

always inquired into. I know only of one case where I refused a pension. The man has made over his property to his sons, but he is allowed to live on the property, which will go to his sons on his death. Wherever there is a chance of that occurring the case is carefully inquired into.

51. *Mr. Field.*] For this purpose do you inquire as to what property the applicant has held prior to applying for a pension?—Yes.

52. You judge a great deal on sight as to whether they have had property or not?—I inquire as to their means and about property they have been possessed of, and what they have done with it. I think the questions I put to applicants frequently take this form: *Q.* “Have you never been able to get any money or property together?” *A.* “Yes; about ten years ago I had 40 acres of land and some cows.” *Q.* “What have you done with the land?” *A.* “I got behind with the interest on the mortgage, and it was sold.” *Q.* “Have you nothing at all now?” *A.* “No.” Or the answer may be, “I transferred it to my son.” Then further inquiries are made as to date of transfer, consideration, and whether the son owes anything to the father. The most difficult cases I have had with regard to property occurred up Woodville way, where there are a number of naturalised Germans or Scandinavians. Some of them were very insistent that if they had not made £74 cash out of their farms they were entitled to a pension. That contention has been put forward a number of times. I also found a difficulty in getting at their interest in the land, where it was a perpetual lease, and their stock and belongings; but in town it is not so difficult to deal with the claims.

53. A great number of complaints have been made by people with regard to the necessity of having to go into the Magistrate’s Court, before a crowd that may be there after the criminal cases are put through, to give evidence in support of their claims; old ladies particularly, who have never been in a Police Court before, complain about this: do you think it would be a wise thing to allow these people to be examined in the Magistrate’s room instead of the Court?—I have lately taken the pension cases in my room. Up country, where there is not a sufficient room for the Magistrate, I have done the usual Magistrate’s work in the Court, and then adjourned for a quarter of an hour, so as to give sufficient time to clear the people out. I then came down to the table instead of sitting on the bench, and placed the applicant on a chair beside me, and asked the necessary questions in a kindly way; and if the applicants answered frankly they are treated very kindly. If the applicants commence to fence with the questions I put, I say that I will adjourn the case for a month.

54. You said that in some cases people connected with wealthy families obtained pensions, and that in consequence a number of people were beginning to make claims that otherwise would not have made them: do you think it would be a wise thing to allow the newspaper to publish the names of those who get pensions?—We do not prevent it—we cannot prevent it. I stretch the point by taking the claims into my private room. I allow a constable to be there, but, as a matter of fact, we do not allow any people in who are not connected with the case.

55. Do you think it desirable or not to publish the names of those to whom pensions are granted?—I think if a return were presented to Parliament every year it would be sufficient.

56. It seems to me it is desirable in this respect: that it is just as well that people should know to whom pensions are granted in case there should be fraud?—I have had quite a number of anonymous letters sent to me regarding pensions which have been granted, but I have generally found the statement made to be false. It is a serious question to publish the names, but it is a great safeguard. So much depends upon the intention of the Legislature with regard to these pensions. Is the door to be opened or closed more than it is? Is the tendency in the way of granting pensions to everybody who has lived twenty-five years in the colony, with a good character, and is sixty-five years of age, whether poor or rich; or is the tendency to confine the pensions to the absolutely needy?

57. *Mr. Field.*] The tendency should be to encourage people who are entitled to come in and ask for them. I know of cases where people who are entitled to a pension have declined to apply for it because of the publicity?—I have not the slightest doubt that the publicity keeps a great number of people away. If people could look upon the old-age pension in the same way as the Civil servants look upon a State pension—as a matter of pride—they would come in.

58. *The Chairman.*] You said there was a difficulty in getting information from the Post Office: that might be obviated by compelling the pensioner to produce his bank-book?—But when asked the claimants generally say, “I have no money in the bank,” when it turns out sometimes that they have.

59. *Mr. Field.*] Are your powers of inquiry sufficiently wide in connection with the banks?—We have to depend entirely upon the applicant’s statements with regard to any money in the banks. People connected with the Post-Office Savings-Bank, or the ordinary banks, will not tell us anything about the deposits. I leave that question to the Legislature to say whether there should be any alteration or not in that respect. I express no opinion upon it.

60. Do you think there is any possibility with the law as it at present stands that any fraud can be committed by these warrants?—Plenty of possibilities. It all depends upon the persons administering the law.

61. Have you any reason to believe there has been any fraud?—I do not think so. I always see the people. I examine them personally. They have generally been to the Clerk previously, and I depend a good deal now on Mr. Thomson, the Clerk of the Court, who has had a long experience, and we both rely upon our perceptive faculties.

62. Can you give us any indication as to any method by which the issue of warrants could be made safe?—No; I think it depends upon the Magistrate making due inquiries before granting the warrant.

63. *The Chairman.*] Will you draw up a list of questions that you suggest should be put to applicants, and supply copies of the forms you produced?—Certainly. [See Appendix B.]