



The Shammick Chronicle

The Little Parish with a Big Story

Newsletter for November 2025

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Welcome to the November edition of the Combe Martin Village History Project newsletter. This month, we explore the layered heritage of Combe Martin—from its manorial estates and industrial landmarks to the folklore etched into its cliffs and inns.

As winter approaches, we reflect on the stories that shaped our village and invite readers to share their own memories and connections.



Manors, Mines, and Memory

Combe Martin's Historic Estates and the End of Feudalism

Following last month's spotlight on [Sir John Pollard](#), this issue explores the manorial estates that once shaped Combe Martin's social and architectural landscape.

- West Challacombe Manor (Grade II*): A 15th-century farmhouse originally called "Orchard," featuring a rare cruck barn from the early 14th century.
- Higher Leigh Manor: Built between 1851 and 1855 by Henry Keene Bowden. It later became a convent during WWII and now houses the Combe Martin Wildlife and Dinosaur Park.
- The Old Rectory (1847): A Grade II listed ecclesiastical manor with 72 acres of glebe land. The rector's benefice once rivalled the holdings of local squires.

Historic estates reflect the transition from feudal hierarchy to Victorian philanthropy and community use. Though privately owned today, their stories remain part of Combe Martin's shared heritage.

Landmarks of Lore and Labour

From the Hangman Cliffs to the Pack o' Cards Inn

Combe Martin's landmarks are steeped in legend, industry, and eccentricity.

- The Hangman Cliffs: Great Hangman, at 1,043 feet, is the highest sea cliff in England and Wales. Local folklore tells of a sheep thief strangled by his own stolen cargo atop the Hanging Stone. Victorian writers linked the site to Druidic remains.
- The Pack o' Cards Inn: Built in 1690 by Squire George Ley after a lucky card game, this Grade II* listed inn mimics a full deck—four floors, thirteen rooms, fifty-two windows. It features bee boles, a sundial, and a press gang table.
- Combe Martin War Memorial: Erected in 1921 beside St Peter ad Vincula Church, this granite monument honours fifty-nine villagers lost in the World Wars.

Other historic sites include the Castle Inn, once frequented by sexton James Norman (Marie Corelli's Reuben Dale), and the Village Hall, originally a Drill Hall built in 1909.

Preserving the Past

As Combe Martin adapts to modern tourism, its historic buildings face new pressures. Yet many remain protected and celebrated.

- Community Centre: Housed in a 15th-century church hall, this Grade II listed building has served as a poorhouse, school, and civic hub.
- Lime Kiln in Kiln Field: A Grade II listed industrial relic, recently restored and still visible near Park Lane.
- Old Customs House: A Gothic seaside cottage with unusual arched windows, once part of a 19th-century customs complex.

Even modest features—like the embedded grindstone on Cross Street or the bee boles in The Pack o' Cards Inn garden wall—offer glimpses into Combe Martin's industrious past.

Literary tourism also plays a role. Victorian writers such as Marie Corelli, and R.D. Blackmore, helped immortalise Exmoor and Combe Martin in fiction. Their legacy continues to attract visitors seeking the landscapes behind the stories.

Botanist Clara Ethelinda Larter's connection to Combe Martin is both residential and botanical — she lived here and contributed to scientific knowledge through her work in the area.

While residing in Combe Martin, Larter collected botanical specimens that would later anchor formal species descriptions.



Botanist Clara Larter

[Clara Ethelinda Larter](#) (1847–1936) was an English botanist, celebrated for her contributions to the study of Devon's flora.

After living in Barmouth, North Wales from 1885, Mrs Larter later settled in Combe Martin where she remained from at least 1899 until 1909. Larter eventually returned to Torquay, where she died on 13 May 1936.

[Kallymenia larterae](#) (Holmes, 1907) (originally *Callymenia larteriae*) is found in Combe Martin and Torquay. The red algal species was named in Larter's honour.



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Reader Feedback

Which landmark speaks to you? Do you have old photos, stories, or family ties to these places? We welcome contributions for future issues – [email us](mailto:combemartinvillage@btinternet.com).

Next Month: “Christmas in Old Combmartin”—from wassailing to sixpence alms.

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Dive deeper into Combe Martin’s history with the Combe Martin Village History Project website, Combemartinvillage.co.uk. We welcome [contributions to our blogs](https://combemartinvillage.co.uk/blogs).