A Belleek artisan skillfully adds details to a porcelain harp. Photo by Nancy Groce, Smithsonian Institution

For 150 years, artisans at Belleek Pottery have handcrafted statues, fine vases, intricate pottery baskets, and delicate porcelain figures in the lovely County Fermanagh village of Belleek. The firm’s distinctive porcelain is collected and treasured by connoisseurs throughout the world.

Estate owner John Caldwell Bloomfield founded Belleek Pottery as a new source of income for his tenants in the aftermath of the 1840s potato famine. Deposits of raw materials—feldspar, kaolin, flint, clay, and shale—and the mill power of the nearby River Erne made Belleek an ideal location for pottery making. To make use of these resources, Bloomfield set up a factory and hired fourteen master potters from Stoke-on-Trent, England, to train local workers.

Belleek quickly gained a reputation for making fine porcelain, as well as utilitarian pottery. By the 1860s, Belleek was filling orders from Queen Victoria and exporting products to the United States, Canada, and Australia.

The Smithsonian Institution thanks Belleek Pottery for assistance with this display.