

WILLS DEPOSITED.

61. The deposit of wills appointing the Public Trustee executor and trustee continues in undiminished volume. During the year 6,812 such wills were deposited with the Public Trustee. The number withdrawn through the death of the testator or otherwise was 1,542, leaving a total of 73,523 wills of living persons on deposit with the Public Trustee at the 31st March last. This figure has now reached a total more than two and one-half times the number of wills deposited as recently as ten years ago.

In addition to the work involved in the preparation of this large number of new wills, much work in redrafting wills already on deposit is necessitated by changes in the circumstances or the intentions of testators. During the year 4,058 wills were so redrafted. The total number of wills prepared was therefore 10,870, made up of new wills, 6,812, and redrafts, 4,058.

The custody of and the preservation of secrecy regarding the contents of the wills entrusted to the safe keeping of the Public Trustee are matters of paramount importance. Separate staffs are set aside both at the Head Office and at the Branches to deal with the wills deposited and the correspondence relating thereto, and every precaution is taken to ensure the safety of the documents and papers and secrecy relative to the contents of the wills. The original wills are filed in the Head Office in strong-rooms devoted exclusively to the purpose.

The utmost care is taken in handling the wills and in checking and filing them. As an additional safeguard, to ensure that all filing is correct, a stock-taking of the wills on deposit is carried out at regular intervals. With the large number of wills now on deposit, this is a heavy task, but it is undertaken for the additional safety which it ensures.

LEGAL DIVISION.

62. As I have mentioned in an earlier portion of this report, the Office includes on its permanent establishment officers versed and qualified in all phases of the work, both professional and administrative. One of the advantages of the system of administration by the Public Trustee is the availability of expert and specialized knowledge in regard to the various phases of the work, and an important feature is the professional staff employed by the Public Trustee for the transaction of legal business. It is also of distinct benefit to the Office to have its own staff to deal with the various legal matters and problems as they arise.

There has been a very considerable volume of legal work requiring attention during the year, and a brief reference is made hereunder to the more important matters which have been dealt with.

63. *Applications for Probate or Administration.* The applications involve the assembling of the necessary documents, such as the will, proofs of death, proofs of due execution of the will, and so on. During the year applications were made for probates of 899 wills, and applications for orders to administer were made in 260 cases. Included in these figures are a number of applications which were made on behalf of the Public Trustee by outside practitioners by reason of the fact that the relative wills directed that the legal work should be attended to by solicitors nominated therein, or for other special reasons.

64. *Elections to Administer filed.*—A simple and inexpensive process whereby administration may be obtained is available to the Public Trustee in respect of estates, testate or intestate, of which the value does not exceed £400. Instead of applying to the Supreme Court for a grant of probate or administration, the Public Trustee may in these cases file an "election to administer" in the Supreme Court. This procedure was adopted in 641 cases during the year.

65. *Resealing.*—Reference has been made in the course of the report to this procedure, which is adopted to validate in New Zealand probate or letters of administration granted by a Court of competent jurisdiction in some other part of the British Empire. During the year twenty-six applications were made to have such grants sealed by the Supreme Court under this process.

66. *Applications to the Court regarding Matters arising out of the Administration of Estates.*—In the administration of estates it frequently becomes necessary to sell, lease, exchange, purchase, obtain loans to carry on businesses, deal with the shares of missing beneficiaries, take steps to bar claims which the Public Trustee is not