

The complaint

Mr S complains that National Savings and Investments (NS&I) has failed to repay him for his premium bonds holding.

What happened

Mr S said he purchased £20,000 premium bonds at a London post office, in part by surrendering older premium bonds and the rest of the sum was paid by cheque to NS&I.

Mr S said he found his premium bonds to be missing and contacted NS&I who informed him they had been previously registered but had been repaid in 2003 to a total value of £20,198. Mr S didn't accept this and wants a reimbursement of £20,000 he invested because of non-delivery of the bonds. Mr S complained to NS&I.

NS&I responded to Mr S's complaint to say that from its investigations it could see that the bonds were repaid on 2 December 2003 at a total value of repayment of £20,198. NS&I said it doesn't retain paper documents over many years but holds this record on its computer.

Mr S wasn't satisfied with NS&I's response and referred his complaint to our service. Mr S has described the deeply upsetting personal circumstances he has had to face over the last few years and the impact this has had upon him.

Our investigator didn't recommend that the complaint be upheld. He was persuaded the information provided by NS&I demonstrates the account in question was settled with a payment in December 2003 that was likely to have been for the full balance.

Mr S disagreed with the investigator. He provided his holder's number but said he still didn't know how NS&I accepted from an anonymous person premium bonds registered in his name. Mr S said the premium bonds weren't delivered to him and he requested an ombudsman review his complaint.

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.

Mr S would like a reimbursement of the sum of £20,000 invested in the purchase of premium bonds because of non-delivery of the bonds. NS&I states that the bonds under Mr S's holder's number were repaid in December 2003. Mr S said this is the correct holder's number that was given to his bonds.

I've looked at NS&I's records to see if it can support what it has said about Mr S's premium bonds. The records show a holder's number which is the same number that Mr S has provided, which proves that he acquired the premium bonds. There is also an account number and a cheque number relating to the payment of £20,198. The records show the issue date for the payment in 2003.

I agree with the investigator that it's reasonable that NS&I would have only limited information available about Mr S's premium bond account due to the passage of time. It isn't required to maintain paper records indefinitely, but its computer records provide the necessary information to show what happened.

We have to decide complaints on the available evidence. Sometimes – as here – there's not a detailed picture of what took place. And so I must decide according to the balance of probability, in other words what I think is more likely than not to have happened. In this case NS&I's investigation found computer records to show that bonds under Mr S's holder's number and that the value of £20,198 was repaid by cheque on 2 December 2003.

The system screen shot information provided by NS&I demonstrates that Mr S previously had an account, and also shows that a payment was made that was likely to have been for the that full balance which settled the account. From what I've seen, I am satisfied that NS&I has handled Mr S's account correctly and repaid the premium bonds following an instruction in accordance with its procedures.

I am sorry to learn about Mr S's circumstances, but I hope he understands why it would be unfair for me to require NS&I to repay the premium bonds again.

My final decision

For the reasons I have given it is my final decision that the complaint is not upheld.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 8 April 2024.

Andrew Fraser
Ombudsman