

The Lamont Harp



An Clarsach Laomannach (The Lamont Harp)

The **Lamont** Harp, now in an Edinburgh museum, is the oldest surviving Celtic harp. The harp was the traditional musical instrument of the Celts, long before the adoption of the bagpipe in the 16th century. The harp was the instrument of the bards, those individuals whose gift of oral recitation made them invaluable to the early clan chiefs.

The Lamont harp dates from at the latest, the mid 1400s. It was in the possession of Lillias, a daughter of Duncan Lamont, our 8th Chief, when in 1464 she married Charles Robertson of Lude. The harp stayed at Lude, near Blair Atholl, until 1914, when it was purchased by the National Museum of Antiquities for 850 guineas. It is now one of the prized historical objects of Scotland

Here is the description of the harp by David Kortier, a well known harp maker, who has examined the Lamont Harp:

"The Lamont is entirely of one species of wood, a hardwood, which is unusual. It is clear to me that the wood is English walnut, not hornbeam, however. I immediately thought "walnut" when I had the harp in front of me, but the color did not seem right. (I am most familiar with American black walnut.) Later in the day, I visited the Russell Collection of Keyboard Instruments at the University of Edinburgh. There in front of me was acres of this same wood. The lid of one early harpsichord in particular (English, about 1720) looked as though it could have been from the same log as the Lamont. The Curator there informed me that the wood in question is walnut, meaning, of course, English walnut.

The other curious thing about the Lamont harp is an inscription, apparently previously not noted, on the harp. Robert Bruce Armstrong, in his exhaustive description of this harp around 1900, does not mention it, because the harp was covered with a heavy red paint then. It is scratched unceremoniously into the side of the soundbox, and says, Al. Stewart of Clunie his harp 1650. Here is a project for a research musicologist/historian!"