

Surname Origin Report

Fadkin

Customer query:

I have traced my Northumberland family name Fadkin back to 1684, and would love to know the origin of the name. The spelling Fatkin was also recorded from 1676.

Area of Origin

The spelling Fadkin was not recorded in the 1881 census. The spelling Fatkin was recorded 77 times, so it is a very rare name. The name was found mainly in the area north west of central Newcastle, known as Central Ward, and Leeds. The map shows the distribution according to actual figures, but distribution according to numbers per 1000 of the population show the same areas of concentration. Surnames tend to predominate in the area in which they arose.

As the name Fadkin occurred in Northumberland before the Industrial Revolution, during which a large portion of the population moved to industrial areas, the name is most likely to have originated in that county, rather than Yorkshire.

However, a single member of such a small family migrating to a new area, and becoming prolific, whilst the original family dies out, can distort such a picture, so conclusions must be tentative.

Type of Name

The name Fadkin is made up of two syllables. The first, Fad- or Fat- is obscure, and is discussed later in the report.

The second syllable, -kin, is usually attached to personal names, suggesting the surname is based on a personal name.

Surnames based on a father's personal name are known as patronymics.

The Meaning of your Name

The ending –kin was added to a shortened form of a name to denote relationship, similar to the ending –son, meaning an offspring, 'little', or 'son of'. So Fadkin means little Fad, or Fad's son.

The following works of reference were searched for Fadkin:

The Penguin Dictionary of Surnames, Basil Cottle, Penguin 1978

A Dictionary of English Surnames, Reaney and Wilson, Oxford University Press, 1997

H.B. Guppy, The Homes of Family Names, 1890

The surname Fadkin did not appear in any of these books.

As the surname occurs in Yorkshire the following was also consulted;

Yorkshire West Riding, English Surname Series, by George Redminds, 1973.

There was also no reference to the name in this book.

How and When your Name Developed

Although the origin of the first syllable is obscure, knowing that the name is based on a first name is helpful in identifying when and how the name Fadkin may have developed:

From the 12th century it was common across the country for an individual to be identified by his father's, or sometimes his mother's, name.

These descriptive names, known as bynames, began to be adopted as hereditary names from around 1270 in northern counties.

The trend was based on fashion, and need, as a large portion of the male population were known by a limited number of first names, which had become very popular, creating a requirement for better identification.

By 1500 most of the urban population had adopted an hereditary surname, although many were unstable, ie prone to change, especially in northern counties.

In rural parts of the north new surnames were still being formed in the 16th and 17th centuries. The last type of name to be formed were those based on personal names.

Patronymics reflect the personal names which were in use at the time that surnames became hereditary. By the mid 14th century these were mainly Germanic names introduced by the Normans, such as Robert, Adam, William and Thomas.

By the late 12th century, a relatively small number of Germanic names became very popular very common.

Shortened forms began to be adopted to differentiate individuals with the same name. They were often formed from the first syllable of a name, or rhymed with the first syllable.

The custom of adding 'kin' arose in Flanders, and was adopted by those of Flemish origin in southern Britain from the 12th century. The custom spread north, and was adopted by the general population, so that a surname ending in -kin is not necessarily indicative of Flemish origin.

The Social Class of your Earliest Ancestor

Surnames based on personal names were at first predominantly held by small freeholders and peasants. Most wealthy landowners had already acquired hereditary surnames by the time this type of name evolved, although this class difference subsided over time.

Are all the People with my Name Related?

As this name is so rare it almost certainly originated from one family, or individual.

The two clusters of Fatkins, in Leeds and Newcastle, may be explained by migration, either from the north to Yorkshire, or in the other direction.

Recognised Variants

The exact spelling of surnames was not established until the end of the 19th century, with the introduction of compulsory state education. Spelling variations were common – there was often no set way to spell a name, and no concept of a spelling mistake.

The spellings Fadkin and Fatkin are interchangeable in the records. They differ only in the medial letter 'd' or 't'. In speech these sounds are often confused, or substituted for one another. The two sounds are both produced with the tongue just behind the teeth. When 'd' is pronounced the vocal cords vibrate, and when 't' is produced the vocal cords are still. They occur next to the sound 'k', which requires the vocal cords to be still. This may influence the speaker to reduce the amount of vocal cord vibration for the 'd', making it sound more like a 't'.

From a phonetic point of view therefore, Fatkin is slightly easier to say. There is a tendency for Fadkin to become Fatkin, but less likely that Fatkin becomes Fadkin.

As this name is so unusual, listeners who were not familiar with the name, such as clerks, had to rely solely on what they heard to determine the correct spelling. This may explain why the version Fadkin had died out in England by 1881, whereas the spelling Fatkin survived.

Possible Variants

The ending –kin was added to a personal names, usually male, and usually one introduced after the Norman Conquest (many of which are familiar today, eg Robert, William, Simon) rather than an Old English (OE) name.

Sometimes shortened forms rhymed with the full name, so Hodgkin was the son of Roger.

This leads to the conclusion that Fad or Fat is as shortened form of a personal name.

However, no such personal name has been found, either in lists of OE or Germanic first names.

There is therefore a strong possibility that the name Fadkin has undergone a phonetic, or spelling, change. Therefore a consideration of possible phonetic development may hold the key to discovering the origin of this name.

The nearest shortened name to Fat is Bat and Mat, from Bartholomew and Matthew. Such a change is theoretically possible. There are no known shortened forms rhyming with Fad.

Name endings were prone to change entirely, so Fadkin may have previously been Fadson, Fadking, Fadcot, or something similar.

Vowels are also prone to change, giving a variation such as Fudkin, Fodkin or Fedkin.

Perhaps Fadkin arose from MacFadyen, variations of which include MacFadden, MacFadzan, MacFattin, MacFadzean. There are instances where the Mac- is dropped from a surname. The sound in the middle of 'fadyen' is not well defined and may be prone to changes, eg to Fadgen, Fadchen, Fadkin (these are hypothetical variations).

Fadkin could have also theoretically arisen from Adkin, if the family used first names which ended in -f, such as Geoff and Ralph. So Ralph Adkin and Geoff Adkin could become Ralph Fadkin and so on, the 'f' migrating from one name to another. This does happen in connected speech, sounds becoming attached to neighbouring words, as in speech the gaps between words are less well defined than on paper (eg in 'they're over there', the first 'r' can be heard at the beginning of the word 'over'.)

There are documented examples of this process affecting surnames, eg Nash comes from 'atten ash', at the ash tree.

The distribution of the names Adkin and Atkin may support this theory. Adkin is found mainly in the Midlands, whilst Atkin is found on the eastern side of England, from Northumberland to Lincolnshire, with preponderance in those two counties. The distribution of these names therefore overlaps the distribution of the names Fadkin and Fatkin, with the cluster in Northumberland of both suggesting such a theory should be given serious consideration.

The names Adkin and Atkin derive from Adam, meaning the son of Adam.

Tracing your Family Name Back Further in Time

Try and go further back with your family by looking for the surname in different guises, along the lines I have suggested. At this stage it is preferable to use the original records rather than indexes. By the 17th century surnames were still new and settling down. Not only did they change, but individual families sometimes used different versions at different times, or used more than one, completely different, surname. This is sometimes shown in the records by the use of aliases, eg John Fadkin alias MacFadchen, or something like that. Or you might have a John Fadkin also using a completely different name in parallel, eg John Bell.

Conclusion

The name Fadkin, and its variant Fatkin, originate from an unidentified personal name. The most likely explanation is that they arose from Adkin, or Atkin, but in the absence of further evidence all theories must be considered.

General evidence of such names, ending in –kin, is that they were formed between the 12th and 17th century. Names in the north developed in the later part of this time scale.

If Fadkin did develop from another surname, this would also be a patronymic and therefore late to develop in the history of surnames, particularly as it is a northern name. Fadkin would by necessity have had to develop later than the original surname. Fadkin therefore is probably a relatively new surname, and may have originated as recently as the 17th century.

Bear in mind all possible, theoretical, spelling changes when searching for your family in early records. By the 17th century surnames could be very unstable.

Nevertheless, the further you can get back with your family line, the easier it is to interpret the origin of the name.

Good luck!

