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# Woman's OWN

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The ornaments were glued to the mantelpiece. The children couldn't go out alone. You might even wake up and find the wall of your house gone. The village of Bridge was caught in the grip of the juggernauts—until the people began to fight back. Douglas Keay reports

**T**WO minutes is all it takes to drive through the village of Bridge. You go down a hill, past some houses, up a hill on the other side and out. It's like a thousand other villages in Britain, places people pass through, places with nothing to stop for. But Bridge is different if you have the bad luck to live there, because Bridge is on the A2 London to Dover road—the main route to and from Europe and the Common Market. Bridge is a juggernaut village, the worst in Britain. At any time of the day or night a car, van, or motor-cycle goes along the High Street every four

seconds, a juggernaut, probably with a trailer, rumbles through every 46 seconds. The road is 17 ft. 6 in. wide. Juggernauts are eight feet wide. Two of them passing one another leave a maximum 18 in. clearance and in places the pavement in Bridge's High Street is only 18 in. wide. I stood in the High Street with my back against the front door of a house looking directly in front of me to the butcher's shop across the road. In a moment the view was blotted out by the first juggernaut. From then on an almost continuous wall of thudding steel and monster wheels

## HOW THE VILLAGERS CONQUERED THE MONSTERS OF BRIDGE



grazed so close to me that I could smell tyre-rubber burning, I could see the smallest scratch on a muddy hubcap. After three minutes I had taken all I could bear. So what can it possibly be like for those who have to live in a juggernaut village? John Milton had been painting the outside of his house a bright orange. It was worse than useless, and he knew it. The paint had no chance to dry before it was sprayed with grit kicked up by the lorries. Mr. Milton's effort was more of a morale-booster than anything else, a sort of Dunkirk defiance of the juggernauts. But at least from a distance, the

woodwork looked more cheerful. "I got so mad with them belting past me all the time I was on the point of hurling the paint pot at them," he said.

### Muck reaches the bedroom window

Mr. Milton was forced to do the painting himself. No professional decorator would risk putting up his ladder. "They'll do the back of the house, but not the front." "Same with window-cleaners." "Same with wife Ann. "Not that said his much point in cleaning there's much point in cleaning windows on this road. They get dirty again in a minute. On a wet

day the muck shot up by the lorries reaches as high as our bedroom window." We talked in the living room. Mr. and Mrs. Milton's chairs were as far as possible from the front window. The juggernauts pass within 18 inches of the house—closer sometimes if they have a heavy load that is slipping slightly. Like everyone else living in the High Street they go in perpetual fear of a lorry crashing through the wall into their front room—as one indeed did down the road. But what really annoys Mr. and Mrs. Milton is the unknown early morning lorry driver's mate, who periodically leans out of his cab

and calmly lifts the Milton's pint of milk from a holder on the wall without even slowing down. As recently as 10 years ago, when the Miltons came to Bridge "for a bit of peace and quiet", the village saw less than half the volume of traffic it suffers now. "It was a place where you could stand in the street and have a chat with a friend," said Mrs. Milton. "Nowadays I have to pluck up courage just to step out of my front door. You can call this a dead village," said Mr. Milton, "because that's what it's become." His wife waited patiently for a slight lull (Please turn to page 45)



Pictures by Alan Meek

hours—over twice the amount the road was designed to take.

In another survey where 398 householders were questioned, John Purchase and his team were able to show that “95 per cent expressed concern over personal safety in Bridge High Street; 73 per cent felt so strongly about it they were prepared to demonstrate publicly by sitting in the roadway and breaking the law; and 62 per cent at that time had already participated in demonstrations.

Like some wartime general recalling the tactics of a particular battle, John gives a wry smile: “You have to show these Ministry chappies you know what you’re talking about.”

No opportunity has been missed. On occasions even gimmickry has been employed to make the villagers’ demonstrations more effective. At one protest meeting a chair was left empty except for a sign reading: “The man from the Ministry.” Another time, while police were trying to remove demonstrators sitting in the road, one protestor swallowed a harmless pill and announced he had a heart condition and must remain seated for

15 minutes after taking the pill. Both incidents were aimed at ensuring publicity for the cause.

A few lorry drivers are openly hostile to the villagers and the sit-down demonstrations, but most of them, John Purchase believes, are in sympathy. After one appeal by the committee for funds, a group of delivery drivers from Fords even organised a whip-round to collect money for Bridge’s campaign.

“We have no quarrel with the drivers,” said John Purchase. “They are only doing their job. It is the owners who allow overloaded and potentially dangerous vehicles on to the road that we are fighting.”

Month after month, John Purchase and Brian Lewis between them have spent, on average, 20 hours a week fighting the Battle of Bridge. At times their wives have thought the struggle has become an obsession.

Mrs. Purchase told me: “Sometimes I’ve wished my husband would leave off for just a while and take an interest in something else—like decorating the house. But when you live in a village with these sort of traffic problems you’re only

too glad someone is trying to do something about it.”

About 18 months ago Mrs. Purchase suffered a stroke which her husband blames largely on the tension of living on the main street. The family has since moved to a quieter area—“even though we had to drop £10,000 on the potential price of our house in order to find a buyer.”

But what about those remaining in the High Street, the families living in the 50 houses that front straight on to the traffic?

Last autumn, 10 years after the battle started, the Government announced that Bridge *was* at last to have a by-pass. And this month the bulldozers actually move in. But it will be at least 18 months before the by-pass is built and the traffic routed away from Bridge.

### They will have to continue to fight

In the meantime the number of juggernauts barging through Bridge will increase. So John Purchase and his friends are continuing their battle to bar even bigger lorries, to ensure a closer check on mechanical safety of

juggernauts from the Continent, and to urge a system whereby heavy lorries have depots near big towns, where goods can be transferred to smaller lorries for delivery to the shops.

They are wary of what may happen if the plans for the Channel Tunnel are actually put into operation. They have too much experience of bureaucracy to trust that any promises to protect the ordinary person will be carried out unless the people themselves make it their business to prompt the bureaucracy.

They believe they will have to continue to fight for a way of life that is, at least, tolerable. And in fighting for themselves they believe they are setting an example to all those people who fear that in the face of authority they are powerless.

As John Purchase says: “You don’t need to be violent or an anarchist to save what you believe is worth saving—but you do need to get together with your neighbours and *fight*.”

**NEXT WEEK:** How the villagers of Otmoor held back the waters of a reservoir.