

## The Harp "That once thru Tara's Halls....."

It is difficult, with any degree of accuracy, to determine where the harp first originated. Some believe it was first conceived in south-east Asia, while others credit the Phoenicians (early Egyptians). In any event, as is the case with most new developments, it probably evolved over time, until it reached Ireland, where the Irish embraced it as the national emblem of Ireland.

The most famous harp, Brian Boró's harp is on display in Trinity College, in Dublin and is the same harp that was used as the national emblem of Ireland. It was used on Irish coinage and adopted by Guinness on their logo.

Irish legends tell us, Dagda, a chief among the Tuatha De Danaan, owned the first Gaelic harp. If this legend is correct that would age the first Irish harp—some six to eight thousand years old. In the courts of the great Irish Chieftains, the harpist was of a higher social class, ranking only behind chiefs and bards. The harpist would play as the bard recited poetry for the court. In times of troubles the harpist would lead the warriors into battle and incite them to courage and victory.



During England's conquest of Ireland the harp was banned.

By the late 18th century the traditional Irish harpers were nearly extinct. Harpist had always trained a protoge to carry on their tradition, nothing was written. In 1792 a Harp Festival was held in Belfast to in an attempt to revive the art. Fewer than a dozen harpists were found in all Ireland. A young gentleman named Edward Bunting was given the task of notating all the music played at the festival. Even after the event, Bunting continued to collect music, legends and all aspects of the Harpists skills. Most of the surviving works of the early harpist was made possible, by the efforts of Edward Bunting.

Turlough Carolan (1670-1738), the famous blind Irish harpist, is credited with hundreds of popular tunes that are still popular to this day.