

The complaint

Mrs W complains Newcastle Building Society (NBS) can't find an old account of hers.

What happened

Mrs W found an old passbook and letter from NBS, saying she'd made a withdrawal in 2007 and had over £1,300 left in the account. There were no entries after the 2007 withdrawal, so Mrs W contacted NBS and asked it to trace her account.

NBS said the account had been archived in 2011, which likely meant there'd been no transactions on it since 2005. Mrs W said the passbook showed a withdrawal in 2007, so this couldn't be right.

And Mrs W said she needed to post the passbook to NBS to make a withdrawal, and since she still had the passbook showing her balance she can't have withdrawn it. Mrs W wanted NBS to pay the money she had in the account and any interest, so she complained to NBS.

NBS responded to Mrs W and said it was still sure Mrs W's account had been archived in 2011, probably because it was closed. NBS had carried out searches and had no record of other accounts for Mrs W, so it thought the money had left NBS.

But NBS couldn't be sure of this because it didn't have the records anymore, the account had archived 14 years previously.

Unhappy with this response, and NBS not being able to find her money, Mrs W brought her complaint to this service. An investigator looked into things but didn't think Mrs W's complaint should be upheld.

The investigator thought NBS had carried out all the searches it should and still couldn't locate an account for Mrs W. The investigator thought this showed it was more likely Mrs W had withdrawn the money and closed her account.

Mrs W said she definitely hadn't closed the account. Mrs W asked for an ombudsman to decide things.

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.

Mrs W has a passbook from 2007 and NBS says this account closed in 2011. Because of the time passed, I wouldn't expect either party to have complete records about what's happened.

Where evidence is incomplete or contradictory, I can make a decision on the balance of probabilities, what's more likely to have happened.

I can see Mrs W's passbook was last updated in 2007, and shows a remaining balance of over £1,300. I can understand Mrs W's point about having to post in the passbook.

But I don't think this would have been the only way to access the account or withdraw money. If Mrs W permanently lost or destroyed the passbook, it would be unfair for NBS to simply keep the money because of the lack of a passbook.

NBS has said customers could have called in to make transfers, but I'd also assume NBS would be able to locate Mrs W another way if she had no passbook.

And people tend to put passbooks somewhere very safe, and passbooks tend not to be used for day-to-day banking. I think it's more likely Mrs W mislaid her passbook, but was able to withdraw money from NBS without it.

So, I don't think Mrs W having the passbook, with a credit balance showing, is enough to say NBS must still have this money.

NBS has said it's searched its records for the account number Mrs W has and, separately, her personal details, to see if there are still accounts open at NBS. I've seen these searches, and I'm satisfied NBS doesn't hold an active, open account for Mrs W.

And the record of Mrs W's account number shows the account was archived in 2011, and data's been removed.

NBS was confusing when it said it was likely Mrs W's account had closed or gone dormant in 2005. This wasn't right, but I think this was someone counting back six years from the date Mrs W's account was archived.

Mostly financial businesses, in 2007, would have made accounts dormant after six years of no use. So, it was a reasonable assumption, but clearly incorrect.

But this means I'm more persuaded Mrs W closed the account. NBS has no record of Mrs W's account becoming dormant, which would have been around 2013. I think the most likely reason for NBS archiving Mrs W's account in 2011 is because it was closed.

It's difficult to know for definite what happened, NBS doesn't have records going back to 2011 and I wouldn't expect it to.

But I'm satisfied Mrs W's account didn't go dormant, and I'm satisfied NBS no longer holds an account, or any money, for Mrs W. So it follows I'm satisfied Mrs W most likely withdrew the money and paid it to another bank.

I can see from the passbook the NBS account appears to have been an ISA, so it's possible Mrs W transferred to another ISA she held elsewhere, or transferred to an ISA with a better rate, and this would have been outside NBS.

Unfortunately, I don't think we'll know for certain what happened, so I have to decide Mrs W's complaint on the balance of probabilities.

And, having done this, I think it's more likely Mrs W withdrew the money from NBS and closed the account, in 2011, with a zero balance.

Because of this, I can't ask NBS to pay Mrs W the balance showing in her passbook.

My final decision

My final decision is I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs W to accept or reject my decision before 19 August 2025.

Chris Russ
Ombudsman