



## PENDLE WITCHES – THE DEVASTATING STORY OF ALIZON DEVICE

The case of the Pendle Witches is one of the most notorious witch trials in the UK. Based on the testimony of a nine year old girl, and triggered by Alizon Device, twelve people were put to death.

### ALIZON DEVICE'S CURSE CREATES A BACKLASH FOR THE PENDLE WITCHES

One spring morning in 1612, a young woman called Alizon Device was walking to Trawden Forest when she came across a pedlar and his son. She stopped and asked him for a few pins. Whether she was begging for them or was planning to pay, the pedlar was having none of it. He knew that metal pins were often used in witchcraft and this young woman was altogether too strange for his liking. He refused to open his bag and the two men carried on walking.

This rejection enraged young Alizon, who whirled around and hurled a curse in the pedlar's direction. Seconds later, the pedlar stumbled and fell to the ground; his arms went limp, he was unable to speak and his face went slack. Not that anyone could have known at this stage, but this fateful transaction would change the course of history.

The pedlar's name was John Law and his son was Abraham. Initially, Alizon wasn't blamed for John's condition. But she blamed herself, alright. She was absolutely convinced that she had placed a curse on

him and that all of this was entirely her fault. She even begged Abraham to let her visit John in his sick bed and beg forgiveness for what she had done.

### COMPLETE MEDICAL IGNORANCE COULD BE TO BLAME FOR THE PENDLE WITCHES' FATES

John Law had clearly had a stroke. It could have been sheer coincidence that he collapsed when he did. Or it could have been the fact that he was wary of this young woman, scared of witchcraft and aware of the dark rumours surrounding the family. That absolute belief in evil, the total fear of being accosted by this bizarre young woman and then being the unexpected target of the curse – was it just all too much for him to bear? Either way, it was a tragic set of events that unfolded.

Alizon herself was a peculiar young woman. She was somewhat diffident and little. She would often not look ahead of her when she walked, but directly at her own feet. But when she did look someone in the eye, her gaze was unwavering and discomfiting, eyes wide and unblinking.



## THE ACCOUNT OF THOMAS POTTS WAS KEY IN THIS TRIAL

Thomas Potts, the court clerk, took detailed records of the trial that followed, including descriptions of the accused.

*Alizon was a very odd young girl. Everyone in Pendle knew that for sure. She didn't look particularly strange, not from a first glance, but once you knew her you could tell she... wasn't quite right. She was very unassuming - short, quiet, with mousy brown hair and eyes that rarely left her feet. But despite her appearance the townspeople found her presence very discomfoting. Her eyes were as wide as dinner plates, and when she deigned to meet your gaze you were paralyzed by her glassy stare. She never seemed... quite there. It was disturbing. Not to mention the, well, unmentionable things her family was involved with! - Thomas Potts*

And that, my friends, is a classic description of someone with autism. But couple that with the rumours of a family that had some pretty unorthodox ideas and you've got the perfect storm right there.

## A HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT IN THE FAMILY

Alizon Device lived with her grandmother, Elizabeth Southernns. Elizabeth was more commonly known as Demdike and was largely considered by the community to be a witch.

Within the household was also Elizabeth Device, Alizon's mother, and James and Jennet Device, Alizon's younger siblings.

While the family were known for their involvement with witchcraft, it hadn't necessarily been seen as a bad thing. Back then, the term "witch" was very broad and was often interchangeable with "healer" or "cunning woman." However, the family had a history for using magic and had actually been in trouble in the past for casting curses on their neighbours.

"Demdike" roughly translates to Demon Woman, which suggests that Elizabeth Southernns was revered for her powers, whatever they were considered to be. Demdike, now in her 80s and blind as a bat, was also at a much riper age than most people ever reached back then. The average life expectancy in the 17th century was around 35 years old. This served to add another layer of suspicion to the already strange family.

## ALIZON DEVICE POISONED HER OWN WELL WITH THAT CONFESSION

Admitting to cursing poor John Law was probably the worst thing that Alizon Device could have done for herself and her family. The case reached the ears of Roger Nowell, who was the Sheriff of Lancashire. Roger demanded that the family appear in court for the relatively new crime of witchcraft. And at this point, they didn't really have a leg to stand on, because Alizon had given a full confession to John Law and Abraham had borne witness.



Roger Nowell was a fearsome man. He was forever trying to curry favour with the king. In fact, earlier that year, there had been a decree issued by James I. Desperate to bring the North in line with the more modern Christian religion, he had ordered that every lawmaker in Lancashire compile a list of recusants. So Roger Nowell received the news of this now heinous act of witchcraft with glee. This was going to put him in very good standing indeed.

## **PENDLE WITCHES DRAGGED TO HELL AND BACK**

Alizon Device had set in motion a monstrous string of events. She confessed to not only cursing John Law, but consorting with the Devil. She said that when the pedlar had refused to give her any pins, a black dog had appeared to her and she knew that she was in the presence of the great lord himself. She said that she sold her soul to curse John Law and he had collapsed shortly after. Presumably, poor Alizon thought that she would be spared because she had gone to John Law's bedside to repent and ask for the curse to be lifted. Little did she know she had actually sealed her fate.

It didn't help that her family seemed not to care about each other at all. As they stood before the court, they all admitted to partaking in witchcraft. They were witches, after all, and were not hiding that fact. But they did deny any intention to cause harm. Witchcraft had become illegal under the English Witchcraft Act of 1604, but it held a lesser sentence than causing harm by witchcraft.

However, James Device had something to add. He said that he knew of a local child that had been bewitched by Alizon. Then Elizabeth Device chimed in and dobbed in Demdike, claiming that, of all of them, Demdike was the only one that had a Devil's Mark. This family did not put up a united front.

## **THE DEVICE FAMILY AT WAR WITH FELLOW PENDLE WITCHES**

As well as the in-fighting, the Devices began pointing fingers elsewhere. Another family in Pendle known for witchcraft became the focus of Alizon who explained that her father, John, had been killed by Anne Chattox after the Devices refused to continue paying a monthly protection fee (3.5kg oatmeal).

Off the back of this, on 2 April 1612, Demdike, Chattox, and Chattox's daughter Anne Redferne, were summoned to appear before Nowell.

Both Demdike and Chattox were in their eighties and they were both blind. They provided Nowell with damning confessions.

Demdike claimed that she had given her soul to the Devil 20 years beforehand.

Chattox that she had given her soul to "A Thing like a Christian man" on his promise that "she would not lack anything and would get any revenge she desired."

Anne Redferne refused to make any confession, but Demdike said that she had seen her making clay figures. Margaret Crooke also appeared in front of Nowell as a witness that day.



She claimed that her brother had fallen sick and died after having had a disagreement with Redferne. Crooke also claimed that he had frequently blamed Anne Redferne for his illness.

Based on the purely anecdotal evidence of two clearly feuding families, Nowell delightedly committed Demdike, Chattox, Anne Redferne and Alizon Device to Lancaster Gaol, to be tried for maleficium\* at the next assizes.

## **CATASTROPHE COMPOUNDED BY A NICE BUFFET LUNCH**

Four witches discovered and punished would have been enough of a confidence boost for Roger Nowell. But the situation was made even worse when, on Good Friday 1612, Elizabeth Device ordered a meeting of sympathisers at Malkin Tower.

To make sure there was a good spread on, Elizabeth told James Device to steal a neighbour's sheep.

Word of this meeting and crime reached Nowell and he condemned seven more people to trial.

They were:-

- Elizabeth Device
- James Device
- Alice Nutter
- Katherine Hewitt
- John Bulcock
- Jane Bulcock
- Alice Grey
- Jennet Preston

## **JENNET DEVICE BECOMES A STAR WITNESS IN THE TRIAL OF THE PENDLE WITCHES**

Despite being just nine years old, Jennet Device was the nail in the coffin for her family and other witches on trial at the time. Under usual circumstances, Jennet would not have been expected to give evidence against her family, but King James I had suspended such normalities in his book on witchcraft, *Daemonologie*.

Jennet Device has been demonised as a wicked child for her involvement in the trials. She sent her own family to death, after all. But you have to take into account the fact that the family had all already turned on each other. They were hardly a close-knit happy family unit. She was probably scared of being taken down with them. She obviously wasn't a nurtured child and would have been under a lot of pressure from Roger Nowell and other adults to give testimony.

*My mother is a witch and that I know to be true. I have seen her spirit in the likeness of a brown dog, which she calls Ball. The dog did ask what she would have him do, and she answered that she would have him help her to kill. - Jennet Device*

The minute Jennet entered the courtroom, her mother started screaming at her. It was clear that Elizabeth knew her daughter was not an ally. She was removed from the court while Jennet gave her evidence. She said that her mother had been a witch for around four years and even had a familiar called Ball, who appeared in the shape of a brown dog.



James Device also condemned his mother by saying that he had seen her making statues of her victims out of clay. But then Jennet turned on him as well. She said that her brother had been a witch for three years and that she had, on multiple occasions, seen his spirit leave his body and kill people. James was also tried as a witch.

## THE AFTERMATH OF ALIZON DEVICE'S ACTIONS

Alizon Device was the last of the Pendle Witches to be tried. John Law had forgiven her for bewitching him. However, she had admitted to witchcraft and Roger Nowell wasn't going to let her get away with that.

On the 20th August 1612, nine condemned prisoners were taken to the moors, known as Gallows Hill, and hanged. The only person acquitted was Alice Grey.

Demdike did not appear at the trial and died in horrible conditions in Lancaster Castle awaiting the assizes.

## KARMA'S A BITCH!

Jennet Device disappeared from history for several years. But in 1633, she reappears. In a strange twist of fate, she was accused of witchcraft by a boy called Edmund Robinson. He said that Jennet had killed Isobel Nutter, wife of William Nutter. 16 other women were accused at the same time. A jury found all 17 guilty. However, the judges weren't happy with the decision and demanded more physical evidence.

Finally, a modicum of common sense. The case was referred to the privy council.

The boy, Edmund, eventually caved and admitted that he had made it all up after hearing about the case of the Pendle Witches. Jennet was acquitted, but she owed money for her board at Lancaster Castle and wasn't allowed to leave until she coughed up the money. Which seems particularly unfair, but at least she wasn't about to be hanged like her mother.

Sadly, Jennet was not a rich woman and the last we hear of her was in 1636. We can't know for sure, but it's safe to assume that she died, like her grandmother, Demdike, in the horrible conditions at Lancaster Castle.

## THE TRIAL OF THE PENDLE WITCHES IS, SADLY, JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

I've also written a blog post, in which I try to cover the UK witch trials in general. It's quite long and I genuinely got really upset writing it, but if you fancy giving it a once over, it's here... [WITCHCRAFT BLOG](#)

There is so much to cover with the witch hunts and it's hard to cut information out, because it all feels so important.

Let us know if you are descendants of any of the poor Pendle witches - we'd be really interested to know your take on your family history. I'd also love to hear from any modern day witches, because of all the religions, paganism is one that I could get on board with.