

Witch 352; Bastien Jean Viney, Ban-St-Dié

Bibliothèque Municipale de Nancy, MS 3945, fos 2-24

15 December 1611; Procureur for Canons orders that evidence be taken and that he be arrested and held in custody if there are sufficient indices, then confronted with witnesses for report to be made to him.

16 December 1611; informations préparatoires

(1) Mengeatte veuve Jean Tisserand, du Ban-St-Dié, 40

Had been quarrel between her son Claudel and Adam, son of accused, some 5 or 6 years earlier – Bastien was angry, then Claudel fell down chimney while climbing on roof, without doing himself much harm. Three months later, however, he fell while on his own in fields holding a knife, and lost the sight of one eye; Bastien's wife said this must be witchcraft. Just before her husband's death he had lent them some money on the security of a field, then was frustrated in his hope of obtaining this because the witness paid off the debt. Her husband sowed some barley, but none germinated even when the field was resown, and Viney had previously mocked them saying they would harvest very little. She attributed all these misfortunes to his witchcraft.

(2) Didier Barthremin, du Ban St-Dié, 40

One Michel Pasticier had escaped from the prison at Taintrux, where he was imprisoned on suspicion of witchcraft; when officials came to Ban de Fraisse looking for him Viney told witness he had never been so frightened. Thought this was because he feared being arrested himself on grounds of general reputation. His father had told him that Viney was a thief and had taken things from his garden.

(3) Jean Bietrix, du Ban St-Dié, 60

Seven years earlier Viney returned from drinking at Plainfaing, then told witness that he would always lend him money, saying he had a devil within him who would always provide it.

(4) Claudon Jean Claude, de Plainfaing, 60

Four years earlier Viney had helped him get a lease, and he had promised him a heifer in milk as a reward. Since he did not ask for this he had done nothing, then his wife came asking for a bullock instead. The wife of the witness told her this was not what they had promised; after this they were unable to raise any bullocks in the household, but had to buy them in from elsewhere. Suspicions and long reputation.

(5) Mengel Voineguey, du Ban St-Dié, 56

Some three or four years earlier his cousin Jean Olry was selling him a field for 24 ecus, then when he told Viney he said he would not give 17 for it. Swore by the devil that he had no intention of bidding for it himself, then paid 27 ecus for it,

after which he told Mengel that he was angry, but could have the land for the price he had paid plus some oats; he refused, because he intended to use 'retraite lignaiaire', only to lose two fine bulls he proposed to sell and be unable to do this. He suspected his witchcraft, as he did over the deaths of two mares (which he had predicted). In another case two or three years earlier witness bought some land from a sister-in-law, although Viney had tried to get her to sell to him by giving her a skirt. After this he lost animals to the value of 300 ecus. Had heard him called wicked man and thief in public by Colas Viney le jeune, after which he took no action.

(6) Jean Colin Malguere de Plainfaing, 50

Seven or eight years earlier, as he came out of the tavern, Viney told him that he could always lend him money, and that the devil gave him this. Another man, now dead, had discussed this with the witness the next day, wondering what he could have meant.

At this point Jean Bietrix (witness 3) came back to say that he had forgotten that on the way back from a wedding he said to Viney 'qu'on parloit qu'il manioit un diabolique que communement l'on appelloit mariotte, ou diable familier', asking him to lend it to him for a short time. This Viney said he did not wish to do, adding that he would not know how to feed it.

(7) Demenge Pery de Plainfaing, 40

Story about how he promised he would find money to lend someone the next day, 'disant que d'ou diable dheut venir ledit argent il l'en accommoderoit, s'il plaisoit à Dieu'. [Was this the kind of statement others turned into an incriminating one?] General reputation.

(8) Mengeon Jean Bietrix du Ban St Dié, 50

Seven years earlier he had returned from drinking at Plainfaing 'et comme il crioit hault à son accoustumé ledit Jean Bietrix tesmoing troisième luy dit qu'il estoit toujours joyeux qui respondoit ouy et qu'il avoit toujours de l'argent quand il voulait, et avoit un diable qui luy en donnoit quand il en demandoit ou voulait avoir.'

(9) Jacquotte femme Colas Dany de Creny, residant au Ban St Dié, 24

Husband was hatmaker, and they were newly married; had borrowed 7 francs from Viney, on rather severe terms, to help them buy goods with which to trade, failing to pay interest for two weeks because they were away. They offered him a hat for one of his children to make up for this, only for him to send it back – then they could make no profit on their various enterprises. This included nearly dying in the snow while trying to move some carp to sell, and they blamed his witchcraft.

(10) Colas Viney le jeune, 40

Story of calling him thief at a wedding, and his taking no action.

(11) Jennon femme Colin Mongeon Colin de Plainfaing, 45

When they were neighbours she lost some woollen stockings, which she found in his house. Started to call him thief in public, so he threatened to have her imprisoned, but did nothing more afterwards. Then one Jean Musnier visited her on his account and gave her 3 francs, while telling her to keep quiet about the affair. After this they lost many animals, which they blamed on his witchcraft.

(12) Marie femme Didier Jean Meline, du Ban St Dié, 35

Her husband's father had used a garden as security for a loan of 8 ecus from Viney, and husband had to find 16 ecus to redeem it. Engaged himself again to Viney, and because as a new household they needed grain he agreed to sell him a house she had inherited. She refused to agree to this, then they had to pay him 12 francs compensation, for which some of her clothes were seized. After this they lost several goats, which they blamed on his witchcraft.

(13) Blaison Voineguy de Plainfaing, 45

Had borrowed 19 ecus from him, paying interest in wheat, then Viney refused to take some gold pieces he offered in payment, so that he could not pay off whole debt. Thought he had caused subsequent deaths of a cow and two bulls.

(14) Jeannon femme Jean Mandray de Plainfaing, 40

Story about events 15 months earlier, when their horse damaged his field and he told her daughter it would not go there again – later went missing, and he told the girl where it would be found. It was lying in a stream dead, having been bitten, and they believed this was his witchcraft.

(15) Michiel Jean Barthremin du Ban St Dié, 50

Viney had sold him some wheat, for which he could not pay immediately, so gave him some dried pears as security. When he went to reclaim them there was trouble about a coin, which he would not accept but did not return. Then witness was at market when he developed eye trouble, so that he had to abandon purchase of animal and return home – was still suffering intermittently, and blamed his witchcraft.

(16) Jeannon femme Mengel Blaison Jean Bietrix, 40+

Some nine years earlier, on way home from work, she and Viney saw Claudon Humbert working in his meadow, and he made envious or hostile remarks about Claudon. Then said that if he had a companion he would go 'à la fougie' on St John's Eve, to which she said she had heard some young men did this to protect themselves from being cut or injured when fighting. He answered that one needed to go to the meadow of Raves or on la Brexonard, leaving at dusk to get there at midnight. Then one should lie down after invoking the devil three times, take no notice of anything one heard, and leave a hat or other container in which the devil would place a branch or seed of bracken, which would bring one some money. When she asked if it was necessary to confess or communicate first he said not, but you remained a good man if you had crossed yourself.

She also claimed to have seen him behaving strangely in a garden, when on his own, moving abruptly and swearing to himself. Repeated story about Jean Bietrix and refusal to lend him a devil, on grounds that he had no hay with which to feed it.

19 December 1611; interrogation

Said he was Bastien Jean Viney, laboureur, aged about 50, and native of Ban St Dié. [This is not marked on modern map, but references to Plainfaing, Noirgoutte and Habeaurupt would indicate that it was probably the rather dispersed settlement along the valley of the upper Meurthe south of Plainfaing, where the valley is at about 550 metres altitude, the surrounding hills 800-900.] Father was also Bastien Jean Viney, mother Mengeatte was from Noirgoutte, both now dead.

Sister Mongeatte was married to lieutenant of *mairie* in Ban St Dié, brother Claudon lived at Noirgoutte. Had heard that Mongeatte was under arrest after denunciation as accomplice by Catherine femme Didier Barthremin, currently charged as witch.

Generally denied all accusations. Did agree to details of various loans, generally with some variation from the witness accounts of them. He claimed to have found the stockings he was accused of stealing on a dung-heap, and agreed he had made some payment on that account. The dead horse had been killed by wolves and dragged to the stream – he denied a suggestion that he had taken the form of a wolf.

21 December 1611; confrontations

There was no progress here; no objections or admissions made.

21 December 1611; procureur for Chapter asks for torture.

23 December 1611; Change de Nancy rules that he should be shown instruments, then if he does not confess may be given thumbscrews only.

29 December 1611: interrogation under torture

Would not confess until put to torture (it is not said what form was used). Then did so immediately, saying that he had been seduced by Napnel twenty years earlier when angry with his then wife Catherine. Later killed her with powder in soup because she gave wheat to their pigs. Napnel had said that he would heal her, but could not once she had taken the sacraments.

Said Sabbats had been at Mengin Fontaine, where they ate unsalted meat that was not very pleasant. Asked to name accomplices, identified the late Colas Colignon, Humbert Jeandel, Catherine femme Didier Barthelemy, Marion femme Colas le Rouyer, Hantzotte from Habeaurupt, her sister Mengeatte femme Andras Colas Pierre, Didier Claudel Didier of Noirgoutte, and the widow of Jean Menginat from Saurupt.

Said he had not confessed earlier because Napnel had been inside him – had finally left him like smoke from his mouth.

30 December 1611; interrogation

Now told a story of being seduced by Persin five years earlier, who told him that he was very angry with his wife Jacquotte, and said that if he would believe in him he would have enough wheat. Asked whether he was not a witch already, said that Persin had recognized his mark and told him that he had already been seduced by Napnel, also telling him about the offering of a black hen he made to Napnel to avoid committing more maléfices.

He now attributed his recent misdeeds to the influence of Persin. It was Persin and Cathelon femme Colas Viney le vieux who had killed the animals of Mengel Voineguy on his behalf. Added that he had talked of being given money, but both devils had never given him any that did not turn into leaves or dust. It was Persin, 'le plus contrefait' of his two masters, who had taken the form of a wolf to kill the horse.

Added to list of accomplices Mengel Patichier of Plainfaing, Cathelon femme Colas Viney le vieux, Louys Cambault and Claudatte des Doyen of Habeaurupt.

They had danced without musicians, but 'en rondeau comme font les filles', back to back. Also made hail.

Although he had been able to make the offering of a black hen to Napnel, Persin would not permit him any such relief. Explained that he had left the house in the form of a large rat to avoid being seen by his wife and children, then went to sabbat on foot.

30 December 1611; procureur asks for death sentence

31 December 1611; Change de Nancy approves this.