

B 3323 no 8; witch 032, Noel Purel (dit le Petit Noel), de Blémerey

(1) Jean Henry, manouvrier de Dompjevin, 70

30 years earlier, ploughing in his field, had released horses to rest and recover; his neighbour Grand Demenge Charpentier, had done the same. He had warned latter that horses were straying into meadow belonging to Petit Noel, and that he might be fined, quite apart from bad reputation; accused did then appear, and there was a quarrel, followed by a fight (Grand Demenge was helped by his brother Grand Waultrin, who was accompanied by small son). Noel said to Grand Demenge 'que puis qu'il avoit mangé son pres sciement qu'il luy garderoit quelque bon plaisir et qu'il s'en donroit bien de garde', to which other replied 'qu'il n'estoit guiere bon, qu'il le scavoit bien, et que s'il luy survenoit quelque scandale qu'il le feroit brusler.' 3 or 4 days later the boy fell ill with a bad leg, and had never recovered properly since, despite much expenditure on surgeons and remedies. Claimed he had been present when Jean Colbay of Migneviller, executed as witch 34 years earlier, had accused Noel of being witch - reputation preceded even this, but did not believe he had suffered any personal harm.

(2) Claudon de Benamesnil, laboureur de Gondrexon, 60

30 years earlier Noel and others from Blémerey had been at wedding feast of Pierson Florentin of Amenoncourt, who had married a girl from Blémerey. They stole some hens in Gondrexon, and were told off severely by local women, including his wife. Soon after they lost 2 pigs and a dog, which they blamed on Noel, who already had bad reputation.

(3) Jean Mongeotte, laboureur de Gondrexon, 70

30 years earlier had gone with Claude Petit Claude to seek threshers at Herbeviller, and passing château de Lannoy accidentally witnessed execution where Jean de Colbay maintained accusation against Noel; they heard his case read out to people. Since then he and those of Gondrexon 'ont tousjours . . . heu oppinion que tous les malheurs et desastres que leurs ont arrivés, notamment en leurs grains par gresle, provenoient par les moyens et sortiléges dudit Noel.' Also accused by others executed since. Did not attribute any personal losses to him.

(4) Jean Renard, laboureur de la Chazelle, 50

He too claimed to have been present at execution of Jean de Colbay 30 years before. When they had hailstorm at la Chazelle his sister, who was in service with Noel at the time, reported him as saying to her 'ton frere a bien été estrillé'. Didn't know whether this was said from ill will, or because he felt 'pitié et compassion' for what had occurred.

(5) Demenge Marchal de Dompgevin, 40

Representing community of Dompgevin, who considered Noel responsible for heavy and frequent losses they had suffered through hailstorms. Reputation more than 30 years, and had been accused 'en plusieurs endroitz'.

(6) Jean Godat, laboureur de Dompjevin, 60

Another report of execution of Jean de Colbay and accusation.

(7) Anne veuve Demenge Claude, 50

During last hay harvest Noel had asked her youngest son Mathieu to help him with his cart, but he refused, saying they had too much of their own to bring in. Noel went off saying 'de par dieu', and she was angry with son for refusing him - would have preferred to leave hay lying in fields, because she feared him on account of reputation. Within a week Mathieu became troubled in his mind, which she believed was his witchcraft.

(8) Jennon veuve Vallentin Mesline, paistre, 40

Husband had been paistre for 10 to 12 years, at Blémerey, Reillon, and Gondrexon. Some 4 years earlier she had asked husband to help her winnow, and he left children in charge of animals. Had only been away an hour when Noel arrived, claiming he had been absent 3 hours and upbraiding him. In course of quarrel he said to husband 'T'on luy tenoit le menton bien gras, mais avant qu'il fut le Noel suvant qu'il ne seroit empesché de se garder et qu'il pourroit bien parachever son terme frappant cependant les mains l'une dedans l'autre et estant en grand colere'. Vallentin called him 'petit genot'. Some weeks later Noel touched his shoulder, after which he became ill, vomiting continuously, so that he had to give up work and go back to Reillon, where he died miserably. They both suspected Noel of causing his illness.

(9) Jean Demenge Claude, laboureur, 24

Long reputation; repeated story of brother's refusal to cart hay and subsequent mental illness.

(5 June 1602)

(10) Jean Henry, maire de Reillon, 60

No personal complaint, but long reputation. Appeared as representative of his community, which believed Noel had caused several devastating hailstorms.

(11) Henry Hullatte, doyen de Reillon, 50

Also represented community belief over hail.

(12) Claudon Crolbesner, imballe de Reillon, 40

Ditto

(13) Jehan du Bois, imballe de Reillon, 25

Ditto

(14) Jehan de Benamesnil, imballe de Gondrexon, 38

Reputation 36 years. Community opinion about hail.

(15) Colas Jean Mongeatte, imballe de Gondrexon, 38

Ditto

(16) Claudon Jean Claudon, dit de Gondrexon, laboureur, 50

Long reputation. 8 or 9 years earlier had been imprisoned at Blamont, and on release witness (nearest neighbour) had dispute with him over payment of costs. He called Noel witch, and he replied 'qu'il y en avoit de ceulx qui avoient mangé de son bien et rouillé des os, quy s'en resentiroient et s'en donneroient de garde'. Soon afterwards had 2 horses ill for many weeks, one died and other had to be killed. About 5 years earlier his wife had become ill, 'debilitée et seiche', and died after a year. Bedridden for last 5 months, and surgeons could do nothing, Blamed Noel, especially as they had had several quarrels.

(17) Claudon Clerc, laboureur de Leintrey, 30

Had quarrelled with him 5 years earlier, after agreeing to plough his field. Did so once, but unexpected demand from brother made him unwilling to undertake second ploughing, so he told Noel he would find someone else to do it. He refused brusquely, and soon 2 horses died suddenly.

26 June 1602; interrogation

Agreed that he had been accused by Jean de Colbay, but claimed he had subsequently withdrawn this; had once had attestation of this from late governor of Blamont, but this was now lost, having been produced when he was last imprisoned. Agreed that he had heard that Mathieu, son of Demenge Claude, was 'troublé', but 'il n'a toujours laissé de jouer aux cartes'. Generally denied all charges against him.

27 June 1602; Confrontations

Said that Claudon Jean Claudon had been caught felling a tree in communal woods - but couldn't say who had told him, and thought case hadn't gone to justice because of respect in which Claudon's uncle was held. Otherwise accepted

witnesses as worthy, but denied their interpretation of events. Not confronted with representatives of other communities.

30 June 1602; procureur fiscal asks for torture (extraordinaire)

1 July 1602; Change de Nancy agrees, but should be 'assez mediocrement eu esgard a l'age dudit prevenu'.

9 July 1602; Interrogation under torture

Despite application of thumbscrews and lengthy session on rack, withstood first session of torture. Brought back after dinner, and given 'tourillons', but 'il n'a voulu rien confesser quel tourment l'on luy ayt faict' - then admitted he had been witch for 40 years. Had then been in service with Jean Demenge Claude of Blesmerey, and was guarding horses when approached by man in black (Pairsin). Given money (pieces of wood) and black powder. First use of powder was to kill a cow belonging to Didier Cherier, who had called him 'genot'. Denied having ever been to Sabbat, and had not seen Mre Persin since time soon after first seduction, having decided he was an 'abuseur' and that he would return 'vers dieu'. Admitted killing horse of Claudon Jean Claudon, as result of dispute over payment of fees arising from first imprisonment. At this point was recognised that accused was 'perplexe en son entendement' and further interrogation was put off till morrow.

10 July 1602: interrogation.

Agreed he had given sickness to paistre Waltin, by breathing over some mutton latter had bought. Victim had subsequently been spitting blood, 'mais qu'il n'est cause de sa mort parce que ce n'estoit son intention.' Some 5 years before, because hay harvest was so poor, killed numerous village animals by scattering powder - included some of his own, and two of Claudon Jean Claudon, on account of frequent disputes with latter. Now agreed that 7 years before, when a great cloud came up at night, he had gone out to look at it, and been carried off in air by his master to assembly (which he thought was made up of evil spirits like his master) to make hail by beating water in usual fashion. Confessed to killing of various animals and persons, and giving of illnesses to others - but denied some of the original accusations. Usually accompanied by explanation in terms of quarrels or grudges. Now confessed he had been several times to sabbat; only person he had recognised there was la Jobarde. Discussed harming various crops - was usually disagreement, but those in favour went ahead anyway. After the year (4 years before) when there had been an exceptional wine harvest, their master had called on them to use hail on the vines - he was unwilling, because he had vines, but others carried out instructions without demur. Asked about accomplices, only added Jean Bon Claude; on being racked again, named Claudon de Benaumesnil of Gondrexon, and an unknown with a deformed foot from Blamont.

10 July 1602; procureur fiscal asks for death sentence

13 July 1602; Change de Nancy approves

Goods worth 1,545 Fr; widow allowed to keep them for 1,000 Fr, payable in two instalments.