

The Birmingham 'cake slice'

Jemma Lee, UK Archives Manager, HSBC

[Text on screen] Objects of our affection from the HSBC UK archives: the Birmingham 'cake slice.'

[Jemma Lee] People look at it and they do generally think this is a cake slicer, but I don't think anybody realises how important an item it is.

This is a ceremonial trowel. It was used to mark the laying of the chief cornerstone of Midland Bank's first purpose-built head office in 1867.

By 1865, the bank was so successful that Henry Edmunds commissioned a grand, new head office to be built on New Street.

Edmunds demanded an ambitious design. He wanted hydraulic lifts for moving ledgers and fully outfitted accommodation on the top floor for the porter and his wife.

There were one or two challenges along the way. As soon as construction began, all the stonemasons went on strike. And by 1869 the building had gone twice over budget. Despite these problems, the building was completed.

By 1918 Midland Bank had become the largest bank in the world. It survived two world wars, expanded overseas and officially became part of the HSBC family in 1992.

The opening of HSBC UK has really provided us with an opportunity to showcase the history of Midland Bank. The original Victorian building still stands today, just half a mile away from the new headquarters.

I like to think that the building and our humble trowel serve as an elegant reminder of our roots in Birmingham.

My name is Jemma, UK Archives Manager, and this is my favourite story from the HSBC archives.