

The Story of Catherine Cauchés and her Daughters

During the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the people of Guernsey were split between adherence to the old Roman Catholic faith and the new Protestantism. Queen Mary I was a Catholic and her reign saw Guernsey's most infamous event of persecution take place.

On May 27th, 1556, a woman called Vincente Gosset was brought before Hellier Gosselin, Bailiff, and the Jurats, accused of having stolen a silver cup from the house of Nicholas le Couronnez, of St. Peter-Port. She had then taken the cup to a neighbour called Perotine Massey, and asked her to lend her (6d.) on it. Perotine, suspecting the cup to be stolen, and guessing the owner, reported the theft to Le Couronnez, and Gosset confessed to the theft. When Nicholas Carey, the Constable of the town, went to Perotine's house on this matter, he saw some pewter vessels there of which he doubted the ownership. He had all the denizens of the house hauled off to the prison in Castle Cornet while the case was being investigated. These were Perotine herself, Catherine Cauchés, her mother, and Guillemine Guilbert, her sister.



The personalities of these women are obscured by the local practice of invariably speaking of married women by their maiden names. Catherine Cauchés then a widow, was a daughter of Pierre Cauchés, of St. Martin's. A relative of hers, Anthony Cauchés, had been Rector of St. Anne's, Alderney, and was only succeeded by Pierre Herivel in 1550. She was also undoubtedly one of the family after whom the Rue Cauchés - running from the bottom of the Merriennes Hill to the Forest Road - was named. She had evidently been twice married, once to a man called Guilbert, father of Guillemine Guilbert, and again to one of the family of Massey, who at the time held much land in St. Saviour's parish. His daughter, Perotine Massey, had married one David Jores, a Norman Protestant schoolmaster, minister and refugee. The ceremony was performed at the Castel Church by Monsieur Noel Regnet, one of the French pastors who had supplanted the original Catholic priests in the Guernsey Churches, and who was banished for disloyalty in 1554. At the time of the trial, Jores was in London; probably he had fled the island owing to the increase of the severity of our laws both against aliens and against heretics.

The three women were brought before an 'enquête' on the 5th June, 1556. By the testimony of the neighbours before the Crown Officers, it appeared that they had always lived honest, respectable

lives, and were deemed incapable of theft. This record of the neighbours' verdict is a valuable proof that the old *'enquête du pays'* was still in use in the island in criminal cases. It was a survival of the 'Normal of peers' (i.e. equals), a jury supposed to have a knowledge of the facts of the case, and was held informally before the Crown Officers or the Justices of Assize. Only the *'raport'* of the evidence would be produced at the regular trial before the Bailiff and Jurats.

On July 1st, 1556, the other prisoner, Vincente Gosset, was proved guilty of larceny. She was condemned to be whipped all around the town and at the carrefours, which were the 'Grand Carrefour' at the junction of the High Street, Smith Street and the Pollet, and the 'Petit Carrefour' at the junction of Mill Street, Fountain Street, and the Bordage. This unfortunate woman was then taken to the pillory at the corner of the High Street and Quay Street, where one of her ears was nailed to it. After she was torn away from the pillory she was further ordered to be banished from the island and *"d'estre myse soubs le pleine de Mars."* This meant that she was taken to the shore with the furthest limit reached by the highest springtide of the year - the March tide. There she must wait for a passing ship to take her off, maimed and destitute (as all her goods were confiscated by the Crown) to start life again in a strange land.

Here, according to all modern procedure, the case should have ended. Gosset had been condemned and Catherine Cauchés and her daughters had been acquitted of theft. Unfortunately, the neighbours, while declaring them "not *guille* of that they were charged with," added "saving only to the commands of Holy Church they had not been obedient." And thus, on the entirely new issue of their non-attendance at Church they were handed over by the Bailiff and Jurats to the Dean and the Ecclesiastical Court to be dealt with.

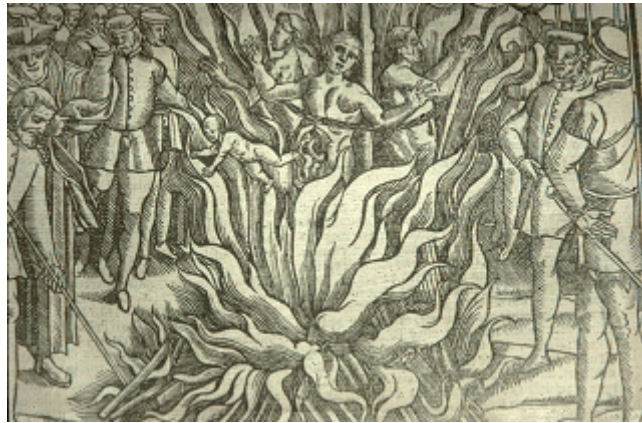
The Dean was the last of the Roman Catholic Deans in our history; a Jerseyman by the name Jacques Amy, son of Jean Amy Snr, of the Rue de Grouville, Jersey. Ordained by the Bishop of Catholic Priest in 1525, he was nominated Rector of St. Saviour's Church, Guernsey, in succession to Sire Pierre Careye on the 19th September, 1547. Three weeks later, on the recommendation of Sir Peter Mewtis, the Governor, he was made Dean of Guernsey. He evidently had either openly connived or passively acquiesced in the Protestant reforms and persecutions of the six years of Edwards VI.'s reign, 1547 to 1553. Therefore, he must have been considered doubtful not only by our bigoted new Governor, Sir Leonard Chamberlain, but by the Bishop of Coutances himself, who probably was making enquires as to what his Dean had done to maintain the true faith in Guernsey during the late apostasy. So he and his clergy evidently jumped at the opportunity not only of "getting their own back," but of proving their zeal and fervour to their ecclesiastical superiors.

The three women were brought before the Ecclesiastical Court - which then sat above the N.E. aisle of the Town Church. Upon "being examined of their faith concerning the bordinals of the Romish Church" they replied "that they would obey and keep the ordnances of the King and Queen (Philip and Mary) and the Commandments of the Church, notwithstanding that they had said and fore the contrary in the time of King Edward the 6th in showing obedience to his ordnances and commandments." By the Dean's orders, their submission was of no avail and they were returned again to prison. When they were next brought before the Dean and his colleagues, they were examined separately as to their beliefs before again being returned to prison. On July 14th, 1556, the Dean, Jacques Amy, and four Rectors, namely, Jean Alles (Rector of the Forest), Pierre Tardif (Rector of St. Martin's), Guillaume Paquet (Rector of the Castel), and Jean Navetel (probably Rector of St. Andrew's), wrote a Latin document record at the Greffe officially declared the accused guilty of heresy. Consequently on the following 19th of July, the Bailiff Hellier Gosselin met with ten out of the twelve jurats; Bailiff, Thomas de Vic, Pierre Martin, Nicolas Careye, Jean Blondel, Nicolas de Lisle, Jean le Marchant, Jean Le Feyver, Pierre Bonamy, Nicholas Martin and Jean de la Marche. Having read the document that read "*ils ont estey aprouvez heretiques*", they condemned the three prisoners to be strangled and burnt that very day, with confiscation of all their goods to the Crown.

In justice to the Bailiff and Jurats we must remember that, as Sir Fredrick Pollock tells us, "*according to the law of the Church the man convicted by the Ecclesiastical Authorities as a ... heretic was to be delivered over to the Secular power, who ... if he neglected to do what was implied to the bishop's sentence was liable to excommunication, while, if he persisted in his contumacy for a year, he himself was accounted a heretic.*"

It is difficult now to realise the horrors of an execution in those days, callous as people of the 16th century were to human suffering. The executioner, '*L'Exectioner des hautes oeuvres*,' was always a convicted criminal who had been induced to accept an unpopular office by promise of a free pardon. In 1556 Pierre Queripal was holder of this *post* '*pour ses malfaits et demerites*.' The prisoners were shipped from the wretched prison in Castle Cornet and landed at the '*Chaussee*' for trial before the Royal Court. The departure from the castle of the solitary boat bearing the trembling wretches under the charge of the Sheriff, was watched by a crowd in awestruck silence. This was followed by the pathetic lauding, where the King's officers were waiting in readiness with the Bordiers, carrying their official iron halberds. These Bordiers were the owners of the fields liable to the service of Bordage. It was their role to escort criminals from prison to the Court House or to the place of punishment: the Cage, the Pillory, the Gibbet, or the Stake.

In this case, on leaving the Court the dismal procession would have filed up to Tower Hill, where their stakes were set up. Catherine Cauches was placed in the middle. They were first strangled, but the rope broke before they were dead. So they were still alive when the fire was set around them. Perotine Massey was heavily pregnant and a male child was born as she died. He was picked out alive from the flames by a bystander - the master gunner and surgeon ("*cannonier et cirugien*") of the island called William House. The Sheriff brought the baby to the Bailiff, who said he was to be cast back into the flames. And by so saying has insured eternal infamy for his memory.



The facts of the case are confirmed by the official records at the Greffe and the detailed trial report included in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. After Queen Elizabeth succeeded her sister Mary as Queen, a petition was presented in 1562 to Her Majesty's Commissioners by Matthew Cauchés, brother to Catherine. This embodied the facts, gathered, as he says, "*By the faithful relation both of French and English, of them which were then present, witnesses and lookers on.*" He also pointed out that the verdict was due to "*malicious hatred*" by the Dean and his accomplices who had "*illegally condemned his sister and his two nieces for heresy, they declaring all the time their innocence, and, moreover, the baby born of one of them being taken up and cast into the fire again, four being executed, though only three had been condemned.*"

Queen Elizabeth took action to punish those responsible and in part to redress the injustice.