

The complaint

Ms G complains that there should still be a balance in an old savings account held with Bank of Scotland plc trading as Halifax.

What happened

Ms G had a savings account with Halifax. She recently found the passbook for the account which showed the account was last accessed in 1997 and had a balance of around £1,000 at that time. The passbook was intact and didn't show any signs of the account being closed.

Halifax was unable to find the account in its system. Ms G complained to Halifax. During the complaint process, it accessed an archived system which showed the account had been closed in 1998 and the balance at that time was nil. It confirmed the account wasn't dormant when it was closed. Ms G didn't think this information was accurate, and it didn't match the records in her passbook.

The complaint was referred to our Service with Mr G representing Ms G. The Investigator didn't agree with Ms G's complaint, so it was passed to me to make a decision.

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.

Due to the amount of time that has passed, there is limited information available about the savings account. I've reviewed the images of the passbook provided by Mr and Ms G, which is indeed intact and shows the latest balance as around £1,000 in 1997. And I've also reviewed the system notes Halifax has provided from one of its archived systems. Having done so, I'm satisfied the account's balance was withdrawn to nil in 1998.

The system notes give details of the savings account; including the applicable interest rates each year, interest accrued, personal details of Ms G at that time and the transactions on the account. I appreciate why Mr and Ms G have found it difficult to match these records with the passbook. The transactions are listed across several different pages and are broken up with other information, making it challenging to follow.

I have gone through and cross referenced this information with the transactions recorded in the passbook. I've been able to match the dates, transactions and rolling balances in both from April 1996 through to June 1997, this being the last transaction in Ms G's passbook. I've not gone further back than 1996 as the later balances match.

Following the last transaction in Ms G's passbook, the system notes show interest was paid into the account in June 1998. The last transaction on the statement then shows the balance of around £1,000 was withdrawn from the account in July 1998. There are no further transactions listed.

Given the level of detail here, I've no reason to doubt the accuracy of the records kept in Halifax's archived system. It therefore follows that the balance was withdrawn from the account in 1998 and it's likely the account was closed shortly after before any further interest or payments were made.

I appreciate how disappointing this will be for Mr and Ms G when they thought they had found a not insignificant balance in an old account. But the evidence does show the account balance was withdrawn in 1998 and there were no further transactions. And Halifax has confirmed the account wasn't dormant when it was closed, which would suggest it was actively closed by Ms G.

Mr and Ms G argue that this couldn't have happened without the passbook being presented and then marked to show the account was closed, as is the case with their other passbooks. But I'm afraid I don't agree. Whilst it was common practice for a passbook to be presented and marked to show the account was closed, Halifax has confirmed it was possible for accounts to be closed without this if the customer had valid identifying documents. This is also in line with my understanding of practice at the time. Banks wouldn't deny a customer access to their account because they had mislaid their passbook. I understand Mr and Ms G say the passbook was never lost, and that may be the case. But I consider it likely that Ms G withdrew the funds and closed the account without the passbook for whatever reason. Given how long ago this was, it's reasonable that Ms G may not remember this. I find this more persuasive than the alternative that Halifax's system notes contain falsified entries meaning the balance wasn't withdrawn as it's records show, and the account remains open.

I appreciate Mr and Ms G's strength of feeling on this, so I'm sorry to disappoint them. But I've carefully thought about it, and I don't consider there was a balance in the savings account before it was closed. So, I won't be directing Halifax to do anything further.

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 Ms G to accept or reject my decision before 5 January 2026.



Emma Taskas
Ombudsman