

The complaint

Mr P complains that Santander UK Plc closed his account and didn't tell him. Mr P also complains that Santander haven't returned his closing balance.

What happened

Mr P held a savings account with Abbey National, which he managed using a passbook. Mr P has said that he used the account to save for his retirement.

The last entry in Mr P's passbook was in 2007 and showed a balance of just over £13,000. In 2010, Abbey National merged with Santander.

In 2023, Mr P asked Santander to find the account and pay any funds in the account to him. He said he had lived at the same address for more than forty years and Santander hadn't told him that it had closed his account.

Santander said that the passbook isn't proof that that account is still open. They said the account had been closed in June 2010. They also explained that they only hold details of financial transactions for a maximum of six years, so they couldn't provide any information about the account activity or records of any letters which may have been sent to Mr P at the time about the closure of the account.

Our investigator said since Santander's searches identified that the account had been closed in 2010, she was satisfied that the account isn't open. She thought it was most likely the funds had been withdrawn from the account without the passbook and that the account had been closed many years ago. So she said Santander didn't have to do anything more.

Mr P wasn't happy with this answer. He maintains that Santander still has his money. And he wants it back.

As no agreement could be reached the matter has come to me to review.

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 evidence is incomplete, inconclusive, or contradictory (as some of it is here), I have to make my decision on the balance of probabilities – that is what I consider is more likely than not to have happened in the light of the available evidence and the wider circumstances.

I appreciate Mr P feels that finding an old passbook showing a balance present on the account must mean the account should still exist and still hold a balance. Mr P says Santander never told him it had closed his savings account. He says Santander still has the

money that is in the account – around £13,000, which he was saving for his retirement. So, he says he should still be able to withdraw the balance.

Based on my knowledge and experience of the type of account Mr P had, it will usually be recorded in the passbook when the money has been withdrawn and the account closed. But passbooks can be mislaid and then found at a later date. Account holders are entitled to access their money, so banks usually allow account holders to make withdrawals without presenting a passbook. Santander has confirmed that this is the case with Mr P's account. When this happens banks will usually verify an account holder's identity using other methods. But this means the passbook will not have been updated to show the withdrawal or closure.

I also think there is a possibility, in this case, that the account might have changed in some way when Abbey National merged with Santander. This happened around the same time as Santander closed Mr P's account. So, I think it's possible that Mr P may have been issued with a new passbook or the account may have transferred to a non-passbook type. But I would still expect to see that the old passbook had been cancelled, however, that doesn't always happen.

In any event, Santander has provided evidence to show that it has searched for Mr P's account, using the details shown in Mr P's passbook. Those searches revealed that Mr P's account was closed on 18 June 2010. Due to the time that has now passed, Santander can't provide details of any correspondence or communication it may have had with Mr P at the time about the closure of his account. I wouldn't expect Santander to keep records indefinitely about closed accounts – it's just not practical to do so.

When I weigh everything up, I think Santander has done enough to show that the money was, more likely than not, withdrawn without presenting the passbook sometime after the last entry in the passbook in 2007. And I'm satisfied that the account was closed in 2010. Therefore, I can't fairly ask Santander to pay out the balance that's showing on the passbook, or any interest.

My final decision

For the reasons I've explained, my final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr R to accept or reject my decision before 5 August 2024.

Sharon Kerrison
Ombudsman