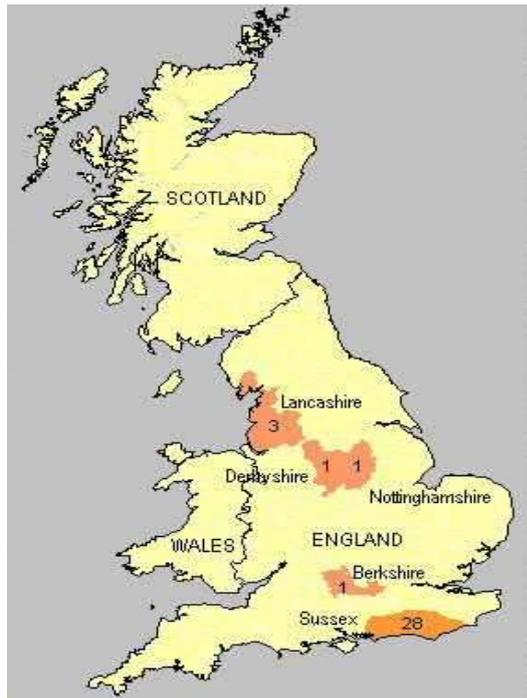


The Origins of the Name

Copies of parish records, the I.G.I. index of christenings, and even the 1976 telephone directories, all show the surname centred on two distinct areas of England: Sussex and Lancashire. In the late 16th century, when parish registers first began to be kept, the surviving registers show the surname to be restricted to **western Sussex and the Fylde coast around Bispham (i.e. near the present town of Blackpool)**, apart from odd entries in Derbyshire, Westminster, Surrey and Devon. The Sussex records for this period show that group as containing some well-to-do individuals presumably fairly well established. The Fylde branch at this period probably consisted of only two or three families of farm labourers and husbandmen.



Known Baptisms 1650 - 1699

The earliest record found to date is that of the will of William Sandam of the parish of Sutton, Sussex in 1527.

All references to the surname outside England apart from those to surnames such as 'Sandheim' and 'Sandholme' in Finland and Sweden appear to have stemmed from English emigration (the earliest recorded being in 1679) together with a few entries related to British forces stationed overseas.

Conjectured origins of the surname all assume that the name has a place-name origin, and a number of alternative origins have been suggested:

- The name easily splits between "sand" - the description of the land and "ham" a diminutive of hamlet in middle English usage and also used to describe a homestead. It would therefore be likely to be used at the introduction of surnames as a means of defining a person or persons residing in a sandy locality, in a region where exposures of sand stratum were uncommon. As the earliest records are from Sussex a study of literature relating to Sussex placenames and etymology seems necessary before this suggestion can be adopted.

- If the Lancashire occurrence of the name were to have a separate origin to its occurrence in Sussex it is probable that references to the surname in Lancashire would stem from the place-name Sandholme, arising from its use as a description of a place as a 'sand islet or hillock' between 1400 and 1540, when surnames were first being adopted. This would be particularly likely as the Lancashire Fylde within which the surname is first found is a low lying area of peat and marshland. The earliest conceivable references found in North Lancashire refer to place-names: - 'Peter de Sandon' - near Lancaster in the 12th century, a locality or land named 'Sandholme' at Scotforth, Lancaster in the 13th century, and the site of a water-wheel here in the same century. Ref. 2 concludes that settlements were sparsely scattered across the landscape and that the need in naming place-names was therefore for topographical points of reference, rather than habitation names. The same reference refers to 'ham' as a description of a settlement, and its wider use in referring to a larger unit: an 'estate', so this usage in the surname, rather than merely a 'hillock', is quite possible.

These conclusions would agree with the general deductions drawn in ref.1, which appears to suggest that the place-name is Scandinavian in origin and linked to the settlement of Norwegians into Lancashire from Ireland and the Isle of Man around 900 - 910A.D. However, the later research in ref.2 points out that this should not be taken to infer a Scandinavian ancestry, and explains that it is most likely that Scandinavian place-names were incorporated into the language of the native Britons by the simple expedient of them being subject to a lengthy period of interfacing with what were only a small minority of Scandinavian traders, raiders, or settlers and their descendants.

The remoteness of the Lancashire Fylde and the relatively poor agricultural background of the Lancashire Sandhams give credence to the theory that the Lancashire occurrence of the name is separate to the Sussex one, given the short period between the adoption of surnames in the 15th century and the appearance of the name as a notable family in Sussex in the 16th. The reverse of this, that the Lancastrians originated from the larger Sandham population in Sussex, is however still not disproved.

Ref 1: 'The Scandinavians in Lancashire' Frederick Threlfall Wainwright. Publ. Vol.LVIII (1945-46) of the 'Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society'. Ref 2: 'The Origins of Lancashire' Denise Kenyon 1991 Pub. Manchester University Press.

- An alternative theory is that the name originated in Scandinavia, based on the occurrence of the placename "Sandam" and the surnames "Sandholme" and "Sandheim" in these countries. When the occurrence of the surname in Sussex in the mid 16th century is compared with the adoption of surnames only 100 years before that it is seen that the possibility of this being the case is low; although the transfer of the name through placenames, as shown possible in Lancashire, could again be true.

For the present it is concluded that, until more evidence is accumulated, that the Lancashire and Sussex families stem from separate origins, and that both occurrences of the surname are likely to be from English adoptions of surnames in the 15th century.