Queen of shoplifters goes to ground with fame in the bag and a fitting epitaph in flowers
Report: Duncan Campbell □ Main photograph: Graham Turner

THREE was a Royal funeral in the capital yesterday. The woman who won a reputation as the Queen of the shoplifters, Shirley Pitts, was buried with great style after the sort of life that was as much Dickens as Dickins and Jones.

Fifteen Daimlers, each as black as a Marborough Street magistrate’s expression, led the funeral procession more than 20 miles from her home in Chippenham to Edgware Road in north London, where a trumpeter and guitar player in brown and beige played the "Heaven in heaven..."

Heads of Irish Barrat’s Cheek to Cheek, as the body was lowered into the grave.

Born on the Lambeth Walk, in south London, 57 years ago and evacuated to Yorkshire during the war, Shirley Pitts started stealing at the age of seven. By the time she was in her twenties, she had won a reputation for being one of the most skilful and enterprising shoplifters in the land.

The handsome Mr Pitts would operate teams of "hustlers", who travelled the land pursuing their trade. Harrods was a favourite shop, a fact recalled yesterday by an elegantly dressed man who worked as a porter.

The funeral was by the Roman Catholic Church of the Assumption in Chigwell, where the priest asked for God’s mercy on "the long arm of the law that had once reached out to stop her with her friendship and condolence with the service for the Kray family."

The Kray twins sent their condolences, and Buster Edwards, the Great Train Robber, was there in person, as were Shirley Pitts’s family and friends who were anxiously that she be remembered as much for her generosity and loyalty to friends as for her activities near the perfume counters.

Her reputation for never "grassing," a tribute as fine as any of the confessions of carnavations and fudgian, was recalled at the grave site, as was her love for a good time, consumed with a champagne bottle made of flowers. Two words in 20 high floral letters spelled out her epitaph: "Gone Shopping."