

and buildings, orchards, gardens, closes, woods, pastures and feeding commons. The fact that Jeffrey, John and Richard Soden of Sibford Gower were assessed for Poll Tax on their land rather than their goods suggests they were owners rather than tenants of the manor. In another Chancery Court case heard in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, Thomas, son and heir of William Soden, demanded that the deeds of his land should be delivered to him by John Lynde and his wife Alice. So by the sixteenth century, and probably before then, the family had become freeholders.

Following the Lay Subsidy records of 1523 to 1576 no further information about the Sodens has come to light until the period when parish registers of baptisms, marriages and burials were kept. Before the Reformation there was no country-wide standard system of recording these events, and it was not until 1538 that it was made mandatory for incumbents to maintain such records. In the event few have survived from this early date. It was because they were kept in such a haphazard fashion that Elizabeth I approved an order of 25 October 1597 that registers should be kept in parchment books though earlier records could be copied into them from the commencement of the queen's reign in 1558. Thus it is that the Swalcliffe parish registers start in this year.

The making of a last will and testament became a common practice after 1540, though people in modest circumstances let wills go