

Ancient looted harp re-created

An ancient harp with royal connections, destroyed during the Iraq war, has been reproduced by British experts.

The 5,000-year-old Lyre of Ur was found in a mass suicide grave in 1929 and had been kept in a museum in Baghdad until it was looted in 2003.

Harp enthusiast Andy Lowings, from Peterborough, decided to create a working reproduction.

Cedar of Lebanon wood was flown from Iraq and the harp was made by an expert in Bishops Castle, Shropshire.

Almost 2lb of 24-carat gold was donated by the South African firm AngloGold Ashanti.

It was fashioned and fixed to the instrument by fine metal experts at West Dean College, in Sussex, and by master craftsman Simon Benney.

The lyre's original Sumerian engravings, on Mother of Pearl, were reproduced by a jewellery expert from the University of Loughborough, using revolutionary lasers at the University of Liverpool.

More than 4lb of lapis lazuli, a blue gemstone from the mountains of Afghanistan, was fixed to the soundboards, although a further 8lb of the stone are still required, along with a relatively small amount of silver to decorate the top of the yoke.

Mr Lowings, 54, said: "We still have a little way to go before the lyre is finished but it already looks magnificent and, most importantly, it works and is being played around the world.

"The idea of the international community pulling together to make one, small, positive thing from the ongoing horror in Iraq is quite appealing to people."

The instrument, which once belonged to the Sumerian royal family, was discovered in the mass grave by British archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley.

It was kept in the Baghdad museum until the building was looted during the Allied bombing of the city in 2003.

Gold and silver sheeting and precious stones were ripped off the lyre and its broken wooden frame was dumped in the car park.

Fortunately, its foot-high gold bull's head had already been removed and stored in a bank vault.



The harp's gold bull's head had been stored in a bank vault.



The harp was found by British archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley