

	History:	
	Topic:	Correspondence from "The Shifter"
	Date of Record:	July 2023
	Author:	Nicholas Newman
	Notes:	"The Shifter" was the pseudonym of an anonymous writer who penned a weekly column in the Bury Free Press.

Correspondence from "The Shifter"

"The Shifter" was the pseudonym of an anonymous writer who penned a weekly column in the Bury Free Press from around the beginning of the last century to the end of 1943. A person of independent thought, the newspaper was keen to make clear that any views expressed by him/her were not that of the Editor. It is uncertain whether it was a commercial decision to end the column or perhaps the ageing author just passed on.

The justification for the mention of The Shifter here, stems from his interaction with Lonsdale J. Boldero who lived and farmed in Hargrave, before retiring to Horringer.

The Shifter

Entitled "BEHIND THE SCENES (By "THE SHIFTER")", the column even in its early days would tackle weighty issues such as the Boer War and the effect on homeland taxation. Regular comment was made on the machinations of the government, the local council, the findings in local court cases, and then on a lighter note the quality of local theatre productions and the success or not of local fetes. With an obviously well-placed ring of informants the column was quick to highlight injustices and hypocrisy at a local and national level. Some matters would trigger a particularly hard-edged rant.

Full vent to the writer's feelings came at times of trouble such as the Great War.

The following item was printed as part of the column on the 28th December 1918.

The war is over bar the signing of the peace terms. It means this, and I have been asked to express opinion, as to bets which have been made on the end of the war. The war is not over until peace is signed and declared. Thus, all who have made wagers that the war is over by Christmas (for instance) are losers. There are also many bets that "hostilities have ceased by Christmas." Well, I do not feel competent to give opinion on this, but would remind my readers that an armistice is merely a suspension of hostilities. And don't overlook the off-chance that the Hun brutes, if they could catch us unawares, would do the dirty on us. They must not be trusted one inch. The nature of the blonde beast is just the same today as it was when he made his first attempt to wipe us off the face of the earth. Don't forget it.

A recurring theme was the decline in standards, such as common courtesy and civility, with an early example of this was prompted by the post-war labour shortage.

The following item was printed as part of the column on the 11th January 1919.

We shan't know ourselves when we get back (if ever) the days of civility on the part of assistants in business establishments! Personally, I am a bit doubtful about our return to the courtesies of life all round, because the flippant young fry and the cantankerous older who magnify their own importance by the labour shortage, will have taken so deep a draught of the beverage of independence to be beyond reach of reason.

Still the general public need not abandon all hope. The balance of the labour market will be restored in time, and we may get back in our public departments and trading establishments assistants who will not feel it beneath their dignity to be courteous, and who will not unnecessarily keep you waiting while they carry on a private conversation.

Of course, all those who are paid to wait upon us are not discourteous. The picture is brightened by many exceptions, for instance, I was in a certain Government Office the other day where all those behind the counter displayed courtesy and readiness to oblige, with the exception of one sweet young thing, who picked and chose here and there whom she would attend upon. "First come first served" was not an axiom of hers. She bestowed her personal service whether she listed, and if she did not mean her glance to fall on you, well you might as well have been the last in the queue as the first.

Then perhaps a more balanced view of The General Strike of 1926.

The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 15th May 1926.

Probably the vast majority of people in this country were delighted Wednesday last when they heard shortly after one o'clock that the General Strike was called off. As representing, to a small extent, the man the street, I never thought that it would last long, because, as Sir John Simon, K.C., has pointed out, it was not a strike at all. From the very first it was an unlawful act, and possibly this fact had weight with those who were responsible for creating chaos and trouble. Whether action will be taken against men and leaders remains seen, but one thing is certain, that such state of affairs must never recur.

All trade disputes should be settled by arbitration. The hot-heads and extremists are responsible for what has happened. Labour on the whole is perfectly sound today, and the workers of this country generally speaking are honest and loyal. They have been frequently not misinformed, but badly led. The future trade unionism must suffer from this great blunder.

We all, at this time, need to keep our heads and to adopt the excellent principle of "Give and take." We cannot all see alike or think alike, but we all can, if we will, "Play the game." All through these past eight days our Prime Minister, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, has been splendid. He has gone up greatly in the estimation of his countrymen. Space forbids saying more this week of other great and loyal men.

Whilst views expressed in the column had somewhat mellowed over time, the threat of war returned in 1939, and "The Shifter" had his own views on appeasement and pacifism.

The following item was printed as part of the column on the 1st July 1939.

Hitler Has Us "Set".

And Hitler, after commanding us not to have anything to do with: Red" (?) Russia, is putting out "feelers" for a trade pact between Germany and the great and powerful Russian Empire. Doubtless with a view to a military alliance later on against Britain. The Fueher has us fairly twisted around his little finger. How he must secretly laugh.

There are many other examples of the often flowery penmanship and slightly right of centre views expressed in the column, but what has this to do with Hargrave one may well ask? Well from the selected clippings of "The Shifter" reproduced below, we can gather that he met and locked horns with Mr Lonsdale J Boldero a Hargrave farmer in a public debate at a meeting in Hargrave during World War I. This then led to a friendship and exchange of correspondence, plus an acknowledgment in his column of the death of Mrs Bolder in 1929.

If that was it, then it would not sustain mention, but in 1939, "The Shifter" then reproduced some of Mr Boldero's memories of Hargrave life. The social history aspects of life in the village contained within his article written just before the outbreak of World War II are invaluable and fascinating. We can tick the following off: a new village hall and chapel, a well dug to find a good supply of drinking water, a new telephone kiosk, an active WI, a women's Keep-Fit Class and a women's cricket team.

Here are the Boldero related clippings in chronological order.

The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 9th November 1929.

I noted with regret the death of Mrs. L. J. Boldero, of Horringer, and I extend sincere sympathy to the bereaved husband. Mrs. Boldero, who was of a kindly disposition, was an ever-welcome visitor among the sick and distressed in the parish of Horringer, and she will be greatly missed in this phase of sympathetic work, as also for her services in parochial matters generally. I knew Mr and Mrs. Boldero years ago, when they lived in Hargrave, and I have pleasant recollections of their charming home there. The present Rector of Little Saxham held the incumbency of Hargrave at that time. I am talking now of the period prior to and during the war.

The following item was printed as part of the column on the 8st July 1939.

Hargrave, and a Heckler.

Some of the villages around Bury St. Edmund's have piquant associations for me. Take Hargrave, for instance. In years gone by it had a noted shoemaker. If my memory stands me in good stead on this point. But he was more than that. He was a well-read man in matters of history and politics, and he was fond of arguing. Likewise of heckling public speakers. He once launched a heckling attack on me when I was addressing a meeting in Hargrave in advocacy of the Thrift Campaign during the war. But I was accustomed to hecklers; invariably managed to get on well with them. And it proved to be so at Hargrave. My shoemaker friend and I exchanged cut and thrust, and presently I found him in amicable agreement with me, because, although a keen debater, he was broadminded enough to accept reasoned argument. I often think with kindness of him. The Rector (the Rev. C. W. Floyd, I think, speaking from memory) presided over the meeting, and my esteemed old friend L.J.B. was amongst

those present. I rather fancy that as the last time I was ever at Hargrave. Shall I ever visit the parish again? I wonder.

The 'Thrift Campaign' was a wartime initiative, launched by the government of the day in 1915 which encouraged frugality at a national level and in the homes and individual lives of the population. The Hargrave meeting does not seem to appear reported in the local press.

The following item was printed in the Bury free Press on the 29th July 1939

Behind the Scenes

By The Shifter

A Letter From Hargrave

My recent comments upon the "Thrift" meeting I addressed at Hargrave during the war, and upon the intelligent and well-read "Heckler" with whom I crossed swords on that occasion, have brought me a long, friendly, and interesting letter from that well-remembered controversial adversary. He remembers the meeting quite well, seemingly, and appreciates my references to the gathering and to himself. He still lives at Hargrave, where he was born and has resided all his life and where he hopes to end his days in peace and quietness. And he particularly adds: "who knows where the horizon ends and the blue sky begins."

Unlike my correspondent I live far from my native heath, and both before and since the meeting at which he and I met I have travelled through England, Ireland, Wales and the Continent. Am I any the happier for those travels? Well, I would not erase them from the book of life if I could.

Set Forth Local Progress –

But to return to the letter from Hargrave. The writer gives me some interesting information as to how they are getting on in the parish. He Says: "We have built a Village Hall – not one of those black wood huts that disfigure the countryside, but made with bricks; with damp course and all. Also a Methodist Chapel, the two costing close on a thousand pounds; erected and paid for by local effort."

Good. Both these structures are welcome additions to the higher social, moral, and Christian equipment of the village. Their influence cannot fail to have and beneficial and happy effect on local life.

My correspondent goes on to say that the R.D.C. have been busy sinking a well on the village green, delving over 200 feet for a water supply, the aqua pura being stated to come from the Derbyshire hills; " a proof of the importance of Hargrave," he says. Nor does the usefulness of this water supply end with its utility for domestic purposes, apparently for the letter before me states "To get the water up you work the handle up and down, which requires considerable strength, thus answering two purposes, the supplying of our needs and ensuring the development of our muscles; something that the poor town dweller who merely turns a tap misses."

The Post Office, has also come in to the picture, I am informed through the medium of a kiosk on the village green, a leaflet ensuring the inhabitants that the said kiosk was specifically designed by Giles Gilbert, R.A. "proving that nothing but the best is good enough for Hargrave," asserts the writer of the letter before me. Then comes a deserved tribute to the local Women's Institute, the members of which recently came out top in a singing competition. Truly a notable village record so far.

And Interesting New Features

With a due sense of effective recital, my correspondent reserves a couple of tit-bits as a finale to his epistle. He adds: "A Keep-Fit class has also been formed in the village to which the ladies of all ages and sizes have rolled up (figuratively speaking of course). Yes and likewise a Women's Cricket Team, who recently beat a team from Barrow. One of the Hargrave players could not be bowled or caught out and so was asked to kindly retire!" Well what else was there to do? I admit the method of dislodgment was unusual, but if you cannot get a batswoman out in the usual way the only course open seems to be to adopt the unusual, because you cannot in reason carry the same match on for ever, and it is possible that these "Keep-Fit" Classes are going to produce batswomen who glue themselves to the crease in front of the stumps.

In conclusion, my correspondent kindly expresses the hope that if I ever visit Hargrave again I will call upon him and have a cup of tea and a chat, after which he promises to take me for a walk up the Village Street "set in the midst of green fields" He guarantees that we will shall not be "disturbed by the roar of buses, or half choked by petrol fumes."

Capital. I will bear this invitation in mind, although alas, the fleeting passage of time does not hold out superabundant hopes in this matter, Still, I can cherish recollections of Hargrave.

The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 23rd December 1939.

Reminders of Bygone Days.

I have had a couple of pleasant reminders of former days in Bury St Edmunds.....The other pleasant reminder of the past was a letter from my old friend Mr. Lonsdale J. Boldero, of Horringer, in which he emphasised his oft-repeated invitation to "Shifter" to visit him some day. Perhaps the invitation may bear fruit one of these times. You never know, "Shifter" has several of such standing invitations from West Suffolk amongst his treasured correspondence,.....Unfortunately the passing years, and other things, do not make travelling easier. In his letter Mr. Boldero recalls many incidents and persons linked with Hargrave, where he lived and farmed for many years, and with Hartest, whose former Rector, the Rev. Arthur Packer, whom I recently commented upon, he knew well. Incidentally I might mention that the handwriting of Mr. Boldero who is well advanced in the octogenarian stage – is as firm and as full of character as that of one in the vigour of early manhood. I wonder what is the secret of his virility. Perhaps he may tell me if and when we meet. Continued good health and activity to you L.J.B.

Lonsdale William James Boldero

Lonsdale William James Boldero's history in Hargrave is detailed in a separate article in the 'Families Section' of this website. In brief he was born in Drinkstone in 1854 the son of a wealthy Rattlesden farmer John Boldero (1806-1886) and Sarah Maria Raynam (1811-1879). The family comprised at least 17 children of which 14 survived beyond 60 years.

In the 1881 census he is to be found running a farm in Somerton and shortly after he marries Jane Bell (1861-1929) in 1883. They have four children Hubert Lonsdale (1885-1898), Alice Margaret (1886-1956), Guy Seymour (1893-1927) and Reginald Keith (1895-1921). By the following census in 1991 he is farming at The Grove, Hargrave, employing several men and usually a house servant. Son Guy was to serve in the Army Service Corps (Reg. No. 295301) in World War I.

The family are still recorded farming in Hargrave in the 1921 census, and press reports show them being very active in the local community. However, it seems that they must have retired to Horringer shortly after. Wife Jane passes on in 1929, but Lonsdale continues to live at Avondale, Horringer until his death in 1952 at the age of 99 years.

With age sometimes can come a little problem with memory loss, with "The Shifter" seemingly a little confused as to where Lonsdale is living in 1939, although the national Register for that year confirms him living in Horringer. Also, initially he remembered Lonsdale as an accomplished shoemaker although he later corrected himself, as Mr Boldero was only ever a farmer. Finally, as to the comment about his handwriting, that is less surprising, when as a boy, Lonsdale attended private school at Barford House, Broxbourne.

Nicholas Newman
July 2023.