

144. Did you write off anything on debentures last year?—Yes, some provision has been made.

145. The debentures in respect of which provision had to be made by the bank in the way of writing-off have related to concerns in the North Island or in the South Island?—I do not see how it is possible to separate debentures from the trading concerns to which they belong. We have had no opportunity of dealing with debentures; they are practically as they were.

146. But there is a difference between the debentures of trading concerns which you are carrying on yourself and other debentures. I have separated them to show their position,—(1) Trading concerns you are carrying on yourself; (2) companies and shares held in companies; (3) debentures held by the bank in connection with trading concerns, but trading concerns not carried on by the bank: and my last question refers to these debentures?—I am not able to give any information about them.

147. I am not asking you to give the names of the companies?—No; I am not at present in a position to give the information you want as to the debentures. If the question is repeated I will look the matter up, and try to give the fullest information available on the subject.

148. Has the interest—you hold debentures which bear interest—has the interest to your knowledge on these debentures been paid?—Yes.

149. In every case?—I would not say, except generally, that they had been paid in every case. I would like to have an opportunity to look into the matter, because it is difficult to separate, in connection with this question, debentures we have in connection with live accounts in the bank, and it is difficult to say how far it would be safe to go in answering the question.

150. You withdraw your answer?—If you will be good enough to ask the question on another occasion I will look into the matter and give the best answer that is possible.

151. Am I to understand, then, that you are partners as well as debenture-holders in companies?—I would not like to attempt to define the position at a moment's notice.

152. Can you answer this question: Taking the trading concerns, shares held in companies, and other debentures for the last year, do they show a profit, and how much, if any?—I think they do; I could not say how much offhand.

153. Have complaints been made to the bank in respect of these trading concerns that the bank was injuring other traders and some of its own clients by continuing to carry these concerns on?—I believe complaints have been made, and I believe they are entirely without justification.

154. Have you made inquiries into any of these complaints?—We have. We have made inquiries into complaints in respect to the Woolston Tannery, and in respect to flour-mills, and I am satisfied there is not any just ground for complaint in either case.

155. Have you had special reports, or general reports in connection with these trading concerns, or any of them?—In relation to the complaints to which you referred?

156. No; in reference to the financial position and the bank's business?—Yes; we have complete reports and balance-sheets.

157. That is in respect of trading concerns. Have you any such reports in respect of companies in which the bank holds shares?—I think we have complete reports and balance-sheets from all in which we are interested.

158. Have you as on the 31st March last any reports in reference to the companies in which you hold interest-paying debentures—prior to the 31st March last?

*The Chairman*: I notice that the counsel for the bank appears to be prompting the answers.

*Witness*: No; he is indicating only the answers that could be prepared in a satisfactory form. It is not possible to reply on the spur of the moment to a question of that kind; but we could easily prepare the information, and, if you would repeat the question, I would like to have time to answer it. With all these trading concerns it is difficult to determine at once how far it would be safe to go, and I do not feel at liberty to reply without a little deliberation.

159. *Hon. Mr. Seddon*.] It is a simple question requiring only a simple answer: Were there any reports on debentures in connection with trading concerns prior to the 31st March last?—I do not know.

160. Had you any reports on these concerns since the 31st March last?—I think not.

161. You have had no reports by officers of the companies in respect of which you hold these debentures since the 31st March last?—The only reports I know of are reports up to the 31st March, 1896.

FRIDAY, 31ST JULY, 1896.

Examination of WILLIAM BOOTH, Director of the Bank of New Zealand—*continued*.

1. *The Chairman*.] At the last meeting of the Committee, Mr. Booth, you undertook to produce certain returns at this meeting. Will you kindly give the Committee a list of them in the first place?—I have got them in the order they are required, according to the schedule handed to me a few days ago. At paragraph 8 of the printed paper I am required to produce a return of all expenses incurred in connection with the banking legislation prior to 1894 and since.

2. You have that?—I have got that return here.

3. Have you No. 1?—Yes.

4. And No. 2?—No. 2 is practically included in No. 1.

5. We will number them as you hand them in?—No. 3 is a statement of the amount of money paid by the Bank of New Zealand to Mr. John Murray for services in connection with the banking legislation of 1893, 1894, and 1895.

6. And No. 4?—That is the shareholders' committee's report of 1889.