

= Wellard =

Wellard is a fictional Belgian Tervuren dog from the BBC soap opera EastEnders . He first appeared in the series on 18 October 1994 , and became EastEnders ' longest @-@ serving pet , before being killed off on 15 August 2008 . Although the character is male , he has been played primarily by three female dogs : Zenna , her daughter Chancer , and her granddaughter Kyte . A fourth dog briefly served as a replacement for Zenna in 1996 , when she was given time off from the show to have a litter of puppies .

Wellard was briefly written out of the series under executive producer Matthew Robinson , but returned when Robinson was succeeded by John Yorke . Wellard 's owners for the majority of his duration in the soap were Robbie Jackson and Gus Smith . He was voted " Best Pet " at the 2008 Digital Spy Soap Awards , and named the UK 's favourite soap opera pet in a 2009 Inside Soap poll . Wellard was a fan favourite , and although a storyline that saw him threatened with euthanasia for biting local café owner Ian Beale was poorly received by critics , his death drew generally favourable reviews .

= = Storylines = =

In November 1994 , Walford resident Robbie Jackson (Dean Gaffney) takes in a dog he assumes to be a stray , naming him Wellard . The dog 's owner , Mr Hammond , locates him and demands him back , but Wellard later returns to Albert Square of his own accord . Robbie realises he has been mistreated and has run away . Mr Hammond admits to neglecting Wellard , and allows Robbie to keep him . Wellard fathers puppies with Grant Mitchell (Ross Kemp) and Nigel Bates 's (Paul Bradley) greyhound , Frieda ; however , the puppies are stillborn . When Robbie begins a relationship with a woman allergic to dogs , she gives him the ultimatum of choosing between her and Wellard : Robbie chooses Wellard . Several years later , when Robbie is due to leave Walford to live in India , Wellard is run over , delaying Robbie 's departure . He is cared for by Robbie 's sister Sonia (Natalie Cassidy) , who gives him to her friend Gus (Mohammed George) after Robbie 's departure . When Gus is involved in a minibus crash , Wellard is able to save his owner by leading him to a spot from where he can call the emergency services .

Wellard is reported to the police when he bites local café owner Ian Beale on the buttocks . He is taken away , with the possibility that he will be euthanised , but Gus and Deano Wicks (Matt Di Angelo) launch a campaign to save him , under the moniker " Walford One Owed Freedom " (WOOF) . When Wellard is put on trial , Ian 's partner Jane (Laurie Brett) presents character witness statements for the dog , written by Ian 's children , Lucy (Melissa Suffield) and Peter (Thomas Law) . Wellard is found guilty , but as a result of the statements , Gus is allowed to take him home as long as he keeps him on a lead at all times . When Gus leaves Walford to travel with his girlfriend Keisha (Suzie McGrath) , he leaves Wellard with his friend Mickey Miller (Joe Swash) . Mickey sells Wellard to Vinnie Monks (Bobby Davro) , who intends to give him to his girlfriend Shirley Carter (Linda Henry) . When it transpires Shirley does not want him , Vinnie gives Wellard to the Jackson family . Bianca Jackson (Patsy Palmer) feeds Wellard a chocolate , causing him to suffer from theobromine poisoning . He has to be euthanised , is cremated , and has his ashes scattered on the local allotment .

= = Development = =

Wellard 's name is a portmanteau of " well hard " , meaning " very tough " . The character was originally played by a Belgian Shepherd (Tervuren) named Zenna , who was cast at the age of one . Producers had envisioned Wellard as a " rough , tough mongrel " , and Zenna 's owner , dog @-@ handler Gill Raddings , explained : " She had the look they wanted and the ability to do what was needed on command . " EastEnders ' producers were initially unaware that Zenna was female , and had to find a canine double to serve as temporary replacement in 1996 when it transpired that she was pregnant , going on to deliver 10 puppies . Zenna was retired in 1998 , as she was " losing her

looks " .

Zenna was replaced in the soap by her daughter Chancer , who was in turn succeeded by her own daughter , Kyte . Kyte played Wellard for seven years , longer than Zenna and Chancer . The dog , whose pedigree name is Minka Independance Kyte , came to the soap from Raddings ' company Stunt Dogs , along with another EastEnders dog , Terence . She had previous experience in the television and film industry , having appeared on A Touch of Frost , The Jonny Vaughan Show , 102 Dalmatians and Gladiator . Raddings revealed that Kyte came to understand the words " action " and " cut " , meaning the director would sometimes have to give an alternate cue such as " go " during scenes featuring Wellard , as the dog would become instantly alert upon hearing the usual commands , which appeared incongruous in scenes which called for Wellard to be relaxed . Kyte worked closely with Mohammed George , who played Wellard 's owner Gus . George was afraid of dogs as a child , but after working with Kyte for three years , commented that they were so close he " sometimes [felt] like [her] dad . "

Wellard was briefly written out of the show under executive producer Matthew Robinson , but returned in 2000 , when Robinson was succeeded by John Yorke . A show insider commented : " Wellard just disappeared . It seemed odd because Robbie loved that dog and never noticed it had gone . " An EastEnders spokesman stated of his return : " John Yorke believes Wellard should be an integral part of Robbie 's character . "

When a 2005 storyline saw Wellard threatened with euthanasia for biting local café owner Ian Beale (Adam Woodyatt) , James Desborough of The People suggested that EastEnders producers were hoping to emulate the success of a storyline from rival soap opera Coronation Street , which saw fans protest the arrest of character Deirdre Rachid (Anne Kirkbride) , going as far as to lobby the UK Parliament for her release . Desborough deemed the storyline " bizarre " and accused the BBC of being " desperate to boost flagging ratings " . An EastEnders spokesman responded that it was simply " a funny story which we hope the nation will get behind . "

In June 2008 , it was reported that Wellard was to be killed off . A show insider explained : " Wellard has been a much @-@ loved character and everyone will be sad to see him go . But if you think about it , Wellard was not a puppy when he arrived on Albert Square , so he would be over 100 in dog years by now . It makes sense for him to bow out of the show gracefully . " Raddings commented : " I used to take Kyte on set everyday but I found the scenes when Wellard was put down too hard to watch so I asked someone else to take her to filming . " The scene in which Wellard was euthanised had to be re @-@ edited , as Kyte could be seen breathing when supposedly dead . At the time of his death , Wellard had been in EastEnders for 14 years , making him one of the show 's longest @-@ running characters , and its longest @-@ serving pet .

= = Reception = =

Wellard was voted " Best Pet " at the 2008 Digital Spy Soap Awards . His death storyline was nominated in the " Tearjerker " category at the 2008 All About Soap Bubble Awards . In 2009 , a poll by magazine Inside Soap named Wellard as the UK 's favourite soap opera pet . He came second in a poll to find Britain 's favourite TV pet in April 2006 , losing to Lassie , and in March 2008 was named the fifth best dog on television by Anna Pickard of The Guardian , behind Bouncer from Neighbours , Willy from EastEnders , Lassie and Dogtanian . It was noted in The People in July 1997 that Wellard was " a firm favourite with the soap 's fans " , while in August 2008 , the Daily Mail deemed him " one of [EastEnders '] most well @-@ loved characters . " The dogs received fanmail from viewers hailing them as the best actors on EastEnders .

Zenna , Chancer and Kyte were occasional targets of professional jealousy from their human co @-@ stars , and some television critics have suggested that Wellard was a better character than his owner , Robbie . When Michael Greco commented in 2002 that Wellard received better scripts than his character , Beppe di Marco , the Sunday Mirror 's Ian Hyland wrote : " He should try being Robbie Jackson . Wellard gets better scripts and better girls than him . " Similarly , Garry Bushell of The People compared EastEnders with rival soap Coronation Street following a 2003 scheduling clash , observing : " ITV had Richard Hillman 's heavyweight murder confession . BBC1 gave us

Robbie Jackson 's heart @-@ to @-@ heart with Wellard . (Don 't scoff ? it 's tough to play moving scenes with a dumb and soppy creature , but Wellard rose to the occasion .) " . Derek McGovern of The Mirror criticised Gaffney 's acting ability , observing : " Outside of Lassie movies I haven 't seen a dog consistently steal scenes off a human the way Wellard used to pinch them from Dean . " Gemma Bissix appeared in the show as a child actor from 1993 to 1998 , playing Clare Bates . She commented on her return in 2008 that as a child , the dogs playing Wellard were better paid than she was . When Emma Barton , who played Honey Mitchell , was axed from the soap later that year , she spoke of her dismay that Wellard 's death was being marketed as a bigger storyline than her character 's exit . Roz Laws of the Sunday Mercury called it " particularly galling " that Barton 's exit was upstaged by Wellard 's death .

Hyland was critical of the 2003 storyline which saw Robbie leave EastEnders to move to Mumbai with his girlfriend Nita (Bindya Solanki) and her son Anish (Ali Zohoor) . He explained that the aspect of the storyline which upset him most was Wellard being run over " so the scriptwriters could engineer the inevitable last @-@ minute dash to the airport " , questioning : " What 's Wellard ever done to deserve that ? " The storyline which saw Wellard threatened with euthanasia after biting Ian Beale received negative reviews from critics , deemed " bizarre " by James Desborough of The People , and the " longest , most tedious ever soap storyline " by Jim Shelley of The Mirror . Bushell simply wrote : " Wellard bit Ian Beale . Which one needs the Tetanus jab ? " Tim Teeman of The Times called it the " daftest " storyline of the year , comparing it to a similarly ill @-@ received and long @-@ running storyline given to the unpopular Ferreira family .

Wellard 's death drew generally favourable reviews from critics . The Guardian 's Nancy Banks @-@ Smith deemed Wellard to have " died with great dignity [...] Not , as a lesser dog might , making a meal of it . " Grace Dent , also of The Guardian , wrote that she was an " emotional mess " when Wellard was euthanised , calling him " one of the true old guard of EastEnders " . Andy Bollen of the Sunday Mail deemed it a shame Wellard had been killed off , calling him " the most convincing actor on the soap " , while The Mirror 's Maeve Quigley called Wellard 's death sadder than that of human character Jase Dyer (Stephen Lord) shortly afterwards . Wise similarly opined that Wellard upstaged most of the cast , and that his death was more of a " tear @-@ jerker " than the return of Jim Branning (John Bardon) who had been absent after suffering from a stroke . The Mirror 's Kevin O 'Sullivan commented : " a canine Oscar to the hound who played Wellard ? the pedigree chum whose sad demise after 14 years of fouling Walford 's pavements was genuinely moving . " Shelley wrote that it signified the " [d] eath of the best actor in the show " , and the South Wales Echo published the obituary :

In contrast , however , Laws felt that EastEnders was becoming too depressing , noting that Wellard 's death came at the same time Jase was murdered and Honey and her husband Billy (Perry Fenwick) broke up , writing : " I feel like slitting my wrists when I tune in now . [...] There 's only so much gritty realism we can take in our soaps , and EastEnders is really overloading us at the moment . " In 2013 , Digital Spy 's Naomi Gordon opined that Wellard 's death was one of the eight " saddest fictional dog deaths " , saying " There wasn 't a dry eye in the house . "

= = Impact on popular culture = =

Wellard is considered a " celebrity " dog , and during his EastEnders tenure , the dogs playing him would occasionally make personal appearances at events , including the dog @-@ show Crufts in 1998 , a fundraising appeal for the Victoria Animal Hospital in London in 2000 , and the first All About Dogs Day at Notcutts garden centre in August 2008 . Satirical impression series Dead Ringers referenced Wellard in a 2004 episode , running the continuity announcement : " Later on ITV1 , new drama featuring the latest EastEnders star we 've signed up for a ridiculous advance . Yes Wellard the dog is Barker , a cop on the edge with a drink problem and distemper . " For Red Nose Day 2007 , Aardman Animations created a Creature Comforts @-@ style short featuring Wellard asking for money for Comic Relief , along with selling his offspring and being put in prison . In January 2012 , Wellard appeared (with Dean Gaffney) on Big Brother 's Bit on the Side .