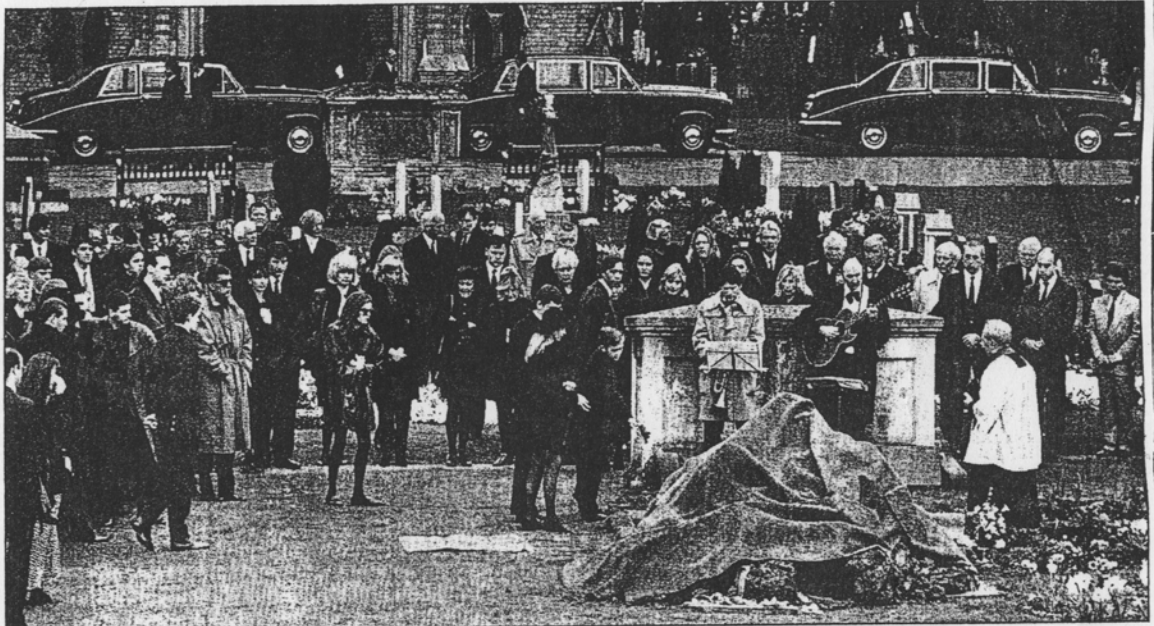


Mourners say a final farewell to the 'queen of the shoplifters'. David Connett reports



Mourners at Lambeth Cemetery, south London, (above) for the funeral of Shirley Pitts. The cortège (below) passing through Hoxton, east London, and (bottom) floral tributes



Underworld pays tribute with flowers and music

IF THERE are no security cameras on St Peter's Pearly Gates, Shirley Pitts will really be in Heaven. Once inside she will never have to keep an eye out for store detectives ever again.

Scores of mourners, including Buster Edwards, one of the Great Train robbers, yesterday paid their last respects to Shirley when she was buried in a style befitting the uncrowned "queen" of shoplifters.

Shirley's final exit brought traffic to a standstill as a 20-strong cortège of limousines ferried her coffin, family and friends from her home in Chigwell, Essex, to a south London cemetery.

With a string of convictions for theft and other crimes to her name, even the law couldn't pass up the opportunity of a final salute to an old foe. They stopped traffic in Hoxton, east London, to speed her last journey.

Shirley, 57, who died of cancer, was buried in an expensive Zandra Rhodes designer dress, which had been paid for, friends emphasised.

She bowed out to the tune of *I'm in Heaven* played by a trumpet player shivering inside his duffle coat as wind and rain licked on-lookers at the graveside.

Photographs: Geraint Lewis

Fitting floral tributes included the message "Gone Shopping", a Harrods bag - Shirl's favourite shop - and a bottle of chilled champagne. Mourners said they looked in vain for a tribute from the Oxford Street retailers' association.

Written tributes from friends and acquaintances unable to attend the funeral - largely because they are guests of Her Maj-

esty or are enjoying permanent vacations on the Costa del Sol - included members of the Kray family and Ronnie Knight.

Her brother Charlie was among those who could not be there. He is serving 15 years for kidnapping and torturing a woman.

Born into a London criminal family, Shirley Pitts came to enjoy a reputation as one of the best female thieves since Moll Cutpurse.

While serving one of three jail sentences she escaped from a prison van taking her to court so the child she was bearing would not be born in prison.

A friend said: "The world she moved in is a very macho world but Shirley was well regarded in her own right. She was one of the old school. A good woman who looked after those who mattered."

