

The complaint

Mrs M complains that Santander UK Plc has no record of her savings despite her having an account passbook showing a balance.

What happened

Mrs M has lived abroad since 2007 and explains that when moving in February 2024 she found a passbook for an instant savings account. This shows a balance of £1,650.08 in 2003. She says she's aware that Santander took over the financial business providing that account in 2004. And says that as she didn't withdraw the money, she tried to contact Santander about this and didn't receive a response.

After Mrs M had been in touch with this service Santander issued a final response letter to her complaint. It said that it hadn't located any earlier correspondence from Mrs M and apologised that as a result it hadn't responded to her earlier. Santander said that based on the copy of the passbook Mrs M had sent it had carried out an extensive review of its records. The only information it had was that the account was also closed on the day of the last update of the account on 13 January 2003. And it said it wasn't possible to confirm what had happened to any closure funds. Santander said it wasn't required to keep records for more than seven years.

Our investigator didn't recommend that the complaint be upheld. He said that he thought it more likely than not that the account had been closed and the money withdrawn. There was limited information and Santander couldn't show what had happened to the funds. If the money had remained with Santander, he'd have expected there to be a dormant account record. But this wasn't the case, and the only other possibilities were that the funds had been withdrawn or transferred. He appreciated Mrs M's frustration when trying to contact Santander. She'd not been able to show that a recorded letter had been delivered or provide copies of emails to Santander. And it had said it hadn't received them and he said had now responded.

Mrs M didn't agree and wanted her complaint to be reviewed by an ombudsman. She said she was sure that she didn't withdraw this money from her account. And that she'd only have been able to withdraw it with a passbook. And that this passbook wasn't marked as closed as one she had with another financial business had been.

What I've decided – and why

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

Where the evidence is incomplete and contradictory, as here, I'll need to make findings on relevant issues on the basis of the balance of probabilities – that is what is most likely to have happened.

Mrs M had rediscovered an old passbook since she moved abroad. On the face of it this shows that there was still a balance in her account in 2003. And she says she hasn't withdrawn that money or it seems checked on the account since and if she had done there'd be a record in the passbook.

I need to say that it's possible generally that if a passbook is say temporarily mislaid a new one can be issued and then used. I don't have evidence of that happening here. But I'm satisfied that Santander has carried out the extensive checks about Mrs M's account as we'd expect it to. It's not required to retain information indefinitely and it's clearly now over 20 years since the last entry in the passbook provided by Mrs M. The information Santander has is that the account was closed, and it can't say where the balance went. But as our investigator has said there's no record say of any dormant balance retained. I agree that it's most likely that the money was withdrawn or transferred.

I don't doubt Mrs M's genuine belief is that Santander has retained her savings balance. But I'm afraid that taking into account my assessment above I don't consider this is supported as being the most likely explanation of what happened. And I know I'm going to disappoint her when I say that as a result, I won't be requiring Santander to take any further action.

My final decision

My decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs M to accept or reject my decision before 11 August 2025.

Michael Crewe
Ombudsman