

WATERFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Hugh Collender: Sports manufacturer, rebel and supporter of the Fenian movement

Hugh Collender was born in December 1828 in Cappoquin, Co. Waterford. He grew up in a small farm just outside of the town. He was a fervent nationalist and was involved in an ill-fated attack on a police barracks, which led him to flee to America in 1849. While in the United States, Collender became an acquaintance of Kilkenny man Michael Phelan, who was considered the ‘father of billiards’ in America. Collender became Phelan’s protégé. In 1853, Collender was Thomas Francis Meagher’s manager for his lecture tour of the southern states. Meagher became the godfather to Collender and Julia Phelan’s (daughter of Michael Phelan) first child.

In 1855, Michael Phelan and Collender set up a joint venture named Phelan and Collender. They co-published *The Rise and Progress of the Game of Billiards* in 1860. Collender had a keen interest in chemistry and technology, which led him to develop the ‘combination cushion’ for billiards. The success of their business led them to donate much of their money to the cause of the Fenians. In 1871, after Phelan’s death, the company was renamed the H.W. Collender Company. Two years later, Collender built a substantial factory in Connecticut, for the manufacture of billiard tables. It would go on to employ two hundred people, and subsequently become the market leader in billiards tables. The factory was destroyed and rebuilt after a fire in 1883, and a year later merged with a couple of other companies to become the Brunswick Bake Collender Company with Collender as President. It has continued in existence since 1960 as the Brunswick Corporation. Collender died in 1890 in New York of kidney failure.

Cian Manning