

TKCIS2

Foundation for European Societies of Arms Collectors

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Swansea, 30th September 2005

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in response to your Consultation process on the banning or licensing of knives and swords, in my capacity as the Secretary, and the UK Representative, of FESAC, the Foundation for European Societies of Arms Collectors.

Statistical Evidence

In reading your consultation document, I was saddened to note the statistical information of violent crime in Scotland. However, I must query how many murders were tragic domestic incidents, in which the type of knife which young people and criminals carry in public places is not in fact used.

Licensing

Licensing of knives and swords could mean putting numbers on them. Putting a number on a £20,000 medieval sword or on a relic Roman bronze sword would be anathema. How could a number be applied to a hardened steel blade? At the present time the ICOMAM (International Museums) organisation has succeeded in obtaining dispensation from the UN marking requirement for antique and museum piece firearms.

Collectors

I would welcome your initiative to exempt persons with a genuine reason for purchasing, manufacturing and owning a knife or a sword.

In addition to the groups you mention, I would ask you to give special consideration to *bona fide* collectors, who in Scotland (as in the rest of Europe) work tirelessly and spend generously of their own funds and time, to preserve your Scottish heritage. It is well recognised that museums and public collections by their very nature cannot carry all the burden of preserving a nation's heritage, and therefore the private collector, often working closely with the curators of public institutions, fulfils a very valuable role.

However, it is essential to recognise that collectors, unless they possess substantial wealth, often start in a modest way with one single item which attracts their attention. From that one item they may build up a substantial collection over many years. It is also essential to allow young people to collect antique or interesting artifacts including military knives and swords, so long as they are not used for violent anti-social behaviour or crime. In the UK we tend to keep our young people children far too long. It is way past time that we start to recognise that some of them can act in a socially responsible manner, and that we can trust them to do the right thing.

Forbidden Fruit

In particular, I feel very strongly that any suggestion to hide the sale of items such as knives and swords by displaying them behind darkened or frosted glass shop windows, would have the opposite effect to that intended, by glamorising the “forbidden fruits”.

Definition of “knife” and “sword”

I feel this is far too vague for meaningful interpretation by the authorities charged with applying any proposed legislation.

Surely a long stick with a sharpened end would fall within the same definition?

Or a branch with thorns?

Or a cargo hook?

Or an antique military bayonet?

Or a spear or lance?

Or an arrow?

Or an antler?

Or a paperknife?

Or a screwdriver?

All the above can be used as weapons. What is needed is a law to prevent the carrying and use in public of an offensive weapon with intent to threaten or harm someone.

It appears that your existing legislation already covers the above scenario? If this is not the case, why not simply strengthen the powers the Police and Courts have already?

I suggest this would be a better use of scarce Police time and man/womanpower than introducing a new licensing regime.

Military Bayonets

As noted above, these items could be interpreted as falling within the definition of a knife or a sword. In fact the light infantry units of the Army traditionally fix “swords” in place of bayonets. Antique and replica Baker and Brunswick muzzle-loading flintlock rifles also fix “swords”. Collectors and shooters of firearms traditionally collect the accoutrements which accompany a rifle, and the bayonet is a very popular item.

I would dare to say that a bayonet is particularly unsuited for stabbing for it is to be used in combination with a rifle. A bayonet without a rifle has no function. A bayonet with a rifle is more like a spear, the bayonet is part of that spear.

Given the cost, the size and weight, and the rarity of most bayonets, I would be surprised if any are carried by young people and used in threats or fights in a public place. They would have little or no “street cred” with young people.

I feel that any proposed legislation should not make mention of bayonets as prohibited items or items subject to licensing. Their purchase, sale and ownership should remain free as at present.

Militaria Fairs

I feel it is important to allow the sale of heritage items such as knives, swords and bayonets in the course of a Militaria Fair or similar event, without let or hindrance. These events are not normally frequented by hooligans or criminals, and they offer the opportunity for young and old to begin and expand their collecting hobby.

Re-enactors

I also wish to write in support of Re-enactors. They are a valuable resource in that Re-enactment societies and individuals not only help preserve our common heritage, but they also perform an invaluable educational function.

In England and Wales, I have personal experience of Re-enactment events organised by and on behalf of such institutions as English Heritage, CADW and the National Trust, to mention but three. It is to be hoped that your Scottish heritage institutions also encourage displays by historical Re-enactors. Of course, swords, knives and bayonets feature prominently in such activities.

Trusting you will find the above comments helpful,

Yours sincerely,

R W Cook

ROGER W COOK BA, FCII
Secretary to FESAC