LINEN, made from fibers of the flax plant, is one of the world’s most ancient fabrics. It was introduced to Ireland during early Christian times. During the eighteenth-century industrial revolution, linen factories replaced home production, and linen manufacturing became a mainstay of the Irish economy. It was encouraged by the British government, in part, because it did not compete with the English woolen trade.

During the nineteenth century, Jacquard technology and powered looms enabled Irish mills to produce vast quantities of beautiful, high-quality damask linen with intricate designs.

In 1854, Thomas Ferguson founded a linen mill near Banbridge in County Down. Today, the firm continues to manufacture Irish linen in Banbridge.

Thomas Fergusons Irish Linen products bear the “carpet beater symbol” of the Irish Linen Guild. Among them are many specially commissioned, or “bespoken,” linens that feature coats of arms of some of Europe’s most prestigious families or the monograms of well-known celebrities.

The Smithsonian Institution thanks Thomas Fergusons Irish Linen for assistance with this exhibit.