

Witch 031, Didier le Vefue 1

B 3323 no 7; witch 031, Didier femme Nicolas le Vefue le Viel, de Leintrey

30 May 1602; informations preparatoires

(1) Jennon femme Nicolas Colin, d'Embermesnil, 32

Said she had been married to Colas, son of accused, and had lived with her for 14 years without seeing any grounds for suspicion. Had quarrelled with her and husband over what was due under marriage settlement, on several occasions, but no harm had resulted. Had always seen them living as 'gens de bien', 'et tient ladite Didier pour bonne chrestienne et fort devote'. Denied specific interrogation about finding her unconscious in a barn.

(2) Catherine femme Claudon Thomas, 40

Held Didier to be 'une bonne personne'; would say if she were otherwise, although she was 'soeur paternelle' of her husband. Asked about having a sick horse which accused had cured, said that a horse had been ill the previous autumn, but Didier had not touched it, and had been upset at its illness - recovered after husband bled it.

(3) Pierson Nicolle, tixerand de Dompjevin, 27

Had lived in her house for 21 months without seeing any evil in her. Had seen her go out of house one evening and talk to someone, but could not see them or hear what was said. She told him that her daughter-in-law (first witness) had called her witch, and they therefore intended to separate households, but they did not do so. He had a fever which lasted 8 or 9 weeks, and didn't recover despite remedies he took and herbs Didier applied to his arms. Finally had dispute with her late son Colas, perhaps because he wasn't working; Didier touched him on shoulder and said he should leave, and they would pay him. Did this and soon recovered, so suspected her of curing him by touching.

(4) Thouvenin Bergier, 40

Long reputation as witch. During previous Lent had seen her handling a bone during the sermon, which she then put away in her apron.

(5) Estienne Connot, 57

Had not heard any harm of her, except during last year when there were rumours of witchcraft. When procureur fiscal of Blamont had made enquiries about use of a dog's head a little while before he had told him that there was one in Nicolas la Vefue's house - when he informed Nicolas of this he replied that it had been taken away by some soldiers who had been billeted on them.

(6) Claudon Thomas, laboureur, 47

Never heard any harm of her until she was accused by la Jobarde. Asked if he had had a horse sick, said that one was chilled previous autumn after a frosty night; Didier came to see it, as his sister, but merely helped warm it, after which he used a herbal remedy learned from the late Jean Thiebault, which cured it.

(11 June 1602)

(7) Jennon fille de feu la Grande Marye, 23

Last Easter week Didier had stopped her to ask news of her mother, then asked her to give some apples to a sergent at Blamont. When the sergent came to Leintrey to summon witnesses to give evidence against the other accused witches he didn't want to take the apples, although she offered them to him; she and her little niece, daughter of her brother Claudon Marchal, then ate them. She became ill with a painful leg, and finally asked Didier to look at it - a day or two after she did this it was better, but niece then became ill for a month, expelling horrible matter from her body. In view of reputation thought this had been her witchcraft.

(8) Nicolas Geoffroy, maire à Veho, 55

5 years earlier had a persistent fever, which nothing seemed to cure. Heard that Didier 'avoit quelque cognoissance aux malladies', so sent his daughter to seek her aid through her sister Barbelline, wife of Grand Colas of Leintrey. Had sent him some herbs to make drink for 5 days, while saying 5 paternosters and 5 ave Marias each day. If this didn't work he should ask her for another remedy; was obliged to do this, and she sent more herbs, ordering him to go to cemetery, take soil from grave of last person who had died, and hang it round neck with herbs. Again to say prayers and make other religious observances (including neufieme), and to replace soil at end. This time he did recover; ended deposition by saying 'mais pour tout cela il n'a point d'oppinion qu'elle soit autre que femme de bien et luy servy tres bon que de ses enseignements'.

(9) Zabey femme Remy Grand Demenge, 25

Some 3 years before, when in service of Demenge Bon Claude, her mistress had trouble with her leg; consulted various women, who told her it was 'mal St Anthoine'. Sought medicines from Didier, but couldn't bear application of first set, so asked her to come and see her, Said she was too busy, but would come that evening, telling her to inform her mistress that they should use a blessed candle to measure the length and thickness of her leg, then put the candle with an offering of 2 deniers and holy water in a clean sheet, which they should hang from eaves on side of house towards St Anthoine. Told witness 'de n'en rien dire a personne, car les gens sont sy mauvais maintenant'. Recovered when this was done; neither of them suspected Didier of causing illness, despite fact that she had long been suspected as a witch.

(10) Margueritte femme Demenge Bon Claude, 27

Repeated story of leg and successful cure. Idea had been to leave offering until she could make pilgrimage; she said it had been in a stick, and they could not find it 2 weeks later after recovery, so she had deferred pilgrimage. Previous year had cow which went very lame, and Didier sent her small son Colas with herbs, but these proved ineffective and cow had to be killed. Despite long reputation, no personal suspicion against Didier.

(11) Hannix femme Demenge Martin, 36

Knew no harm of accused, although it was said 'qu'elle enseignoit des recettes'.

(12) Zabel femme Claudon Ozenatte, 25

Knew nothing against Didier. Since she had been accused 'l'on dit que sy elle est telle que c'est de devant qu'elle fut maryée'.

(13) Catherine femme Demenge Tocquart, 34

Knew no evil of her.

(14) Jean Jobard, 27

Knew no evil, except that for last 3 years he had heard 'par bruit commun et comme en cachette qu'on la soupçonnoit pour sorciere'.

(26 June 1602)

(15) Barbe veuve Jean Renard, 80

Some 5 or 6 years earlier she heard that she was a witch, and that her daughter-in-law Jennon had accused her of causing death of her children. Returning from Blamont with Jennon, latter told her 'qu'elle n'en avoit point parlé, ny n'en avoit jamais heu la pensée'.

(16) Colas Gadel, 50

His first wife had been Margueritte, widow of Jean Thomas, brother of accused. Had quarrels and lawsuits with Didier's husband over dowry, and had both children and animals dead. Nevertheless, he didn't suspect Didier of being cause of these losses, and although she had been suspected for 3 years he still held her innocent.

25 June 1602; interrogation and confrontations

Said she was about 50, daughter of Thomas Grand Pierson, laboureur of Leintrey, and his wife Zabillon. Mother had died so early she had no memory of her; lived with father until marriage at age of 23. Knew she had been accused by

Margueritte veuve Demenge Vaultrin, but she had done her great wrong. Asked about talking to herself in strange language, said 'qu'aucunesfois elle se propose comme elle se doict gouverner en sa vieillesse et ce qu'elle fera' - but in ordinary tongue.

Said that Pierson Nicolle had become ill after diving into 'fontaine' to recover his knife; fever was very inconvenient because it was at time of sowing. As for dog's head, they had hung it from 'rattelier des chevaux' on advice of reitres who had been in house, but made no other use of it; it had not been blessed.

On question of apples, said that Jehennon had spoken to her of sergent who treated her mother well, and of desire to do something to thank him; gave her apples to make a 'flannon' without any evil intent.

Originally denied giving remedies for fever, but when pressed agreed she had done so, but claimed this was a long time ago. As soon as one left church had to take first herbs one found on a grave, then put them in holy water and say 5 or 9 paternosters and ave marias. Said she learned this from her mother. Asked how many kinds of fever there were, said she did not know. Then asked which were black fevers, said these were those for which one made pilgrimage to Vargaville and Vic. Earth taken from grave was when 'on est surprins de l'air d'un trespassé qu'est une fiebvre et fault prier pour le deffunct.' Did not know of any for which one made neuvaine in graveyard, and had not taught this. Herbs were put on arm or around neck.

Denied having recomended use of blessed candle.

Made no objections to witnesses and accepted many of their testimonies, but denied accusations of doing harm. In effect accepted claims about healing activities, including those she had denied at interrogation. Said she had learned 'recettes' from her mother, 'laquelle pour estre née le jour du Grand Vendredy pendant qu'on disoit la passion scavoit beaucoup de choses'.

28 June 1602; interrogation

Had confessed to François Charier, sergent, in prison, so was brought before court. Said she had been seduced 14 years earlier, when distressed over loss of pigs they had been fattening. Man approached her in barn - thought he was her husband, but she fell down and he promised her money for more pigs if she would renounce God and take him as master. Persin had intercourse with her, gave her money (pieces of glass) and black powder. Admitted going to sabat twice, in company with la Jobarde; other person she had seen there was Jenotte Thoussaint, the first witch executed. Could not recognize the young ones, who were masked so that only eyes and noses were visible. Denied any maléfices, claiming to have resisted demands of Persin.

Agreed she had used dog's skull, with ointment on it, for treatment of swellings. Denied killing her brother's children to obtain inheritance. Asked about children of her late son, said 'que non, et fut esté bien malheureuse, au contraire qu'elle ne desiroit que d'avoir des filles de luy.' Pressed further on denials, admitted killing series of own animals which had done damage, or which she could not care for properly, and 2 cows belonging to others.

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30 June 1602; procureur fiscal asks for question extraordinaire

1 July 1602; Change de Nancy approves

9 July 1602; interrogation under torture

Said bone she had was rib from a corpse; Persin had told her to make powder with this and use it to kill animals, even though she normally had powder from him. At sabbat made hail, but were usually frustrated by ringing of bells.

Then said 'qu'on la feroit dampner, pour ce qu'on luy faict dire choses qu'elle n'a pas faict . . . qu'elle n'avoit point faict mourir des gens ny gasté des biens, ains que ce faisoient les autres, et n'en estoit consentante d'aultant qu'elle voyoit bien qu'elle estoit abusée.' Did however say that original confessions were true.

10 July 1602; procureur fiscal asks for death sentence

? July 1602; Change de Nancy approves, while asking for confirmation of confessions, which should have been obtained after gap of a day.

13 July 1602; formal death sentence, which was carried out same day

Goods worth 520 Fr after payment of costs; allowed to remain with heirs Nicolas and Claude after payment of 400 Fr.