

B 4077 no 1 Witch 069, Barbe femme Jean Mallebarbe

8 July 1596; note from Didier Clement prévôt of Charmes that he has arrested Barbe wife of Jean Mallebarbe de Charmes. Informations préparatoires had already been taken against her, and she had been called witch in public by Laurent Rouelle taillandier of Charmes without taking any action. Late prévôt had intended to arrest her on account of this and common fame, but she had fled; had just returned after absence of 4 to 5 months, and been arrested.

8 July 1596; interrogation

Said she was about 60, native of Langley, daughter of Claudon Chappelleur and his wife Margueritte. Had been married for 27 or 28 years. She had usually worked 'à journée'; over last years she and her husband had sold small pieces of land to support themselves, as well as receiving charity from 'gens de bien', so that they now owned only a small house in Charmes and a garden on whose fruits they partly lived.

Said she had fled because of threats from the sergeant Jean Coureur that she would be put in prison, because of dispute with Laurent Rouelle, because she feared 'la furie du defunct prevost', and because a sister living at Portessenix had advised her to do so. Would not have returned if she had thought she would be arrested. Had not wanted to take Ruelle to court because she was too poor. Had lived at village of Pont near Bonsay, with Claudon la vefue, working when she could, but mostly begging.

Asked if she had ever served the Devil, confessed that she had, although not very well. Said she had been seduced by maitre Percy about 6 months before, when angry with her husband, by whom she had been 'tancée'. Promised to give her 'de l'argent en abondance'.

10 July 1596; interrogation

Said that previous day she had sought to withdraw earlier confessions, but now reiterated them. Had tried to hang herself in her prison previous night, because she was afraid she would be tortured; asked to be put to death, but not to feel the fire, as she had harmed no-one. Devil had given her two sacks of powder, but she had thrown it in river.

Threatened with torture if she did not make fuller confession, put date of seduction back to 12 years, and admitted killing two cows, belonging to men against whom she had grievances. Had been to sabbats, and had been beaten by Devil because she did not want to carry out his will; in particular, in view of dearth and hardships of poor, had not been willing to spoil crops. Had seen some 700 witches at chief sabbat near Remiremont, but much smaller groups near Charmes. Had been masked, and those in smaller group were all people from the villages whom she did not know.

When begging in village of Vallois, had been refused at three houses running, and avenged herself by killing a horse at each.

13 July 1596; PG des Vosges orders further questioning to establish details of crimes she has admitted.

13 July 1596; interrogation

Repeated earlier admissions, and said they had not been made from fear of torture. Said she had been at sabbat near Remirement some 5 or 6 weeks before, when there had been a dispute about whether to cause a hailstorm. One named Claudon Pallet of Rejouville, recently burned at Darney, had been there, and she accused him of wanting to damage crops so that he could sell his own grains, of which he had a good quantity, better - he gave her a kick in buttocks, which carried her an incredible distance.

Pressed to confess malefices against persons, agreed that she had killed her neighbour Claudon wife of Mathieu Basle, with whom she had quarrelled, and who had called her 'vieille bigotte et genoche'. Threw powder down her neck, and she died after illness which lasted 18 months. Had not wished to cure her, and had done nothing to help her because she had not been asked.

Said she had seen bourgeois women at sabbat, with silver belts; they arrived on sows or calves, but did not eat with others, and she could not recognise them because they were masked. Pressed about accomplices, she finally said that she had seen Claudon widow of Bastien Thiery, called la Romaine.

After this interrogation, a check was made about an ox she had confessed to killing; widow of owner agreed that it had died strangely, and that they had suspected witchcraft - although apparently not knowing by whom.

Mathieu Basle, asked to testify about wife's death, sought deferment until 20th, since he was getting in hay at Germonville, where he had moved because of his fear of Barbe.

18 July 1596; asked to repeat her accusation against 'la Romaine', but warned against false accusations, she now said she had not seen her at sabbat, and had accused her in order to speed up procedure.

19 July 1596; PG des Vosges asks for question extraordinaire, since there are reasons to think she has not confessed full extent of crimes.

21 July 1596; Change de Nancy approves

24 July 1596; interrogation under torture

Before torture embarked on a fresh series of confessions to acts of malefice, all in reaction to some offence done her. Had given some lingering illnesses, so that their limbs were twisted and they remained crippled; others she had killed. Had been changed into form of a cat to try and strangle the wife of Claude Hullon, whose husband had accused her of causing a fog on the lake. Several of her malefices had been because she had been refused charity, although she had not followed advice from her master that she should avenge herself on receveur of Charmes, who had called her an old witch, because he did often give her alms.

Said she had killed an ox and two cows belonging to Laurent Rouille, who had called her old witch and accused her of stealing wood from his barn; had wanted to kill him, but a wind had come in her ear telling her she had no power over him.

When she had said she could tell no more, she was put on the rack and drawn a little; promptly asked to be released, and she would tell all. Added new range of crimes.

Altogether confessed to killing three men and two women after refusals of alms, also four children of those who refused her. Had crippled two other men after quarrels for other reasons, killed a man who caught her stealing wood and threatened her with punishment, killed a man 15 years earlier for no motive other than master's orders (was now claiming to have been witch for 20 years), and made baker's child sick after refusal of bread on credit.

Renewed accusation against 'la Romaine', adding two others; 'la Crissatte' of Charmes, and Catherine Rossel of Floremont

Same day some of supposed victims were heard. Claudon Marlier said she had given him illness which had now lasted 3 years after quarrel when he cut off overhanging branch of apple tree; would have liked to make formal accusation, but for his poverty. Claude Hullon's wife confirmed story of cat which had leaped at her throat. Others also confirmed suspicions. Nicolas Meschy, now maire of Charmes, said she had been suspected not only of causing death of his father (which she had confessed), but of that of his wife; had been sent for during illness to bring some cure, but had refused, so that victim died with last words being that 'la Mallebarbe' was the cause of her death.

PG des Vosges asks for death sentence 2 August, Change de Nancy agrees on 3 August; carried out 6 August.