

Combe Martin (North Devon)

A Guide to Regional Connections

October 2025

This original, simplified guide was created by the Combe Martin Village History Project (CMVHP), to support local heritage awareness and discussion. It is not a peer-reviewed academic publication and it should not be cited as a scholarly source.

While every effort has been made to ensure factual accuracy, some connections are interpretive and intended to prompt critical thinking. For advanced research, users are encouraged to cross-reference with academic materials and primary sources.

Place	Why It Matters	Think Critically
Barnstaple	Confirmed fitting-out site for Combe Martin-built schooners. Key trade and rigging hub.	Why was Barnstaple chosen over Ilfracombe for outfitting ships?
Ilfracombe	Maritime support centre with historic shipbuilding and harbour infrastructure.	How do we distinguish between shipbuilding and fitting out?
Countisbury Wind Hill	Most likely the site of the Battle of Arx Cynwit (878 CE), a key Anglo-Saxon victory over Viking raiders.	How did geography shape military outcomes in early medieval Devon?
Lynton & Lynmouth	Depended on Combe Martin's produce; shared tourism and cultural economy.	What does this tell us about rural trade networks?
Berrynarbor & Watermouth	Shared mining history with Combe Martin; listed silver-lead workings.	How do adjacent parishes shape regional identity?
Bere Ferrers	One of only two major medieval silver sources in England alongside Combe Martin.	Why might silver have been concentrated in just two places?
Porlock & Watchet	Sites of Viking raids; show Combe Martin's strategic vulnerability.	How do we know if Combe Martin was directly affected?
Swansea	Received Combe Martin strawberries via SS <i>Snowflake</i> . Major trade partner.	What does this trade route reveal about regional economies?
Canterbury	Ecclesiastical anchor; Becket's legacy and Bishop Jewel's theology link to reform.	How might Becket's martyrdom have shaped local religious life?
London	Combe Martin silver showcased at the Great Exhibition (1851); legal ties via Pollard. Also Mansion House silver.	What does this say about rural contributions to national prestige?
Exmoor National Park	Cultural and environmental backdrop; shaped mining, tourism, and literature.	How does landscape influence heritage and identity?
Blackmore Country	Literary region tied to <i>Lorna Doone</i> . Combe Martin is not featured in the novel, but is part of R.D. Blackmore's family history.	How do we separate author biography from literary setting?

Broader Questions for Discussion

- **Continuity vs. Change:** How did Combe Martin's religious identity evolve from medieval Catholicism to Elizabethan Protestantism?
- **Local vs. National:** What does Combe Martin's presence at the Great Exhibition suggest about rural innovation?
- **Evidence vs. Inference:** Which connections are directly documented, and which are interpretive?

Suggested Answers to Questions

Question	Answer
Why was Barnstaple chosen over Ilfracombe for outfitting ships?	Barnstaple offered deeper inland access via the River Taw, established rigging facilities, and stronger trade infrastructure. These made it more suitable than Ilfracombe for final outfitting of Combe Martin-built schooners.
How do we distinguish between shipbuilding and fitting out?	Shipbuilding refers to constructing the hull and frame, as done in Combe Martin. Fitting out involves adding masts, rigging, and equipment—typically completed in Barnstaple.
How did geography shape military outcomes in early medieval Devon?	Elevated sites like Wind Hill near Countisbury provided natural defence and visibility. The Anglo-Saxon victory at Arx Cynwit likely depended on this strategic terrain.
What does this tell us about rural trade networks?	Lynton and Lynmouth's reliance on Combe Martin's produce illustrates how coastal villages formed interdependent economies before modern transport links.
How do adjacent parishes shape regional identity?	Shared mining operations and overlapping family names in Berrynarbor and Watermouth suggest a regional identity shaped by labour, land use, and kinship.
Why might silver have been concentrated in just two places?	Unique geological conditions in Combe Martin and Bere Ferrers created rare silver-lead deposits. Medieval mining was limited to areas with visible ore and accessible terrain.
How do we know if Combe Martin was directly affected by Viking raids?	Viking raids are recorded at Countisbury, Porlock, and Watchet. Combe Martin's coastal location and topography suggest vulnerability, though direct evidence is limited.
What does this trade route reveal about regional economies?	The SS <i>Snowflake</i> 's route to Swansea shows how even perishable goods like strawberries were exported across the Bristol Channel, linking Combe Martin to Welsh markets.
How might Becket's martyrdom have shaped local religious life?	Becket's legacy influenced church architecture and liturgy across England. While Combe Martin had no shrine, its medieval church likely reflected Canterbury's ecclesiastical authority.
What does this say about rural contributions to national prestige?	Combe Martin silver featured at the Great Exhibition (1851), and the London Mansion House, showing how rural industries contributed to Britain's national image and technological pride.

How does landscape influence heritage and identity?	Exmoor's rugged terrain shaped mining, tourism, and literary imagination. It anchors Combe Martin's identity in both physical geography, mineralogy, and cultural heritage. Combe Martin Bay is a site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
How do we separate author biography from literary setting?	Combe Martin does not appear in <i>Lorna Doone</i> , but it is part of R.D. Blackmore's family history. The village belongs to the real landscape that inspired his fiction, not the novel's setting.

Source: [Combe Martin Village History \[The Little Parish with a Big Story\]](#)

Further Reading & References

For related articles, source notes, and contextual materials, visit www.combemartinvillage.co.uk.

The CMVHP website offers curated heritage content, and contributor insights, to support deeper exploration.

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