

# Denis Hempson

Denis Hempson was born in 1695 at Craigmore, near Garvagh, Co. Derry. He was blinded by smallpox at the age of three and got tuition at the age of 12 on the harp from Brigid Ó Cathain. Other instructors included John Garrigher an itinerant harper whom Hempson followed into Donegal, and Patrick Connor and Loughlin Fanning, both of whom came from Connacht.

At 18yrs, Hempson set out on his own under the patronage of Mr. Fanning from Garvagh who bought him a harp. He travelled throughout Ireland and Scotland playing in the big houses of noblemen who patronised harp music. He played for Bonnie Prince Charlie in Edinburgh in 1745. Hempson was one of ten harpers who competed at the Great Belfast Harp Festival in July 1792.

Hempson played the harp in the old style with long fingernails. He was the only harper to play in this style when he attended the Belfast Harp Festival, as the oldest harper present, in 1792.

A gay bachelor, Hempson married at the age of 86 and commented that the devil must have buckled them, he being blind and she being lame! He died moments after playing the harp, aged 112 in 1807 after living through three centuries.