

27/9/05

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September 26, 2005

Knife Crime Consultation Team
Scottish Executive Criminal Justice Division
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
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Dear Sirs,

I have read your pamphlet on Tackling Knife Crime and would have filled in the Questionnaire, unfortunately few of the questions asked are specific enough with regard to serious collectors like myself and there are thousands I can assure you. Some collect Scottish Swords or Cromwellian Civil War Swords. I collect and study Japanese Swords from the 2nd World War all the way back to the 13th - 14th Century. The swords, daggers and armour bought and sold at auctions and arms fairs all over Britain, Europe and America are, or can be, very expensive indeed. The best and rarest of these have sold for £300,000 to £500,000 at Christies, Sothebys and Bonhams. Of course, the average collector buys more modest examples but average prices are between £500 and £4,000. These are not the swords used in (mainly West of Scotland) Gang Fights.

There are many collectors in Scotland and like everybody else we are concerned at the use of cheap Spanish, and now Chinese, copies in serious assaults on our streets and while it is academic as to whether being attacked is worse with a cheap replica or a genuine 400 yr. old Japanese sword the chances of being attacked with the real thing is practically nil. Serious collectors spend a lot of money in having antique Japanese swords polished. There are only three polishers in Britain of any standing (one a Police Sergeant in Strathclyde) and they charge up to £25 per inch of blade. To send a blade to Japan can cost all-in with freight and insurance and polishing, at most £3,000 - £5,000. The Japanese top polisher charges £100 per inch of blade. None of the collectors even allow you to breathe on a polished blade (true).

Any Action taken to stem this problem of weapons usage on our streets will meet with whole-hearted approval by serious weapons collectors. If I may, I will ask you to think back to the 1996 Banning of Guns. There are more in play now after the banning than ever. A Drunken idiot intent on doing damage to someone will, if he cannot get a knife, use a baseball bat or I believe a six iron golf club, or a piece of wood with a nail in it. Make the punishment fit the crime. Lord Carmount did in the 1950's in Glasgow

In/

I would suggest that you contact any of the following:-

Dr. Gregory Irvine
Assc. Curator
Far Eastern Department
Victoria & Albert Museum
London, SW7 2RL

Dr. Steven Smith
Far Eastern Department
Liverpool Municipal Museum
Liverpool

Mr. Clive Sinclair
340 Hurst Road
Bexley
Kew
DA 53LA

Mr. David Batty
Christies Auctions
South Kensington
London

Mr. Ian Bottomley
Tow Armouries Museum
Leeds

Mr. Raymond Flockhart
Park Gardens
Prestonpans
East Lothian


Tel: 01875 81431

Mr. Flockhart advises the Royal Museum of Scotland on the Ivy Wu Gallery in Chambers Street, Edinburgh. He is a Martial Art Instructor and one of the most knowledgeable collectors of Japanese weapons in Scotland. He and I and a few others in Scotland are Members of the Northern To-Ken Society of Great Britain. To-Ken means, roughly, Japanese Sword.

In closing I would point out that the study of Japanese weapons is not a frivolous pursuit. It involves history, metallurgy and engineering knowledge. I you have any further queries I would be happy to assist.

Yours faithfully,

ALEX BEAN



p.s I enclose part of a leaflet for the Symposium at the V & A in February 2002, hosted by Dr. G. Irvine, which perhaps can give you a broader picture of a very large subject.

The Japanese Sword: the Soul of the Samurai

**An Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum,
Gallery 129**

19 September 2001 - 3 March 2002

The Japanese sword has a unique place among the world's weaponry. Perhaps in no other society has technology produced such a superb cutting weapon that is held in high esteem due to both its effectiveness in battle and in the spiritual qualities it is believed to contain. Its efficiency is such that it can cut through armour without breaking or bending and its spirituality is imbued by the religious rites involved in its production and its associations with the deities of Japan.

The sword was the indispensable weapon of the samurai and represented his attitude to life itself. He should be prepared to combine his physical strength with his inner spirit and have the inward resolution to use the sword at a moment's notice to kill, or to be killed. The importance and significance of the sword to the warrior are perhaps best summed up in the traditional Japanese saying "The sword is the soul of the samurai".

Drawing exclusively on the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the exhibition will include Japanese blades dating from the fourteenth century to the early twentieth century. Austere and elaborate mountings for the swords, together with a small selection of decorative metal sword fittings will also be displayed along with some examples of other types of samurai weaponry such as arrows and examples of guns. The exhibition will be further enhanced and the objects contextualised by the use of video footage which will demonstrate examples of sword-making and of the actual use of traditional samurai weaponry.

A Sword Study Day (9th February 2002) with guest speakers from Japan and the UK will accompany the exhibition. An important element of the Sword Study Day will be demonstrations of the traditional samurai arts of

Kyudo (Japanese archery); Kendo (Japanese sword fencing) and Iai-do (attacking and cutting techniques with a Japanese sword). The exhibition follows the publication in late October 2000 of the V&A book "The Japanese sword; the Soul of the Samurai" written by Gregory Irvine, the curator of this exhibition.

Contact:

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EDUCATION DEPARTMENT PUBLIC EVENTS PROGRAMME

**STUDY DAY & DEMONSTRATIONS LINKED TO JAPANESE
SWORDS EXHIBITION SEPTEMBER 2001-MARCH 2002**

From 19 September 2001 until 3 March 2001 I shall be presenting an exhibition entitled **The Japanese Sword: the Soul of the Samurai** in Gallery 129. This will be part of the series of in-house exhibitions and displays presented in this gallery alternately by the Far Eastern Department and Ceramics Department. The exhibition, drawn entirely from our own collections, will consist mainly of swords and daggers, but will additionally include other samurai weaponry such as sword fittings, matchlock pistols and triple-barrelled guns; powder flasks; arrows and arrowheads together with photographs of Japanese warrior prints from the V&A collection [thereby avoiding conservation problems] together with other graphic images. The exhibition will be linked with my book '**The Japanese Sword: the Soul of the Samurai**' which is due to be published late in