

CATHERINE HAYES  
(1818-1861)



WILLIAM  
MAKEPEACE  
THACKERAY  
(1811-1863)



KENSAL GREEN CONNECTIONS: THE DIVA, THE NOVELIST, THE QUACK AND THE COMPOSER  
(PHOTOS: SIGNE HOFFOS)

JOHN ST. JOHN LONG  
(1798-1834)



MICHAEL BALFE  
(1808-1870)



## THACKERAY & THE CATHERINES HAYES



William Vincent Wallace (1813-65) and Michael Balfe (1808-70) both wrote songs for their compatriot Catherine Hayes – including this by Wallace, companion to another she sang, ‘Why Do I Weep for Thee?’.

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Wallace’s Carrara marble ledger lies by Balfe’s pink Peterhead granite obelisk in Square 74. Thackeray’s marble tomb stands by the south path in Square 36. Ainsworth’s Portland Stone monument is NW of the path in Square 154. The Limerick-born quack doctor John St. John Long (1798-1834) also has a striking monument near Catherine Hayes’ on Centre Avenue. Cruikshank’s monument still stands between theirs, although his remains now lie in St. Paul’s Cathedral.

A Web search for ‘Catherine Hayes’ leads to both an early Georgian murderess and an early Victorian songstress. The invaluable Bob Moulder reminds us that this unfortunate coincidence links the Irish Diva with another KG notable, the author William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63).

The name of Catherine Hayes (1690-1726) was once a byword for criminal depravity. She had incited two men to bludgeon her husband with an axe, dismember the body and distribute the parts between Millbank and Marylebone. Moreover, she had adulterous affairs with both accomplices, even though one was also her illegitimate son. They were hanged and gibbeted; for complicity in the death of her husband, she was found guilty of Petty Treason and burned at the stake.

A century later, Thackeray deplored the vogue for ‘Newgate romances’, represented at their best by Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* and Ainsworth’s *Rookwood* (both illustrated by Cruikshank, for yet another KG connection). He set out to parody the genre, drawing on the Hayes story – with mixed results, although some critics detect a glimpse of *Vanity Fair*’s roguish Becky Sharp in *Catherine* (1839-40). A decade later, in *Pendennis*, Thackeray cited as unworthy “the greatest criminal, tyrant, booby, Bluebeard, Catherine Hayes, George Barnwell among us” – but, by then, another Catherine Hayes was famous, for entirely the right reasons.

The upshot, like the critique of celebrity culture, has a familiar ring. A journalist in Dublin misconstrued the reference, and attacked Thackeray for “unmanly grossness”. Other Irish papers pitched in, Thackeray received threatening letters, and a stalker even took lodgings near his home. Fortunately, an apology settled the matter amicably, although Thackeray later wrote (privately): “Accursed let his memory be / Who dares to say aught in dispraise / Of Oireland, the land of the free / And of beauty and janius [genius] and Hayes.”

SIGNE HOFFOS