

Witch 072, Jean de Socourt 1

B 4093 (1) Witch 072, Jean de Socourt

29 July 1607; PG des Vosges notes that a formal accuser has appeared against Jean de Socourt, who has a bad reputation, and orders his arrest.

27 July 1607; formal statement by Nicolas Fouesse porter of Moselle gate at Charmes, that he renders himself partie formelle against Jean Anthoine dit Jean de Socourt. Said that 3 years earlier, carrying out his duty, he had asked Socourt's sons to put down fruits they were bringing in. They had been angry, and they and their father had made to attack him, but he deterred them with a hatchet he was holding. Jean threatened that he would repent. Since then had been coming to lodge and demanding wood and other things, which witness and his wife had been frightened to refuse him. Finally, in view of his general reputation, had decided to ask for proceedings against him.

28 July 1607; prévôt of Charmes refers matter to PG des Vosges

4 August 1607; informations préparatoires (Fouesse had been allowed to go out under oath to organise his witnesses).

(1) Nicolas Thieriat drappier de Charmes, c. 49

Told how around last Christmas Jean had tried to obtain lease of room in house of which he was principal tenant; he had prevented this because of his reputation, and fact that he had once been accused by la Triffatte. Soon afterwards accused went and sat next to his son Robert on a bench; when latter got home fell strangely ill, losing use of one side. Tried to find remedy (not knowing about accused having approached him) without success. Soon after his wife saw Jean's wife lying on ground, and out of pity gave her a piece of tart. That night heard someone go into son's room, but thought it was one of their servants; next day he was cured, and told them that Jean had come into his room and rubbed him with a black substance, telling him he would be better at dawn. Witness had been so angry whe he heard story that he wanted to become partie formelle, but some of his friends dissuaded him.

(2) Robert fils de Nicolas Thierat, c. 14

Confirmed story as told by father; Jean had given him something to eat and used ointment. Next day pain had gone, but he had remained weak for long time.

(3) Alison femme à Nicolas Thierat, c. 45

Confirmed earlier depositions.

(4) Claude Didelot charbonnier de Porsieux, c. 50

Some 2 years before his son Mengien, aged about 25, had come to serve Adam Briel marchal at Charmes for 2 months. During this time quarrelled with Jean's sons and called them 'fils de coussart'. When back with father he took a sack of charcoal to sell in Charmes; fell ill on return and died after 15 days. During illness asked father if a witch could harm someone without giving them something to eat, because when

he was in town Jean had embraced him and said; 'he galant tu te port fort bien'. At son's request he went to Charmes, where he called Jean a witch and asked him to remove sickness he had given his son; he made no demur, and said he would come next day - but failed to do so.

(5) Alix veuve de Nicolas de Vaubexy cordonnier de Charmes, c. 26

About a month before his death her husband had done a deal with Jean for exchange of some leather against some old shoes; Jean had made threatening remark when difference of a gros was asked for - 'tu l'auras mais en autre endroit, que tu ne te donrast de garde asseure toy qu'il te cousterat.' Shortly afterwards husband fell ill of unknown malady, and died after 5 days; during this time he asked her to go and seek healing from Jean, who came with some grease and tried to do so. Since husband's death prévôt had been obliged to warn him not to molest her.

(6) Didier Morel de Charmes, c. 55

Two years before Jean had asked for loan of his horse; his daughter Mongeotte had told him they had 50 toiles to take to river for bleaching, and so needed the horse, at which he had left in fury. Subsequently he bought a pig at fair which Jean had wanted - he touched it, and it died next day. Later his daughter met Jean, who complained that her parents had not given him some meat at Easter as they usually did, and repeated 'bien bien' in a threatening manner. Fell ill immediately, and 2 or 3 weeks later took to bed, dying 3 or 4 days later. Before death said to father that she knew Jean would not stop with killing the pig; also incident when he came into room and left without saying a word. Long reputation, and accusation by la Triffatte.

(7) Nicolas Barry tailleur de Charmes, c. 55

About 5 years earlier had bought some old shoes from Jean for his daughter Barbe, but had not paid him as much as he asked. When she was in fields wearing the shoes, she suddenly felt as if her foot had been pricked, and leg became all twisted. Suspected Jean, and had intention of accusing him if she did not recover quickly; didn't know whether he had heard this, but about 12 days later passed by and gave his wife good day. He took this for a good sign, and the girl then recovered. Had later accused him of giving sickness to girl, to which he said 'c'estoit une incredulle'. On another occasion went to his house and found him lying on straw foaming at the mouth - said to him 'd'ou diable demens-tu, viens tu du sabat'. General reputation; accusation by la Triffatte.

(8) Francoise la Roche veuve de Nicolas Gaillot d'Essegney, c. 50

Her husband had died 12 years before, of an unknown illness, just after occasion when he had been angry with Jean, who had put some leather in wrong place. At that time had less of a reputation, and they had not thought of possibility that it was witchcraft; subsequently hearing him so much suspected, believed it must have been.

(9) Parisot Cugnin de Charmes, c. 40

When Jean had been accused by la Triffatte 11 or 12 years before, the witness had been sowing at Socourt and had met his brother Thiery, who asked for news of his brother, then asked for message to be given to him. Wanted to meet him to advise him to flee, but when Jean heard this he said it was evil counsel, and he was no witch. Witness did not believe he had done him any harm, but general reputation.

(10) Agnez femme de Claude Vallon gouverneur moderne de Charmes, c. 46

Said that some 6 years earlier her son Claudon aged 18 had fallen ill with a strange illness, to which no remedy could be found, so that they suspected witchcraft. Illness followed occasion when she had refused to sell Jean the skin of a calf he had skinned, after which he said the boy was 'd'une bonne famille'. During illness she asked Jean to touch him; he came to house but then said his hands were too cold, and boy died soon after. Had always suspected this was his witchcraft.

(11) Jacques Bouchier de Charmes, c. 48

Told of being on road at 1 a.m. previous year around St. Peter's day, with son-in-law, and seeing Jean returning hurriedly - turned off road as they approached and went over fields. Thought he was returning from sabbat, especially as it was thundering at the time.

(12) Pierre Grand Jean bouchier de Charmes, c. 31

Repeated father-in-law's deposition (above); also general reputation.

(13) Andreu Bouillon cordonnier de Charmes, c. 40

When he was gouverneur of Charmes 2 years before, had told Jean's children not to go to Pexelz on pain of imprisonment; Jean had not liked this, and witness thought he had caused subsequent death of a cow. General reputation.

(14) Jacquatte femme de Didier Loys Rouyer de Charmes, c. 44

Some 10 to 12 years earlier her 12-year-old son Jean had been touched on stomach by Jean, saying 'garde la ratte'; had stomach pains on return home, and feared it was witchcraft by Jean, in view of his reputation. Died some 9 or 10 days later. She and her husband believed this was witchcraft, particularly because her husband had refused to guarantee Jean when he wanted to rent a house - he had been angry, and had also declared that he had saved the boy from drowning, when he had fallen from his horse, but 'qu'il passeroit encore une fois par ses mains'.

(15) Idatte femme de Claude Richard de Charmes, c. 28

Previous year Jean had asked to buy flax from her, and she had told him she had none, because it had failed on crop. Had been slow to leave house, and she had to tell him to go, saying her husband would be angry if he found him there; when husband heard of this he said he would beat him if he met him. A week later was thrown in river by sudden great wind, and saved by two other women who came on scene; believed this had been Jean's doing.

(16) Didier Loys Rouyer de Charmes, c. 47

Repeated wife's story, although he said he himself did not suspect Jean of causing son's death, despite general reputation.

Statement that these are all witnesses produced so far, although there were others currently absent who could also testify if necessary. Extracts from trials of la Romaine and la Triffatte appended.

15 August 1607; PG des Vosges orders interrogation

18 August 1607; interrogation

Said he was Jean Anthoine dit de Socourt, native of Socourt, cordonnier. Resident at Charmes since first marriage, 34 years before; had 4 wives in all, first three of whom had all died quite early, together with total of 6 children he had by them. 2 sons of 3 by fourth marriage were still alive, although wife was now dead. Pierre, aged 20, was now learning trade of blacksmith, while Nicolas aged 22 was helping his father and learning his craft.

Asked how his wives had died, said the first had been of pleurisy, second in childbirth, third of 'un flux de ventre', and fourth of 'une pourriture en son corps' after illness lasting a year or more.

Agreed he had been arrested on petition of Nicolas Fouesse, and said this was out of hatred after an occasion when Fouesse had been drunk in his lodge, and he had said to those who were there that they should leave.

Admitted that he had been called witch by some, and for lack of money or witnesses had preferred to endure this. Had thought of taking Fouesse to court, but latter had acted first - he was 'un ivrogne plain de mauvais vouloir'.

Prévôt told him there was a general belief he had killed his four wives; he was evidently upset by this, bowing head and muttering prayers.

20 August 1607; interrogation

Agreed that he had given 'gresse de cheval' to various people, but this had been because they asked for it, and he did not know what they had used it for (this was in response to remark that such grease was not a remedy for head and stomach troubles etc.).

Asked about accusations by la Romaine and La Triffatte, said they had been made out of hatred. When begging with them he had sometimes been given more than them, and he had also refused to mend their shoes. Also said that Jesus had been accused by false witnesses and by Judas, and the same might be happening to him.

Said of Nicolas Thieriet that he had never heard mass or a sermon.

21 August 1607; interrogation and confession

Jean had been unable to eat in prison; sergeant pressed him to confess his guilt, and after he had shut door accused called him back, asking for prévôt to be sent for so that he could reveal things he had so far concealed. On arrival he offered 20 francs to be released from 'ceps', saying he could bear this no longer; Prévôt indignantly refused, but said he might have 'quelque elargissement' if he confessed his crime.

Then said he was a witch, and that he had been seduced 3 years earlier. Had just recovered from a serious illness, during which he had spent most of what money he had, so that he could not afford to buy leather for his trade. While in misery thinking of his extreme poverty, was approached by devil in form of a dog, which offered to make him rich. For two years did not make use of stick and powder which devil gave him, despite several attempts to make him do so. Finally decided to kill his wife, after devil had suggested he was 'bien miserable de tant endurer d'icelle', and put flowers shown him by devil in her soup. Had also killed horse belonging to Nicolas Claudrat and cow belonging to Nicolas Meschy with intention of getting leather (he failed), and horse of Nicolas Michiel who had overcharged him for carting some flax. Had been to sabbat on numerous occasions, and had resisted his master's attempts to make him do evil as far as he could; had recognised no-one. Asked that his case should be concluded as soon as possible, so that he could be executed and leave the world.

22 August 1607; interrogation

Pressed to reveal more about crimes and accomplices, on grounds that it was impossible that what he had already confessed was complete account. Said he knew no more, and that he had often thought, as he left church, of telling all to prévôt, but had been restrained by thought of ignominy this would bring on his two sons and all his family. Now wanted to have case finished quickly, and to save his soul, but could not confess to other malefices or identify accomplices, because this would mean telling lies and risking loss of soul.

Check was then made on owners of three beasts Jean claimed to have killed; they said that while they had not suspected witchcraft at the time, the deaths had been violent and sudden.

23 August 1607; PG des Vosges claims that he is already sufficiently condemned by confessions, but asks for question extraordinaire for supplementary information about malefices and accomplices.

25 August 1607; Change de Nancy agrees.

28 August 1607; interrogation under torture

Accused began by revoking earlier confession; said he had made it only in order to be released from prison. Was then racked, and finally admitted that original confessions were true; had revoked them hoping to resist torture and be 'renvoyé'. At first said he had done no more, but was then racked harder, and made further admissions. Had killed Didier Mourel's daughter, because her father often spoke ill of him, and the daughter of his 'compere' the tanner Nicolas Meschy (dead of long and strange illness since his imprisonment) on account of the hatred Meschy bore him. Then a series of other deaths; wife of Jean Simonin, wife of Colas Georgeot, 'la

Harmande', Grand Claude, le Rossel Bocquel, Pierat Mognien, and his own second and third wives. These last had refused to do as he commanded them; after their deaths he had in each case killed a child he had by them, since there was no-one to look after it. Also said he had killed more than 20 animals.

Said he had been a witch for about 25 years, and had been many times to sabbat. There he had seen le petit Jacquemin, la grande Lucie and her daughter Marie, and Catherine Rondelatte of Essegney.

Also said that he had often made his annual confession without confessing his crimes or that he was a witch, 'pour ce qu'il estimoit que prenant la sainte hostie il en estoit bien absoult'.

29 August 1607; interrogation

Confirmed earlier confessions. Said of sabbat 'que c est tout abus et tromperie et que le plus souvent qu'ils pensent y estre ilz ne bougent du losgis'. However he had sometimes really been there, and only person he had recognised was 'la Rendellatte'.

Prévôt had then been to Poursieux, Langley and Socourt to see if people there would confirm Jean's accounts of his malefices. They did so, although they had not suspected him at the time; nevertheless 'ilz le craindoient beaucoup comme faisoient plusieurs autres desdits villages ou il hantoit souvent et n'estoit refusé que bien peu de choses qu'il recherchast, tant estoit il craint et soubconné du crime de sortilege'.

30 August 1607; Jean again confirms confessions; case sent to PG.

31 August 1607; PG des Vosges asks for death sentence

1 September 1607; Change de Nancy agrees.

4 September 1607; confronted with la Rondellatte and others he had accused. After looking at her for a long time he discharged her, and said he was a liar and a perjurer; then said he did not want to maintain accusations against others, so was not confronted. Followed by formal death sentence from 'anciens maires' of Charmes, and statement that it was carried out immediately.