

Richmond - Twickenham Times

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# Obituary: actress Sheila Camfield

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By Times reporter

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It is with great sadness that we record the death of Sheila Camfield, who died peacefully at her home in Sherland Road, Twickenham, on March 3 at the age of 63, writes her friend, William Hall.

Sheila was a popular and key figure in the Richmond Shakespeare Society, where she had been a stalwart for more than a quarter of a century, both on stage at the Mary Wallace Theatre and behind the scenes in the box-office and behind the bar.

Her energy and enthusiasm were boundless. Some of her performances were not just memorable, but unforgettable particularly in recent years when she surfaced in pantomime and farce. Who can forget her unashamedly prancing about the stage in a clown's outfit worthy of Bertram Mills' Circus?

Under her stage name of Sheila Dunn, she was a committed professional whose face became familiar to millions in many hit TV series over four decades from Dr Who in the sixties to EastEnders and The Bill. In a career spanning more than 40 years, she appeared in Z-Cars, The Professionals and The Sweeney, several directed by her late husband Douglas Camfield.

Born in Wolverhampton, the daughter of ICI chairman Bill Dunn who invented the bullet-proof engine of the Spitfire Sheila moved to London to study at LAMDA. She won her first appearance in Dr Who after Douglas Camfield saw her photograph in Spotlight, cast her in several episodes with the original Doctor, William Hartnell - and later married her. Their marriage would last until his death in 1984 at the age of 51.

Her film career included roles in Roman Polanski's Dance of the Vampires and John Schlesinger's A Kind of Loving.

In later years Sheila turned to comedy, as Harry Hill's mother, and also playing an "old Baby Spice" in An Audience with the Spice Girls. Last year she featured in the TV drama The Lost Prince, as well as the comedy series Bremner, Bird and Fortune.

The funeral took place on March 15 at Mortlake Crematorium, attended by numerous friends from the theatrical profession and elsewhere, and followed by a celebration of her life at the Mary Wallace Theatre. Sheila is survived by her only son Joggs, a music PR executive.

Derek Stringer, Richmond Shakespeare Society chairman, added: "At times like these, it is customary to lapse into hyperbole, but it is no exaggeration that Sheila was one of the warmest and most generous spirited people that one could wish to meet. This was illustrated by the number of people at the service and at the theatre. Mortlake Crematorium, our foyer, auditorium and stage were all bursting.

"It was fitting that a sombre occasion turned into an enjoyable celebration, during which £511 was raised for the Actors' Benevolent Fund. There will be a large, Sheila shaped, hole in the society for some

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time to come."

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