COMMEMORATIVE CLANGMEET AT BOXMOOR

Earlier this year I noticed that St. John's Church, Boxmoor, Hemel Hempstead, celebrated the 150th anniversary in May. It reminded me of an unusual commemoration of the church's centenary back in 1974.

The event was covered by the local newspaper reporter and photographer. Earlier in the year a report in the Hemel Hempstead Gazette looked at the history and traditions of a 'Clangmeet' and explained the importance of a "clangstick". I hope you find this insight into our local tradition as fascinating as I did.

Transcribed from the Hemel Hempstead Gazette Friday 22nd March 1974.

Clanger-Eaters' Clash Will Make History

Through the ages there has been much rivalry between Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire over the "clanger" and as part of the St. John's Parish Church, Boxmoor centenary celebrations there will be a clanger-eating contest on 15th June.

This will probably be the first time in history that these two counties have held a contest between them. The Bedfordshire clanger-eating champion from Caddington will be competing against the St. John's team of Hertfordshire men (and women) who will try to beat his time of less than five minutes to eat a clanger.

As few people are familiar with these culinary masterpieces, and in view of the forthcoming contest, the Gazette thought it was time to throw some light on the subject!

Originally, the clanger was eaten at celebrations, much as the turkey is eaten today. Vast numbers of them would be consumed, washed down with home-brewed ale, and there was a great deal of rivalry for the title of "Clangmistress of the Year". This title, along with the Clangstick, was awarded at a special ceremony to the best clang cook of the village.

To many, who are familiar with Cornish pasties, Yorkshire puds and Cambridge fancies, the Hertfordshire clanger or 'Tring Dumpling' regrettably means nothing. This is how it was described by an ancient of the district. "Well, it's a pudden, not yet a meat pudden, nor a jam pudden, more a bit of both with a bitty in the middle that is pudden". Imagine then a large suet pud with meat at one end and jam at the other. It was wrapped in cloth and boiled and often taken to the fields or the factory by workers for their lunch.

It was mentioned in early books by travellers through the county as one of the peculiar dishes met on the way. Edward de Huxton was quite amazed by what he had to eat in an inn near Saxmoreham. "Rose early from my bed and was much pleased by the girl who did bring me a curious Hertfordshire Clanger with which I did break my fast". He appears to have survived his ordeal for records show that it was years before his demise.

It was Pancras, ninth century Abbot of St. Albans who wrote: "Non initium clangae edendum, sed ultima pars ad ultiman morsalem consumptam quae veram gloriam et corpori et spiritu conferre fidemus" – it is not the beginning of the eating of the clanger, but the consumption of the first part to the very last morsel which we believe yields to the true glory both to body and soul.

Many of the recipes for this dish claim to have been handed down for generations, only replacing the ripe fruit by conserve and then jam, as tastes progressed. One family apparently even used the water in which the clanger was boiled as a basis for soups, claiming that any clanger that was dissolved in it thickened the soup and gave it a mellow texture.

Some older Hertfordshire people may well have a piece of cloth stocking-shaped with an opening at one end – this might well have been a clangpouch in which the pud was cooked!

***Above Image**: Mrs. Sallie Dove of Boxmoor, helped by her small child to display her family heirlooms. Left is a wooden Clangstick complete with an uncooked clanger and (right) a wooden Clangbowl.*

The pud was placed on a clangstick, and the clangpouch was then drawn over it, the stick was withdrawn and the steaming pud was carried to the table, when cooked in a clangbowl. The clangstick, once a well coveted piece of kitchen-ware is now very hard to find, and the one photographed here was removed from its hallowed resting place on the sitting room wall above the television. It was used by a great grandmother who won the title of Clangmistress for seven years in succession when she reluctantly agreed to relinquish her eligibility to future competitions and to give up her clangstick to the new Clangmistress after her "reign supreme". It was generally thought that if she had not done this she would have created the title of 'Clang Queen of All Hertfordshire'. All still claimed that "nought could beat hers", perhaps thought a trifle unkind to the new winner.

This clangstick did the rounds of the village closely watched by the family until they were able to win it back and once back in the family a battle ensued. The villagers were reluctant to lose their coveted prize and the family, their "heirloom" and so a compromise was sought – after much discussion in the village pub it was decided that a carved "symbolic" stick would be used instead. The whereabouts of this one is not known, however.

At the "Clangmeet", where the clangstick was awarded, all the lassies and lads gathered in their Sunday best. The clangers for the competition were prepared at home and often two or more would be made by the anxious housewives, only one of which would be deemed perfect for the Clangmeet. When the housewives ran out of clangpouches, they used stockings and woe betide a contestant with only one

stocking on, for then her secret was out and she was disqualified. The 'clangsters', a group of older men of the village, would gather round and taste a portion from each end of each clanger before deciding the winner. Whether it was the texture of the pudding or the flavour of the meat that won you the title is not known. The winner was then announced and all then ate and drank their fill. With dancing and singing and music, the Clangmeet continued. The happy Clangmistress had been chosen for yet another year.

You may or may not believe everything that is said about the clanger, but nevertheless there is the chance to see one – and people eating them – on the Moor this year, the Rev. Rex Merry, curate of St. John's Church, has agreed to head the Hertfordshire team at this contest and he would very much like to hear from anyone who has a recipe for the clanger or who would like to support Hertfordshire in the contest and get a free meal into the bargain. The clangers used in the contest will be of a standard size and the rules allow water to be drunk throughout. There will be a prize for the fastest eater and so if you are interested, contact Mr. Merry at 23 Beechfield Road, Hemel Hempstead.

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Transcribed from the Hemel Hempstead Gazette Friday 14th June 1974

Clangers At The Ready?

***Above Image**: Some of the local team getting in some practice at The Swan public house, Boxmoor (now Swan Antiques on the corner of Box Lane and London Road). Back Row (L to R): Malcolm Bury, Malcolm Instone, Brian Dikker and Gazette photographer Keith Waterton.*
Front row (L to R) Sally Edwin, the Rev. Rex Merry and Mrs. Sallie Dove.

CLANGERS at the ready? Certainly, this hungry-looking crowd are all prepared for tomorrow's (Saturday 15th June) historic clanger-eating contest on the Moor at Boxmoor.

The event, organised as part of St. John's Church centenary celebrations, will be a contest between the nine-strong Boxmoor team and a group from Caddington in Bedfordshire, the village that has in recent times taken over the ancient Hertfordshire custom of clanger-making.

What is a clanger? Well, It's a Tring dumpling. And what is a Tring Dumpling? It's a large suet pudding with meat at one end and jam at the other. It was traditionally wrapped in cloth and taken to the fields to be eaten for lunch.

The contest is expected to be featured on BBC 1's "Nationwide" this evening.

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Transcribed from the Hemel Hempstead Gazette dated Friday 21st June 1974 (edited).

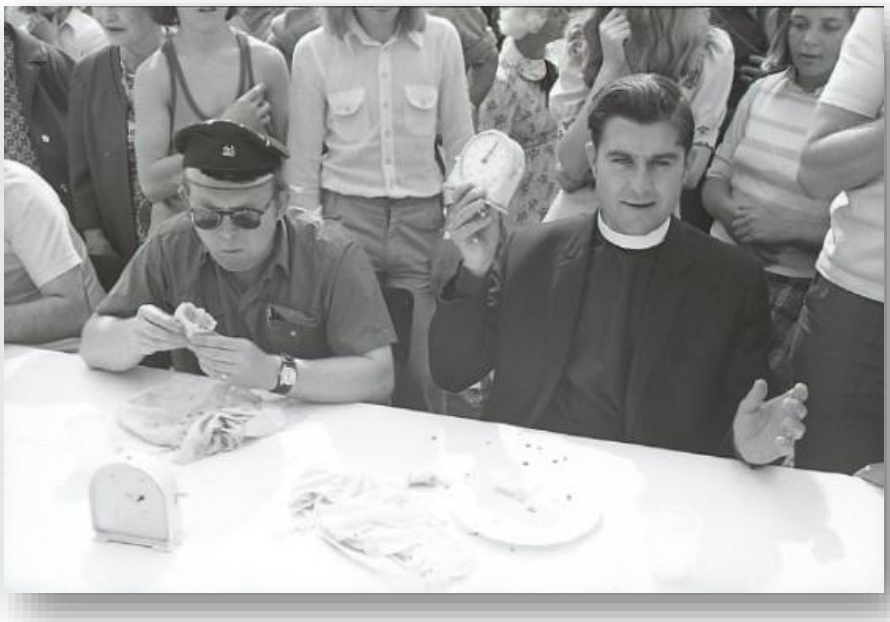
The Great Boxmoor Clanger-Eating Contest

There were clangers galore at St. John's Church centenary celebrations on Saturday 15th June. Fortunately they were not the type one drops, but the edible variety.

The organisers of the fete, which was part of the centenary celebrations, thought it would be fun to have a clanger eating contest.

So hearty Hertfordshire folk pitted their clanger eating potential against a team from Caddington in Bedfordshire. The winner of the was the Rev. Rex Merry, curate of St. John's, who beat the Bedfordshire champion, 22 stone Dave Millett. Rev. Merry swallowed the stodgy pudding in a record 2.2 minutes. Mr. Millett's time was 2.8 minutes.

***Above Image**: Bedfordshire clanger-eating champion, Dave Millett in action.*



***Above Image**: The victorious Rev. Rex Merry.*

Their efforts were rewarded by a welcome draught of ale from a barrel donated by the Gazette. Rev. Merry also received a tankard and Mr. Millett won a chicken.

Other members of the Boxmoor team were Mr. Malcolm Instone, Mr. Brian Dikker, Mr. John Mann, Mr. Malcolm Bury and Gazette photographer, Keith Waterton. In the Caddington team were Mr. Ray Smith and Mr. Alan Martin.

***Above Image**: A spot of inter-county rivalry – pictured: Rev. Rex Merry (left) of St. John's Church, Boxmoor and Dave Millett (right) the Bedfordshire clanger-eating champion.*

The clangers for the contest were made by Mr. Jennings of Westoning, Bedfordshire, who makes them especially for contests and carnivals.

There will be a return match at Caddington Carnival on Saturday, 29th June, when Dave Millett hopes to beat Boxmoor's clanger-eating cleric.

The fete, which was one of a series of events to be organised throughout the centenary year, attracted over 600 people and raised about £250. The proceeds will go into a fund which is hoped to eventually exceed £10,000.

The money will then be invested and used to pay for the upkeep of the church.

There were numerous stalls and side-shows at the fete including a coconut shy, bran tub, white elephant stall, tombola, pick-a-straw, treasure hunt and various raffles.

There was also a fancy dress competition and musical entertainment was provided by the Cavendish School Brass Band.

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Dacorum has two main claims to the origin of the 'Hertfordshire Clanger', not to be confused with the more recently described 'Bedfordshire Clanger', which became popularised in the early 19th century.

In reference to the ninth century account by the Abbot of St. Albans Abbey, which predates the 'Bedfordshire Clanger' popularity by almost a millennium. The 'Trowley Clanger' from Trowley Bottom near Flamstead in the east of the Borough, would potentially have a better claim geographically, because of its proximity to St. Albans, rather than the 'Tring Dumpling' from the western edge of Dacorum.

We may never discover the true origins of this ancient fast food, but it certainly needs more research and investigations into its culinary birthplace.

There are still a few Bedfordshire bakeries where you can purchase the traditional 'Trowley Clanger'. Perhaps it's time for a culinary revival of our local traditional delicacy - anyone fancy going to a Clangmeet?

Compiled by Pam Gasking.
Museum Collection's & Research Volunteer, Dacorum Heritage.

Source: The Gazette archive, part of the Dacorum Heritage collection, cared for at The Museum Store, Berkhamsted.