

Witch 131, Jeanne Bigenel 1

B 8281 no 1; witch 131, Jeanne femme Claudin Bigenel de Villers-sous-Preny

12 March 1599; informations preparatoires

These followed insults to her from Bastien Treuchot, who had called her 'vielle genosse, sorciere, coppon d'enfer', and complaint made by her husband.

(1) Claudin le Gaulx, maire pour les Srs, 65

Said she had come to village 56 or 57 years earlier, 'ou bien tost apres commença a estre amoureuse. Icelle estante enceinte, plusieurs jeunes gens qui alloient apres elle, chacun en envoyoit la charge a son compaignon, quelque temps apres, ung nommé Pierre Masson la fiança, lequel voyant qu'elle ne se delaissoit de familiariser et passer son temps avec beaucoup de gens s'en alla. Environ ung an apres ung nommé Hanry Pinelle manouvrier l'espousa, duquel elle eust deux enffans, et au bout de quatre a cinq ans qu'ilz furent ensembles mourut ledit Hanry, peu apres ledit Claudin Bigenel homme marié et ayant une femme plus belle que ladite Jeanne, s'en va par les champs avec icelle par l'espace de six ou sept semaines, ou estant de retour l'on voyoit souvent ledit Bigenel aller aupres elle tantost au boys comme ailleurs, estant la femme dudit Bigenel nommée Babon malade plus de trois mois avant (missing word) ledit Bigenel se desbaucha par les champs avec ladite Jeanne, ladite Babon estante proche de son trespas cinq semaines environ apres leur retour, print sur sa mort que c'estoit du mal donné par ladite Jeanne.'

2 years before at next Easter met her at Pont-à-Mousson, and she told him Mademoiselle said he should pay her 6 gros within the month; where he demurred she touched his shoulder, Next day his body became all swollen, and remained so for a month, until he met her again and she asked for money, saying she had not a penny. He gave her 9 gros out of fear, at which she said he was a good man and touched his shoulder again. Was healed next day, although he could not affirm this was her doing 'synon par conjecture'.

(2) Anthoine Chantaire, mre echevin en la justice, 50

Had seen no harm in her, but had heard her called witch in public by Treuchot after death of a horse 3 years earlier; had not heard of her seeking redress.

(3) Blaison Vit, 60

Had heard her called witch in her absence, but in public only by Treuchot. Horse had died as if rabid, after she treated it with herbs. Had never heard good of her, and was said that in youth she was 'fort liberalle de sa personne'.

(4) Conince doyen en la justice, 30

In 2 years he had been at Viller had been in many houses as tailor, and heard no good of her.

(5) Jean de la Haye, lieutenant de maire, 45

Had heard no ill of her, and had found her good neighbour over past 7 or 8 years.

(6) Jean Noel, laboureur, 35

Had not heard her called witch, but around last Christmas her daughter, wife of George Fourrot of Nolleray, had said at mill that her mother was unwilling to visit her sick husband, adding that she feared she would cause her some dishonour.

(7) Jacques Barbillon, vigneron

Had several times heard Mengeon femme Jean Jantaire accuse her of bewitching her husband, and tell her to come and take it off. When he married it had been after frequenting their house, when their daughter was marriageable, and she and her daughter told him he would never be lucky with the wife he had chosen; he replied that if he had some misfortune he would charge them with it.

(8) Jean Baxot, vigneron, 30

Had heard her called witch by Mengeon femme Jean Michault dit Jantaire, who said 'Vienca sorciere, ne veux tu pas dessorciller mon mari, t'avois bien grande haste de te lever de dessus ta selle, pour luy faire asseoir et pour l'engenosser ce n'est pas des auljourd'hui que tu nous hay, et tu as envy a nous, tu es venu tout a temps pour nous faire du mal'. On another occasion Mengeon accused her of killing a pig, to which she replied 'Se n'est pas des auljourd'hui que tu nous veulx du mal, meschante langue'. Had not heard that she had sought redress; long reputation.

(9) Mengin Gerard, laboureur, 50

Long reputation; had seen no harm in her, although she frequented his house.

(10) Claudin Joly, vigneron, 25

Had heard Mengeon femme Jean Michault call her witch, although she was a little way off and he was not sure whether she heard. General reputation.

(11) Jean Mengeot, vigneron, 40

Had seen no harm in her, but heard rumour 2 or 3 years earlier that she was a witch.

(12) Elizabeth femme du precedent, 38

Had suspected her over some leg trouble she had suffered. Had also heard from Cathin femme Drian Gigould that after quarrel with her they had both been ill. Lucye femme Bastien Treuchot had told her that their milk had been off for 6 weeks, until she asked Jeanne about it, after which it was good again. Has heard that when her daughter Barbe, wife of Fiacre Barbillon, had dispute with the miller Germain le Rond, he told her not to make him speak out. Said his child had been ill, unable to stand, until a woman had visited him.

(14) Chrestofle Due, cousturier, 60

Had seen no 'malefice' in her, nor heard her accused. Did remember that she and her mother had come from Champagne as beggars more than 40 years before, and that she was 'prodigue de sa personne' with young men when she grew up.

(15) Drian Gigould, vigneron, 60

Long reputation. Two 'citrouilles' had been stolen from her vines 18 months earlier; he had adjacent lot, and she accused him of stealing them, which was false. A week after quarrel he became ill, with pains in one leg then the other, as he was still without hope of cure. His wife Cathin had fallen ill in same fashion a week later, and was worse than him; suspected this had been her doing.

(16) Mengeon femme Jean Jantaire, portier du château, 30

Had told her off several times during illness of her husband; she had said he would soon recover. Had lost a pig after it got into her house. Also had a fine ox ill, and when Bigenel came to see Mlle de Barisey about vines he rented from her asked him to look at it, saying that if his wife were what she was reputed she should cure it. He took it by horns and was thrown to ground; said he did not believe she was such, and the ox recovered.

(17) Didier Malgendre, manouvrier, 35

She had come into house one day 'tout esperdu', saying 'Jesus Didier voila le Rousel qui a ung cheval mort il dict que je l'ay fait mourir, je n'en crainct dieu, le monde, Son Altesse ny la justice'. He comforted her and sent her home in better humour, but her husband then sent for him and he found her in same state, 'comme prest a mourir', and had to comfort her again.

(18) Jeannon femme Blaison Jeantaire, 37

Said that 2 years earlier she had been stable when she was taking dung out; that night a fine horse fell ill, and died next day with venom coming from mouth. Did not want to charge her, except on account of reputation.

(19) Blaison Jeantaire, laboureur, residant en la maison de Mlle de Barisey, 28

Told of same incident, which was 2 weeks after he had not renewed her daughter in his service at end of year. She had come to fetch trunk when she went into the stable. Those who saw horse thought it was bewitched. He had lost 5 others afterwards, and had called her husband in to deal with one of them. Promised him some grain, but when Jeanne came to fetch it gave her 'cramoie' rather than barley, after which horse became swollen and died 6 weeks later. When it was cut up the butcher showed him a quantity of worms he found in its lung, and creatures like snails out of their shells from its testicles.

5 or 6 weeks earlier had said he would give 10 francs to have her out of the world if she were found to be as reputed; then lost 4 sheep. although no others died in the village, even those which were kept in same building.

(20) Jean Michault dit Jeantaire, vigneron, 40

Had heard she had been called witch, but this was not in his presence. Had been pruning vines of Mlle de Barisey with her husband, and went to house where he found Jeanne alone. Told her he had been looking for workers for the morrow, and she made him sit down where she had been sitting. Became ill on way home, told Mr de Roussy at château and remained ill for 6 weeks; heard she had told others he would recover. After he was better his wife said to accused 'Vous avez fait mon marit malade, Monsieur de Roussy n'en est guaire content, s'il scavoit que vous fussiez telle il vous feroit brusler', to which she replied nothing.

(21) Orianne femme Anthoine Jeantaire, 17

18 months before saw her washing a pot in the stream, and before she saw witness she opened her arms and said 'il y fault jecter de la pouldre par la a tous les diables'. When she saw her she showed her marks like those of mal St Barbe on her arm, saying they were painful and she had been told that the powder 'd'un tallon St Martin' might do them good.

13 December 1599; Rémy asks for arrest and interrogation. Change de Nancy approves.

25 January 1600; interrogation

Said she had not been absent for 6 weeks with Bigenel before marriage, but merely for 2 days on trip to Rembucourt, 4 leagues distant. Agreed that when she was 15 she had intercourse with Pierre Masson, to whom she was betrothed, but whom she did not marry. On testinony of Claudin le Gaulx in general, said that when he and his wife quarrelled she called him 'vieux sorcier roy des genots', to which he replied 'va sorciere toy mesme', but this did not make her think they were witches.

Said that on orders of damoiselle de Barisey she had collected some of the herb called chat for horse of Bastien Treuchay, but had not applied it.

Denied series of other charges. In case of Drian Gigoult (whose wife was now dead) claimed he had been ill since getting very cold when in prison for 2 or 3 days. Deaths of horses of Blaison Jantaire resulted from their being old and badly treated. Jean Michault's illness resulted from carrying too heavy a load of wood.

Appears also to have been confronted with at least some witnesses - record is rather incoherent on this.

7 February 1600; Rémy asks for torture. Change de Nancy asks that she be interrogated separately on each charge, and confronted with witnesses in different fashion.

9 February 1600; interrogation

Said she was about 57, native of Vitry en Partoy, daughter of Martin Colas and his wife Barbe. Had lived at Chalons in Champagne, but when she was 5 or 6 her father was drowned when bathing, as were her two 'paraines'. She and her mother had to go about begging, until they took up residence at Villers. 8 or 9 years later she was seduced by a young man and had a child by him - this was a charcoal burner named Drolbat, who accepted responsibility for the child. Was then betrothed to Anthoine Limousin Masson; reason he did not go through with

marriage was not her reputation, but that her 'perattre' 'se mesloit de despouiller des bestes mortes'.

4 years later married Hanry Puinel, servant in house of Didier la Ruelle, and lived with him for 14 years. Was then widow for 7 years, guarding animals at Viller and elsewhere. In 6th year of widowhood went to see uncle at Mongueville, staying overnight at Bar on the way (14 leagues distant), but returning in a single day. Went with another widow, and on way met Bigenel, who was looking for a young man who had gone off with some soldiers. He then accompanied them, but did not try to seduce her - he had done so earlier, below the rampart. Since he still pursued her, she went off for a year to live in Griscourt, 2 leagues away, and it was during this time that his wife died. Denied he had debauched her in the fields, or that she was cause of his wife's death.

At suggestion that she contradicted previous testimony, said they must have misunderstood what she said before. Otherwise added nothing to previous statements, and continued to protest her innocence.

10 February 1600; confrontations

Long discussion with Claudin le Gaulx, in which there seemed to be disagreement over details rather than essential. He seemed to agree that she had spent 9 months at Griscourt, but said Bigenel had gone off for betrothal the week after his wife was buried.

Otherwise denied all charges. Did not seem to be given chance to object to witnesses.

23 February 1600; Change de Nancy approves torture, with moderation appropriate to her age.

26 February 1600; interrogation under torture

When tortured she began to confess. Seduced 2 years earlier, when husband sent her out to fetch wood he had cut; man in black told her she was angry, which she denied, but said she could not find wood her husband had sent her for. He showed her where they were, then offered her money, but she replied she had heard from others that his money was only oak leaves. Denied knowing his name or having intercourse with him; then asked to be put down, saying she would tell the truth.

Now said she had been seduced 10 years earlier, in manner already described. Now said her master was Percinet, that he had intercourse with her and gave her powder (yellow/kill, black/cure), also money which was oak leaves. When she saw she was abused she made sign of cross and hid from him, saying softly 'Jesus pauvre miserable que je suis, je suys abusée', at which he went off through woods with great noise.

Put powders in hole in wall of house, and did not find them until 8 years later. Then was angry with Claudin le Gaulx for his refusal to help her in her need, and made him ill, then took pity and cured him. Had also killed horse of Blaison Jeantaire when he terminated daughter's employment. Later saw 2 more of his horses at pasture, and wished one of them might be drowned, as it was - her master must have done this, as she did nothing.

Had not caused illness of Jean Jeantaire, but did send him 2 pears which she had pierced with a pin to put black powder in them, in hope of curing him. He was summoned, and agreed he had eaten a pear she sent, then recovered.

Had only seen Percinet once since her seduction, when he came on night when husband was absent, and carried her off to wood near Rembercourt. Were many women and some men dancing, all masked, and were 3 masters present, one of whom was large and turned around the dance. She sat by the fire, but was then taken to the dance; 'a l'entour de laquelle danse y avoit des testes de xols droicte, et des sermentz de vigne, laquelle prevenue entendist qu'il failloit faire tumber lesdits xols pour gaster et perdre les bledz, et remuer les sermentz avec leur piedz pour gaster les vignes, ce qu'elle ne fist comme les aultres'. Master then took her on his shoulders, and there was noise like thunder, after which she found herself back in bed.

Still denied causing any harm to horses of Bastien Treuchet, or his other animals.

17 March 1600; Rémy asks for death sentence. Change de Nancy approves subject to reiteration of confessions.

27 March 1600; interrogation

Confirmed earlier confessions, although she claimed her master had never made her renounce God, or forbidden her to go to church.

4 April 1600; she had been found dead in prison. Goaler said that she had taken food perfectly well previous day, and made no complaint about illness; there was no apparent reason for death.