

Wendy Richard

Gone but still with us

Not many actresses are as known by their real name as they are by the character they had played for several years, but the name Pauline Fowler was synonymous with Wendy Richard, the brilliant actress who played her.

Her departure from EastEnders in 2006 was sad and even sadder was the death of Wendy who succumbed to cancer, just months later.

The British actress, born Wendy Emerton on July 20 1943, was educated at the Royal Masonic School for Girls in Rickmansworth, Herts.

She then studied at the Italia Conti Academy stage school in London and was first introduced to television audiences as Joyce Harker, a regular in the BBC's 1960s soap The Newcomers.

Although best known for her 20-year role as Pauline Fowler in EastEnders, most people over 40 fondly remember her for her role the Cockney shop assistant Shirley Brahm in the 1970s sitcom Are You Being Served? She also had roles in Dad's Army, Up Pompeii! and The Likely Lads.

Wendy joined EastEnders as matriarch Pauline Fowler when the programme began in 1985 and remained in it until her character died.

The reason she gave for her departure was an objection to certain parts of the storyline.



At one stage, Wendy was reportedly given a script which included a vicious tirade against Margaret Thatcher.

She refused to perform this sequence, accusing the scriptwriters of using the series as a soapbox for their political opinions.

Her first three marriages ended in divorce. She lived with her partner of over 10 years, John Burns and the two married in October last year.

The star, awarded an MBE for services to television in 2000 and in 2007 awarded a British Soap Award for Lifetime Achievement for her role in EastEnders, has twice before been diagnosed with breast cancer.

She battled it in the mid-1990s and in 2002, then the disease went into remission for several years.

But she was told last year that it had returned in an aggressive form, attacking her kidneys, bones and spine.

In October, she revealed in a newspaper interview that her cancer was terminal.

The television star died on Thursday 26 February 2009, aged in 65, in the Harley Street Clinic in London. Her husband John Burns was by her side.

Her agent Kevin Francis said, "She was incredibly brave and retained her sense of humour right to the end."