

THE BOOK OF MERE

PORTRAIT OF A WILTSHIRE TOWN

Dr David Longbourne

The well-watered town of Mere, in south-west Wiltshire, lies on the old coaching road to Exeter. The Duchy of Cornwall owns much of the land in and around the town, whose royal connections date back to 1245 when Richard, Earl of Cornwall, was granted the manor by his brother King Henry III. In 1253 Richard built a castle on the summit of today's Castle Hill which rises abruptly to the north-west of the town. Nothing of the fortification remains but the hill continues to offer visitors and parishioners alike a magnificent view over the beautiful rural surroundings.

To the north and east is the edge of Salisbury Plain with fine downland scenery, whilst to the west, just two miles away, is the renowned National Trust property of Stourhead on the border of Somerset. Historically, however, Mere's relative isolation led to a high degree of self-sufficiency – and it is perhaps because of this that the townspeople still enjoy all the benefits of a close-knit and friendly community. *The Book of Mere* tells the story of that community, covering every aspect of local life down through the years, from schooling and shopping, through entertainment and sport, to work and worship – in times of hardship and poverty, and wealth and prosperity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

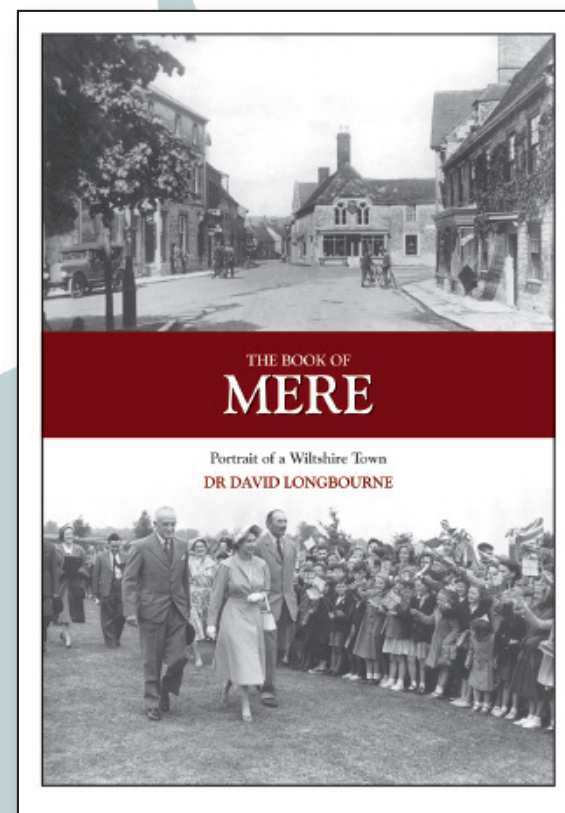
Retired GP David Longbourne has lived in Mere for over 40 years, and has been a keen local historian since joining the area's history committee which published *Mere: A Wiltshire Country Town* in 1975. Five years earlier he helped to found Mere Historical Society and, since 1984, has been honorary curator of the town's museum, which holds a large photographic archive, much of which is featured in *The Book of Mere*. The project was prompted by various recent historical studies, and the author acknowledges the great help he received from past authors and present researchers, as well as the community at large.

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