

Solden, Soudan or le Sowden at this time? Reaney* explains that they are equivalent to the Old French word 'soudan', meaning sultan. The sultan was a character portrayed in medieval plays and pageants and, as we have seen, Soudan was a recorded spelling of the surname in England in the Middle Ages when French was the spoken language. Soden is therefore said to have been derived from the soubriquet attached to a man who played the part of the sultan.

While this explanation is plausible, there may be a much earlier derivation indicating that the Sodens were of Anglo-Saxon stock, the name having originated from the Old English 'suth' (south) and 'den' (a narrow wooded valley), hence meaning a dweller in the south of the valley. It is interesting to note that there are several places in Germany named Soden, whence Old English is partly derived, and the modern German word 'suden' means south. Soden, as in England, is also a German family name to this day.

The conclusion is that during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there were several widely-scattered but unrelated families bearing the same name whose derivation was dissimilar.

The spelling of Soden has gone through many variations over the years. The way in which a surname was spelt was seldom constant until the middle of the eighteenth century, for few people could write before then, and in most records the name was written by a clerk who only had the sound of it to go on. A list of the

* A Dictionary of British Surnames P. H. Reaney, London, 1961