

B 8708 no 8; witch 269, Jean Jacques Gerardin de la Voivrelle

26 October 1611; procureur for canons orders arrest and investigation

28 October 1611; informations préparatoires

(1) Catherine servante à Mengeon Renouard de la Voivrelle, 25

Some 2 months before Jean had asked to borrow a sickle from Jean Lyenard, her fellow servant, but he had refused, saying he would not lend it to his own father for fear it would be spoiled. Jean only said 'de par dieu', but about 6 weeks later Lyenard became violently ill, and went home to Chasnoy de Saulcy. Told her to tell accused that he was a witch and had made him fatally ill - died 10 or 11 days later.

(2) Barbeline femme Mengeon Renouard de la Voivrelle, 40

Told same story about illness of Jean Lyenard. Then told of occasion when she went into garden behind house of her father-in-law, adjoining that of accused, and his wife asked if their small servant boy could also look after a cow for them. She was worried in case he let it escape and there was trouble over damage, after which they might suffer harm, so said he was already in difficulties keeping existing animals, but if he could do it she would not be opposed. The other said that if he were her boy and was disobedient he would get a good beating; some 5 weeks later he became very ill, was in bed for 7 weeks seeming out of his senses, and later said he felt as if there was a fly inside his head eating him. Believed he had caused this, in view of long reputation as a witch, and in anger that boy did not want to guard the cow.

(3) Bastienne femme Claude Gerardin de la Voivrelle, 50

The boy mentioned in previous deposition was her son, who had told her that he had felt as if a fly went in by his ear, so that he could hear nothing; also lost speech, but cried continually for 3 weeks. Made pilgrimages, including one to Beau Bernard, after which he started to recover. Added motive that she had quarrelled with Jean because his son had taken fruit from her tree.

(4) Gerard Marchal musnier à Coinches, 30

Previous Sunday Jean had come to mill asking if he had corn to sell, and was obviously upset; witness knew of reputation, and stories about Lyenard and a horse belonging to Demenge Alix of Neufviller. Said he had not quarrelled with the youth after refusal of sickle, but his relatives had been to complain to Chapter. As for the horse, said he had not been near it, but it had been watered 'ayant chaux', which was cause of its death.

(5) Claude Jean Charpentier de Coinches, 60

Around a year ago had dispute with Jean on subject he had forgotten, and 6 months later lost a cow, over which his suspected him - long reputation.

(6) Jean Charpentier de Coinches, 30

On Sunday evening he had been with accused, who said he was expecting to be arrested at any time. Asked witness if witches who were not executed were damned, and he said this was true; Jean replied that it was therefore necessary to have patience and endure the execution, which made him suspect he was guilty.

(7) Barbeline femme Dieudonné Jean Demenge de Coinches, 40

Illegible deposition about remark he made on Monday.

(8) Jacot Thoussaint de Coinches, 30

2 years before, when witness was farmer of great tithes for Coinches, la Voivrelle, and Faing-Thiery, he had sold some grain to Jean, who had been discontented (with quality or quantity?), and said he would remember. Soon after he lost a bull, over which he suspected him; reputed witch for several years, and had sold pigs and 'regain' when he thought he was to be arrested.

(9) Claude Tendon du Chanoy de Saulcy, 40

Two weeks ago on Monday he had taken his brother-in-law Jean Lyenard into his house; had maintained that Jean had bewitched him until his death, 'sans que l'on luy peut oster la fantaisie qu'il en avoit (jacois bien remontré)'. On second night in house claimed that Jean had thrown powder through window so that he was 'appunaisé', and could not bear to remain in room, so was taken into kitchen and died by fire 4 days later.

(10) Collatte femme Claude Lyenard de Saulcy, 22

Repeated previous testimony - Jean was her brother-in-law.

(11) Poline femme Demenge Mengel de Raves, 35

Had been in service for 9 years at la Voivrelle, and heard Jean called witch without taking any action.

(12) Demenge Claude Jacques de Raves, 56

Some 5 years before, when living at Neufviller, had complained to Jean about losses of beasts, and latter offered to teach him some remedies, but had never asked him further.

(13) Colas Barre de Neufviller, 55

Had complained to Jean that after herbs and cabbages had been stolen from his garden nothing would grow there, despite manuring; advised him to burn 'du fanel de febves', after doing which it was fertile again - did not know if there was 'du malengin' in this. Had a quarrel because Jean did not pay him 16 francs he owed, and while he was working in house of witness as 'cousturier' a fine cow lost its calf, over which he suspected him. His sisters had already been executed for witchcraft.

(14) Mengeatte femme Jean Charpentier de Coinches, 25

Previous Sunday and Monday Jean had spoken at length to her of his fears, and she tried to console him, telling him he should ensure his salvation, 'et que c'estoit peu d'endurer la mort, qui n'estoit que comme un vent d'oyseau. Surquoy il dit que le diable se mectoit en beaucoup de guise pour nuire aux personnes, qu'il endureroit beaucoup, mais qu'il ne diroit pas qu'il soit sorcier . . . et qu'il vailloit mieux faire penitence en ce monde, et qu'il n'accuseroit personne pour complice . . . '

(15) Marguerite femme Demenge Alix de Neufville, 35

Shortly after last St Jean had gone to see her father and mother at Saulcy, riding one of their horses; passed Jean on way, who was going to church at Bertrimoutier, and they gave one another good-day. He passed very close to horse, although she did not see if he touched it. On arrival gave horse some hay and went to Mass, but on return when she went to take it to drink its legs started to give way, and it died within 2 hours. Suspected him - reputed witch for many years.

(16) Claudon Demenge Perrin de Remomeix, 65

Had quarrelled with Jean after making contract to remove weeds from his field, also question of child which was beaten - accord eventually made, but he lost two bullocks which he imputed to his witchcraft. His uncle and two of his sisters had already been executed.

(17) Claudatte veuve Valentin Claude Milan de Remomeix, 40

Some 12 years before her small daughter Laurence was guarding beasts when they strayed and there was a quarrel; he cursed her and she was ill for a year.

(18) Jean Perrin de Remomeix, 32

Some 18 months before he had lent Jean some money, and gone to his house to ask for repayment. Had fever, and he said he had cured others, so would give him a remedy. Later sent him 'mitridat' and powder like 'fleur de foing', which he was to take in milk. Supposed to take it in two doses, but in fact took it in one go, and thought he would die; became blind and had to be put into bed. Believed that Jean had intended to kill him; had already had a sister and an uncle executed as witches.

(19) de Raves, 40

Had for some years leased cows to Jean, but one of them always lost its calf. Decided to take it back; owed him 4 francs for additional value, but counted this against debt owed him by Jean's late father. A fine calf was born, but died within 15 days, and he imputed this to his witchcraft if he were as he was reputed.

(20) Agnes veuve Jean Demenge Babel de Faing-Thiery, 55

At Christmas 7 years earlier Jean had tried to outbid her late husband for post of herdsman, but seems to have been too late with his offer, so was unsuccessful. Around Chandeleur husband became ill and died in a week, which she believed was Jean's revenge.

(21) Pierron Jardolle de Faing-Thiery, 40

A week before last St Remy he was told that accused had stolen some of his fencing; caught him carrying this, and they had harsh words, during which he called Jean thief and witch, saying he would have him burned, and was threatened himself. Next day, in full daylight, a foal was strangled by a wolf, and he suspected that as a witch Jean had been able to turn himself into a wolf. When he had deposed against Jean's uncle he heard that Jean was blaming him for his arrest; a horse went lame, and he let Jean's wife know that if it was not healed he would burn some witches. Horse then recovered, and he suspected Jean had been responsible.

(22) Marguitte femme du precedent, 40

Supported husband's testimony about losses.

(23) Claude Renouard de Faing-Thiery, 50

Had heard him called witch, and had called him so himself, in presence of dean of local court, without any action following. Had lost various animals, and he might have been responsible if he were a witch, since in confrontations his uncle had claimed he was not solely responsible for these losses.

(24) Beniste femme du precedent, 48

Confirmed husband's deposition, adding that when working in their house Jean had said he knew how witches managed to have plenty of butter. They put a 'graine' in their own cream which drew that of others.

(25) Mengeon Thiehay de la Voivrelle, 30

Said he had heard Jean say that he had learned from certain witches that to have plenty of butter they took a cauldron of water and beat it with white sticks, to draw butter from others. Suspected him of causing a fall when he had hurt his leg under a cart, while having lawsuit against Jean's children.

(26) Didier fils Claude Aubert, 13

He had been boy who refused to guard additional cow for Jean, and told of his subsequent illness, which had now lasted 7 weeks. 'Ne scait autrement imputer son mal pour l'asseuré, ou audit prevenu ou a sa femme, mais est l'opinion de plusieurs a l'endroit du marit, pour en estre des longtemps en reputation.'

(31 October 1611)

(27) Jean Simon de la Voivrelle, 52

6 years earlier his son Jean had married Catherine, sister to his wife, and they had been living with family as 'domestiques'. On a very hot day Jean was working for them as harvester, and shouted to her to bring some water. She replied that her brother-in-law was coming and would bring him some later, to which he responded with a curse, that the devil might break her neck and her limbs. Catherine, who was pregnant, promptly had trouble with a leg, and after delivery languished for 10 weeks, 'toute pourrie' up to the waist, before she died. Asked if she suspected Jean, replied 'que l'on n'en sonna mot de paoeur qu'il n'en arrive quelque inconvenient plus grand'. This made him suspect that if he were a witch as reputed he was the cause.

(28) Claudatte femme du precedent, 40

Repeated husband's testimony; added something about remark made by Jean when sister received last rites, but illegible here.

(29) Claudon Jean Simon, doyen de maire en la mairie de St Margaree, demeurant a la Voivrelle, 36

Some 3 years earlier Jean had been in charge of flock of la Voivrelle, and either by his doing or on his orders one of witness's sheep had leg broken. Angry at this and earlier losses, told him he must heal it or pay for it; he tied up leg and it recovered. Shortly afterwards lost a pig, which became blind and had head all swollen, and in view of reputation believed this was his doing.

(30) Mengeon Renouard de la Voivrelle, 40

As neighbour and relative of Catherine, was present when communion was brought to her during illness. Jean was also present, and said to them 'Vous estez tous bien sages, mais sy c'estoit moy, je ne la ferois communier, d'autant que sy c'est faict de sortilege, il n'y aura plus moien de la guerir apres qu'elle sera communiee'.

2 November 1611; interrogation

Said he was Jean Jacques Gerardin, aged about 62, 'parmentier et mainouvrier de son estat, comme il peult mieulx, se meslant aussy de coudre'. Was son of Jacques Gerardin of la Voivrelle and his wife Annon, from Faing-Thiery.

Agreed that his uncle and two of his sisters had been executed for witchcraft. Claimed that he himself was innocent, and had been arrested 'pour l'abus que le monde a de luy'.

Agreed that he knew about Jean Lyenard's belief that he had bewitched him, by means of his wife. Admitted conversations with miller at Coinches, and with Jean Charpentier, about prospect of his arrest, although not all details of the latter.

Said he had not taught Demenge Claude Jacques means to protect his animals from witchcraft, but offered to tell them now. Repeated rather garbled magical prayer, calling on son of God to keep witches away. Said he had learned this from his sister, since executed. Said he could not remember advising Colas Barre about making his garden fertile, but did admit that he had learned the remedy from the wife of Colas Maimbourg of Vanifosse.

Agreed that he had given medicine to Jean Perrin; it was cure they used in own household for fever. Admitted stealing fencing material and being called thief and witch by Pierron Jardolle; had not sought reparation because 'il n'est pas puissant assez pour ce faire'.

Said he was not responsible for illness of Catherine Simon, and had no memory of cursing her, but agreed to remark about communion; had said that before receiving this they might find some remedy and should search for one.

'Quel remede il estime plus salutaire a la sante de l'ame et du corps, que la perception du corps de notre Seigneur

Dict qu'il ne scait, sinon qu'aulcuns ont recours aux devins et devisnes

Luy a esté remontré que c'est oeuvre diabolique, et que tous ceulx qui y vont, se dampnent, puis luy a este demandé de qui il a apprint que la perception de ce tres auguste sacrement, empesche le recouvrement de la sante corporelle, semblant le vouloir ainsy conclure, par le conseil qu'il donnoit, de ne communier ladite Catherine

Dict que le peuple commun en juge ainsy

Interroge qui luy a enseigné que quant le malade est communié, il n'y a plus moien de le guerir

A dit que nul ne luy a apprins, et le scait par le bruict commun du peuple'

3 November 1611; confrontations

Continued to deny all important allegations. Almost no reproaches, but did claim that Mengeon Thiehay had been taken to justice because he made exorbitant charges as guardian of his sisters; Thiehay said that he had not been fined, which showed charges were false.

3 November 1611; procureur asks for question ordinaire

5 November 1611; Change de Nancy agrees

14 November 1611; interrogation under torture

As soon as he felt the thumbscrews he offered to confess. Seduced 18 years earlier by big man in black, who asked him about his affairs; he replied that he was in a bad state and could not pay his debts. Percin said that if he would renounce

God he would give him enough to live and to pay his creditors, but bag he gave him contained oak leaves. 3 days later was given powder (black/kill, grey/languish, white/cure). Tried it out on one of his pigs, which died; after this resolved to use it as little as possible, and as a result was beaten by his master, whose hand was black as coal and seemed to have claws.

Confessed to killing Jean Demenge Babel, with powder put in a plate, because he had underbid him for guard of herd. Also Catherine Simon, with powder he put on some pears, because of refusal to fetch water. Similar method used to kill Jean Lyenard. His master had suggested that he kill or make ill Didier Aubert, after he refused to guard his cow, but he objected that he was a poor orphan. Finally agreed that master should make him ill for 7 weeks, so he would soon recover.

Also confessed to killing a pig belonging to Claudon Jean Simon, which often ate pears in his garden, so he put powder on some; this followed dispute in which Simon had complained that his children were pasturing village herd too often in same place. Had killed two bullocks of Claudel Jean Perrin, by putting powder on grass, because he had paid him a franc less than agreed for removing weeds.

Had been to sabbat about once a year, either around St Jean or in autumn, on Thursday evenings around two hours of the night; carried on shoulders by Persin as fast as the wind. Wife did not realise he was absent because he put a straw figure in his place; came home on foot. Danced to sound of flute and ate unpleasant meat which was not salted, others present were masked. Made hail by beating water of stream with white sticks given to them by Persin. Gave a hen every year, a black one if possible, not to have to attend more often.

Asked about accomplices, said he thought he might have recognized Demenge Thiehay of la Voivrelle, but could not be sure. Judges then ordered that he be racked, but he added no more names. Said that hail finished as soon as bells were heard. His master had persuaded him not to receive communion bread, but two or three times he had kept it in his mouth, then wrapped it in paper to give to his master. Had told him not to take holy bread or water, since 'cela n'estoit que tromperie et ne servoit de rien'.

15 November 1611; interrogation

Confirmed earlier confessions. Would only identify Jean Thiehay as being at sabbat; had grey and red mask, but had known him by his voice. Said that at end of sabbat they kissed Persin's arse, which 'sembloit estre tout velu et plain de poil par les parties'.

16 November 1611; final confirmation of confessions

17 November 1611; procureur asks for death sentence

21 November 1611; Change de Nancy approves

29 November 1611; execution carried out