

THE BEDFORDSHIRE CLANGER



by Paul Schaverien

The Bedfordshire Clanger: A Short History

The Bedfordshire clanger is a traditional English pastry that originated in the county of Bedfordshire, in the East of England. Its history dates back to at least the 19th century, although some sources suggest its origins could be earlier.

Purpose and Name:

The clanger was designed as a portable meal for farm laborers. It's said to be "two meals in one," with a savory filling at one end and a sweet filling at the other. This allowed workers to eat both lunch and dessert without carrying multiple containers.

The name "clanger" may derive from the old dialect word meaning "heavy" or "clumsy," referencing the dense pastry, or from "clung," reflecting how the pastry enclosed the filling.

Traditional Ingredients:

Savory fillings typically included meat, potatoes, and onions.

Sweet fillings often featured jam or fruit, sometimes with sugar or dried fruit.

The pastry itself was shortcrust, sometimes enriched with lard or suet.

Cultural Significance:

It was an affordable, practical food for laborers, easy to carry and filling.

In modern times, the clanger has experienced a revival in regional bakeries, food festivals, and pubs, though the dual-filling tradition is sometimes simplified to just savory or sweet.



Recipe for a Bedfordshire Clanger

Ingredients

For the Pastry (makes 4 large clangers):

500g plain flour

125g cold unsalted butter (cubed)

125g lard or suet (optional for traditional texture)

1 tsp salt

150ml cold water (approx., adjust as needed)

For the Savory Filling:

250g minced beef or pork (or a mix)

1 medium onion, finely chopped

1 medium potato, peeled and finely diced

1 carrot, finely diced

Salt and pepper to taste

1 tsp dried thyme or sage (optional)

1 tsp Worcestershire sauce (optional)

For the Sweet Filling:

100g jam (plum, damson, or strawberry)

50g dried fruit (sultanas or raisins)

Optional: a pinch of cinnamon or nutmeg

Egg Wash:

1 egg, beaten with a splash of water

Instructions

1. Make the Pastry

In a large bowl, rub the butter (and lard/suet) into the flour and salt until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs.

Gradually add cold water, mixing until a firm dough forms.

Wrap in cling film and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes.

2. Prepare the Savory Filling

In a pan, sauté the onion, carrot, and potato until slightly softened.

Add the minced meat, seasoning, and herbs. Cook until the meat is browned.

Add Worcestershire sauce and a splash of water if needed.

Allow to cool completely.

3. Assemble the Clangers

Preheat the oven to 200°C / 390°F / Gas Mark 6.

Divide the pastry into 4 equal portions and roll each into a rectangle, about 1/4 inch thick.

Place a line of savory filling along one end of the pastry rectangle.

Place the sweet filling at the other end, leaving a gap in the middle.

Fold the pastry over to encase the fillings and seal edges with a fork or by pinching. Shape them into elongated dumplings or sausage-like forms.

Brush with egg wash.

4. Bake

Place on a baking tray lined with parchment paper.

Bake for 35-40 minutes, until golden brown and cooked through.

Serve warm or allow to cool for portable snacking.

Serving Suggestions

Traditionally eaten hot or cold, straight from the farm lunch box.

Modern versions can be served with a small salad or chutney for a contemporary twist.

