

## Chapter Two

### World of the glassmakers

Fifteenth century records show that the Duke of Lorraine set out to favour glassmakers who settled in his dukedom. He encouraged them to come to the Darney region and to bring the art and secrets of their craft. Glassmaking was ideally suited to the area because all of its needs were present. Sand, water, trees, ferns for flux, clay for pots and stone suitable for constructing the ovens, all occurred in plenty. Rulers of Lorraine wanted the revenues that came from the glass, but they also had other motives.

Glassmakers needed unpopulated forested areas so that they could remove trees, or at least the branches of trees without upsetting the locals. We find them operating in desolate border regions where few people lived. This suited the Dukes because they had a continuous problem with their mighty neighbours who tried to steal or at least, encroach on their territory. No doubt the Dukes thought, who better to preserve my interests than a fief holder who has sworn allegiance!

Each benefited from the deal. Dukes were supposed to protect their subjects from foreign attackers while the fief holder looked after the border. In practice the fief holder had to defend himself as best he could. Usually he did this by building a big strong house in the style of a mini fortress. Few other persons would have wished to live in such a remote place cut off from village and town life.

In fifteenth century Darney in Lorraine, we find the first distinct records of the glassmaking families: Thysacs, Henezels, Bisval, Thiétry, Houx and several others. Earlier references with similar spellings are found.

### Fiefholding

The lord of the manor kept tabs on his fief holders and today those records form an excellent window on the past. Each fief holder made a return to his Lord on such occasions as when the fief holder died or when his lord died. Then the succession needed a reaffirmation of the homage. Jehan Thysac and Guillin Thiétry made a return in 1431 for the fief of Grignoncourt. As usual in such a return, they reported the extent of their holding, the buildings and other property and the persons dwelling there. They made their return to the Duke of

Burgundy. Grignoncourt was then just within the border of his territory of Franche-Comté.

They held their land as a fief because that was the way most land in northern France was held. The system had developed in the region from before the ninth century. Originally a band of warrior vassals, in the service of their lord, had lived in their lord's house. There they were provided with all the needs of life and with weapons and gear, in exchange for acting as a defence force, should the need arise.

After the ninth century, each of them would have been settled on an estate, but the lord retained the legal title to the land. The vassal held the estate as a fief, collected all the produce and governed all its inhabitants, in the same way as a landed proprietor. During the tenth century a custom grew up by which, on the death of his father, the son of a vassal had the right to take his father's place and could use the land held by his father. For this, he became a vassal of the lord. Feudalism had come. Fief holders were linked to the soil and subject to the will of the great landowner.

The land itself never became hereditary, for it was granted as a fief. What was handed down was the right of the vassal's heir to have the same fief deal with his father's lord. The personal bond between vassal and lord stayed. Homage due to the lord always recalled this bond between the two persons, which only ceased on the death of either of them. On the death of the vassal his heir was bound to do homage to his lord before assuming the fief. On the death of the lord the vassal was bound to renew his homage to the lord's heir.

The act of homage, which recalled his status as a vassal, preceded the act of investiture. The knight-aspirant knelt and placed both his hands between those of his future lord. Besides this basic sign of self-interest foregone, (which the lord demanded from the most humble dependant), there was also the kiss of peace. This was a positive gesture of mutual alliance exchanged between lord and man standing side by side as equals. This was the ceremony of homage, a ritual that bound the two men to mutual love, counsel and aid. Then followed an oath, by which the young knight swore allegiance, or fealty, to the older, (his lord). He promised that he would be obedient and loyal. The act of investiture came next. It was a symbolic ceremony. In it the lord gave the fief to the vassal by handing him an object representing it.

In time a fief was regarded more as possession of an estate than as a reward for service. It had come to seem natural to have several fiefs, obtained by inheritance, marriage, or purchase. When a man held different fiefs owned by different lords, the same man found himself the vassal of several lords. This could result in quite a mess. When these lords warred among themselves, the man was duty bound to fight on both sides at once. It gave our man a big problem. Thus as he took the oath to fight against his lord's enemies the vassal would make an exception for some other lord. Now, feudalism having become

hereditary, it was reduced to an empty ceremony, retaining only the public display of the vassal's submission.

### **Glasshouse Thiétry**

A few years after the 1431 return, in 1448, we find a further record that tells that Jehan Tyson and his brother Guillaume, held the Glasshouse Thiétry. It was also called Affans, and this is thought to be an awkward spelling of "Enfants" or children. The name probably refers to the fact that the younger generation of the glassmakers held this glasshouse. It suggests that earlier generations held other glasshouses in the region. So here we have evidence, which suggests that glass working was practised around Darney, even before 1400. Now, Thysac children held Glasshouse Thiétry. They held it with Nicolas Thiétry's sons, Colin and Henry. They were notable members of the glass working community and quite active because in the same year they were also referred to in the opening paragraph of the great Charter of the Glassworkers, mentioned later: " ..... *Jacob Guillaume Tyson and Jehan his brother who are glassworkers of Jehan Brisonale.*"

Around 1443 it seems likely that Guillaume had a son, whom he named after his brother, Jehan Thisac. This Jehan subsequently married a lady called Alix Barisey. (See pedigree page\_228)

Many books say that these families moved into the region from Bohemia. So far no actual record has been found to support this. One thing is sure: glassworkers in Bohemia were not noble. In the period before the beginning of the fifteenth century Bohemians appealed to some French glassworkers, who could be from Lorraine, for the stained glass window of the Cathedral Saint Guy of Prague! Recently the MOST branch of the Institute of Archaeology in Czechoslovakia has made a systematic investigation in Northern Bohemia. Their important discoveries have been sites from the second half of the thirteenth century at Jilmová I, II and III, in the district of Chomutov. These constitute the earliest evidence of glassmaking there. Altogether about twenty-nine workshops have been identified from written sources and about fifteen by archaeology but so far no family connections have been found to Lorraine.

The forebears were Germanic. They spoke a language from the North of Lorraine and the Alsace up to and beyond the Mountains Métalliques. Most of them seem to originate near Darney. There was and still is, a hamlet called Hennezel there. Hennezels either originated from that town or gave their name to it. There is also a tiny hamlet called Thiétry. Again that family either took or gave its name. The Tyzacks have been said to come from a small town called Thisé near Besançon, in Franche-Comté. Is there still a discovery waiting to be made?

Darney, the historical centre of the Lorraine glassworks, is about forty-two miles south of Nancy. (map page\_70) The hamlet of Grignoncourt is eleven miles

south of Darney. Thiétry is a tiny hamlet just below today's D164, and about three miles south-east of Darney, and today you could easily drive through and not even notice it. After 1766, Lorraine formally became a region of France.

## **War and Plague**

The period leading up to our first records was one of considerable disruption. Thirteen hundred and forty-eight is undoubtedly the most important date of the entire fourteenth century. Then the Black Death reached France. Afterwards nothing was ever the same again. Pestilence, on this scale, marked the end of the medieval period.

Fleas of rats spread Bubonic plague. Its twin scourge, Pneumonic plague spread by saliva. Both struck in 1348. There was an appalling death toll particularly in densely populated areas, in monasteries, armies and in most towns. The size of the population, which had already been declining, plummeted everywhere. Less accessible areas, such as our area of interest at Darney, were probably not so badly affected. This is no more than a guess because the written evidence is scanty and difficult to interpret. After its first brutal coming in 1348 it never completely went. Several outbreaks recurred from time to time, notably in 1353-5, 1357, 1377-8 and 1385-6. A temporary respite was followed by a new attack in 1403 and 1419. As an example, population levels in Normandy are believed to have fallen to only 43% of what they were at the start of the century. Confusion reigned.

Of course at the time, death from normal causes, was no stranger to these people but plague was different. Plague struck at random. Where previously there had been a surplus of labour, now there was a shortage. Wages rose. There was an immediate gain in the standard of living. Capital resources such as tillable land and buildings were now spread over half the number of people. Taxation was put on with relative ease.

This time was "The Hundred Years War". In the summer of 1340 there were nearly 50,000 knights and squires, in the field. The king paid them in gold coinage, collecting every possible sou from his subjects. As warriors, these nobles still exercised lordship but now the crown was their chief means of support. When not actually engaged in an offensive, or even during a truce, they ravaged the land. On the fringes of public war, it was inevitable that brigandage should flourish.

Attack and defence were essentially local operations, but the King of France himself, was involved in detailed plans for the defence of the whole country. In 1358 and again in 1367 he gave orders for an inventory of all fortified places to be drawn up, so that they might be made more defensible. This period saw the castle building that has left such an imprint of the French landscape of today. New fortified towers appeared on parish churches, bridges and monasteries,

also on manor houses. They were no longer mere symbols of judicial authority, but had a prime military function.

With each of these changes, towns became more important. Walled and heavily defended, towns were very important for military commanders. They were also the principal place of refuge for those whose lives were devastated by the movements of armies. Plague frequently depopulated many towns. A new influx of peasants, trying to escape from the excesses of the soldiery, would then repopulate them. So the peasant had two choices, he could be ravaged by warriors on the loose in the countryside, or be ravaged by pestilence in the towns.

It is not clear how badly Darney and the surrounding region were affected by plague. Being such a remote and densely wooded area, it may have escaped some outbreaks. There are however records of some outbreaks that it did not escape. The dense woods may also have offered some protection from armies passing through. Darney was however located on the "Spanish Road" used by the Hapsburg monarchs travelling from Franche-Comté to the Spanish Netherlands, and later from Savoy to the Netherlands.

### **Glassworkers' privileges**

So to attract glassworkers to this Lorraine it was necessary to give some privileges. An early document called the Charter of the Glassworkers 1 is in existence dating from 1481. According to Tom of Relanges, the scribe who wrote it, there was an earlier version from 1448. He says he copied the 1448 version, word for word. As he writes he tells us that the original copy of the Charter burned and was destroyed. "*In spite of great diligence,*" he says, "*the glassworkers were unable to recover it.*" The Charter burned although in the safety of the Keep of Darney, by a "*fire of chance*".

*"They ask for this new copy to be re-authorized,"* writes Tom. *"They will be careful in future to find a safe place to keep the new copy."*

The Charter includes our Jacob Guillaume **Tyson**. It also avows the status of glassworkers as of noble rank and it says their status is equal to the status of a knight. Furthermore it says that for the payment of two "fat Florins" a year, free wood, bracken and herbs for glassmaking are all granted. Also granted within that payment are beasts of the forests, twenty-five pigs each and as many fish as they could catch.

Reading this charter reveals many names of Lorraine glassworkers. Several of them later came to England.

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1 Raymond George "Lichecourt". 1993.

Below are the translated essential excerpts of the text of the Charter of the Glassworkers:

*" Jehan, is the son of the King of Hiérusalem, Duke of Calabre and of Lorraine. In the year one thousand four hundred and forty-eight, we the bailiff, grant and authorise the following for our good friends Pierre Brysonale, son of Bisovalle, Henry his son, Nycholas son of Mengin, **Jacob Guillaume Tyson and Jehan his brother**, who are glassworkers of Jehan Brisonale. "*

Here is what was authorised: -

*"These said masters and workmen of glass are, by virtue of their occupation, and talents, privileged. As a result they are granted several nice rights, liberties, freedoms and prerogatives, which they and their predecessors have enjoyed and used in all times past. They hold freedoms, such as knights are judged to have, and as noble people have in the Duchy of Lorraine. There shall be no hindrance to their enjoyment of these freedoms.*

*Let all people of the council and officers of the duke, in his said duchy of Lorraine know the position. Know well the condition of the glassworkers and of their rights and liberties, which the workmen here are accustomed to from all times past. Keep and maintain all liberties and freedoms as they are, and as these people are, from an extraction of noble lineage. After a great discussion with several people of the council of the duke, it is wished that the aforesaid workmen of glass, while they live as glassworkers, maintain their ancient rights, and freedoms, together with their heirs and successors, while they are evidently and necessarily, working as glassworkers. And each one of these, is granted whilst a glassworker, quit and exempt from any royalty, any aids, subsidies or any military service, any succouring of troops of horse, and of all debits, exactions and ordinary donations, which can be imposed as taxes in the duchy of Lorraine, without which aforesaid workmen glassworkers would be taxed, asked for contributions and constrained in some manner.*

*This is what the said workmen will make, in the aforesaid glasshouse, such glass and of such a colour that will please them. And they may make and sell them through all the country of the duke, where it seems favourable to them. Without which they or theirs who store or carry aforesaid glass, are kept because of the aforesaid glass, to pay no heavy tax on certain commodities nor ordinary tributes, but will carry them, store and make and sell everything honestly, without any obstacle as herein granted.*

These are the gist of the Charter clauses: -

### **Item**

*These glassworkers can take and keep the wood from the forests of the duke, in the season of the brushwood. They can take it from the region around of*

*their glasshouses. They can also take up to one hundred pigs, which is twenty-five pigs a piece for each workman, for the provision of their households and their own use.*

{There were strict stipulations about how they could cut the wood for their fuel. "For avoidance of damage when cutting trees, one will make aforesaid trees into bushes, use more of the branches than the trunk, the small branches which won't be used can be bundled as fagotage. Fine of two francs of penalty and charges for use made to the right father of the house ." (Count de Jacques Andernach gatherer and controller of Dompaigne.) The object was to leave the tree alive, as we would today by pollarding or coppicing them. In that way the forest would, after a few years, regenerate and the same trees could then be again harvested. }<sup>1</sup>

*Glassworkers can have the pickings of the wood. They can take away bracken and any other fit and appropriate herbs for the work of their masters. Subsequently for payment for all these things, each of these workmen will pay as follows, each year, to His Highness: - Into the hands of his General Receiver of Lorraine, each glasshouse will pay, two florins thick.*

Presumably the "thick" means that the coins must not be clipped to retain bits of gold! The Receiver was the local Tax man.

*Thus of the said rights liberties, freedoms, privileges, facilities, and all the things above described, suffer and allow these **Guillaume Tyson, Jehan his brother**, Colin son, Nycholas and Henry, his brother, who hold of four glasshouses, Mengin Jacob, Henry his son, who holds another, Jehan Hennezel, who hold the other, and Claude, son of Pierre Bysenale, and Chelizot, his stand in, who employ the four glassware workers of these glasshouses and their heirs and successor workmen.*

They are then required to preserve these rights for their heirs!

Item

*Also the builders and workmen when they please, can hunt in the woods and forests of His Highness, around the said glasshouses, without further payment, for big black beasts and red, with hunting dogs in tackle. Any of these things, privileges, liberties, freedoms, and facilities described above and granted to the workmen of the said glasshouses, they are required to keep and to look after and guard for their heirs and successor glassworkers and workmen.*

Item

*These workmen can also net and use tackle to catch fish in the rivers and streams next to these glasshouses as they have in the past times.*

*#Signed by Hacquerel."*

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<sup>1</sup> (M. M. B 5626)