

Canon Edward Hannan 1836-1891

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Founder of Hibernian Football Club

Irish-born **Canon Edward Joseph Hannan** is best-known for his role in founding Hibernian Football Club, aka Hibs.

Glasgow was more popular but many Irish people in the early 19th century came to Edinburgh, settling around the Cowgate. Known as “Little Ireland”, it was a place of extreme deprivation with some of the worst slums in Europe. The Irish folk kept to themselves and the Edinburgh community was generally hostile to them. To help the Irish community, the Catholic Church raised money to purchase a previously Episcopal Church in a close off the Cowgate, inaugurated as St Patrick’s Catholic Church in 1856.

Edward Hannan was born on a farm in Ballingary, County Limerick, in 1836. He was second of the 11 children of John Hannan and Johanna Sheely. He was ordained in 1860, after training as a missionary priest. He had heard about the problems of “Little Ireland” and in 1861 was called to Edinburgh by Bishop Gillis. Appointed as curate to St Patrick’s and becoming Parish Priest in 1867, he remained there for 30 years.

Hannan set up a branch of the Catholic Young Men’s Society (CYMS), inaugurated in Ireland, to help the spiritual, physical and social well-being of young Irish men in his parish. One of these men, Michael Whelahan, a keen footballer aware that established clubs did not want Irish players, suggested to Hannan that CYMS should form a football club. Thus, Hibernian Football Club came to being in 1875 with Father Hannan as first manager, games played on The Meadows until 1880 and the team raising money for charitable causes. Initial setbacks in getting official recognition were overcome by intense lobbying and in 1876 Hibs joined the Edinburgh Football Association and the Scottish Football Association. Hibs moved to Easter Road (Hibernia Park) in 1880. In 1888, Glasgow Celtic, recently formed with the help of Hibs

but now swayed by a businessman, poached over half of the Hibs team through unlawful financial inducements. This, and a period of mismanagement and the lease on Hibernia Park expiring in 1890, meant the end of the Club in 1891. Reconstituted in 1892, with a lease on a new site at Easter Road, Hibs’ future was made secure. By then, Edward Hannan had died of pneumonia in 1891 in Dunfermline, where he had gone to convalesce. There were 2,000 mourners in his funeral procession.



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