.
3. How long?—Seventeen or eighteen years.
4. I believe, in the course of your experience, you have had to frequently check journals and other books in which the weights of goods sent out were entered?—Yes.
5. Would these items have struck you if you had been checking the journal and saw them there, as at all exceptional: first, thirty-two sheets of 8ft. corrugated iron charged as 5cwt. 2qr. 7lb.—8ft., thirty-two sheets?—There is not much difference there. It would depend very much on the brand; some brands are very much higher than others.
6. Suppose it was 26 gauge?—It is a question which depends entirely on the brand. There cannot be very much difference. Going over a number of items like that, one would be very apt to pass it.
7. What would you say of thirty-two sheets of 9ft. iron charged as 6cwt. and 3lb.?—That item appears to me to be a bit heavy. It may be just the same thing: it depends on whether it is New Zealand corrugated iron as against English iron. I would not be a bit surprised if New Zealand iron weighed that weight.
8. But have you not a receipt in the trade for working out roughly the result, whatever may be the lengths of the iron?—Yes.
9. *Mr. Montgomery.*] What is the rule?—About 2lb. per foot.
10. *Mr. Menteath.*] Taking it at 2lb. per foot, thirty-two sheets of 8ft., can you tell us what it will come to? Should it not be 4cwt. 2qr. 7lb., instead of 5cwt. 2qr. 7lb.—a difference of 1cwt. and 23lb?—I am not prepared to swear to that. Some cases are light and others heavy. 2lb. is near enough to make an approximate estimate.
11. *Mr. Skerrett.*] I understand you to say that you do not think the variations suggested by my friend would have attracted your attention in checking unless you were specially directed towards it?—8ft. lengths would not have done so; 9ft. lengths might.
12. You would not pretend to say it would attract attention?—No.
13. I understand the New Zealand iron is heavier than the imported iron?—Yes.
14. And the imported iron varies in weight?—Yes.
15. I think Stewart and Co. were at one time contractors to the Government?—Yes.
16. For oil and colours and white-lead. I think you were in charge of the business of Stewart and Co., who supplied that class of paints?—Yes.
17. I think you have been in many other business houses in the colony?—Yes, a dozen others; some of them larger houses.
18. In a large account, extending to thousands of pounds, would you not expect, in the ordinary course of things, to find corrections and deductions?—Yes, always some; more especially in dealing with the Government.
19. What was your experience with the Government?—It was very unsatisfactory from the first day to the last.
20. Why?—We never got a proper settlement. The last contract is not squared up yet.
21. Disputes have arisen between yourself and the department as to a certain line of goods?—Yes.
22. And there have been occasional corrections, of course?—Yes.
23. I think you have found it prudent to take the construction of the department?—Yes; there is no one to come upon for anything.
24. Even in comparatively large accounts, comprising a large sum of money, would you not expect to find a percentage of corrections and deductions?—Always, to a certain extent, more or less.
25. Is it not generally expected in the trade that a deduction is always allowed in the business?—Yes; there are discrepancies in spite of you.
26. What would be a fair percentage to allow?—In business accounts you can always remedy the difference, but with the Government they must cut and carve. Ours have always been very excessive; some of them as high as 10 per cent. over the Government's.
27. I suppose that even with private accounts a deduction of 2 or 3 per cent. would not be out of the way on a large series of accounts?—That would be too much.
28. What would you put them at?—1 per cent.
29. Then on a private account 1 per cent. would be a fair allowance?—Yes.
30. *Mr. Montgomery.*] You say you would not notice the difference in the No. 8 iron between 5cwt. 2qr. 7lb. and a hundredweight less, but could it not be worked out by your general trade rule?—No; because on thirty-two sheets of the 8ft. there are just about thirty-six or thirty-seven sheets altogether, and looking at it in checking the thirty-two sheets you would be very apt not to notice it.
31. It would be a difference of about 20 per cent.?—Yes.
- 31A. What is the variation in the weights of iron generally?—Three to four sheets in the case; it would bring about a matter of, say, ten to twelve sheets in the ton; some more than others.