

# THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, MERE

## Former Congregational Church

The Congregational Church, built in 1795, was founded as an expression of thanksgiving by Mr. Ronald Butt. A native of Mere, he moved to Warminster where he ran a flourishing grocer's business. He returned to Mere, but his health failed, and seeking a cure he went to Bath to take the waters. The treatment proved successful. During his stay there he was visited by the Reverend William Jay, an eminent preacher of the day. When asked by Mr. Butt how he could best thank God for his recovery, Mr. Jay, knowing of, so it was said, "the religious ignorance and spiritual deprivation of the neighbourhood of Mere", replied "Go home and provide a place for the stated preaching of the everlasting Gospel".

Mr. Butt built the Church and a house for himself under one roof, on a site in Dark Lane, bearing the cost of £650.

The first Minister was the Reverend John Hyatt who rode from Sherborne every Sunday returning on Monday morning. He later published a book of sermons, and a copy of them is still in Mere.

In 1852 it was decided to build a new and larger church. A large schoolroom for the British School was provided in the same building under the church and opening into it. So the "House of God and the place of Instruction" we rebuilt under one roof. This building had a short life as a church, though for many years it was used by the British School and after 1922 by the Mere Junior School.

In 1868 the present church was built by Mr. Charles Jupe, a local mill-owner. He spent both time and money in the interests of Nonconformity in Mere and Zeals. Not only the Congregational Church but the British Schools and Temperance Movement benefited from his support and enthusiasm. The church was well filled for the Sunday services at that time. The gallery was used by the young people, the girls sitting on one side and the boys on the other. But in 1894 with the closing of the silk mills many of the congregation moved away in search of work.

In the early part of the 20th century the church was again flourishing. It faced many difficulties in the Second World War, the Army taking over all of the buildings except the church itself. As the windows were impossible to black out properly services were held in the afternoon and the Friends Meeting House used for other gatherings.

The first woman Minister in Mere was the Reverend Helen Pullen who was ordained and inducted into the Congregational Church in 1967. She served for just over three years.

In 1971 Mere and Shaftesbury agreed to share a minister, and this has proved to be a happy and successful arrangement.

In 1972 the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the English Presbyterian Church joined together to become the United Reformed Church, although some Congregational Churches remained independent. This has meant minor changes in Church government, but no difference in the services or day to day administration.

The church possesses all the minute books including the first, with a record of seventeen people who signed or attested the Original Church covenant.