

A Start for the Sanders Line

The earliest record that I have been able to find of the Sanders family is the marriage of Thomas Sanders to Susanna Spencer on 12 February 1793. They lived and were married in the parish church in Birstall in Leicestershire. They were married by the curate, James Doubleday, and the wedding was witnessed by Thomas Pym and Thomas Green.



The church of St James the elder in Birstall where Thomas Sanders was married to Susannah Spencer in 1793.

There are others with the Sanders family name mentioned in the same registers. The birth of a Thomas Sanders was registered by Andrew and Elizabeth Sanders in 1770, and these may be my five times Great grand parents. Before that we know already Thomas and Ann Sanders who died in 1771. It is not impossible to suppose these are the parents of Andrew, both born in the 1710s or even earlier. The registers also have a Bett Sanders on in 1768, perhaps Thomas's elder sister. Much of this is surmise, guessing from the dates, and also a family tradition where names are repeated and used in alternate generations.

We can however be more certain about Thomas and Susannah. They register the birth of a daughter Ann in 1794, and in 1799 they register two daughters, Jane and Mary, and both of them baptized on the same day -25th August. This suggests that they are twins, but we cannot be certain of that. Neither do we know that Mary survived, because she does not appear again in the records.

We know little of Jane's childhood save that she remained in the village of Birstall. Now Birstall is a large village only 3 miles north of the city centre of Leicester, in the district of Charnwood, and apart from the shape of the land, there will be little that Jane recognizes there now.

The land is flat, the flood plain of the River Weare that flows through Leicester. No doubt the winters were cold and wet and muddy. Cottagers accommodation would be very basic; shelter, a hearth, a few sticks of furniture, and perhaps a bed for the parents. Children often slept on palliasses on the floor, and privacy is offered through primitive screens or hanging drapes.

There is of course no sanitation in the cottage. Water would probably come from a well, with perhaps the luxury of a hand pump if they were lucky. The family would share an outside privy or earth closet. They might even share it with neighbours. The cottage would be lit by candles or tallow lamps.

Where Jane was educated is unknown. Her parents could write their name, no doubt she could also; perhaps learned in the local dame school, or more likely in the Sunday school.

The choice of work would be very limited. Farm labouring for men, and domestic service for women, with an additional option in this part of the Midlands - stocking making. Stockings were an essential item of clothing for men and women. Women had long full skirts, but wore stockings underneath, held up by garters. Trousers were not yet invented, and a man wore breeches that came just below the knee, and stockings. Stockings were woven from a fine wool and were seamed up the back.

Jane learned this trade as a girl of probably no more than 11 or 12 years old, in about 1810. It is likely that she worked either for a company on separate premises, or she may have worked as a part of a cottage industry working from home. In the registers Jane is called a stocking maker by the clergyman who wrote down her details. Later in the census returns she calls herself a stalking seamer. In either case she would have been very familiar with all aspects of this trade.