

Study Name: How do ethics influence the development of policies for accessing public collections which are essentially restricted by law: A case study of the Royal Armouries.

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Interview Transcript: Katie Robson – Registrar (Royal Armouries), 18/7/2022

SB: To get started today, a bit of a broad question. What do you think of when we're talking about ethics and the term ethics in relation to the Armouries' weapons collections and their management in general? Just any general impressions really.

KR: Yeah, it's really interesting because when I saw the job at the Armouries, I thought do I want to work with that? Do I even want to work with that collection? It felt like it had got extra ethical dilemmas to another museum collection really. It's a very difficult topic because I think many of the same things apply really to weapons as to other collections, in a sense. But I suppose it's ramped up because potentially these are objects that can kill people. I mean the museums sector at the moment is discussing the ethics of museums themselves, of displaying any objects, and what are the narratives framing them. I think it's the fact that these very objects are used potentially in conflict between different groups that really ramps it up.

SB: I suppose it's that heightened sense of history, and the idea of contested heritage. They're a lot more pressing in that sense, I'd agree. How do you think these ideas shape their management more generally or is it again, as you say, something that's in the aether and it's quite hard to measure the impact?

KR: Yeah, I think it is because there's lots of different groups involved. From my perspective, I'm very practically focused, following procedures and following the guidelines and we work through that, I work through that as I would with other objects. But then we've got public engagement, curatorial colleagues who are framing these objects, they're writing the interpretation, they are constructing the displays, people that are selecting which objects we are going to display, which is out of my remit in a sense. So it's quite a complex process between these different groups. I mean the risk of putting objects in glass cases, whatever the object is discussed, and taking them out of their context is tricky. I do wonder where it will go with museums because there is a risk, I suppose on a simple level, are we glorifying these objects, we're literally putting them on a pedestal, in a case.

SB: Yeah, when you start to think about it, it's a bit of an odd one.

KR: Lighting them, we're lighting them in a certain way. I think the interpretation is crucial that goes with the objects.

SB: Are you saying that an object's interpretation can't really be divorced from its management, and there are ethical issues that run throughout both of those, would you say?

KR: Yeah, it's difficult because it is a group effort. Luckily for me, I'm only part of the process. It is a bit of a complex web I think, and it is hard to separate off, which is why it's interesting to get everybody's different takes. Because we'll all have our personal perspective, but then there needs to be a collective Armouries perspective as well. But it's a very difficult thing to pin down because it's got to be a bit case by case. I mean the guidelines have to be broad, the ethical guidelines are good, but they are very broad and it has to always be a balance at the specific thing in question.

SB: Yes, that makes sense. When you're speaking of guidelines, are you referring to internal ones or are these external ones like codes of ethics? Could you just elaborate on that a little bit more?

KR: Yeah. I found the MA [Museums Association] *Code of Ethics* really the most useful because they've redone it, they rejigged it, they simplified it and they put it into three clear sections, and I think that's a helpful lens of looking at anything we do. Then the ICOM [International Council of Museums] code is longer and it's similar, they both echo each other. What I am interested in – I don't know if you've found it, but I haven't – I was looking at our Armouries Ethics Policy and the reference to the ICOMAM [International Committee for Museums and Collections of Arms and Military History] ethics, and I haven't seen the ICOMAM ethics document.

SB: No, I've been looking for that and I spoke to Laura [Bell, Director of Collections] about it as well, and she's never heard of it either, so I'm not sure where that's quite come from. That's a really interesting one.

KR: Yeah. Throughout these conversations, I find – and I suppose it's because I am immersed in working in a weapons collection now – I don't really differentiate in my head. When I'm working day to day, I'm thinking of things as objects, whether they're weapons or not. I'm applying the same rules and principles using these codes that run through everything we do. But we've got an issue if we refer to a document that we don't know where it exists in our ethics

policy. That document, because it's weapons specific, I'd be very interested to see what the differences are between the general codes.

SB: I suppose that's the thing, what additional safeguards do you need to behave ethically in relation to a weapons collection? That's the question at the heart of it. Yeah, that would be such a useful document if I could ever locate it. I'll definitely keep an eye out for it, but no success as of yet. Just in relation to the *MA Code of Ethics* and the *ICOM Code of Ethics*, how do you go about applying its provisions specifically in relation to the Armouries' weapons collections, or is it just very much, again, as you said, these are quite general and you'd approach it as you approach any other object?

KR: Yeah, it's a good question. I think as a museum professional, we're all very aware of these codes, at whatever point in our career we've read them. All of our procedures and processes, everything we do really is working to those. But day to day I'm not regularly consulting those. Where I will consult them is if we get a specific example that comes up, and I think this is hard to solve. It's useful to read that wording, which is very broad, but it's a good reminder. Yeah, it's tricky because they're there, they're in the aether, we're aware of them. I'd say everything we do is structured. I suppose the interesting way to think about it is, you've mentioned before, other people that are dealing with weapons, so the police or arms dealers, they are not going to be following these codes, they've got their own different codes and rules. That really shows me how we do aspire to follow those. We have a very different approach, all the time we're thinking about preservation, accurate information, educating, acquiring. It's a very different approach.

SB: Yeah, they're very different ends that the museum is looking for, and therefore the policies and the procedures that you use to achieve those will be very different in practice. Just thinking about those examples you just gave, is there anything that you think you've learned from people like the police or arms dealers about ethical management of weapons collections or is it very much this is rooted in the museums tradition?

KR: I can't think of anything. To think about arms dealers, where I intersect with them is very practically, so I'm always interested in how they practically move objects, the licensing. I can't think of a time when I've consciously intersected on an ethical thing. I think with the police, that is interesting with the current exhibition ['At the Sharp End'], because I didn't realise the structure of the police itself, I didn't realise how many different roles and the nuance involved.

They've got a whole infrastructure of staff who work more on these issues and working in communities. That was quite interesting to me, so a bit more of an intersection there, I think. The other thing that I think is quite interesting, and I need to check the wording, but I was thinking about our purpose as a museum: enjoyment. Yes, we are here to educate and inform, but there's also the enjoyment factor and I don't know if that very word is used in the *National Heritage Act* [1983], I'll have to check that. But that I think is an interesting one to think about weapons, because weapons and enjoyment, for me personally, that's a bit of a jarring. I think that's quite a challenge. Obviously, there's lots of different angles on weapons, there's sport, hunting. My mind goes often to the conflict, but there's lots of different strands. But I think that's a really interesting one, that word 'enjoyment' and how we navigate that with these weapons. I don't know what the answer to that is, but that's a very difficult thing to get.

SB: Yeah, I've always taken it to mean enjoyment of the general experience, and obviously weapons will be a part of that, but it's not something that you'd immediately associate. Yeah, I do get the dissonance there.

KR: I think it's a difficult thing for the Communications team. Well, for different teams within the museum, our social media output. I don't think that's straightforward to navigate, and I do wonder, do we have non-weapons as our family activities, what do we focus on? What's the narrative? If they weren't weapons, would we be doing it differently? Are we really acting in a very different way to other museums because of our collection of weapons? Because our aim is to give access, we've got to give access as much as we can, but are we actually really filtering it because they are weapons and because we know we've got family audiences? I don't know, I'm interested in that.

SB: Yeah. I suppose it's where these ethical issues are coming in at, whether it's coming in at the management stage, or whether it's coming that bit later in the interpretation and dissemination stage. But it's quite an interesting one. You've mentioned the idea of enjoyment, and the values of the Armouries, but what would you consider to be the main values that underpin the Armouries' use, interaction, and engagement with weapons in general, specifically its own collections?

KR: I think the Armouries wants to be, aims to be, aspires to be, a world authority on weapons, to have that knowledge and to try and share that, to try and inform, enthuse, make the collection

as accessible as possible. But balancing it with safety and not being able in reality to fully provide access. But I'm interested because when I'm thinking about non-weapons collections, access is always restricted, things are in cases. How much do the public handle non-weapons? It's always very restricted to try and balance the access and the preservation, which I think is really tricky for museums. Ideally, we'd all want to be able to touch and handle and feel the objects, but then we're not keeping them alive. That's the age-old museum thing. Then I think add in for us, they're also potentially dangerous to the public by handling them and being with other people, the unknown of weapons.

SB: Yes, I completely agree. Those were basically the three main things that I thought, as you said, it's the dichotomy between access and preservation. Then in the Armouries' case, it's complicated by the fact you need to prevent harm. I'm glad that my perceptions agree with yours, that's always reassuring. How does the balancing of these poles operate in practice? Is that something that you notice on a day-to-day level, or is that more on an operational, strategic plane?

KR: Obviously, we've got a percentage of the collection, a very broad range of the collection that is on display, largely cased, some open, and it's there for people, it's there for visitors. Then we've got the digital offer as well, and we've got a much broader, in theory we've got the collection linked to the database, the records are all there. Now, many of them won't have images, which is purely a documentation thing. There's no restriction in that, it's just a backlog that we aspire everything to have an image ultimately. So the collection is more accessible in its broadest sense, in that way. But then we've got things in stores, and I'm interested in what is the difference between them being weapons and not. Because for non-weapons collections it's not easy to go into a store. Now we have extra levels, we have extra procedures of an ID check, an address check, and quite restricted entry to get into those stores, and generally it will be a specific research request or a very specific group activity. I'm interested in, is our public offer more limited because of the nature of the collection, or is it not? Because if they were ceramics, the public wouldn't be able necessarily to handle other non-weapons objects. Is access to stores more open? There's now a push for, because these are the nation's objects, stores are becoming more open. The V&A's new collection centre. People are making their stores open to help this

need to give access, and that would be more challenging for us. Could we do it visually, and what would be the implications of people being able to see all this stuff and but not handle it?

SB: I suppose the issue there is if you're giving images of the stores then that might compromise security.

KR: Yeah, that's the balancing act then, where it's a security issue. I think it almost happens informally because, as often with anything really, people are not fully aware of what goes on behind the scenes. People see the museum, you don't necessarily as a visitor think about what you can't see, what you don't know.

SB: It's the tip of the iceberg, the galleries and the exhibitions.

KR: Yeah. I think the digital offers are really key and we have got lots of work happening around digital engagement. But I do wonder if, because of the nature of the collection, it's more restricted. All of that stuff that is not on display that's in store, it's harder to grant access.

SB: But as you've said, that is the case with any large collection. It's the physical difficulties of we've only got so much space, we've only got so much manpower, and only so many resources. How do we increase that without a commensurate increase in resource use?

KR: I think there is another level. Even if we had all of those things, would we think it a good idea to have quite open access to the NFC [National Firearms Centre]? I don't think we would because of the security, because of the knowledge of all those things sitting there. It's almost a secret facility. We mention it on our website, we don't freely share the location. That's the nub of it. For me, that's where I think it's really interesting, that NFC collection, which is on a much larger scale and more modern weapons to the ones in the main building and in the museum building. That is where I think it's particularly interesting.

SB: I suppose in that case, that's where the pressure towards preventing harm, that's where that's the overriding priority, and at least access has to take a back seat to that.

KR: When is it enough? Is it enough that we've got the digital offer, and online exhibitions and the museum displays? That's the current balance. But there's lots of engagement with the objects at the NFC, it's just not in that physical space. There's content about them, and so I guess that's how we manage it at the moment.

SB: With that there are the legal restrictions that you just can't overcome, so I suppose it's trying to find a way that works around those and offers the best access you can.

KR: Yeah, it's compromise and balance, as I think it is with any ethical question. You're never going to have a nice, easy, straightforward answer, there's always going to be weighing it up. Not straightforward at all. It's always going to be complex, so it's going for the best option after weighing up the different positions.

SB: Yeah, that makes sense. In making those decisions, does the Armouries draw on examples of practice throughout the sector or examples from its own history as well? How much does that factor into the decision-making process on these issues?

KR: Yeah, I think it's interesting the divergence, I think we spoke before about IWM [Imperial War Museum] and them chaining, for want of a better word, weapons down in their displays for security purposes, and the Armouries clearly not wanting to do that. So that's a difference between national institutions with similar collections. I feel like the Armouries strongly goes its own way. But IWM asked me recently about collections security, what our procedure is. I do get inquiries from other institutions about the practical, how do you manage showing these objects to people? What are your safeguards? But in terms of ethics influence, I can't think of examples of that. But that's for me specifically, so it'd be interesting to know if at director level, in other teams it's there. For me, where I do intersect up with other people, it's on the practical. What licence do we need? How do you transport them? How do you display them? It's those sort of questions rather than the ethical. Though the ethics is always there, it comes into everything, I guess. It's there in access requests still, it's always in the background, but not overt discussion of the ethics, really.

SB: Yeah, that makes sense.

KR: In everything we do, we are working towards those ethical codes, so we're asking these questions to make sure we follow the broad things in the code really, that we're always working within those frameworks. But it's not that they're overt, ethical dilemma, I think. I could imagine that happening if it came up, but it hasn't. It'd be interesting, I wonder whether it comes up at the Museum Weapons Group. I think it's quite practically based, but it's probably something we should do.

SB: Yeah. What about something like ICOMAM as well, would that be a useful forum to air ethical challenges across the field, do you think?

KR: Yeah, I think there's a real gap. It's interesting because in my role, I'm not involved in ICOMAM, so that's the curatorial, Research Manager, and Director of Collections, and not for me so much. That seems a really powerful network and forum, and one which would be good to have these discussions and, maybe they do, but I'm not party to them.

SB: I'll have to speak with Laura in that case and see what her take on it is. That's really useful, thank you.

KR: If I had to guess, I'd suspect it might be very curatorial focused in terms of object knowledge. But perhaps I'm wrong on that, it will be interesting.

SB: Yeah, I have read a fair bit of its publications, and there's a bit of management, but I think it's predominantly curatorial focused. Do you collaborate much with registrars from similar institutions with similar collections? So, as you said, IWM. Do you have those like strong links there and is ethics something that comes into your conversations there?

KR: We do have links, but I think they could be stronger. I don't think we utilise them as much as we should because we have nice links with a range of registrars. I don't feel my links with the military collections' registrars are stronger. You're more aware of them. So we don't really have those ethical chats. So again, I think there's a gap in the market there. It's interesting about decision-making, so, for example, the 'At the Sharp End' exhibition. I wasn't involved. I was told that's the exhibition we're doing, so my role is quite limited in that.

SB: It's more facilitation rather than shaping it.

KR: Yeah. I've got the power to question and challenge, but that may be too late. Ideally, if you have an ethical discussion, it needs to be pre- [the exhibition arrangements]. Well it goes throughout, but it's important to have it in the planning stage. So it's interesting about the roles and where things sit, really, who's responsible, who brings ethics into it at each stage. Have we got enough in the procedures that it's okay, or haven't we?

SB: Yeah. Ideally, there needs to be an ethical dimension to all of the policies and procedures, even if it's not explicit. As you've mentioned 'At the Sharp End', what was your involvement in

that? Could you just give like a brief overview of the timeline and how you contributed to it, if that's alright?

KR: Yeah, so it was mainly on the practicalities. It is an interesting one because it's a partnership. It's really led by our public engagement team and the officer in that team working really closely with the team at the police to develop this show, so it's a bit different to a normal display. It wasn't solely curated, which I think is really interesting because we're different groups and we've both got different aims, we want different things from the display. Navigating that I think is really interesting and that was led by public engagement, but there's a multidisciplinary team which I was part of. But, for me personally, it was thinking about, very practically, what objects are we going to be borrowing? How many? How are we safely going to transport them? How we're going to display them? Although, again, that's led by public engagement that links with the narrative more than me. On this one, the display was more led by the content of the exhibition. Are we going to insure them? How do I make sure they don't get mixed in with our objects? But it was a bit of a different one, again, it was a different model because these objects, by the nature of them, they're owned by the police. In terms of the provenance, the police are the owners, that is the law, and they will be destroyed. So our normal guide of we must condition report everything, we will do everything we can to preserve the objects. It was a bit different for this because we know we're not preserving the objects, the objects will be destroyed. So again, that is a slightly different angle to if it was the [permanent] collection objects really.

SB: Were there any other additional, maybe not challenges, but differences to how you normally approach a loan or an exhibition more generally?

KR: It would be interesting to ask all the members of the team really, but from my perspective, the difference was we didn't put an insurance value on the objects. They came as a group, and we didn't condition check because we don't need to preserve them. It was managed as a group of objects rather than each individual object, the detail of all of that and its own provenance. We couldn't go any further back because they've been seized in crime, so it's not appropriate. It's a bit opposite to all the due diligence and the provenance we'd normally go through.

SB: Yeah, it reminds me of the amnesties. It's very similar in that respect that you can't have the provenance from before the police acquired it.

KR: Yeah, so in many ways it's the opposite to usual practice with loans. Also, it's how you interpret the objects. It's what we were speaking about earlier in that the curators could have gone into each object in a technical, very factual way about the objects, but that wasn't the decided narrative of that exhibition. So it was a bit different from the rest of the collection, the way it's displayed, you get more specific about each individual object really. It's quite a different take on the objects for us, I guess.

SB: Yeah. When I saw the exhibition, it seemed as though it was much more the objects as an aesthetic display like, to put it crudely, a display of shock and awe. It's not really about the objects themselves, but it's about the image they present. That was my impression.

KR: Yeah, it's interesting just thinking about the different groups, the people. It's really the people element that this exhibition was trying to get at. We always come from the object focus, whereas I think this was a bit of a flip and it was thinking about the parties involved in these things, the victims, the people that have the objects, the police. So it was very focused on that rather than starting from the objects, as our displays tend to do.

SB: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I was just wondering, what was the experience of working with law enforcement as a lender rather than as a licensing authority?

KR: I guess similar to working with a private lender in the sense that they're not museums, they're not working to museum standards. So it's me adapting my conversation to explain that I do need a full list of objects, and me having to tweak the process to think about risk. Deciding that we can't insure them, we're not going to put a value on them, we're not going to condition check. So quite a different model, and that made my interaction a bit shorter than normal, because we weren't going through the normal process. Interesting to work with the police from a different perspective and seeing that big infrastructure, which I didn't know about. But yeah, I'd equate it to working with a private lender who has no familiarity with museum procedures. But it was more minimal because of the things we've discussed, not needing to preserve. It was more minimal involvement for me for this one.

SB: Yeah. In your dealings with them, did you draw on any specific ethical frameworks? Or was it these are the general parameters within which I work and I'll just go on that basis really?

KR: Yeah, it's following the procedure, so I didn't stop and think about ethics separate from following our usual procedure, which is embedded in that, I guess. It was really thinking through the procedure and adapting that to this particular case because many things were different really. We can't know the provenance; they're going to be destroyed. So thinking how do we adapt our normal loans procedure? I guess the most meaty ethics bit came into the discussion about how are we framing those objects? What are we actually going to say in the exhibition? Which was a conversation more with the public engagement team and thinking about the communications side. We know that some of our audience might not think it's appropriate to display these objects, so that is a very difficult thing. You're going to have quite a range of opinion potentially in the audience.

SB: I suppose it's a different form of interpretation than what the Armouries normally goes for. No, it's a really interesting one. I'm just thinking, do you think that this exhibition will shape perceptions of ethics and what ethical conduct is going forward?

KR: I think it's got to play a part. It's all experience and thinking through these difficult questions, thinking about content. What's your tone? How are you going to pitch it? Yeah, that's all experience and it's very different working with another party. If we'd have been doing this exhibition, just us, not with the police involvement, how would we have done it differently? Because it would have been different. It's a good question. I think it's hard with the ethics because it's always there in the background, but it's not always written down or it's not always overt. A group of individuals that work for the Armouries are all applying their own personal ethical decision-making throughout. Yes, it's quite interesting that because obviously people can leave, new people come in. Where do we record this? Should everything go through Ethics Committee? The structure of how we do this across teams is quite interesting, and is the ethics overt enough? What discussions were had initially when the exhibition idea was discussed? What was the ethical discussion at that group? I don't know, it'd be quite interesting to know.

SB: Hopefully I can find something out about that. It's really interesting how you mentioned everyone's bringing their own nuanced interpretation of the ethics to the table. Would you say that there is an institutional form of ethics or are the individual ones nuanced enough that it's actually it's more of a composite rather than some monolithic conception?

KR: We do have these discussions between us, and we might have slightly different views or often I might change my view. That's the beauty discussing it that you think, I didn't think about that, that's a good point. But what comes across with the Armouries is it's the real commitment to our aim. Our purpose is to give access to this material and provide a space to talk about this material, we mustn't shy away from that. It's not easy, but that's our cause. So even if sometimes we might differ a bit, personally, but we are good at coming back to national museum of arms and armour, we've got to give access. It's something I have to balance when I get asked about how many staff do we need. Can we do this event? We've got to try and do it, because we've got to try and give access, but how can we reduce the risk down? So there is a very strong organisational core ethics, I guess, always at play, and then we have our debates where we bring our personal take. But it's so case by case, these policies and guidelines, by their nature, they've got to be very broad and framework. But it's only when you get the actual conundrum that you've got to steer through it. There's no neat answer anywhere. I guess with these broader, what I've been saying about gaps in the market. Would it help? How many cooks do you want in a kitchen? You might be too many. Sometimes you need a tight group, otherwise you won't get a decision. The more people involved in it, it can mean you don't actually get an outcome. Every institution will have a slightly different aim and purpose, so we've got to go with ours really.

SB: Yeah, that's really interesting. Obviously, the Armouries' institutional context is unique, as all museums will be, but do you think there's room for professional ideas of ethics specifically relating to weapons collections? Something that sits between the broad, generic ICOM [and] MA codes of ethics, and then the specific institutional purpose of the Armouries. Do you think there's a level that can be developed between those?

KR: Yeah, that's really interesting. Do you mean to have an agreed code of ethics for weapons collections?

SB: Yes, so something like this phantom ICOMAM Code of Ethics.

KR: Yeah, that is interesting. Do we need that? Would it help us? I don't know whether it would help or hinder.

SB: I suppose it depends how prescriptive it is, and/or how much leeway there is.

KR: Yeah. I don't know what it would add. I don't know what it would add to the ICOM and the MA [codes of ethics]. Yeah, it would certainly be interesting to explore it and talk to other collections and see what... compare notes. What are our ethical dilemmas? But I don't know whether it would help.

SB: I suppose the alternative is if there is a handbook of professional practice and dealing with weapons collections, maybe ethics can be addressed as part of that. That is the other potential.

KR: Yeah, that's a good idea. That would be good because, as we've said, there does seem to be a real gap. There's guidance about human remains and different hazards. I think that's got potential, definitely.

SB: I suppose that the issue is writing it down. Legal frameworks and professional frameworks, while they can be intricate and difficult, it's there. Whereas the ethics is obviously a bit more slippery, and it's trying to work out if there can be an agreed definition of ethical practice.

KR: Yeah, I don't know because the institutions are so different in their aims. I don't know if it would help or actually cause a problem, because, ultimately, with the ethics it's a nuanced, difficult discussion that's got to be had. An institution must take responsibility for its actions. I don't know. It's interesting whether it would add anything or not.

SB: It could always be framed like these are some dilemmas that you could potentially face and frame it like that, and not saying this is something you have to do or this is something that you should ideally do.

KR: Yeah, it'd be interesting to share. I don't know if you were there, but there was a Museum Association ethics session that was held at the Armouries, and it was colleagues from different institutions across Leeds. They deliberately put in a question, a case study about staging an exhibition, I can't remember what the wording was, but it might have been in partnership with an arms dealer, sponsored by an arms dealer. If you don't work in a weapons collection, and if I didn't work in weapons collection, I might have thought, it makes you think about, potentially, fossil fuel discussions. You say, oh no, ethically we don't want to do this, and you think, well as the Armouries, working with arms dealers, that's part of what we do, that's part of our role. It's a very different take really when we need to fulfil our aims. So it was a clear difference between a weapons collection and non-weapons collections. But then it'd be interesting if everybody in that

room, if they were weapons collections, would there still be a very different take on that because institutions have different values and aims, different personalities, different decision makers? Or would there be more of a consensus? It would be really interesting to see. I don't know how that would play out, because, as we've said, there's a lot of different weapons collections.

SB: Yeah. Something like the Wallace Collection is very different from your own collection, and you're both national museums in the UK, so even within that there's such variety.

KR: Yeah, it's really interesting.

SB: Something that idea links to, is do you think ethical conceptions or current standards of ethical practice are robust enough to meet the challenges of managing weapons collections? Or are there other improvements that could be made?

KR: Yeah, it's a good question. I don't know, I've not thought about it before. The nature of the ethics questions, they're so specific that I'm not sure you could have more of a framework than the ones in existence. But that might be the limit of my thinking. Yeah, I don't know what something could give me in addition to help me because it isn't straightforward. Yeah, I've not identified gaps, that it would be good to have something on this, because they're so broad you have to just apply what's there. But I'd be interested to see some ideas on it. If I were to write my own guidelines for a weapons collection, I don't know where I'd start because it can be just so varied case by case.

SB: Yeah, I suppose the ethical inhabits everything and it's so difficult to divorce it from everything else.

KR: Yeah. I hope it does run through everything we do. I mean that's always the aim. There must be times when it doesn't.

SB: If you can't recall any, that must be a good thing.

KR: Or I'm not aware, because the field of ethics is ever changing as society changes.

SB: Yes, especially in the last couple of years when debates have been rather heated.

KR: Yeah. I mean it's amazing, what people are talking about at conferences and the fashions for that. There's real fashions within the sector as there is in anything, and I wonder what will we be

saying in five years' time. What are we doing now that in five years' time we'll think that should have been better or different?

SB: Hindsight is a very useful thing. That would also apply to something like 'At the Sharp End'. You can't really tell what lessons you can learn now because it's still so immediate. Maybe looking back on it five, ten years in the future, it'll be easier to pinpoint it.

KR: Yeah, it will be interesting to see the audience evaluation. I haven't seen it, but it would be interesting to read that. But then of course, that's people that have engaged with it and there might be people that see it and don't want to engage with it at all, and, in a way, you want to ask them as well.

SB: Yeah, that's always the challenge with audience engagement. But I think that's a whole other thing, that definitely would complicate my PhD a lot. I'll stick to behind the scenes for now, it's much easier. The last thing that I'd like to hear your thoughts on is what role should the Armouries play in the dissemination of ethical conduct? Obviously it's the national museum of arms and armour, what role should it play in relation to the sector at large on these issues?

KR: It's really difficult, because we couldn't put ourselves in that position. It's dangerous to be an authority, because the ethics is so case by case. I mean it's dangerous from a practical [standpoint], when I get enquiries about the management of weapons collections, it's always difficult, and I have to be very careful what I do advise because it's case by case, different licensing authorities will have different takes. So it's getting the balance of sharing, signposting, but being careful not to say this is what you should do. I try and avoid that. I think with the ethics, I'd say it's an institutional thing. I mean it's good to be able to support, we should support and share within the sector, and we should probably do that more. We probably should improve on that. I don't think we do that enough, probably. But to be an authority and be prescriptive wouldn't be a good idea. Ultimately, any institution's got to decide what they want to do, but it would be good to have a support network for it, I guess.

SB: From my perspective it seems as though it's collaboration, conversation, and discussion – that's the way forward on these issues.

KR: Yeah. I think talking, supporting, and sharing is the best way to learn, and sharing when things go wrong. ICOMAM, perhaps a different arm of that, would be a great forum. I think

there is a gap for collection managers in these collections to speak. I mean we do informally, I do speak to other registrars and we do share that, but we could do it more.

SB: Yeah. Just when you were saying where things go wrong, are there any examples that you've drawn on where in the management of weapons something has gone wrong and that's become an example in the sector? Or is it very much in principle, we would learn from that if this happened?

KR: Yeah, we did have a thing recently about licensing, when museums want to lend each other Section 5 weapons [firearms prohibited under the *Firearms Act 1968*]. There was a change at the Home Office, somebody new coming in, interpreting the law. Because the law's the law, but then how you enforce it practically and the procedures, I don't think that's written down. That was one where different institutions and the Home Office discussed it, and found a way forward. But potentially, an institution could have done something the Home Office wasn't happy with. So it would be easy to fall foul because things aren't always clear or documented. I can't think of an example where things have gone wrong. That's the one that I thought, the potential for that could have been there, that could have been a difficult one. But I think we caught that.

SB: Again, it's good that there aren't any obvious examples that come to mind. But yeah, I've discussed that case with Laura and Jen [Kaines, Head of Collection Services] before, and it really illustrates how the legal, the professional, and the ethical just get mixed up in one. They're all contributing to these decisions and these discussions. I think a good place to end. Any last comments you'd like to make, or is that everything?

KR: I think that's it. It's been interesting to take time out from working on the actual examples, just to think more broadly. Thank you for that.

SB: You're more than welcome. With that then, I shall end the recording.