

HSBC Archives

HSBC has an international pedigree which is unique. Many of its principal companies opened for business over a century ago and they have a history which is rich in variety and achievement.

HSBC Archives are among the most important and heavily used bank archives in the world. The archivists are responsible for the collection and management of the records, which span more than two centuries of financial and international history.

Our collection

The archives contain historical records from many of the banks which make up the modern HSBC Group. Types of records include:

- ◆ Board minute books
- ◆ Annual reports
- ◆ Staff records
- ◆ Photographs of branches, staff and local scenes
- ◆ Adverts and promotional videos

The archivists are able to carry out research in response to specific enquiries. Typical questions include:

- ◆ My grandfather worked for the bank.
- ◆ Can you give me any details about his career?
- ◆ How long has HSBC been operating in Malaysia?
- ◆ When did Midland Bank become part of the HSBC Group?
- ◆ Can you provide images for publications and film productions?
- ◆ Can you tell me more about the history of my local branch?

Contact us

Email: history@hsbc.com

Please write to us at HSBC Archives, Level 41, 8 Canada Square, London E14 5HQ, or visit www.hsbc.com/history

**HSBC Archives is open to researchers Monday to Thursday.
Admittance is by appointment only.**

www.hsbc.com/history

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Further Information: HSBC Archives, 8 Canada Square, London, E14 5HQ

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Happy 175th anniversary

Please join us in wishing our Birkenhead branch a very happy 175th anniversary.



The Story of our Birkenhead branch

2020 marks the 175th anniversary of HSBC's Birkenhead branch

The Birkenhead branch was opened by the North and South Wales Bank in March 1845. This firm had been established in Liverpool in 1836. During the nineteenth century it would emerge as one of the UK's largest banks – spreading through Wales, Cheshire and Shropshire.

From the start the bank had bold ambitions to build an extensive network across Wales. The provisional committee was mostly comprised of merchants, manufacturers and businessmen from Liverpool, with the city then widely seen as 'the commercial metropolis of North Wales'. Six branches in North Wales were soon opened and plans were created for extension of the business in South Wales.

One of the bank's earliest and most important customers was the Borough of Birkenhead, with its account held at the Castle Street head office in Liverpool. The population of Birkenhead had been increasing steadily since the introduction of a regular passenger ferry across the Mersey in the 1820s. The town included many merchants and entrepreneurs who helped to build up the local economy by selling goods, providing services and investing in infrastructure.

The 1840s witnessed further developments as the dockyards and Birkenhead Park were opened; and at the heart of this bustling town

was Hamilton Square. In 1844 the directors of the North and South Wales Bank decided to open a branch in the north-east corner of the 'elegant residential Square' for 'the purpose of retaining the present accounts belonging to the Township of Birkenhead and transacting general banking business there.' The new branch subsequently opened for business at 62 Hamilton Square in March 1845.

The first manager at Birkenhead was William Coulson. He had previously been working as an accountant at the bank's head office, but was now tempted across the Mersey with the offer of a new salary of £175 per annum. Coulson was joined by Mr Tomkinson, the branch accountant on £110 per annum, and sixteen year old Richard Williams, who was hired by the branch to begin his apprenticeship there.

By the late 1870s the business had expanded and outgrown the site at 62 Hamilton Square. The bank purchased land on Hamilton Street and commissioned the talented architect John Pollard Seddon to design a new office. The resulting premises were completed in December 1879 and hailed as 'a magnificent building' at the shareholders' meeting the following year. No. 52 Hamilton Street opened its doors to customers in 1880 and the premises were later given the status of a Grade 2 listed building.

Did you know?

- ◆ The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation was the inspiration of Thomas Sutherland, then the Hong Kong Superintendent of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company.
- ◆ HSBC's hexagon symbol was developed from the bank's house flag: a white rectangle divided diagonally to produce a red hourglass shape. Many Hong Kong companies established in the nineteenth century were set up by Scottish expatriates, and like many other company flags of that era, the design is thought to be based on the Scottish flag, the cross of St Andrew.
- ◆ HSBC has been issuing bank notes in Hong Kong since its inception in 1865 and has also played a pioneering role in introducing paper money into some of the countries in which it operates.
- ◆ Sir Thomas Jackson was the chief manager of the bank at the turn of the twentieth century and helped to develop HSBC into the foremost financial institution in Asia during that period. He was so well known across Asia – a letter addressed simply 'T J, China' was sent from London for a bet – and subsequently arrived safely on his desk at HSBC without delay or question.
- ◆ In Hamadan, Iran the manager of the Imperial Bank of Persia branch (now HSBC Bank Middle East) turned his branch into a famine relief centre when fighting, bad weather and speculation caused major food shortages in northern Iran in 1918.
- ◆ In 1952 the Manhattan Savings Bank (later part of HSBC) opened a new office on Madison Avenue. The bank did not want to spend huge amounts of money on advertising and media coverage. So instead the bank's President hit upon the idea of attracting potential customers through the front door with in-bank entertainment. Performers included cartoonists and magicians as well as the installation of comfortable sofas in the banking hall. Huge queues quickly formed around the building and 100,000 people visited the bank in just two days.
- ◆ 2005 saw HSBC become the first carbon-neutral bank in the world, with its global operations contributing zero net carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

A Global History



Your branch's history forms part of HSBC's global heritage. HSBC is one of the largest banking and financial services organisations in the world and has a unique international pedigree. The bank opened its doors for business in Hong Kong in 1865. It focused on the finance of international trade and quickly established a network of branches in ports throughout Asia and into Europe and the US. Its reputation grew as it began providing financial support and loans to Asian countries, and by the early twentieth century it was the foremost financial institution in the East. The Second World War saw the majority of branches occupied but the bank survived thanks to its

reserves and to a timely, temporary, move of head office to London. In the changed post-war world the bank sought new opportunities for expansion as its China market contracted. Acquisitions in the 1950s in the Middle East and India began the transformation of HSBC into a truly international business - the purchase of Midland Bank in the UK in 1992 signalled a step change in this process with the move of its Head Office to London. In the twenty-first century HSBC's diversification and its core values of financial strength and stability have stood it in good stead in the recent global turbulence in economies and markets, and it remains well placed to deal with an uncertain world.

The Story of our Birkenhead branch

George Rae, Managing Director and later Chairman of the North and South Wales Bank, had very close ties with Birkenhead. He served on the town's Board of Improvement Commissioners and had been influential in the negotiations for the construction of Birkenhead Docks. He also pioneered a popular savings scheme for the town's dockworkers, earning the firm a local reputation as 'the tradesman's bank'. Between 1865 and 1898, the bank was at the peak of its success and this was primarily due to the excellent leadership of Rae, who was considered the 'doyen of country bankers'.

Rae retired in 1898 and challenges then lay ahead. In the decade following his departure Liverpool was struck by crises in the cotton trade and the bank was severely impacted by the downturn. Furthermore, despite its regional success, the North and South Wales Bank could not compete with the larger London-based banks that were rapidly acquiring nationwide coverage of the banking scene. During this turbulent time, numerous institutions approached the North and South Wales Bank with offers to acquire its business, but it was not until 1908 that the firm finally accepted a bid by Midland Bank (now HSBC UK) and the Hamilton Street office became part of a much larger national network of branches. The amalgamation was the largest to have ever taken place amongst English banks at that time, and by the end of that decade Midland was operating nearly 700 branches and sub-branches.

When the First World War broke out Mr Bateman was manager of the Birkenhead branch, employing 11 other members of staff. The two youngest employees, Thomas Haywood and David Oliver, enlisted with the armed forces and Bateman made the decision not to replace them. Happily, both men survived the war with Haywood returning to the branch and Oliver choosing to remain serving in the Army.

Frederick Fowler was in charge of the branch when the Second World War broke out. This time five of his 11 colleagues were called to enlist, making it very difficult to maintain a reliable service to local customers. As a result, the branch hired five temporary workers to help with various duties during the war period. There were few women in the bank before the war, however Midland Bank's staff registers show that two of the new recruits – Betty Birchenall and Barbara Brough – became the first female members of staff to work at the Birkenhead branch. Banking was still heavily focused inside the branch in the 1950s, with the vast majority of transactions conducted onsite rather than in centralised processing centres. Banking records continued to be paper-based, with staff relying on manual typewriters, ledger-posting machines and hand-written reference cards. As the twentieth century progressed, life at the Birkenhead branch gradually began to transform, especially as new technologies were introduced during the 1960s and the accounts at Birkenhead were computerised on 26 March 1974.

A key change made on 23 July 2007, when the Hamilton Street branch moved to its new premises on Grange Road, within the Pyramids shopping complex. The Pyramids are a key retail hub in Birkenhead and home to 100 stores serving the local community. Throughout its 175 years, the Birkenhead branch has been at the heart of the town and dedicated to the needs of its residents. Today Birkenhead's customers continue to access a wide variety of services in the branch, from discussing mortgage options to opening a savings account. Transactions, such as cashing cheques and arranging for the payment of bills, can still be carried out at the counter or via express self-service machines, whilst the advent of mobile, online and telephone banking offers even more choice when it comes to managing money in the twenty-first century.



The branch experience



"We begin the new year in a better position, our constituency is growing, and there is no doubt that we shall continue to grow as we have done in the past."

Manager of Harrogate branch reporting to Head Office in 1887.



At the time of the branch's opening in 1845, banking would have been a markedly different customer experience to what we have come to expect today. Opening hours were designed to coincide with local market days. Very few branches began to open daily until the mid-twentieth century. On entering the branch, customers would have approached a line of clerks standing behind a counter surrounded by large ledger books that would be used to record the day's business.

The range of services tended to be limited to providing businesses with advice and small loans; receiving deposits; authorising withdrawals and cashing cheques. At this time if a customer wanted to make a withdrawal from their account, their signature would be taken and carefully checked in several ledger books which held a copy of every single customer's signature.

At the end of every day all the various books would be meticulously inspected to ensure that every penny that came into and left the branch was accounted for. This would sometimes mean that staff had to stay in the branch many hours after closing time if the manager was not satisfied that the day's accounts added up.



"Be liberal in your lending and meet every legitimate demand you can"

Sir Edward Holden, Chairman, to his branch managers upon the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

The world's largest bank

By the end of the First World War, in which 40% of the bank's workforce served in the armed forces, Midland's customers had access to over 1,400 branches. The bank was also beginning to become a force in international banking and developed into the biggest bank in the world at that time. In the 1920s and 1930s Midland sought new business by expanding the branch network, especially in fast-growing metropolitan and suburban areas. The Second World War halted this growth and brought widespread destruction to the branch network, with over 1,350 reports of damage.



Post-war innovation

The bank's post-war history is dominated by innovation in the range of banking services it provided. Gift Cheques, introduced in 1955 were the first of their kind in the UK. Midland also became the first British bank to advertise on television in 1956. Soon afterwards, in 1958, it became the first bank to offer non-secured personal loans which added to its reputation as a trend setter. This innovation was to continue for the rest of the century, another example coming in 1989 when the bank launched first direct. It was the UK's first telephone bank with no branches. It offered a full range of banking products and services from current accounts to mortgages through its telephone lines which were always open, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.



Part of a global group

In 1992 HSBC Holdings plc acquired full ownership of Midland Bank, in one of the largest acquisitions in banking history. Midland was renamed HSBC Bank plc in 1999. In 2015 a new brand – HSBC UK – was announced and the bank celebrated the ground-breaking ceremony for a new headquarters to be built in Birmingham, where the story had begun back in 1836.

A History of HSBC UK

The early years

Birmingham was a remarkable hive of business enterprise in the early nineteenth century. The region was the homeland of the industrial revolution, with Birmingham as its centre of employment and finance. Initially the banking needs of the confident business community were served by private firms of bankers but, especially after the banking crisis of 1825-26, these firms were desperately seeking a more secure financial platform provided by a joint-stock bank (one that is owned by its shareholders as opposed to the bankers themselves). It was in these demanding conditions that the Midland Bank first opened for business in Union Street, Birmingham, on Monday 22 August 1836.

The early decades of Midland's life were a testing period in English banking with several regional and nationwide economic crises. Fortunately the bank emerged from this time with a strong and loyal customer base. Under the leadership of its founder, Charles Geach, Midland developed lasting connections with major industrial and commercial houses in the West Midlands region. By the 1850s it could count railway companies, iron founders, utilities and municipal corporations amongst its corporate customers.

A regional powerhouse

The bank acquired its first branch in 1851 when it purchased the Stourbridge Old Bank. Some years later, when an industrial and financial depression overtook Birmingham in 1878-79, the bank decided to broaden its customer base and began to open new branches and acquire rival banks across the region. This expansion continued in the 1890s when the directors moved Midland's headquarters to London. Under the direction of Edward Holden, who would later become managing director and chairman, the bank conducted a succession of amalgamations.



A remarkable founder

The foundation of Midland Bank was down to the efforts of one 28 year old Bank of England clerk, Charles Geach. Geach was a remarkable individual whose story is as notable as the history of the bank he founded. In 1831 the Bank of England had promoted Geach to the post of Second Inspector at their branch in Birmingham. However, he soon became frustrated by the lack of meritocracy and opportunity within the organisation. He already had good contacts in the local business community as he had assisted in the establishment of a local joint stock bank, the Birmingham Town and District Bank, in 1836. When this bank failed to appoint Geach as its manager, he joined forces with another group of businessmen and founded Midland Bank later the same year. On this occasion, he was appointed as the bank's manager.

Geach's business acumen was widely regarded to have helped the young bank to survive the turbulent economic conditions of the 1840s and 1850s. Aside from his financial nous, he was also prepared to defend the business he founded. During the Birmingham Bull Ring Riots of 1839 a mob threatened to attack the bank. Geach sent his staff to the roof, armed with stones and bricks, whilst he rode through the mob to fetch support from the nearby barracks – thus his quick thinking saved the day.

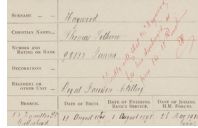


Happy 175th anniversary

1836

The foundation of the North and South Wales Bank

The North and South Wales Bank opened for business in 1836



1880

The branch unveiled new premises

In 1880 the branch moved from 62 Hamilton Square to 52 Hamilton Street



1914-1918

Birkenhead staff serve their country in the First World War

The HSBC Archives staff registers show that two employees from the Birkenhead branch left to join the war effort. The war card for one of the men, Thomas Haywood, is shown here

1908

The North and South Wales Bank was acquired by Midland Bank

In 1908 an agreement was signed by the North and South Wales Bank to amalgamate with Midland Bank (now HSBC UK)

1845

The opening of the Birkenhead branch of the North and South Wales Bank

The Birkenhead branch opened in March 1845 and the first manager was William Coulson

1907

Midland employs its first female member of staff

Miss Anne Tulloch becomes the bank's first female employee



Our timeline

1939-1945

Birkenhead staff serve their country in the Second World War

The HSBC Archives staff registers show that five employees from the Birkenhead branch left to join the war effort



1974

Birkenhead branch is computerised on 26 March 1974

From 26 March 1974 onwards banking transactions made at the Birkenhead branch are stored on computers rather than paper

2020

HSBC celebrates its 175th anniversary at the Birkenhead branch

2007

The branch's address changed from 52 Hamilton Street to 31 The Pyramids

On 23 July the branch moved to The Pyramids



1992

Midland Bank becomes a wholly owned member of the HSBC Group

In one of the largest acquisitions in banking history Midland becomes part of the HSBC Group. In 1999 it is renamed HSBC Bank plc.

1989

Launch of a new concept in banking

Midland launches first direct in October 1989. It is the first business to offer a person-to-person telephone banking service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

2015

HSBC UK announces its plan to relocate back to the city of Birmingham

Our timeline

The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) is established

The bank opens its first office in Hong Kong, followed soon after with premises in Shanghai and London.



HSBC issues China's first public loan

HSBC issues China's first public loan – the 'Foochow' loan. Thereafter, it is involved in the issue of nearly all of China's public loans. The loans are for major infrastructure projects such as railway construction, and other developments such as shipping and coal mines.



HSBC's famous lions make their first appearance

The pair of bronze lions are unveiled at the opening of the bank's newly-built Shanghai office. They became so popular that two lion sculptures can be found guarding many of the HSBC offices around the world today.



HSBC returns to Hong Kong

During the war HSBC had been forced by the occupying authorities to issue banknotes. These 'duress notes' are honoured in full by the bank after the war. This action is credited as a key factor in sustaining the territory's economy in the immediate post-war years.

HSBC acquires the Mercantile Bank and The British Bank of the Middle East

These purchases extended the bank's network across the Indian sub-continent and Middle East, helping to increase HSBC's global reach.



HSBC Holdings plc becomes the parent company of the Group



HSBC Holdings plc launches HSBC and the hexagon symbol as its worldwide brand

