

B 8717 no 3; witch 286, Catherine femme Benoist Mathieu de la Grandfosse

1 June 1616; Procureur d'office for canons of Saint Dié orders investigation.

13 June 1616; depositions

(1) Estienne Hidoult native of St. Hielle, servant of maire Demenage Mathieu de la Grandfosse, 20

Told of incident a year ago previous autumn. Had taken plough out before dawn to make drainage ditch when one of horses, although strong, had back leg stuck, injured itself, and died 8 days later. Saw woman in neighbouring field; when he talked of accident later, accused said she had been the woman. At time had not heard of her reputation as he had since. Had heard Jehennon fille Claude Agathe claim she had killed their 'chalybry'.

(2) Jenotte femme Jean Sterbey de la Grandefosse, 20

18 months before had a cow giving plenty of milk, so that she could feed her child and make a cheese every other day; yield then dropped badly, so that she could only make a small cheese every week. Complained to Catherine, whom she suspected, saying she thought that 'elle yroit au conseil ou elle pouvoit mieulx pour le faire ramener'. Then talked about suspicions to Catherine's sister-in-law Simonne, talking about taking cow to house of accused; same evening it was cured. Advised that Jenotte attributed sickness to her 'l'appellant presque ouvertement sorciere, son marit et elle en furent desplaisant' - threatened to seek reparation at Saint Dié, but nothing came of this.

(3) Simonne femme Mathieu Jean Benay Sterbey de la Grandefosse, 36

2 years before last Easter, accused had sold some cheeses at Provencheres, and told her she would like some herself; reacted angrily, denying she had sold any there, and 'qu'elle s'estoit enquis du profit qu'elle faisoit en mesnage, ad cause de ses fromages, mais qu'elle s'en repentiroit.' 4 or 5 days later a cow she held from curé of Serainville became ill; 'et eut advis de ses voisines de s'en pourchasser comme ils font coutumierement au vilaige', by taking 3 kinds of herbs from Catherine's garden, after eating which the cow recovered suddenly. Accused then asked Jeanotte (2nd witness) how cow was doing, and if it were dead yet - she pretended to know nothing about this. A few days later she put cow to pasture in a small area belonging to her, adjoining Catherine's property, over which there had been previous disputes. Hid behind nearby bush, and saw accused come out with a stick and beat cow, 'disant le diable ne ta il pas encore emporte, tu y yras'; after this witness 'se print aigrement a elle, menassant de la faire apprehender tant pour le mal precedent donné a lad. vache, que desd. menasses et imprecations, ce qu'ouy elle pria la deposante de n'en rien dire, et qu'il n'en soit rien, luy delivrant a ceste effect une piece de tarte.' Subsequently cow was a little better, but eventually died, and she still suspected Catherine.

(4) Beniste femme Dieudonné Valence, of Salle, 40

2 or 3 years earlier, day after St. Bartholomew, a young man from village, Nicolas Gaust, returning from harvest in pays de Lorraine, had been brought to her house sick. Unable to eat, lost voice after accepting husband's offer of a drink, died soon after. Companions said that during illness he had constantly said he was bewitched by Catherine or Cathelo of la Grandefosse.

(5) Claudatte femme Claudon le Charpentier of la Grandefosse, 60

Colas Gaux had been her son; illness was 2 years before. Had been collecting cherries before leaving - late because la Fosse was naturally cold place - when accused asked him for some, remarking that he was very high and should be careful not to fall. He gave her a quantity, and in thanks she gave him some grease for his shoes before he left; mother said to him that it looked unusual, but he took no notice and greased them. Had heard from companions that he fell ill on same day, and languished throughout harvest, before death in manner already described. Could not say whether accused was cause, but if she were discovered to be a witch, as she was reputed, 'elle ne seroit pas asseurée qu'elle n'aye causé la mort audit sondit fils'.

(6) Jehennon femme Jean Musnier of la Grandefosse, 25

Saturday before last 'dimanche gras', accused had come to her parents' house (where witness lived) to ask for a light - a wood called raidy de sapin, used in village instead of candles. Was given it, but not as quickly as she expected, and father remarked that she 'retournoit bien souvent a leur emprunt'. Immediately afterwards best cow, in stable next to kitchen, lay down and died. Next day, as soon as this was known, Catherine's husband came and said that 'sa sotte les prioit de ne point avoir soubcon qu'elle eut faict mourir ladite vache, encore qu'elle eut esté prendre de ladite lumiere, ce que luy fut affirmé.' Witness nevertheless still did suspect her.

(7) Jehennon fille Claudon Agathe de la Grandefosse, 20

Shortly before last Ascension, was keeping horses at her father's house 'le mesnage duquel elle gouverne pendant sa viduité'. Took 'fuelles' to feed them from garden of accused, who then complained that she had taken some which carried a particular seed. One horse which had eaten 'fuelles' died in two days; when other became ill she fed it 'poureaux' from Catherine's garden, and it recovered. 'Veult au surplus la deposante maintenir soit pour vivre ou mourir' that accused had killed her horse, and had told her and her husband so; long reputation.

(8) Jean Musnier, living at la Grandefosse, 30

Told of how accused had taken 'raidy de sapin' from house, and how after cow had been taken to water it died in an hour and a half. Then husband had come and made statement about 'sa sotte', which caused him to suspect her, although he had not done so before. Reputation several years.

(9) Demenge Jacquot de la Grandefosse, 60

Accused had threatened him; hated him when they were neighbours because of inheritance dispute arising from fact that her husband was 'frere non germain' of his late wife. Had three fine calves a year old, which he was feeding with hay from seat before his house, when accused (who was envious) appeared to stroke them. Best of them became ill, stopped eating, had to be taken to fields 'pour le faire deshabiler. Ce qu'il mescroit aux sorceleries de ladite prevenue.' She had also told him 'que sy elle estoit sorciere, elle le feroit mourir. Mais adjousta qu'elle n'en avoit la puissance.' Believed she had bewitched his wife, who had lingered for some time, and one of his daughters who had died after year's illness. His wife had often quarrelled with her, and both women said 'que sy elle estoit sorciere, elle leur avoit donné le morceau de la mort, ad cause de l'envie du bien susdeclairé.'

(10) Mathieu Sterby de la Grandefosse, 30

2 years before last Easter, after his cow escaped and damaged her garden, 'elle donna des maledictions, disant que mal profit en peut il faire'. Soon afterwards cow sickened, languished some weeks, died on eve of Ascension. Told story of illness of Nicolas le Gaux; they had been going harvesting together at Montigny near Vacqueville, when Nicolas complained of stomach pains. Struggled as far as Raon, where he invited witness to drink with him, adding 'que peult estre ne boiroyent ils plus jamais de compagnie'. Subsequently only worked for half a day before he was forced to return home as best he could, saying that he believed Catherine had bewitched him with grease for shoes.

(11) Benay Valencin de la Grandefosse, 60

When an individual from village had gone to St. Dié to ask for investigation of Catherine, she asked witness 's'il faisoit beau en prison'. Later asked him to find out about the 'fruct de son voyage', but he was unwilling; she told him that he had a daughter about to be married, but she would not be there for feast, because she would be dead. Had heard her brother Dedion de Chattay say she was a witch.

(14 June 1616)

(12) Jean Pieron de la Grandefosse, 60

Told of how she had come to house to ask for 'raidy de sapin' saying that she needed to go nightly 'en lieu ou la lumiere a meiche ne pouvoit pas tenir son feu'. Refused once or twice, but finally yielded to repeated requests. Then told of sudden death of cow, and arrival of her husband the next morning, although until then he and his servants had not talked of her.

(13) Jehennon wife of previous witness, 60

Confirmed husband's story. Dated suspicions from death of Colas de Gaux; added 'qu'elle est femme qui veult scavoir tout, et se mesle d'autrui.'

(14) Benay Grand Maire de la bonne fontaine, 60

Had heard from Nicolas de Flabeprey, that one day as he passed her house she asked if he had sold his cow. When he said he had not, she said that he would have done well to do so; three days later it died.

(15) Mengeatte femme Liegey Grand Maire de la Grandefosse, 50

Some two years before accused had asked her to wait for her after mass at Provencheres; had not done so, not thinking she had been speaking to her. Told she would repent, and lost three calves soon afterwards. Her daughter was married to Jean Cognolle of la Grandefosse, but accused said she feared she would remain childless; replied to enquiry why 'qu'elle n'avoit point de joye au coeur, sans autrement s'expliquer.' Feared that Catherine might have made her barren - 2 other daughters had children.

(16) Jehennon femme Mengeon Pierron de la Grandefosse, 22

In 4 or 5 years since her marriage had heard her reputed witch; no personal harm, but she was 'coustumiere de donner des imprecations et maledictions, tant a son marit qu'autres, et est son desir veoir ses jouissance, quand elle veoit son prochain en nécessité, soit par famine ou autrement.'

(17) Nicolas de Flabeprey, living at la Grandefosse, 65

Some 3 years before a German had wanted to buy his fine cow for 12 ecus, but could only pay 9 down. Refused to extend credit, and sold him another cow for the 9. Passing Catherine's house later, she told him he would have done well to sell the cow, and it died 3 days later; he believed this was her witchcraft.

(18) Jehennon femme Claude Liegey de la Grandefosse, 24

As neighbour of accused had heard her say to wife of Benoist Sterbey 'que l'on vouloit prendre elle prevenue pour sorciere, et en faire accuser d'autres, mais dit a la femme dudit Sterbey qu'elle ne l'accuseroit pas, et qu'elle n'en craignit par ce qu'elle n'estoit pas sorciere.' Catherine had told witness 'qu'elle donneroit volontier de son bien a ses enfans, mais que s'ils devenoyent malade, l'on auroit soubcon d'elle, pour ce que l'on l'estime sorciere (quoy que a tort)'.

(19) Marie femme Pierron Jean Thiery de la Grandefosse, 40

Previous week Catherine told her 'en se lamentant, que les gens de la grande fosse seroient bien joyeulx quand on la meneroit brusler, et qu'elle auroit bien chaud, surquoy la deposant repartit que peult estre, ne l'ouyroit elle pas. Ne peult dire sy ladite prevenue parloit a bon escient ou non.'

Signed by maire and notary

6 (?) June 1616; interrogation

Said she was over 40; husband was poor laboureur. Was from Chattay, val de Senonne, father Dedion Henry, mother Mengeatte, both dead for some years. First marriage had been at Rolbaux, val de Senonne, with Jean Knecht. 'Dit qu'il mourut hors du pays, apres s'estre sauve des prisons de Tainctru ou il estoit detenu avec une sienne chambrière qu'il avoit engrossé, et firent mourir le fruit, tellement qu'icelle chambrière fut executée par le gibet, au ban de Sapt. Adjousta qu'elle n'eust espousé ledit Jean que douze ou treize sepmaines lequel elle haysoit de telle facon que jamais il ne habita avec elle, et que ce fut un sort que fut mis entre eux, en l'église mesme, pendant que l'on les espousoit, qui debvoit durer sept ans, au bout desquelz elle eut embrassé ledit son marit comme son cher époux et bien aymé.' Had been given by 'un certain nomme Mansuy des Folz village dudit ban de Sapt, réputé sorcier, pour ce qu'il vouloit avoit ledit Knecht pour une sienne fille.' Denied suggestion that evil spirit had tempted her in order to revenge herself on the chambrière.

Agreed that she had been arrested as a witch, but denied that she was. Admitted to sending husband round to house after cow died, and to having said she would have killed Demenge Jacquot, but did not have the power. His daughter had died of the plague. Questions revealed that Jean Charrey and Claudon Agathe had been to St. Dié to seek action against her. Agreed that she had said she would be dead before marriage feast, also that she had heard that her brother had said she was a witch. Also agreed to making remark about giving property to children. Had she known she was going to be arrested she would have fled.

8 June 1616; confrontations

Demenge Jacquot, 9th witness, was her nephew. Denied all charges, but said that the devil had caused death of Nicolas Gaux. Said in reply to Jehennon Pierron, 16th witness, that she had always helped people of la Grandefosse.

9 June 1616; procureur d'office asks for question ordinaire.

11 June 1616; change de Nancy approves use of thumbscrews.

15 June 1616; interrogation under torture.

Admitted at start that she had told guards she would give 100 ecus to be released and allowed to go far off in Allemaigne. Given thumbscrews, then racked, when started to say she had been seduced 2 years, then 3 years, before - although also said confessions were being made 'par force'. Finally said she had been seduced by Persin 20 years earlier; she was angry because she suspected her husband of affairs with other women, they often quarrelled, and he beat her. Gave her three kinds of powder, black for people, grey and blue for animals; were in form of grains

like seeds. Had intercourse with her, 'mais sa nature estoit fort froide et sans volupté'.

Confessed to series of malefices, along lines suggested by witnesses. Had been to sabbat, and described making hail on two occasions when local crops were badly damaged. Had seen Simonne wife of Mathieu Jean Benay Sterbey, Claudatte femme Claudon le Charpentier, Cathelon femme Benay Sterbey, Jehennon fille Claudon Agathe, all of la Grandefosse.

15 June 1616; interrogation

Confirmed earlier confessions. Added that Persin had wanted her to bring him communion wafers, notably at Easter; had been beaten because she always refused.

16 June 1616; interrogation

Now denied all confessions, saying she was no witch. Repeated remark about paying to be released, claiming she was 'd'une grande parenté' and had 3 relatives who would each pay 100 ecus for her release. Added that she would prefer to be burned at la Grandefosse, rather than in public at St. Dié.

18 June 1616; procureur d'office asks that she be executed, since there is sufficient proof against her.

20 June 1616; Change de Nancy agrees, but only if she will freely admit her guilt as before.

2 July 1616; interrogation

Continued denials; said of those she had accused 'qu'elles sont sorcieres sy elle l'est, et qu'on les fait venir pour estre brûlée avec elle, et que nous serons quitte de recommencer.' Asked about offer of money for her release, claimed that wife of Demenge Henry of la Fontenelle had been exiled to Germany after being accused of witchcraft at Tainctru, and that she herself would never return to country.

Procureur d'office then asked for renewed torture.

4 July 1616; Change de Nancy agrees

6 July 1616; interrogation under torture

As soon as she was racked repeated earlier confessions; now appeared she was speaking of her first husband, following suggestion of judges at first interrogation.

7 July 1616; interrogation

Now confirmed essential of confession, although she now denied some of the maléfices she had earlier admitted. Placed seduction 7 years before; very unclear which husband she had in mind.

12 July 1616; Change de Nancy confirms death sentence.