

Combe Martin Historical Overview

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Source: Produced by the Combe Martin Village History Project (CMVHP).

Note: The content synthesises information from primary historical records (Lysons, British History Online) and modern official records (Exmoor HER, National Park Authority reports).

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1. Agriculture

- **Overview:** Combe Martin is known for its heritage in strawberry fields, local jam production, and exports to Wales.
- **Time Period:** 1800s - 1960s
- **Significance:** The region's loamy soil and transport options helped develop a thriving local economy.

2. Architecture

- **Key Sites:** Church of St. Peter ad Vincula; Pack o' Cards Inn.
- **Time Period:** 13th century; c. 1690
- **Importance:** These sites are listed as heritage and reflect the architectural legacy of the Ley family.

3. Cultural Figures

- **Notable Individuals:** R.D. Blackmore, Marie Corelli, Terry-Thomas, J.M.W. Turner.
- **Time Period:** 19th - 20th century
- **Connection:** These figures have literary and artistic ties to Combe Martin.

4. Early Settlement

- **Overview:** Combe Martin began as a Saxon farming hamlet.
- **Time Period:** Anglo-Saxon era - 1066
- **Note:** The land was held by Brictric and Edwy before transitioning to Norman control.

5. Folklore & Festivals

- **Event:** Earl of Rone Festival; Summer Carnival; Guinness World Record street party.
- **When:** Annual Earl of Rone Festival (May); occasional August carnival
- **Value:** These unique festivals strengthen local identity and attract tourism.

6. Geological Significance

- **Features:** Devonian formations rich in minerals like silver, lead, and copper.
- **Time Period:** 419 - 359 million years ago
- **Impact:** The local geology shaped the region's mining and industrial history.

7. Great Exhibition in London

- **Event:** Combe Martin silver showcased by Ellis & Son, Exeter.
- **Year:** 1851
- **Recognition:** Featured a jewel-casket and knitting basket that gained national attention.

8. Hemp & Fulling

- **Overview:** The area was a significant hemp producer from the 12th to the 16th century.
- **Significance:** Hemp was used in textiles and rope production.

9. Industrial Transition

- **Description:** Shift from mining to horticulture and tourism.
- **Time Period:** 1880s onward
- **Outcome:** Post-mining resilience led to growth in hospitality and soft-fruit production.

10. Literary Legacy

- **Works:** "Lorna Doone" (Exmoor); "The Mighty Atom" (Combe Martin).
- **Time Period:** 19th century
- **Importance:** These fictional settings are rooted in real geography, enhancing cultural tourism.

11. Local School Legacy

- **Institution:** Combe Martin Free School founded by George Ley.
- **Time Period:** Early 1700s – present
- **Contribution:** A legacy of community education tied to local philanthropy.

12. Manor System Decline

- **Event:** Sale of the manor by Sir John Pollard to tenants.
- **Time Period:** 16th century
- **Impact:** Marked the end of feudal lordship and the rise of individual ownership.

13. Maritime & Trade

- **Activity:** Schooners built by Dovell & Partridge on the River UMBER.
- **Time Period:** 1837 – 1843
- **Legacy:** The region developed a strong shipbuilding industry.

14. Market Gardening

- **Overview:** Produce was supplied to North Devon hotels and the holiday trade.
- **Time Period:** Victorian Era
- **Role:** Combe Martin supported the local resort economy through daily deliveries.

15. Mining History

- **Activity:** Silver mining under Edward I; decline by the 1870s.
- **Time Period:** 13th – 19th century
- **Note:** These mines were significant to the medieval economy.

16. Museum & Outreach

- **Institution:** Combe Martin Museum and Information Point.
- **Current Status:** Provides accessible exhibits and supports local heritage events.

17. Prehistory & Raids

- **Findings:** Evidence of Roman mining; Battle of Cynwit possibly at Countisbury.
- **Time Period:** AD 50 – 878
- **Significance:** Highlights strategic defence and Viking raid history.

18. Smuggling History

- **Activity:** Illicit coastal trade during the 'Golden Age of Smuggling'.
- **Time Period:** 18th - 19th century
- **Context:** Coastal geography facilitated contraband routes.

19. West Challacombe Manor

- **Description:** A fortified medieval manor with a unique hammer-beam roof.
- **Time Period:** 14th - 15th century onward
- **Status:** Grade II* listed, reflecting its architectural heritage.

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition in Context	Tags
Anglo-Saxon Era	The period in which Combe Martin was a farming hamlet, concluding with the transition to Norman control after 1066.	Early Settlement
Brictric and Edwy	Individuals who held the land in Combe Martin during the Anglo-Saxon era before it was transferred post-1066.	Early Settlement
Devonian Formations	Geological strata dating from 419-359 million years ago. Noted for being rich in minerals like silver, lead, and copper, shaping the region's mining history.	Geological Significance
Earl of Rone Festival	A unique, annual festival held in May that strengthens local identity and attracts tourism to Combe Martin.	Folklore & Festivals
Feudal Lordship	The system of land control that ended in Combe Martin with the sale of the manor by Sir John Pollard to tenants in the 16th century.	Manor System Decline
Fulling	A process related to textiles and rope production, connected to the area's significance as a hemp producer from the 12th to the 16th century.	Hemp & Fulling
George Ley	The local figure tied to philanthropy who founded the Combe Martin Free School in the early 1700s, establishing a legacy of community education.	Local School Legacy

Term	Definition in Context	Tags
Golden Age of Smuggling	The historical period, spanning the 18th and 19th centuries, characterised by illicit coastal trade enabled by the local geography.	Smuggling History
Hammer-Beam Roof	A distinctive architectural feature, referencing the unique roof structure of the fortified medieval West Challacombe Manor.	West Challacombe Manor
Horticulture	The cultivation of soft-fruits (e.g., strawberries) that became a key part of the local economy in following the decline of mining from the 1880s.	Industrial Transition
Pack o' Cards Inn	A key architectural site and national monument in Combe Martin. Built around 1690, listed as part of the area's heritage.	Architecture
Schooners	A type of sailing vessel built by Messrs Dovell & Partridge on the River UMBER between 1837 and 1843, representing Combe Martin's shipbuilding legacy.	Maritime & Trade
Silver Mining	A historically significant activity in Combe Martin, chartered under King Edward I and important to the medieval economy. Declined by the 1870s.	Mining History
Victorian Era	1837–1901: The time period during which Market Gardening flourished, with local produce being supplied daily to support the North Devon resort and holiday economy.	Market Gardening Victoriana

References:

Architecture	<i>Magna Britannia: Volume 6, Devonshire</i> (Lysons, 1822).	<i>General history: Civil and ecclesiastical division of the county.</i> British History Online
Combe Martin History	Combe Martin Village History Project.	CMVHP Archive
Mining History	Claughton, P.F. (1993). <i>A List of Mines in North Devon and West Somerset</i> .	Exmoor HER: Parracombe Mine
Silver Mining	Harrison, J.P. (2023-2025).	
Smuggling History	CMVHP Archive (2025). <i>Golden Age of Smuggling</i> .	https://www.combemartinvillage.co.uk/early-histories/smuggling-in-north-devon
Manor System Decline	CMVHP Archive (2025). <i>Feudal Manor to Modern Tenancy</i> .	CMVHP

Geological Significance	Pratt & Thurlow (2019). <i>Parracombe Conservation Area Appraisal</i> . Exmoor National Park Authority. SEM8704 .	Exmoor HER: MDE21687
Museum & Outreach	Combe Martin Museum and Information Point	https://www.combemartinmuseum.org/

Notes on Use:

This document is suitable as a secondary-source starting point for undergraduate research or for general historical context. It is not a primary authority for definitive historical claims.

Therefore, when using the "Combe Martin Historical Overview" document for academic purposes, a researcher should:

- Use it for context and discovery
- Verify claims with original sources
- For architecture and general history, consult Lysons (1822) and British History Online.
- For Combe Martin Silver Mining, the article at [Early Silver Mining in Combe Martin / Combe Martin Industrial History | Combe Martin Village History \[The Little Parish with a Big Story\]](#) is a strong secondary source for local details. It directs researchers to primary records.
- For geological and conservation facts, consult the Pratt & Thurlow (2019) Exmoor National Park Authority appraisal and Exmoor HER records.
- When writing an academic paper, the document should be cited as the Combe Martin Village History Project (CMVHP) Archive, acknowledging its origin as a local historical synthesis.
- CMVHP should not be presented as a primary historical record or a peer-reviewed monograph.