

QUEEN OF SHOPLIFTERS IS BURIED IN £5,000 DRESS SHE NICKED



Mourner... train robber Buster Edwards



Gone but not forgotten... a floral tribute spells out mum-of-seven Shirley's shoplifting catchphrase

SHOPLIFTING queen Shirley Hawkins was buried yesterday — in a stolen £5,000 Zandra Rhodes dress. The designer granted Shirley's last wish to wear the blue gown, saying: "It's an honour."

Shirley, 57, who stole mink coats and luxury goods from top London stores, died from cancer last week. Mourners yesterday included Great Train Robber Buster Edwards. Jailed gangsters Reggie and Ronnie Kray sent the message: "One of the best."

Mum-of-seven Shirley — a thief since the age of seven — had a string of convictions. She used 30 wigs as disguises to hit shops like Harrods and Liberty's. Twenty-one black Daimlers followed her hearse as she was driven to Lambeth cemetery, South London, yesterday.

Floral tributes included a wreath in the shape of a Harrods bag in gold roses on green ivy.

And her catchphrase "Gone shopping" was spelled out in white and yellow carnations.

A trumpet player and guitarist played 'I'm In Heaven' as she was lowered into the ground.

Shirley — a friend of

the notorious Richardson gang — was buried alongside her bank robber brother Henry.

Priest Father Dan Harrigan told mourners at her local church in Hainault, Essex: "We all have faults and failures. But we pray God will forgive her."

Her son Christopher said: "She was given the send-off she would have wanted."

"She had borrowed the

dress on a long term basis. It looks like it will be on a very, very long term basis now."

Zandra admitted: "It makes me feel appreciated. She coveted my gown so much she wanted to be buried in it."

Christopher said his mum — the first woman to escape from a British prison — was "the best at what she did."

Trouble

He added: "She had her own professional team of women and there was always a man acting as a lookout who would cause disruption if one was caught."

"When she used to go out in her wigs we all used to say 'Where are you going mum?'"

"She would always reply: 'Going shopping'."

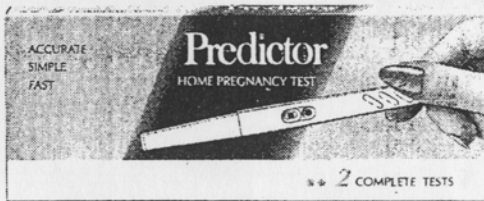
Close pal Lorraine Gammon said: "She was the best woman thief in Britain. But she never cheated a friend or turned her back to someone in trouble."

"She will be missed by the people of London — except perhaps the police and the Oxford Street shopkeepers' association."



Bye petal... green and gold Harrods wreath

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