

B 3325 no 1; witch 034, Claudon de Benamenil, living at Gondrexon

11 December 1602; statement that procureur fiscal of county of Blamont has asked for evidence to be taken against the accused, who had been named by Noel Pural of Blesmerey before his execution.

(1) Jean Danel, laboureur demeurant a Gondrexon, 34

2 years before at last St. Remy Claudon, with most of inhabitants, had bought pasture rights in some woodland; had not wanted witness to take a share, but majority agreed that he should. After pigs went there he had 3 or 4 dead within 3 or 4 days, although he did not know who to blame, having heard no ill of Claudon. Since he had been accused by Noel Pural had wondered if it had been result of ill-will over lease.

(2) Mesline veuve Jean Mengeotte de Gondrexon

Had never heard 'mauvais bruit' of accused, but 9 years before had been two separate hailstorms which damaged crops (one wheat, the other oats), yet his had not been affected; suspected someone in his household was protecting them, but had no direct suspicion of him. 'Encor que son marry deceda y a environ trois mois sy est qu'elle a heu oppinion sur autres et non sur ledit Claudon de ladite mort advenue'.

(3) Barbelline femme Jean Danel, de Gondrexon, 36

Native of village, had never heard ill of accused. Repeated husband's story, said that since accusation by Noel Pural around last St. Jean had had 'fantaisie' that Claudon had caused death of pigs.

(4) Nicolas Connat demeurant à Monsey, 32

Native of Gondrexon, which he had left 3 years before; had never heard ill spoken of him. Nevertheless, 14 years before they had been guarding horses together during night of moon and broken cloud; at 1 or 2 in morning accused thought he saw a wolf, and pointed out spot to witness, who could see nothing. Thought that he 'n'estoit pas trop bon' if he could see something which was invisible to witness. Also story about hail 3 years before.

(5) Sebille veuve Claudon Colas Claudon de Gondrexon

Had known Claudon all her life, and had never heard 'mauvais fame', but had long believed he bore them 'quelque haine et rancune' because her husband and his father had operated 'retraite' on some family land he had bought. Husband had died some 9 months ago, followed within a month by a young horse he had bought a year earlier. She had been 'en grande oppinion que cela procedoit de quelque mauvaise gens', but had only entered 'en fantaisie' that Claudon was responsible

after accusation by Noel Purl. Story of hail, also claimed that he often slept away from house for unexplained reason.

(6) Claudatte femme de Colas Jean Mongeatte de Gondrexon

Native, had heard nothing against him. Told story about hail 9 years earlier; gave rise to idea that someone among his family or relatives was cause. Her brother Jean Bastien 'dit ung jour au defferé en presence de bonne compagnie et en maniere de faire qu'il falloit que ledit defferé fust meilleure qu'eulx ou plus mauvais veu que ses bledz estoient gardez et non les leur, auquel ledit defferé respondit qu'il estoit bon et qu'il faisoit mieux les festes qu'eulx.'

(7) Claudon Jean Claudon de Mesmercy, 42

Native of Gondrexon until 24 or 25 years before, when he moved to Mesmercy; had never heard ill of Claudon until accusation by Noel Purl.

(8) Thoussainct Bastien, de Gondrexon, 40

Native of Gondrexon, had never heard ill of accused, except that 5 or 6 years earlier the late Claudon Colas Claudon said 'qu'il donroit bien sa vie qu'il y avoit des sorciers dans la maison et famille dudict defferé et qu'il craindoit icelluy merveilleusement'. Also told of hail 9 years before; inhabitants had sought reduction in rents, and Claudon had been reluctant to join in their suit.

(9) Nicolas Jean Mengeotte de Gondrexon, 38

Had never heard ill of him, except for story of hail, which had been imputed to witchcraft. 18 years before his wife had chased after a calf, then come back saying it had drowned in the river - yet it reappeared in their garden next day. He had absented himself from house for one or two weeks, possibly because his son's wife had given birth.

(10) Grand Michiel de Gondrexon, 60

Had known accused more than 30 years. Told story of calf which jumped in river some 18 or 19 years earlier, also of hail on crops 6 and 3 years earlier. Two and a half years earlier his daughter-in-law had given birth to a son, and he had slept in the hay in his meadow for 2 weeks, possibly because he was angry; 'et estime que cela n'estoit convenable a ung homme de bonne reputation parce que celuy qui est au champ contre la nuit desire s'en retourner en ville sy ce n'est pour quelque voyente affaire'.

(11) Nicolas Claudon laboureur de Gondrexon, 70

Knew him more than 30 years, had heard no ill of him. Then told of hail 3 years earlier; had believed accused responsible because he bore him ill-will over a 'retraite' he had made.

'Auquel avons demandé comment il luy pouvoit valablement soubsonner tel accident proceder de l'art de sortillage veu qu'il depose n'avoir ouy que luy defferé fut mal famé.

A dit que c'est pource qu'il luy avoit dit qu'il luy cousteroit tout son bien s'il pouvoit et ne scayt chose mauvaise de luy qu'il luy puisse soubsonner que ce que dessus.'

(12) Nicolas Grand Demenge demeurant a Gondrexon, 40

Had known accused since he reached age of discretion, had heard no bad reputation. Told of daughter-in-law's pregnancy; Claudon's son had told him he was angry. Also told about hail, but said that as he was 'paistre' he had not been on scene, and only knew what others had said.

(30 December 1602)

(11) Didier Essenat de Dommevrvre, 35

Told how some 10 years earlier, when serving a widow named Jennon Adam, he and Jean Petit Jean (now dead) had been taking animals to pasture around midnight in the 'banniere'. When they were at place called la Malle Massue near 'ban bois' his horse threw him twice; he thought he saw an animal like a wolf or a dog, but his companion told him it was nothing, and he was sleeping on his horse. Horse nevertheless refused to move. Then saw a man by an old fallen tree; Jean told him it was Claudon de Benamesnil who was guarding his oats - he had some sown a little way off. Knew nothing else against him, but on that occasion if he had not left he was going to attack him with a little club he carried, in anger that he had said nothing to him about his fall.

(12) Elizabeth femme Nicolas de Gondrexon, 40

Some 6 years earlier his daughter-in-law had a cow which broke its leg when going to drink, 'qu'elle soupconnoit estre arrivé par un mallefice engendré par Jennon Pierson de Leintrey bellesoeur a la depposante, ce qu'entendu sadite belle soeur se formalisa de telle charge, disant qu'elle luy faisoit tort et que son pere estoit fort soupçonné d'estre sorcier par ceulx de Leintrey'.

(13) Jehennon femme Colas Danal de Gondrexon, 40

A year earlier had been returning from market of Blamont with Jennon Pierson, and they were talking of her quarrel with his daughter-in-law; she said he was 'ung des grand sorcier qui se pouvoit veoir'. Shortly afterwards Jennon was arrested for witchcraft, then released; the witness was of the opinion 'qu'ilz se cognoissoient bien par ensembles pour sorcieres'. Told of hail; also said that he had been absent since beginning of proceedings 3 weeks earlier, and had only returned after Christmas.

(14) Claudon Jean Zabey maire de Gondrexon, 50

Said he had never heard anything against Claudon, or heard him held to be anything but 'homme de bien'.

(15 May 1603) More witnesses heard at request of procureur fiscal

(15) Marsel Recouvreur de Xousse, 46

Had worked for long time at Gondrexon for accused and others. In spring of previous year had been roofing house adjoining that of Claudon when hailcloud came up, and he had to take shelter. Sat next to accused outside door, and when the women rushed out to inspect the damage 'ledit de Benamesnil commença a discourir avec le depposant et luy demandoit ce qu'il luy sembloit de telle chose, disant qu'il y avoit beaucoup de mauvaises gens qui causoient telles choses, auquel le depposant dit qu'on en retrancheroit petit a petit, en fin se mit a parler du feu petit Noel disant qu'on l'avoit tant de fois accusé et s'il estoit une fois adjournée pour déposer contre luy il en diroit ce qu'il en scavoit, et neantmoins qu'il a entendu depuis que lors que les habitants dudit lieu retournoient de veoir le supplice dudit Noel ilz disoient que ledit de Beaumesnil n'avoit pas tant déposé de beaucoup de ce qu'il avoit dit auparavant. Et au surplus a bien entendu quelque peu de son mauvais fame mais non pas tant que depuis l'execution dudit Noel. Mais que pour son esgard il ne luy a jamais rien soupçonné de ce crime, et dit il plus que trouvant un jour ledit de Benamesnil depuis l'execution dudit Noel il luy raconta qu'il luy estoit survenu beaucoup d'adversité depuis qu'il ne l'avoit veu, et que ledit Noel l'avoit accusé en haine de ce qu'il avoit déposé contre luy.'

(16) Anthoine Colas Claudon jeune fils de Gondrexon, 25

A year before the middle of last Lent his married brother Claudon had died after 2 or 3 days illness, which he 'soupçonnoit prouvenir infailliblement du sortilege dudit de Benamesnil'. They had had a great quarrel over sharing out inheritance from Claudon's uncle; father, mother, and witness shared suspicions. Had heard it murmured 3 or 4 years ago that Claudon was a witch. Also recounted quarrel previous Easter between Claudon and his father over share of some trees, when he told father 'qu'il luy laisseroit bien de six parts une et qu'il n'en perdroit rien' - next day a cow died, which father and witness suspected was his doing.

(17) Margueritte fille de Colas Claudon de Gondrexon, 26

Brother of above; repeated essentials of deposition. She said her brother had been ill for 2 weeks before he died.

(18) Jacquot Febvre de Gondrexon, 40

Knew nothing at all against accused; had never heard anything until accusation by petit Noel.

(16 May 1603)

(19) Jean Bastien de Gondrexon, 45

Was visited at home by prevot, one of the echevins, and the cleric juré, because he was ill and unable to go to Blamont. Said he had heard no ill of Claudon until accusation by petit Noel. Had also been told by Jean Mengeotte of Gondrexon (recently deceased) about affair with hail; accused had been reproached by some others of the village, and 'il faisoit response qu'ilz ne se pouvoient contenir de les aller veoir le dimanche, et qu'ilz ne faisoient les festes, et que quant a luy il laissoit les siens comme ilz estoient sans les aller veoir comme eulx, et mesme que Jean de Beaumesnil son filz a heu fait la mesme response a ceulx qui en parloient en compagnie'. On first occasion when sergent from Blamont had been to village to summon witnesses against Claudon, he had heard of it and run out of back of house and right out of 'finage', not returning for some time, which made villagers think he was afraid.

(20) Claudon Jean Mengeotte jeune fils de Gondrexon, 23

Said Claudon already had reputation as witch before accusation by Petit Noel, because of affair with hail, which had repeatedly spared his crops. Added details about how he had seen sergent from far off and fled, being absent for 2 weeks; had heard that he had again absented himself during fresh hearings of witnesses. Was often in fields at night for unknown purposes; witness had heard about the episode with the horse of Esselat de Dommepvre. Further mentioned suspicions of Claudon Colas Claudon, of which he had heard.

(21) Colas Claudon de Gondrexon, 68

Since he gave first testimony had remembered that his late son Claudon had acquired some land from Colas Jean Claudon of Xenaguesange, brother to the wife of Jean de Beaumesnil. Accused had been angry, and had always been hostile to his son when they met subsequently. When a horse fell ill his son was pasturing it, and 'Un quidam le vint trouver le quel il ne cognoissoit et disoit on estre ung devin, qui luy dit qu'il gariroit bien ledit cheval et que c'estoit le leaud qu'il avoit luy demandant a loger, le quel quidam il logea plustost pour l'honneur de dieu qu'autrement. Et l'ayant ainsy logé il luy racompta qu'il y en vuoit ung audit Gondrexon (sans le nommer) qui luy en vouloit desja avant qu'il fut marié, qu'il n'estoit encore decouvert mais qu'il ne mestroit longtems a l'estre, et qu'il luy mesadviendroit bien tost ou a sa femme. Ce qu'entendu par ledit deffunt le raconta audit deposant son pere, le quel luy conseilla de luy donner une piece d'argent et le laisser aller.' He did so, then some time later (a year previous Lent) fell sick with fatal illness; languished for a long time unable to work, then took to his bed and died in a week. Had told father that he suspected Claudon. Around last Easter witness and accused had to share six oak trees; Claudon wanted one-sixth, although only one-sixteenth was due to him. When he did not agree Claudon said 'qu'il gaigneroit encore assé de luy laisser'; within a day or two he lost a cow, which he suspected to be his doing.

6 years before accused had bought 600 francs worth of land from witness's sister, but within the year witness used 'retraite' to buy them back. Claudon was so angry that he told him 'que s'il pouvoit qu'il luy cousteroit tout son bien'; next year hailstorm devastated all the land he had sown, and he suspected accused because of his threats and his evil reputation.

22 May 1603; procureur d'office asks prévôt to arrest him, so that he may be interrogated 'sans ministere de conseil ny d'advocat'.

30 May 1603; interrogation

Said he was laboureur aged about 60, native of Beaumesnil, resident at Gondrexon since his youth. Said he remembered that Jean Dunal lost various animals, but did not know cause, nor remember having opposed his inclusion in lease. Asked about hail, said that those fields called les champs du pre jourdain had escaped; he only had 4 'hieres' there, which had escaped as had fields of others when the hail stopped before reaching them.

Had indeed been 'guiere content' about 'retraite' of land by Claudon Colas Claudon, but had not wished him any ill. Knew about his illness and that of horse, also about presence of devin in his house; latter had said horse had sickness called 'le layant' which made horses as if they were rabid. Claimed not to remember remark about keeping feasts better than others, but it would have been true.

Agreed that he had spent some nights sleeping in hay in field, having taken some bread and cheese in his knapsack. Only explanation he could offer was that he was 'las'. Denied anger at birth of grandson - said that he 'voit bien volontiers l'enfant'.

Asked again about hail, insisted that his crops had been spoiled with others where hail fell, and had survived with others where it did not. Said he had not slept under roof of his bees, but that he was in the habit of sleeping in garden around St. Remy every year to guard fruits; he and his wife had sometimes taken bed out there. Denied encounter with horse by night, while agreeing that he did sometimes go out at night to guard his oats and wheat.

Admitted he had absented himself for two weeks, staying with brother at Ainville, because he feared prisons and knew depositions were being taken against him. Agreed to dispute with Colas Claudon about trees, although denying it had been serious; also admitted exchange of words between them.

Said his flight on seeing sergent had been caused by fear of prison, 'tant pour les froidures, ad cause du temps de son aage'. Agreed he had been angered by 'retraite' of land made by Colas Claudon, but he had neither threatened him nor done him harm.

Then recorded that Antoine Colas Claudon confirmed statements of his father and sister, Barbelline femme Jean Danal that of her husband. Nine other inhabitants testified about the hail, 'et ne chargent aucunement le prevenu'.

30 May 1603; confrontations

At first confrontation, with Jean Dunal, said 'qu'il ne tient ledit deposant pour homme de bien s'il le charge et qu'il die qu'il ayt faict mourir ses porcz, mais s'il ne le charge qu'il le tient pour homme de bien, et que tous les autres tesmoings qui le chargeront du crime de sortilege, qu'ilz luy faisoient grand tort'.

When he denied remembering anything about seeing a wolf judges suggested that he must be able to remember guarding horses, since it was not long ago, 'faisant croire qu'il cache evidamment la verité'. Later suggested that he was unable to cry and that this was a sign he was truly a witch; he replied 'que c'estoit pour estre troublé et sy esperdu qu'il ne peult pleurer'. Continued to deny all the substantial accusations. Returned to point again at end of confrontations, when he was reported as kneeling and leaning on a stool, appearing to cry but producing no tears.

7 June 1603; procureur fiscal asks for question extraordinaire

8 June 1603; Change de Nancy recommends that he be subjected to the thumbscrews alone, unless he was perceived to be about to confess, when he might be racked.

20 June 1620; Blamont court orders torture, without being specific about its form.

Interrogation under torture

Was given thumbscrews on hands and feet for a quarter of an hour, then racked for half that time 'mediocrement'. Brought back later for a second turn on the rack. Doggedly insisted that they did him wrong and that he was innocent; finally sent back to prison.

28 June 1603; procureur fiscal of county of Blamont, writing from Luneville, states that he should be renvoyé, until and unless the procureur can produce 'indices aultres et plus pregnans' than those on which trial had been conducted. Court at Blamont confirmed this sentence same day, ordering his release.