

# Chapter One

## Frontier men

Jehan de Thysac drew his épée and struck young Martin. Blood flowed, the lad fell dead, Jehan spurred his horse and without more ado fled to escape the rigours of justice!

Now we are reading what the scribe wrote in his flowing hand on the 11th September 1490. That was the day when Alix de Barizey, Jehan's wife, came to plead with the Duke for a remission. Duke René granted it. *Jehan de Tison had struck with his sword and killed the man called Martin, who was the son of Grand Cola of Vittel.*<sup>1</sup>

Jehan's reputation did not suffer from his homicide. He became a pillar of the establishment. In 1501 he bought the office of Prévôt of Darney, for three years. He paid Count Hennezel, receiver of Darney, the sum of thirty-one livres (pounds). It was customary to purchase offices of state. A few years after Jehan's purchase, in 1523, François I of France, set up the "*Bureau des Parties Casuelles*". This became the official organ for the purchase of offices of the French state. The king needed the money!

Most of these cases of remission record that the deed was an accident and utterly unintentional. That was most probably how this one was presented. But it is unusual that this remission grant does not tell details of the killing. Jehan de Thysac was in a position of some authority; he was châtelain of Monthureux-sur-Saône<sup>2</sup>.

This murder was not unique. The archives are full of Thysacs who killed. There are numerous records of pleadings by their relatives, humbly seeking remission and pardon for them. Were they hot-headed, or just acting in self-defence?

But it was a time of violence. It was a place of violence. All who lived in their kind of location and at this period had to be able to protect themselves and their possessions.

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<sup>1</sup> Arch. Dep. de Meurthe et Moselle, B 4, folio 35

<sup>2</sup> Arch. Dep. de Meurthe et Moselle, B4 folio 35

They were not submissive people and they carried the épée, a ready means of defence.



The borders of the duchy were badly defined. Little could be done about this except what the dukes did: give some tough persons a proprietary interest in the borderland property. Few wanted to live in such isolated places because of the roaming bands of mercenaries and the passing armies. All of these lived off the land and fed themselves from the few lonely inhabitants.

Lorraine, in the fifteenth century, was a border region, standing between France and what is now Germany. Over much of it lay dense broad-leaved forests. Most of the people lived in the towns. A few brave souls spent their days in the remote wilderness of the woodlands. Those who did so were there either because they were outlaws or because their craft needed the location.

Woodlands were then vital to glassmakers and the Duke of Lorraine needed such pioneers. He was looking for reliable subjects to repopulate these waste border areas.

What better solution could the Duke find to protect his territory than glassmakers? It was a craft he wanted anyway. His stately homes needed glass for windows and for the table. The Dukes of Lorraine also wanted to recover this vast no man's land from the abbeys. How was he to attract these people?

His father Raoul had been killed at the battle of Crécy in 1346. Duke Jean 1st took over the government from his mother, Marie de Blois, in 1360, at the age of sixteen. As duke he was the vassal of Charles IV th of the Holy Roman German empire. Before that in 1347 this same Charles had been crowned king of Bohemia. So Charles IV, Jean's, liege lord, knew Bohemia well; he would know it had a flourishing glass industry.<sup>3</sup>

When his vassal, Duke Jean, sought tough skilled people to populate his barren borderlands, in Lorraine, who better to advise him than Charles. They had a lot in common; they had both lost their fathers at the battle of Crécy.

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<sup>3</sup> Currently being researched by MOST

So in 1369 Duke Jean granted the Letters of privilege and liberties to the glassmakers whom he called his friends. In the very flowery language of the time he said in effect, "*Come, work in my Duchy and I'll make it worth your while!*" Unfortunately we have found no proof so far that they came from Bohemia<sup>4</sup> but the possibility remains high.

The charter, the Duke's grant, is a unique document in the history of European glass working, far exceeding the scope and rights granted by other similar licences. It was a period of several such authorizations. For example that given in 1302 by the Bailiff of Givors, that of 1338 given by the Dolphin of the Viennese, or the one of 1406 by the Count of Rieneck to the glassmakers of the Speesart. The Lorraine Charter was granted in 1369, reaffirmed in 1448 by the good King René, and solemnly confirmed by his son, Jean of Calabria, for the hundredth anniversary, in 1469.

We know the charter was granted in 1369 and we know that in 1392 there are records of Henezells, a related glassmaking family, being in Lorraine and acquiring the Lordship of Belrupt, amongst other Lordships, that year. Not a great deal is known about the glassworkers in Lorraine from 1369 until the mid 1400's but after that the documents appear in larger numbers.

In 1448 Guillaume du Thysac and his brother Jean owned the "Grosse Verrière". Later Jehan de Thysac, his son, was to follow in father's footsteps.

On the 5th March 1473 the Duke of Lorraine, René II, wrote a letter.

*"Given to Jean de Tixot (Jehan de Thysac), esquire, and Alix de Barisey, his wife, the remains of the big glasshouse of Darney for the establishment of a glasshouse in a place called the Glasshouse of Lige court which place for a long time was a ruin and much is in decay and desolation. After asking them to visit it, they looked and thought they would be content to take it. They would improve it with a house and barns in order there to live.*

*Permission of access agreed against the sum of ten small guilders per year<sup>5</sup>."*

It sounds uninviting and derelict but if you made your living from glass perhaps it was perfect?

So Jehan and Alix took on this borderland site and built a fine strong house, fit for a family. It would act as a place of refuge should trouble come. Life in their remote border territory was full of risk. It was necessary to build well and securely. Both Jehan and Alix came from glassmaking families so they were familiar with such a situation.

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<sup>4</sup> But see "Le Dictionnaire de la Noblesse de France, &c., par M. de la Chenaye-Desbois," 2<sup>nd</sup> édition, 1774, VIII., p. 25, et seq.

<sup>5</sup> Arch. Dep. de Meurthe et Moselle, B3 folio 162-164 and B 754 No. 23

## Strong House of Jehan

The buildings that Jehan built in 1473 included a tower, or keep, and a glassworks. We know what the tower looked like because a fair part of it remains. It is a three-floored building, about forty feet square, with a sloping roof. The stone walls are about three feet, thick. This was the so-called strong house (*maison forte*).

Views from either side of the strong house of Jehan built 1473.



Defensive functions were concentrated almost exclusively on the keep or *Donjon*. In earlier times the three storey keeps were built of wood but later, particularly in the south, they were of stone. This Thysac building seems rather large, and may have been the residential building. Generally however such structures were not lived in. The residents normally lived in a hall where the lord publicly exercised seigniorial justice. The keep was military or defensive and was for the storage of valuables, (including the wives!).

Jehan de Thysac built his "strong house" near the glassworks for protection because of the permanent state of insecurity caused by the wars that affected Lorraine and its neighbours in the fifteenth century. A man could only count on himself so he constructed his house solidly, with windows shelved in and set with stout bars made of iron. This, his strong house, became the ultimate shelter until the arrival of powerful

friends. Against any onslaught from well-commanded troops however, it provided a paltry and vulnerable defence. It was effective only when the threat came from one of the gangs of looters or brigands roaming on this southern frontier of Lorraine where borders were so badly defined.

He chose this kind of site for access to woodlands; as glassmakers, the Thysacs had to suffer risk and hardship for their craft. Although there are few remains, except underground, we know what the glassworks looked like.

*"What we know of Lorrainers' glasshouses, suggest it was about forty feet square, of timber with a shingle roof, the ridge some thirty-six feet high. The square furnace was of sandstone, found in the area, and six feet or more square. Such are the details of a Lorraine house built in southern Ireland for Davy the Frenchman, soon after 1600."*<sup>6</sup>

Jehan's Lichecourt grant was doomed to ill fortune. If it were not trouble from brigands in the rough country, then trouble came in other forms. With a timber building, for protecting the furnace and the workers from the weather, it is not surprising that fire broke out.

On the penultimate day of February 1487, Duke René II wrote another letter about Lichecourt:

*"Be given that since one month or about their house at this glassworks, with all their possessions, furniture and title documents, which support the deeds for the above, by chance of fire were burned. So that these supplicants herein could recover their aforesaid house and dwelling thus burned, they are granted, by special grace, acquittal and relief from the aforesaid royalty of five small florins for the next six years"*<sup>7</sup>. In those days they were resilient. Jehan recovered from the fire and was soon trying his luck in other fields. On the 20 February 1489, undaunted, Jehan accepted the Lordship of Monthureux on the river Saône. He was appointed "*Lord of Monthureux sur Saône*". He served as a go-between to Monsignor Bressy, (Lord of Montureux and of Nonville), and Philippe Vitry, (prior of Relanges<sup>8</sup>).

Today, four kilometres north-west of Darney and one kilometre south-west of Relanges, rolling cultivated lands meet a beech forest. Turning left, from the D164 at Relanges, we see a magnificent vista. Just a few metres away is the flowing stream of Belmont. There, rising up, centre stage, is the fairy tale Château of Lichecourt. Even now it is an imposing estate. Château Lichecourt as we see it today was mostly the work of generations who came after Jehan.

In November 1994, the then owner of Lichecourt was digging holes near the chapel at the back of the Château Lichecourt and came across a glass oven. It is made of the

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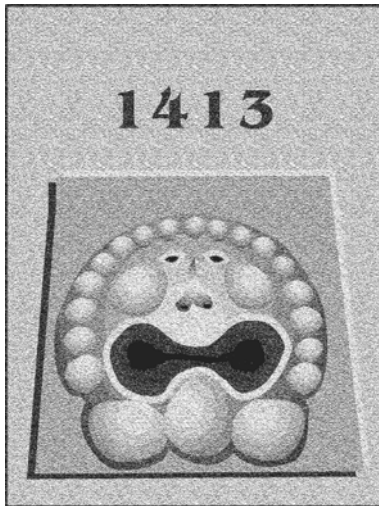
<sup>6</sup> D.R.Guttery, From Broad-Glass to Cut Crystal. Page 7.

<sup>7</sup> Arch. Dep. de Meurthe et Moselle, B3, folio 162-3; B754, number 23

<sup>8</sup> Rose-Villequey, Page 47 and number 115

local stone, rather like millstone grit. It is coated with a clear pale green glass about 1/16" thick. From the known records of glassmaking at the Château, the age of that oven must be more than four hundred years.

The estate of Lichecourt has a long history. It was mentioned in 1050 under the name of "*Ligisdi curtis*" in a bull sent by the Pope Leo IX to the Abbey of Bleurville. Its age comes to our attention because the 1473 letters of grant for the Glasshouse mention that there had been a glasshouse and an estate previously in this place "*of a long time ruins*".



Philippe of Lenoncourt made a confirmation of the lease of the Glasshouse of Lichecourt, in favour of Jean de Tixot, on the 29 February 1488.

It recalled the letters of grant addressed to Bar 5th March 1473.<sup>9</sup> These letters told us that Jehan Tixot dwelt before "*in the big glasshouse of Darney*" and enjoyed some "*concessions made to him by Jean of Calabre*".

"*Concessions by Jean of Calabre*" refers to the privileges granted in The Charter of Glassworkers of 1448. This mentioned that the "glasshouse of Affans" (Affans, alias the Glasshouse of Thiétry) is kept by Guillaume Tisoir and Jehan his brother.

References in the grant to waste and desolation were the result of the turmoil and disruption caused by the wars and pestilence in the area. The description fits well with the history of the region during this period. Knowing full well the condition the ruins were in, Duke René II did not want to be accused of leasing a pig in a poke to his vassal. He told them to "*Go and look at it and don't blame me.*"

The remains of the big glasshouse of Darney, offered by René had been there at least 60 years. Proof of this is this stone built into the wall above the door of the present château. It is what remains of a meutrière or defensive device for shooting arrows or pouring oil on unwanted callers. It carries the date of 1413.

They went and saw it and must have liked it with the added attraction of a forest close to the estate which was also owned by the Duke of Lorraine and called the Bois le

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<sup>9</sup> M. M. Reg. L.P. - B 3 folio 162 and 163

Compte. Some months after sealing this agreement, René II signed an alliance with the Duke of Burgundy. This agreed that Charles le Téméraire, (usually translated as the Bold), had free passage of his troops into Lorraine. Duke René also handed over five positions of safety among which were Dompierre and Darney. One can hardly imagine Duke René doing much to resist any request from Charles to cross Lorraine. At the time René had no strong allies.

### **Duke of Burgundy and the French King**

Lorraine was in the middle of a power contest between the Hapsburg, Charles the Bold, and the Bourbon, Louis XI of France. In 1474 Louis was stirring things up for his main adversary. He managed to broker a reunion between the Swiss and their ancient enemy, Sigismund of Austria-Tyrol. René II of Lorraine was in alliance with these two. Louis felt that such an alliance would make it more difficult for Charles the Bold to nibble off bits of Lorraine.

At last René had some support to face Charles the Bold. Now that the Swiss had got Sigismund off their backs, they were free to concentrate on their western border. They invaded Franche-Comté. This certainly got the attention of Charles. However, he was still nursing the ambition of joining his Burgundy and Franche-Comté with his lands in the Netherlands. He responded to the Swiss attack by seizing Lorraine, which separated them. René was in luck, for the Swiss were also causing Charles trouble in Savoy. The campaign, fought by Charles with his ally of Savoy, formed an epoch in military history. By this time the use of the trooper in plate-armour as a real cavalryman to charge on horseback had again come into vogue. Charles, was well supplied with such troopers but Swiss foot soldiers now fought in deep columns of pikemen, invulnerable to such a cavalry charge. Their weight, as they advanced, could bear down horses and men. This was the first important break from the customs, which had dominated medieval warfare. The lesson at Nancy and others was immediate, important and undeniable. Infantry could win victory in battle over cavalry.

The tradition of the knights had been to form themselves into batailles - that is, compact masses formed of several ranks, which charged with lance in rest. These techniques had succeeded, in earlier times, against badly armed or undisciplined infantry. When the armies of French gendarmes used these tactics against disciplined infantry, formed up in quantity, the result was a century and a half of famous defeats. They were defeated at Crécy, Poitiers, and Agincourt, and in battles against knights on foot supported by English archers.

Now René II re-occupied and recovered his beloved Lorraine. Charles viewed René's action with contempt. With this level of hostilities under way, Charles just marched across Lorraine en route to the Netherlands. He made a fatal mistake. He stopped at Nancy and besieged it. At last he met his match. René II, fighting for his dukedom with troops who were now mostly Swiss, overthrew Charles, the Bold. Charles was

slain on 5th January 1477. Local legend says that wolves ate half his body and left the rest in a frozen pond.

With the fortunes of war swinging backwards and forward over Lorraine's southern border it is small wonder that the backwash caught up Lichecourt. As troops marched towards Nancy they passed close by the Château.

From the first years, this Lichecourt establishment experienced the worst difficulties. In 1476, the Duke of Lorraine referred to damage incurred by people of war when he agreed to a reduction of royalty to make the glassworks viable.

23 June 1476.

Letters of the duke of Lorraine René II in favour of Jehan de Tixot and Alix de Barisey:

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*Since our letters (of 1473) of request about this, (the glasshouse), they erected and built the said glassworks. Although built they operated it for no time and then the wars came, through which they lost many of their possessions. It was impossible for them to maintain the said glassworks at the charge of the aforesaid ten florins per year. It is for them impossible to continue to pay for the future like this, they say, given the big investment and expenses that they paid and supported. They knew that to maintain the said glasshouse they would be in ruin, with big losses. They sustained damages and costs because of some people of weapons and of the war. Those people were for three years in the country of Burgundy, which is next adjacent and on the frontiers.*

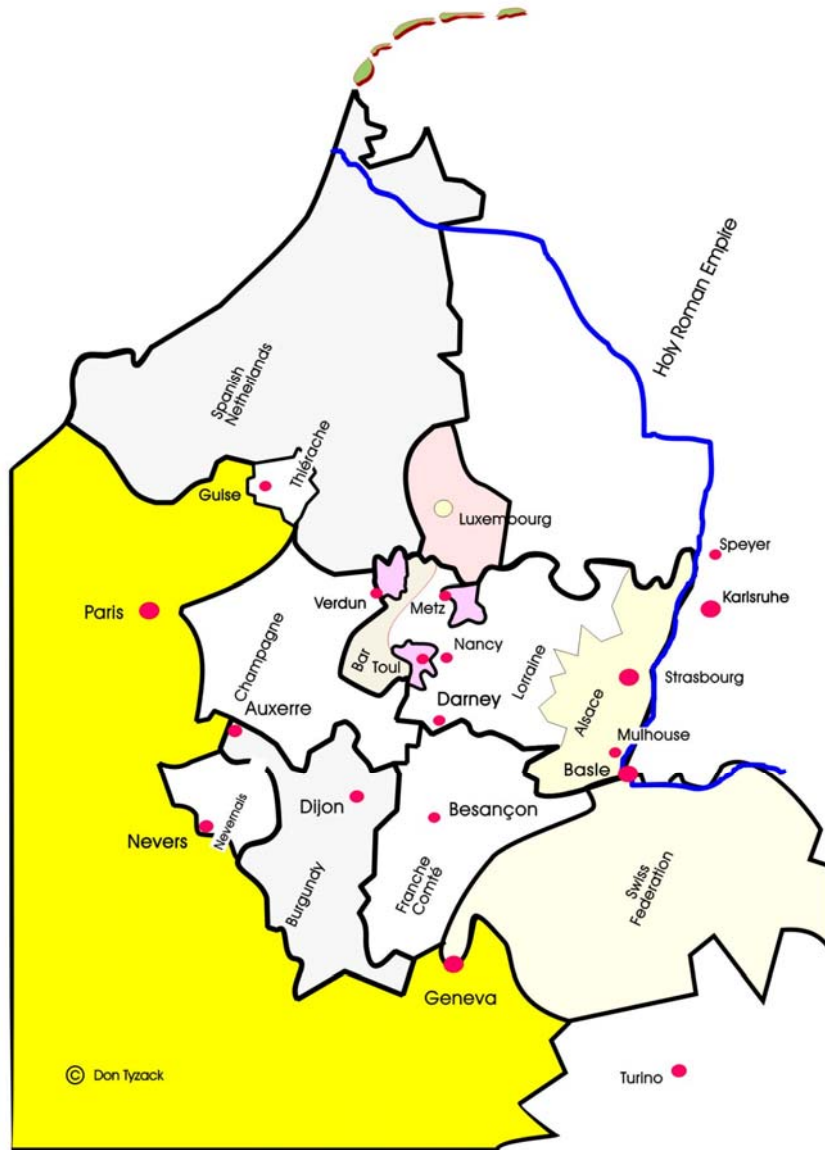
***"They obtain reduction of the aforesaid royalty of one half forever<sup>10</sup>."***

It is a surprising fact that René was so generous and had time to settle relatively minor domestic problems amounting to a mere five florins per year. At the time René was engaged in the thick of the fighting.

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<sup>10</sup> Arch. Dep. de Meurthe et Moselle, B3 folio 162-3; B754, number 23





When Charles, the Bold, was killed, Louis XI saw his opportunity in the region and set about agitating and stirring up trouble. After much intrigue by Louis, Charles's daughter Mary married Maximilian, the German Emperor. Presumably she tried to counter Louis's forays into the region. The resulting calm enabled some recovery to begin and landlords generally were anxious to restore production on their estates. Many made favourable agreements with their peasants and vassals granting long and even perpetual leases for small payments. Just as things seemed better, Louis seized the duchy of Bar in 1482, from poor old René II of Lorraine. Jehan de Tisac, a dweller in borderland regions, had property in the duchy of Bar. It must have been just over the border. Again our small region was in political upset but fortunately it was not to last long this time. Louis died on 30th August 1483 and Charles VIII, his young son, evacuated Bar and left them alone.

On 2nd April 1484, Jehan made a return for Lichecourt where he dwelt, but he also noted the possessions in Bar. This was most probably what later in 1524 became the Glassworks of Boyvin. Letters of grant for Boyvin, authorised by Duke Anthony, in 1524, say that the new glassworks would be held, "*in enlargement of the business of the Glassworks Ligecourt*". Indeed Glassworks Boyvin is just a stone's throw from Lichecourt <sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> M. M. Reg. L.P. B 3 folio 162 & 163