

The Shammick Chronicle

COMBE MARTIN

The Little Parish with a Big Story

Newsletter for Christmas 2025

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Welcome to the last 2025 edition of the Combe Martin Village History Project newsletter. 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 Christmas approaches, we reflect on the stories that shaped our village and invite readers to share their own memories and connections.

The Roses Movie (2025) and Combe Martin on Screen

Combe Martin's cliffs and Exmoor's coastal scenery recently stepped into the spotlight in the feature film *The Roses*. The Searchlight Pictures production captured the village's seascape and natural drama — the same landscapes that have inspired folklore, writers, and generations of locals.

Just as Victorian authors once wove Combe Martin into their stories, *The Roses* now adds a cinematic chapter to the village's heritage. Visitors can seek out the locations they've seen on screen, adding film tourism to the mix of history and literature that already draws people here.

The film reimagines *The War of the Roses* (1989), following a seemingly flawless couple whose relationship spirals into a bitter domestic stand-off ([See Filming Locations](#)).

Combe Martin's story keeps growing — from manors and mines to novels and now movies — all part of the village's rich and evolving identity.

We wish all our readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Forty Silver Sixpences at Christmas

Several local histories report that at one time - most likely during the reign of George III (1760 to 29 January 1820) - the parish rector, acting for the governors of the National School which was established by Combe Martin squire [George Ley](#) in 1733, entrusted the master with forty silver sixpences to be allotted to the deserving poor folk in the village.

This was done in accordance with a bequest from Mr George Ley. With the forty *silver sixpences* - each 'tanner' a welcome and valuable gift - jingling in his pocket, the "skulmaister" [schoolmaster] went about his alms duties.

People might have stood anxiously waiting at their cottage doors on either side of the long street. In those days, silver sixpences were 92.5% sterling silver (being debased from 1920).

Perhaps the silver came from Combe Martin's own mines. The high office of Almoner eventually passed to the clerk of the Parish Council; and the forty sixpences were distributed not on St George's Day but at Christmas.

The first George III British sixpence was minted in 1787, and the last in 1820.

Combe Martin Community Centre

A 15th Century Church Hall

Combe Martin's listed Community Centre stands on Church Street at High Cross. The rubble stone building is designated at Grade II by Historic England, and it was once a medieval Church Hall. Squire George Ley established a Free School here in the early 1700s.

Combe Martin's red 'K6' King George V Jubilee Box, designated Grade II and standing outside the Community Centre on Church Street, has been there a very long time. It was designed in 1935 by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V.

The former medieval church house is listed as being "of special architectural or historic interest, for its visual and functional relationship between the former church house and the Grade I 13th century [Church of St Peter Ad Vincula](#)".

The building is now occupied by Combe Martin Parish Council. For good reasons, the Community Centre was built near the Parish Church.

The building almost certainly began as a typical English 15th century "church house" or hall (Historic England, 2023). And it likely had an upper floor reached by a staircase. Early in its life the building was an alms-house, a pre-1664 poorhouse or 'pogey', and a workhouse.

In Britain, such early alms-houses existed for people in certain circumstances. From 1662-1800 it was used a poorhouse, and from 1800-1834 as a workhouse.

A small covered place in front of the old poorhouse was still called 'the market' in 1822. In 1834 the building became an endowed free school, becoming a national school in 1856 until it was taken over by the local education authority in 1906. From the late 1960s, the former church house has been our village community centre.

The building has pre-C17 origins, but it was extensively altered and extended in the 19th century, and has quadrupled in size. During the 19th-20th centuries the building served as a village school.

Combe Martin's Castle Inn

Standing on Castle Street - suggesting there was once a medieval castle here - the Grade II listed Castle Inn (LEN 1111867) is early nineteenth-century and built of imperial Gault brick, painted.

Gault brick is made from a mixture of a heavy thick clay soil and sand, forming a colour between white and pale yellow. The Castle Inn has recently been repainted and refurbished, and remains a historic local landmark.

This public house featured in Victorian and Edwardian guidebooks, and was a favourite haunt of Combe Martin's celebrity [sexton James Norman](#) (1844-1898).

James was the model for Reuben Dale in Marie Corelli's *The Mighty Atom* (1896). He lived in a thatched cottage across from Corelli House close to the Castle Inn, and James is buried in the parish graveyard.

According to official sources, this three-story 19th century public house has a frontage with 2 windows and 3 windows above, sashes with glazing bars. Slate and tiled roof.

Few wonder about it, but the Castle Inn is a short walk from the Park Hills where, it was said, a castle or a moated manor house stood in the fourteenth-century.

Combe Martin's Old Bowling Green

Behind the Castle Inn on Combe Martin's old Bowling Green, Mr and Mrs Berry were photographed outside No. 3, perhaps in the late 19th century. Their cottage, built of rubble stone with a slate roof, likely dates from the 1850s.

One curious feature is the so-called "Pitt's Picture" window — a bricked-up opening that may have been filled to avoid the Window Tax before its repeal in 1851, or simply closed for practical reasons. Either way, it stands as a reminder of how everyday houses carry traces of national history.



A Crowd Gathered at the Bowling Green

Early 20th Century



The open space at Combe Martin's Bowling Green served as a gathering point, once used for markets, recreation, and formal civic events. In keeping with local tradition, the Bowling Green is still used for Combe Martin's annual Strawberry Fairs.

The presence of hats, long dresses, and waistcoats helps date the image to the late 19th or early 20th century, likely between 1890 and 1910. The mix of generations hints at a tight-knit community, where events were shared across age groups.

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](#).

Coming in the Spring Chronicle: “The Writers and Artists Who Immortalised Combe Martin”.

Visit CMVHP

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

Visit Combe Martin Museum & Information Point

Telling the history of Combe Martin and providing vital visitor services, the fascinating museum is located on Cross Street near the main beach. It has a brand new website at Combemartinmuseum.org.