

54. Now, I take it that if the accounts are available, and the Commission desire it, you will furnish a statement of this character?—Yes.

55. I want you to give us the best information you can at present as to the actual cost of the surveys: what was the system?—A surveyor or engineer was put in charge of the field party. He had a sub-imprest for the payment of accounts and wages, and so forth, and he sent me in a monthly return of the expenses and wages of his party. Where there were several parties these were brought together in a general imprest return.

56. This return was signed or analysed by whom?—By me, generally.

57. And did you check the work?—Everything was checked.

58. The amount of work done, the wages paid, and so on?—Yes.

59. Assuming you found it in order?—Then these returns, with the vouchers attached, were sent to the accountant for the time being in Christchurch.

60. And there paid?—They were paid out of imprest, and the imprest was passed through as required, but they all came within a general audit; and if a voucher happened to be missing it was sent for by the auditor.

61. From what you know of the whole of the transactions, can you say whether the rates paid for the work were the ordinary rates for survey-work?—All the men employed were specially good men; they were all hard workers, and certainly the work could not have been done more cheaply.

62. You told the Commission you cannot speak with regard to the Nelson Section or any other section in particular, but you can get that detail later on?—Not without analysing the accounts.

63. Now, coming to the second head—the cost of the land bought—there you are asked to give certain information: you cannot give it at once, but I understand you will prepare a statement from the books?—Yes; I had such a return, but I do not know what has become of it. Of course, all this land was acquired by agreement and deeds of release through the solicitor. We got these deeds of release to protect the company. We paid a portion on account, and the terms of the agreement were embodied in these documents.

64. You can get the data required for answering the requisition?—Yes; but we want these agreements, if possible, because they embody the details.

65. But in the meantime you say you had the control of the purchase?—Yes, subject to reference to the general manager for the time being.

66. Now, taking the Nelson end, you had the negotiations for the purchase of land for the railway at that end: do you know what, if any, of the claims remain unsettled?—No claims are unsettled; but, in regard to the claim of Mrs. Morrison, I understand she never took up the cheque for the land.

67. Do you know where this land is?—It is between Belgrove Station and Foxhill.

68. Was the piece of land valued by any other valuers except yourself?—It consisted of a number of pieces of land, with some severances. It was a complicated case.

69. But were the whole of the interests to be taken away valued by valuers other than yourself?—Yes; by two valuers, recommended by Mr. Fell, the company's solicitor.

70. What were their names?—Mr. Sharp and Mr. Sinclair.

71. Do you remember what their valuation was?—I have a difficulty in speaking from memory, but I think the total was somewhere between £200 and £300. Her claim was about £1,300.

72. Did you increase the amount fixed by these two valuers in the offer you made to Mrs. Morrison?—We considered about £300 to be a fair compensation figure; but afterwards, and after some negotiation, the general manager agreed to give £500, really in order to avoid litigation, which would have been costly.

73. You thought £300 a fair market-value, and you increased it to £500?—Yes. It was negotiated through her agent, Mr. R. J. Reeves.

74. Was the amount accepted by her?—Yes.

75. Why was it not paid?—The cheque was with Messrs. Fell and Atkinson for payment, but Mrs. Morrison appeared afterwards to raise some difficulties, or to want some further concessions.

76. The cheque for £500 was lying in their office, but Mrs. Morrison kept raising difficulties and would not sign the deed?—Yes.

77. And the matter was put off from time to time owing to these difficulties?—Yes.

78. How long was it lying in Fell and Atkinson's office?—Some two or three months, to the best of my recollection.

79. Then the company got into financial difficulties and the cheque was not honoured?—It was withdrawn.

80. And it is plain that Mrs. Morrison is still entitled to that £500?—I presume so.

81. But, on the other hand, that £500 does not appear as a sum paid by the company for the acquisition of the land?—No.

82. That is the only claim you know of that remains unsettled in respect to the Belgrove Section?—Yes.

83. Still dealing with the question of land-purchases, can you say whether the land purchased for the railway was bought at the lowest market-price?—Yes, it was the lowest market-price, by which I mean the lowest possible under the circumstances.

84. Can you say whether more land was bought than was necessary for railway purposes?—As a rule there was not. At Totara Flat there was perhaps a little in excess of actual present requirements. Sometimes the amount of acreage taken does not make much difference, because if you took less area you would have to pay a higher rate for it, and more for damages.

85. It saves severance, also entry probably upon the other remaining portion of land, and so on?—Yes.