

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: Jen Kaines – Head of Collections Services (Royal Armouries),
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SB: Good morning Jen. Thanks again for joining me, this time, hopefully, we'll talk a bit about access and what that means in the context of the Royal Armouries and its weapons collections. To start off with, how would you define the term access in your capacity as a member of the Armouries collection staff?

JK: Okay, so I guess, access is a very broad range thing we talk about it all the time. I feel very passionate about access and access for all. I feel like as a collections staff member that's our reason for being, our *raison d'être* really, is making sure that everyone can have access to our collections because we are here to facilitate rather than to guard. Although we are the guardians of the material, I don't use the term the guardianship as in to guard, but to care for. I hope that we are here really to not put up those boundaries in terms of the way that people can access the collections, but absolutely to facilitate. Now I think that access is inherent within the ICOM [International Council of Museums] and the Museums Association ethical guidelines, I mean it's completely enshrined within them. Even within our mission and our reason it's about providing fun, learning, inspiration, using the collection, because if we weren't using a collection we wouldn't be a museum. I guess that all being said and us being as open as possible, within our collection, we absolutely need to adhere to the law. The law in terms of our collection specifically does put up some boundaries and some restrictions on the access to those collection types that we hold.

SB: Just a few.

JK: So absolutely, we have that access is two pronged in terms of its physical and philosophical access, and a lot of the time the law puts more restrictions on us in terms of that physical access rather than the philosophical access. Yeah, so we're here to facilitate that, to break down any restrictions or any boundaries and it should continue to develop. It's developed a lot since I've been in the sector more broadly and since I've been at Royal Armouries, so now four and a half years, in terms of how we facilitate that kind of access. Some of it's around new technologies and new understandings of different access requirements and us being more collaborative with

our audiences rather than us being dictatorial about how we do things. So I think access has developed and is continuing to develop, and it's something that as the whole organisation, absolutely, everyone should be working towards reducing boundaries and stumbling blocks and any other things in terms of our access. Yeah, so that's how I look at access in the very broad sense is that we are here to facilitate. I keep using word access because it's a useful word, isn't it?

SB: It's such an easy word to use and it can mean so many different things, which is what I've been trying to grapple with.

JK: Yeah. I guess we do use it as shorthand in museums as that all-encompassing term and I think sometimes we do mean it in the all-encompassing nature of the word access. I know that when we look at things like access audits, sometimes when people are looking at access audits, they are looking often at physical access. I think that's changed quite a lot actually since I've been in the sector, in terms of there is a broader understanding within museum staff that access can be much more than wheelchair ramps, which is what I know that when I first started, everyone seemed to be obsessed with. It's much more than that and it's those intellectual access issues, and how and what people want to know, I think is more prevalent and is where we've been focusing on in the last wee while.

SB: It's the idea of access as a holistic approach rather than specifically focusing on, say, physical access or things like that. Thank you, that's all really interesting. One thing that you mentioned at the start of that part is the idea of guardianship, I think that's really important, and I've seen it come under the idea of stewardship as well, that sort of idea. But what would you say is your role in this idea of stewardship and access to the collection?

JK: Yes, my role it's that line between the two. Our reason for being very much as the Head of Collection Services is to look after the collection and make sure that it's there for future generations, that's part of my role. To that end, we need to make sure that we are looking after it in terms of its physicality, so in terms of that collections care, making sure we're storing it in the right conditions and we're not overly exposing it to agents of decay or hideous environmental conditions, and all the rest of it, and we're not doing any remedial conservation on it that would reduce its life or take away any of its materiality to look at it in the future. But also, to manage the risk in terms of that access and to facilitate access. A lot of what do I do on a day-to-day

basis is that risk management thing around if we do something, or if we allow it to be displayed or be used in a certain way, are we putting it at risk? Does that risk outweigh their benefits? So that's really my role is that judgment call on the access or using it versus not using it, because actually even just keeping it in a storeroom, locked away, has issues with it as well. It's that balance and that cost-benefit analysis between using it and having lots of people look at it immediately versus will it still be there in a hundred years' time. That's my role really.

SB: Again, it's a strategic level idea. Something that links to that, again, you mentioned some of the frameworks that the Armouries is working in within access. But another one that you didn't touch upon specifically is the *National Heritage Act* [1983], which is the legal basis for the Armouries. How do you go about translating its requirements for access into everyday practice?

JK: I think the thing with those Acts, the legality around it is, 1) they're written by people who aren't museum professionals, and they're never very specific. If it mentions words, it hasn't actually gone down to the level of detail. So we are always trying to translate it. I mean that one was written in the 1980s, which feels to me quite recent, but actually when you look at it, that's forty years ago in fact, it's forty years this year, isn't it 1983?

SB: Yes.

JK: Yeah, it feels like that one is a new act, but it isn't really. Terminology and thoughts change over that time, and we are trying to work within that and work within the law, but interpret it to enable us to do what we want to do now or what we should be doing now. So that's why I think, whilst that Act hasn't changed, our policies and procedures and how we do things underneath that and our framework of use has absolutely shifted and will continue to do so. I mean these things should not be fixed in stone, but we need to adhere to the letter of the law, which is non-specific, luckily, most of the time, and that's what gives us the flexibility to develop those strategies and to work within different procedural frameworks rather than legal frameworks.

SB: Yeah, to me, it seems like a process. You go from the *National Heritage Act*, and then you go to the institutional mission, and then you go to the policy and then procedure, and then you're into practice. It's that cascade, really.

JK: Yeah, and it's easy to change the bits at the bottom. As soon as you go up that framework, then it becomes harder, and more people are involved and it becomes more cumbersome. Us

being able to change the Act is not something that's going to be simple to do. But, in a way, that's I guess why it's also written in that very subjective language, so you can interpret it in different ways and we have done so. But still answering to the letter [of the law], as it were. So I mean, that Act talks about preserving stuff but also using it for the core purpose and that's exactly what we're doing, and I don't think we would ever want to change that. Because that's what we do, we look after things, but also we want to use them and develop them in different ways.

SB: Yeah, that's great. The next thing is how would you go about that? In the specific instance of weapons, when they have their own very specific restrictions on access, how does the organisation go about that in a broad holistic way?

JK: Yeah, we have to look at the letter of the law again and determine where the red lines are in terms of what can and can't be done. So it's very specific in terms of firearms legislation that those persons who are deemed prohibited under the [Firearms] Act [1968] cannot access weapons. Okay, so that's a red line and we can't allow that to happen. What are our red lines and what are those lines where we cannot bend those lines? So those are things that are absolutely non-negotiable, we can't move those things, we can't interpret them in any other way. Then there are other things that are more interpretive, more managed on a risk basis, and that's the whole basis of how we manage things. You look at the legality, and I guess we also look at the safety aspects of things, make sure things are safe, otherwise we shouldn't be doing them, and then it's around that risk-managed basis. In a way, the weapons that we look after, they're not unbelievably different to other museum objects. I mean, obviously, there are certain legal constraints, but most of the time it's around whether the object is robust and is not going to fall apart. An unloaded firearm, what are you going to do with it? It's basically it's a big club potentially, but then you'd probably do more damage if you dropped it or something on yourself, a big quern stone or something, or you might break it. It's things like that. So other than those clear red lines that the *Firearms Act*, and the other acts specifically around weapons, give to us, everything else is on a risk-managed basis basically.

SB: Yeah. The idea of risk management is one that's come up throughout our conversations, how would you go about implementing that in practice?

JK: We do look at that framework of law and then underneath that you think what your red lines are and some things are enshrined in policy, so they are very fixed in what we can and can't do. We'd look at that in terms of, again, the law, so you draw up those red lines and you'd say, right, well those are the things that we definitely can't do, those are the things we can do, these are the things we want to do. Then underneath that, your procedures would definitely take into account, and how are we going to do that in practice? With our collections security, we've been looking at, so we can't allow everybody to come into the stores and take away firearms and use them. Okay, so how are we going to restrict that? What do we do on a practical basis? Then we look at our onion skin approach in terms of what's the big things that we can do, what are the little things that we can do, and how do we work through those. That's our approach in terms of that and we bring in all the best practice guidelines and ethical guidelines, and inherent working practice. A lot of the things we've been doing, everyone's been doing this for years. The Royal Armouries is what, we've been saying 700 years old this year, so there's a huge amount of grandfather rights, how things have happened in the past. Then you find that, actually, it doesn't make sense to have. For example, in the stores we have swipes and keys, and we've found that's the most secure, whereas previously we'd just have keys or just have swipes. It's things like that that you then develop over time, the best practice, the way that we feel that it is best to manage that risk. Then we look at things like any incidents or accidents, or potential concerns, damages, all of those things are investigated, reviewed, so that we can go, oh well actually if we did that, that would be better or that would be more secure or those kind of things. It's constant review and reflection, thinking about things from different points of view and that's why you bring in other people. For example, in security terms, you'd look at bringing in, and we have done, the National Security Advisor, other outside experts, you would test those procedures. So you'd have put them in place and then you'd say right, we're going to use these for three months and then review, and get other colleagues' opinions of how it works. We've done that quite a lot with the collection security procedure, we implemented a new procedure and then had thoughts around, well actually that doesn't quite work, or that zone should be different how it works. So that's how we've implemented it on a risk-management review level. Does that answer the question?

SB: Yeah, definitely. That's great. It's that idea of only having restrictions when you need them because it's the idea that access is ultimately what you're aiming to facilitate and any unnecessary restrictions are an obstruction to that. Rather than going from the opposite

perspective, we need to do this and then roll it back. Yeah, the way of framing the whole issue is really interesting.

JK: I think that's what's changed dramatically. When I first started in the sector, back in the 1990s, there was definitely a core of, even at that point, quite old-school curators or collection staff who were very much, well we should keep all the precious things to ourselves and that you needed to be somehow worthy of accessing the material. Whether that would be a certain academic level of you've got a degree, you're a 'proper' researcher, and things like that. That if we let lots of people look at things then it will be to the detriment of the object, so we need to keep them close and they were very much risk adverse. I think that's where we've come away from, is that actually, and especially in a national collection, the collection's here for everyone and it's everybody's heritage, and what does that mean and how do people access it? I think some of the thinking around access, anyone could come and have a look at things. Well yes, but not in terms of firearms and things like that. You're right, it's a complete shift from we'll keep everything very close and we won't let anyone look at it, unless you're really worthy and then we'll let you look at it, and now it's the other way round. We'll let you look at everything unless we really can't because of the law, and then we'll keep it close because we need to do that. But are there ways, even where we've got to keep it close, how do we do that? How do we facilitate somebody coming to look at that if we can't just put it on display or allow you to handle it, or anything else? I feel that in the last 40-50 years there has been a complete shift of that philosophy in museums, which is great because actually that's what we should be doing. But there are some people who are still, well I don't think people should look at things. But they're very much more in the minority, individuals rather than, as I say, when I first started in the sector, that was some of the majority view, especially in national museums that I came across. Yeah, it's good that it's changed.

SB: It's that idea of gatekeeping and whether museums should do that or not. I suppose the thinking now is that they shouldn't, these are collections held on behalf of the public.

JK: Yeah. I think it's also around the information as well. So it's not just about the physicality of the objects, but it's that in the past it's been very much, oh well we're museum people and we know all about the objects and we will tell you about these objects because we know more than you, and we'll tell you what you should think about these objects. Now it's very much more

well, okay, we can tell you about the practicalities, how big it is, what materials it's made of. We can tell you the facts and we can tell you in terms of the materiality, and then we can tell you about where we got it from, potentially, and where it was used and how it was potentially used. But the stories around it, actually, we want your opinions and your views and your stories. It's very much making it a more of a two-way process rather than this dictatorial, this is what you should think about this object, which is also really interesting and challenging. How you do that in a collections management point of view, of how do you determine whether it's fact? How do you determine whether it's the right information? It's that whole, how do you interpret history and the history of objects? That's also changed, I think. In terms of that intellectual access, that's changed as well I think in museums from very much us telling the audience and now it's like the audience is now telling us, which is good.

SB: It's that shift from a didactic one-way to the dialogue, a there's lots of various ways that museums can facilitate that. Speaking to the principles in general, so things like risk management, the idea of the onion principle. How does the Armouries ensure that these are maintained and observed across all three of its sites? Because, obviously, each one has different challenges and opportunities.

JK: Yeah. We do have standard policies and procedures across the three venues. They're regularly tested, reviewed, and audited, and the Collections Services team work across the organisation. They're not necessarily based in one venue and so we physically go and see what's going on, undertake our jobs at the other sites to make sure that it works for all of the sites. There are some nuances around some of the procedures that are site specific just because of their physicality and who else is there. At the Tower [of London] things are slightly different because of our relationship and partnership with Historic Royal Palaces [HRP]. The buildings are also quite different, so how we manage security in a purpose-built museum in Leeds versus a Victorian fort is quite different. The Fort [Nelson] I guess there is less implemented physically. It is a Fort, so it's quite secure. There are some differences, but the principles are the same, and, as I say, they're tested and reviewed regularly. That's partly because the collection services team goes to the other sites and works at the other sites. So it's not a one size fits all, although it has been in the past a bit more because everybody has been historically based in Leeds, and so our headquarters in Leeds has often dictated procedure and policy elsewhere. Now that should

happen and can happen, but it's also we need to reflect the broader organisation and I think moving to a more digital way of working, more activity-based workplace. Post-COVID, I think that really has moved our thinking and become much more of an organisation rather than separate entities. It's hard because the venues are separated by three-hundred miles. But actually, because we now, a lot of the time, operate in a digital world that's brought us more together, which is good.

SB: Yeah, that's something that I've certainly appreciated when I've been doing my work at the Armouries, definitely easier to contact people through [Microsoft] Teams and things. One thing as well with the different sites is that the nature of the different collections there as well, so [at] the Fort the collections there are very different to the other two sites particularly.

JK: Yeah, our security is probably slightly less at the Fort than at Leeds and that's, you're right, it's partly because of the collection type. If you're going to try and steal a 10-ton mortar, well you're not going to put that in your bag and run away with it. Whereas at Leeds you've got small, beautiful pistols that you can just literally put in your pocket and off you go. So it has to be relevant to the collection type, absolutely. Obviously, we display a lot of the material outside at the Fort, and while some of those things are not in great condition, they were designed to be exterior mounted objects that they were painted twice a year and they lived their entire lives outside. Whereas some of the other things that we've got at Leeds are much more environmentally sensitive, so it is scalable. Again, it's about that risk management for those individual objects and for that individual site. There are differences, but there are lots of similarities as well.

SB: Yeah, it's having that overall approach, but with enough flexibility built in to account for nuances of the different places.

JK: Yeah, and I always think that the mark of a good registrar is knowing where the flex is, so not being a rigid 'computer says no' attitude. It's much more of a, okay well the computer says maybe, and I can move it to this level, and then I can't move it any further and I don't want to move it any further. For me, that is the mark of a good registrar, it's knowing where that line is and where the risk tips over into unacceptable versus an acceptable risk.

SB: Again, it's going back to risk management again and the idea that ultimately it's a person deciding. Yes, you can have all procedures that you want, but in the end an individual is going to have to make that decision on the ground, responding to whatever circumstances.

JK: That's what's really hard, and that's often not reflected in where the registrar sits in terms of hierarchy, in terms of pay, in terms of responsibility. You're right, that responsibility sits with the registrar. Yeah, there's a lot of pressure potentially on that individual, because if they get it wrong, then it's a lot. But if they get it right, which is what happens most of the time, at least you hope, it means that everybody wins, and everybody has access to the collections that they should do and the collections are fine and nothing happens to them. So it is a real balancing act and it's all about risk management.

SB: So we need more registrars, more good registrars.

JK: Of course, we need more registrars. But I'm bound to say that, aren't I?

SB: Indeed. That's all been really interesting to hear. Just moving on to the more specific uses of the weapons collections and the procedures surrounding them. What precautions does the Armouries take when initiating direct access to its collections? So handling sessions, things like demonstrations where there's no physical barrier between the public and the Armouries' collections?

JK: I think you know what I'm going to say, it's a risk-managed approach. We do have policy and procedure in place, which is based on all the best practice guidelines and recommendations and what we do across the sector. Then if we're looking at individual events, for example, there is a process and this is documented, so it's a fully documented process showing our risk mitigations and our risk thoughts. If suddenly the Education team come and want to demonstrate a Lee Enfield rifle, we'll look at where they want to do it, we'll look at when they want to do it, we'll look at who is involved in that, staff numbers versus public numbers, where it's situated, where the access routes are in terms of the object. We'll look at how many objects have we got of that type. What kind of Section weapon is it [under the *Firearms Act 1968*]? Is it a deactivated firearm? Is it a handling weapon? Is it all of those things, and we'll make a call on it. Sometimes we'll add in a level of we need another member of staff because we feel that we need more staff members there in order to protect it. We might say, we don't want you to do that outside the

museum on the square, we'd like you to do that in a different space, we'd like you to do that in the Bury Theatre or we'd like you to do that in the education suite. We will make sure that there's a member of conservation on hand if they're going to do something that you just think, maybe we need that. It's all around that, so we have a format, we have a process, and then we also have a level of checking. It would go to Katie [Robson, Registrar] for determining if she's unhappy with it, then she talks through with other colleagues, with me, with the Director of Collections, so that we've got a sign off of risk, so that everybody's happy with all the things that we've put in place. We do that on a regular basis, so Education, Interps [Interpretation], Displays, everybody comes and says, right okay, this is what we'd like to do, and then we'll look at that. We don't usually ever say an outright no, we usually go, well okay, but if you could do this, this, and this, then that would make everybody more comfortable. Yes, so that's how we do it. That, as I say, is all documented on a very simple form, so that we've got all of that as backup as well in case anything happens. Then we can review those, and so we are looking back and we're building cases of education want to do this with this type of weapon, well that was the same as that other event that we did the other week and, actually, we learnt that we didn't need that extra member of stuff that we thought we might. We're constantly tweaking our views around it and reviewing the risks and trying to work that through really.

SB: It's the idea of building on precedent, using that experience to refine the existing procedures. With some of the demonstrations, I know that some of them use things like explosives, which have their own separate legal issues. What are the safeguards in respect to those specifically? Just because we've spoken a fair bit about firearms and other weapons.

JK: Yeah, so we do small arms firing at Leeds and then we do a large-scale firing at the Fort. Now small arms firing, under a certain amount of black powder, is basically you can hold it and use it without any additional legislative requirements. Now all of those staff, so the Education-Interps [Interpretation] team that fire weapons, blank-firing, will do so, and they've been fully trained by the NFC [National Firearms Centre] team, so that they know that they are safe and they can only fire, they're certified on certain weapons. For example, you would have like Andy Deane, firing a Lee Enfield [rifle], that's fine, because he's signed off on that and he'd been trained at the NFC on that. But if he wanted to fire a Snider-Enfield, he would not be able to unless he'd been signed off on that particular weapon, so that's around the firing and then also

around the loading and what ammunition you would use. For most of the demonstrations of small arms, it's all blank ammunition, it's not live in that sense, but it is usually brought in from a gunsmith or whatever, and we have track of that ammunition and we know what that is. You can hold up to seven kilos of black powder without any additional legislative framework, because it's basically personal shooting requirements, as it were. Now at the Fort, it's slightly different because we operate there under a Health and Safety Executive [HSE] explosive site licence, and so there's a whole level of additional governance around that, and not just holding the amount of powder that we would potentially use for an artillery display. But also, you can't just buy, well you can buy 25-pounder cart[r]idge[s] off the shelf, but they're very expensive and won't necessarily fit in your 25-pounder. You definitely can't buy Tudor saker rounds, so we would have to make those up ourselves and that's where we have also a processing and manufacturing licence. So it's very tightly legislated, inspected by HSE, by the fire brigade, by the police, with competent authorities and a lot of training in order to make sure that we are making the cartridges safely, that we are firing those things safely as well. There's a whole other level of legislative requirements around explosives, and especially black powder because it is highly volatile, much more so than some of the other high explosives that you might think of. It's more restrictive with black powder than other things. So we have a whole level of other things to think about in terms of explosives at the Fort and in terms of artillery firing.

SB: Yes, I think it really illustrates very well that idea that characterises the whole field, really, that idea that access looks very easy from the superficial level, but you don't see all of this preparation and risk management that goes on behind the scenes and that's what I'm trying to bring to the fore with my work. It's this idea that collections management is really key to access, and what the registrar's role is in that really.

JK: Yeah, it's that whole thing. Everyone says that if you don't know what you've got, you don't know what it is, and you don't know where it is, you can't use it. It's that whole thing of documentation and that collections management that goes on behind the scenes, which isn't very sexy. It isn't the exhibition and it's not the all-singing, all-dancing stuff, and it's not the Education team coming out dressed as a Napoleonic soldier firing a gun. All of that really exciting, glamorous stuff. Yeah, collections management isn't that. But without all that stuff, none of the rest of the exciting stuff can happen because we might be illegal, and we don't know

where anything is, and anything's not in a great condition. So all of those things absolutely underpin everything that we should be doing in museums. Our point is that you've got to have good collections management to facilitate all of that stuff and, without it, it's just not going to work. It's really important and I think it's really exciting because that means that you can do more things with them. But I think you have to be a certain kind of person to think that it's very exciting to make sure that you know all the Ts are crossed and all the Is are dotted, and absolutely everything is just right in order for you to be able to showcase this amazing material culture that we look after. I think it's very exciting, and there's always more to learn about objects and their history, their materiality, and how they were used. I mean it's just endlessly fascinating really.

SB: I think it's very satisfying when something goes well and there are no issues, and everyone has a great time and the fact that it has been delivered well, it's quite a satisfying experience. Moving on again a little bit to something that has been mentioned a bit so far, that idea of exhibiting weapons and displaying weapons. What are the additional safeguards that the Armouries uses when exhibiting weapons in its own public galleries, specifically?

JK: Obviously as a national museum, we have certain constraints and certain levels that we need to meet and expectations. A lot of those are set out by the way that we're insured, so under the Government Indemnity Scheme, so those guidelines, the recommendations from the National Security Advisor about how we move, how we display things. There's also obviously legislative control in terms of if you are displaying a live firearm, which most of ours are, in fact all our firearms on display are, there are certain levels of security that we need to meet under the firearms legislation. We have certain levels, most of the material, and especially the small arms and things like that at Leeds, are displayed behind quite thick glass in order to mitigate those issues around theft. But that would be the same for a lot of museums, theft and environmental control. A lot of museums will use cases to do that, and there's only certain things that are on open display, and most of those things like a whale harpoon on open display are not likely to be stolen. You can't buy ammunition for that off the shelf, so the levels of risk, it's a big metal tube basically. But again, it's around that risk management. Then I guess as we work towards new displays or we think about how we might display something, it's a very much a collaborative team effort. Again, under risk management processes, your designer might come up with a weird

and whatever wacky idea of I'm going to hang this weapon at eye height or something, and you'd be like, well actually you can't do that for a number of reasons. So again, we've got policies and procedures in place, working off guidelines and recommendations and legislative frameworks around that to look at mitigation. The way that our firearms are displayed are not necessarily the way that other museums' firearms are displayed, and that's partly because our general level of security is higher than most other museums. Partly because we've got security onsite at Leeds 24/7, really comprehensive CCTV and, as I say, this onion-skin approach to security. Our weapons are not, as others are, routinely wired to the base of cases, because the National Security Advisor feels that our general level of security is far above most other museums. That's partly because that's what we deal with, it's always small arms. Again, at the Fort it's slightly different, so putting cannon on display, large pieces of cast iron. Cannons are not as vulnerable or security risk as others, so a lot of those items at the Fort are all on open display because the levels of risk are much less there. Again, it's all about that risk management stuff. Our most secure bits are probably the highly sharp swords and knives, and those ones we would be even more careful of, even though they are lesser in terms of legislative frameworks because somebody getting a sword could create high personal risk very quickly. Whereas, as I say, a firearm with no ammunition is more club-like, it will cause damage but it's less likely to cause somebody personal damage than a very sharp Japanese sword, for example, that is unbelievably sharp and never dulls.

SB: It's that idea of this higher threat of immediate damage with edged weapons compared to a higher theoretical damage from firearms. I think that's probably the balance there. But when they're on display, it's a relatively straightforward approach and you're not having to do change much once they're in the case. But what about, perhaps the most vulnerable point, during the deinstallation and the installation, what safeguards does the Armouries have there? Certainly with its weapons collections.

JK: We always work on the basis of actually we just don't open cases in public opening times or, if we do, galleries are shut. That's a level of risk that we just don't feel is necessary. It used to happen before I arrived and we've moved towards a, oh well, if it was a Section 1 [firearm regulated under the *Firearms Act 1968*] you'd be okay opening a case during public opening hours with enough staff around it. But I don't feel that that's the level of risk that we should be

taking. It was always seen as we could take off edged weapons because they're not as risky, but I don't think that's [true]. So we've moved to a mechanism of we do not open cases in public areas with any members of the public being around. If we need to take anything off in an emergency situation, we would shut the gallery to remove that threat. Otherwise, we would do stuff out of hours. That's why I'm also trying to keep, we close for one day a week at the moment at Leeds, which we didn't do pre-COVID, and I'm trying to push that we keep that because it makes things so much easier if we have a whole day where we can open cases and move things about outside public opening times. I also think it doesn't look great to the public either if you are trying to do things in cases, because it just doesn't look great if you're doing that in public opening times, so it's better if we can try and restrict it to outside those opening times. It means that people don't see how cases are opened, the weak points of all our security procedures, what keys you would need, how we would open it, and all the rest of it. It just reduces all those risks by removing that and just keeping it out of hours.

SB: Yeah, it's that idea of security, but it's also like that idea of you don't want them to know how the sausage is made. There's that magic of it being there, and seeing it actually coming in and coming out, perhaps that dispels that a bit. The idea that keeping the gallery closed is an interesting one because there's the argument that that is reducing access. But I suppose it's balanced with the fact that it's allowing you to make the necessary alterations.

JK: It's also about protecting our staff when you move an object. When you put it in and out of a display, that's where the levels of risk go up. If an object is not moving, it's not being handled, it's less likely to get damaged. There's multiple pressures on staff when you are handling and moving stuff. If you are doing that, being watched by the public in a public sphere with the fact that you have no idea who these people are and what their thought processes are, and whether they might want to come and just be really interested and have a really good look, or want to touch it or potentially then want to take it from you and use it against you. All of those things just adds a whole other level of stress onto a member of staff. Extra pressure, which means that they're then more likely in that situation to then accidentally drop it, damage it, move too quickly and it gets bashed, whatever. So again, it's around us protecting our staff and their well-being, and not adding more pressure onto something that is already a high-risk situation because you're

just moving objects, so there's multiple levels. It's around us protecting our internal audience, as well as external audiences.

SB: I suppose with weapons there's the additional danger that physical damage to staff or to visitors, as well as physical damage to the object as well.

JK: Yeah, it's a real mixture. It just reduces the risk and makes everybody more comfortable to do it that way at the moment. As I say, we can do things outside if we need to, but it just feels like the better way, and we have had no issues with us doing it this way. Partly, it means that actually with one day a week closed or if we are closing galleries, we usually liaise with other colleagues and often it will be other colleagues who have closed galleries. So Estates colleagues need to fix a hole in the floor or the lighting's gone, so they'll go, we're going to have to close the gallery for this purpose, and it then means that we have the opportunity to go in and do stuff. For example, our colleagues at HRP were doing some major works at the Tower, which meant that the Tower was shut just after Christmas. Now that's really rare, the Tower is never closed and it was closed for two days. It meant that we could send a team down to the Tower to actually open and clean all the interiors of the cases at the White Tower, which you could never do because the White Tower is obviously a massive draw and we get thousands of visitors through there. Even on quiet days, there's always hundreds of visitors through and you just couldn't risk opening Henry the Eighth's silvered and engraved armour case, and going inside and cleaning that case. Just even cleaning the glass inside the case, when you've got all of those people there. It's things like that, we didn't initiate that thought. It was around we're closed for two days because they were doing some other works in the rest of the Tower, and we can't have anyone in. Great, well that means we have an opportunity to do some good work and make sure that the glass is clean on the inside of the cases, so people can see things better.

SB: Yeah, making the most of the opportunities.

JK: Yeah, and working collaboratively as a team, that's we're about across the organisations.

SB: That's really useful, thank you. Going on, linked to the idea of movement and transport that we mentioned. How does the Armouries reduce risk when lending weapons to other institutions? Because obviously that's an important part of both the Armouries' work in general and the registrars' work in particular.

JK: Again, like other museums, it's part of our *raison d'être* really, that if we can't display all the material that we hold and lending is one of those key things that we can do to promote access and access to different audiences because we have taken it to a different place literally. Because the object will sit in a potentially different context to the way that we would display something. Our objects are borrowed because they're arms and armour, but they're not shown in that arms and armour context as we do within our venues because that's what we're about, and they will be shown as part of a different story. Accessibility in terms of loans in that sense are promoting access and that's really good, and that's something that we are absolutely trying to do more of. Obviously that involves, as you say, greater levels of risk because we're moving objects, we are sending them to places that we don't know potentially. Like all museums, we work under a duty of care for those objects. Again, like other museums, and not necessarily because they're weapons, we have a full rigorous assessment process where loans are requested, so we look at all aspects of that other institution and how we are going to move the objects and how we're going to pack it, and all the rest of it. So again, it's around that risk mitigation. We look at everything to do with that other venue, so their security, their staffing levels, their emergency planning. We focus on whether we are comfortable with the levels of risk versus that access and use issue again of is it an acceptable risk to lend this object or not. We look at all of those risks and we also want to make sure that our borrowers are comfortable with that level of risk as well. That's why sometimes we will add in certain levels of security, for example, that in other circumstances those venues wouldn't necessarily have, a 12-millimetre laminated glass display case because most of their items are not of a certain [level] in terms of theft or threat or security that they would need that. But for certain objects that we would lend, we would want that level of protection, so it's around that. Obviously we're again a national museum, so some of the standards that national museums and under the Government Indemnity Scheme we would have to meet because it's a national collection. Other ones are the things that we will have put in place to make sure that we are all happy with that level of risk. We'll also look at how we transport it in terms of plane, train, truck, whatever, but also what routes we are taking. Are there any stopovers? Everything to do with that from when it leaves the wall, as it were, or the display case from us, to when it comes back. We will look at all of that, and some of it we'll use shorthand terms, and we all know what that means in terms of is it insured nail to nail and is it a fine art single-use transport. We will do some of that as shorthand, and other bits we will really go into

detail and we'll look at areas that we particularly know that there are particular risks around. I know when we've lent to Japan, for example, certain parts of Japan have a high propensity to earthquakes, so we would look at earthquake risk and their risk mitigation for earthquakes. I wouldn't be asking for that same level of earthquake mitigation if I was lending to London, for example. As a registrar, you have to know things about physical geography. You have to know things about political geography. For example, we have had a recent case where we were lending or had request in from Poland, and one of the questions that was part of this negotiation was what happens, because it's very close, [with] the Ukrainian conflict and working out whether the Russians might then attack other areas around that area. We did look at that and we added in some wording into the contract that would mean that actually, if we were unhappy with the political situation, we might have to remove the object or not send it, and that would then not be a breach of contract, it would be part of our risk mitigation. So you need to know about the politics and physical stuff as well as everything else. Yeah, there's a lot to think about. But again, you use your networks. We use the National Security Advisor who knows everywhere. You would ask other people, so if you were lending to a venue overseas that you weren't sure about, you would ask who else is lending, what else do they know, who else has lent in the past, have they had any issues? All of those things. You'd ask them for detailed facilities reports. Like in Japan, because they're aware of earthquakes there, as I say, they will know that we're already thinking about that. So before, as part of their request, they will probably have sent information about how they mitigate those high-level risks. Yeah, so there is a lot to think about, but again, it's all about risk management and it's about mitigating those risks and making sure that everyone is comfortable with undertaking that. That is partly why our loan approval process is that we make recommendation, but it is Board of Trustees who sign off on those loans, the final say. It can't go unless the trustees are assured that we have made all the risk mitigations that we can and they're comfortable with that level of risk for that object to go.

SB: I suppose it's one less thing where the responsibility is officially on the registrars.

JK: Yeah, I mean it's on your recommendation, but not necessarily on your head as it were, in that the trustees have taken that total liability and taken that away and that gets approved. Loans go through a process; everyone will make a recommendation. It goes then to our Collections Development Committee, who will then approve or make a recommendation, approve the

recommendation and then that goes through executive board and Board of Trustees. It's not the registrars' responsibility in that sense, but the lion's work has sat with them. Everyone trusts what the registrar says, so if the registrar recommends the loan to go ahead there's a fair chance that it will go ahead. But it's not usual that recommendations will be overturned, it's the other way round. If a registrar says, actually, I am not comfortable with sending this, sometimes, in my experience, senior colleagues and trustees will overturn that because they want it to happen and it doesn't matter what you say. Sometimes it just has to happen, politically with a small 'p'. Then you have to do everything you can to put everything in place to ensure as far as you can that the object is protected.

SB: Yeah, that's a really great overview. Thank you. There's so much to think about, and with weapons you've just got to be even more on it.

JK: Yeah, the other thing to say with weapons is obviously, some weapons, it's easier within UK. If they are weapons, they would fall under different legislative frameworks. There are some things that we cannot easily export and import because they are weapons, so you would also have a think about where. You may not be able to send them to certain countries because they might be on a list that you're not allowed to export weapons to, for example. There are other levels, but that's lesser than all the other things that you would think of as a museum actually.

SB: I suppose it's an additional thing. Just again moving on to another form of access which is beyond the walls of the institution: digital access. How does the Armouries go about addressing the distinct management requirements of offering digital access to weapons collections? Because the challenges are quite different and obviously opportunities surrounding the fact that there are much fewer legal restrictions in that sense.

JK: Yeah, that's the thing, once you've put the information out there, we have no idea in a way, I mean we do. But if you put it out on the web, you have very little control over who has access, who's using it, for what purpose, which is great on one level because everyone's got access to everything and then it's potentially not so great. Digital access has an enormous potential and I think it's something that we've started working on and we constantly are chipping away and trying to improve, but it's not something that we have fully exploited yet. A bit like other museums, we have focused on publishing the information from our collections management systems, so the information that we as museum professionals use to manage the collection.

That's mostly very factual based, so we're talking about dimensions, calibres, material types, and all of those kind of things, which is great. But it's not necessarily, although it might be, the information that wider audiences want to know about the collection. We've got that information and it sits in our collections management system. But those systems were always historically, they were designed as that, they were to manage the collection for us to know about it. They weren't designed to be public front-end facing, so a lot of the terminology that we use is very sector orientated. It's very niche and un-understandable by anyone who doesn't understand that level of terminology. We've used it to know what things are, how big they are, so we can store them properly. What calibre they are, because then we would know what firearms type they are and therefore which they fall under in terms of legislation. The audience out there, which is worldwide, might, probably do, want something completely different in terms of information attached with that object. I think that's where we struggle with it because the potential is enormous, as I say, you're reaching literally everybody worldwide. But we don't know what those people want, and we don't know how they want to engage with those objects. For me, things like having good images of objects is really important because at least people can see things and they can take away, in a way, what they want to from those images. But then how do we make that accessible to somebody who is visually impaired? All of those things. So it's great, but it's somewhat limited and I think that we need to talk to audiences more, which we're trying to do under the Digital Vision Project about what do people want to know. Again, we don't really want to do that thing as we've done on site is us saying this is what you need to know about this object. They might want to know how does it feel to hold that object. What does it feel like to fire a small arm? All of those things. The digital world has the potential to do all of that, and for us to do that. But we're still coming at it I think from a very museological, collections-management way of doing things, so we're telling people facts about objects, which is fine. But then, is that what people want to know about the objects? I think for us, on our collections online, that's what we do, facts about objects. It's not about context necessarily and it's not about use and it's not about all those other things around objects, it is about facts. Yeah, so there is a massive potential and we haven't explored that fully yet. As I say, we've taken the information from our management system and put it online without necessarily thinking more broadly about what do people want to know about it. I think the other thing that we've learnt around our digital stuff, is it's also extremely vulnerable. We obviously had the big cyber-attack last year, which

took out the link, well it took out almost all of our systems, but it took out the link between the collections management system and the collections online system, and that hasn't yet come back. The information is different in both systems. The risks around that digital information being taken by a third party, either maliciously or to do anything with it, we haven't really got to grips with. That level of security that we present to our physical sites and collection, we have not presented to our digital as yet. So we are thinking about that and how we do that as well. Because you wouldn't want people to be able to access collections information online to then drill back through to know where the object is, to then be able to work out how you physically get that object. So there's a lot of work to do. I think it has massive potential, but yeah, I think we're just at the very start of it. We've been pushed by sector-wide initiatives to get collections information online. On our collections online you'll notice there's a lot of information and lots of things don't have pictures and you think what is everyone getting from that and how much access are you providing by just giving a number, which is an internal number, the description of 'gun'. Because some of them are that basic, and you just think, well, is that worth us even doing because is that not then creating massive frustration, well what is this? So I think there's massive potential; I don't think we're there yet. But I think it'll be interesting to see how it develops. I don't think it will ever take away the physicality of people wanting to come and see things and wanting to see the real [thing]. I think that's proven so many times and everyone uses the Mona Lisa as the case study for that, in that you see the image of the Mona Lisa everywhere, but people still queue for hours literally to go and see it in the Louvre because they want to see the real, the original, not just a copy. As I say, massive potential, not sure we're there yet to exploit all of that. But interesting in terms of access because it does take away some of those physical access issues in terms of location, in terms of physically getting up the five flights of stairs at the White Tower. Those kind of things.

SB: That's really great to hear your thoughts on that. The idea that the Armouries has chosen to go for a more factually based approach, I suppose it's also that that's safer as well, there's less risk of that being used for alternative things and obviously there are certain things about weapons that you can't publish. Certainly, if they've originated from an amnesty, for example, you can't publish the provenance, you're not given that in the first instance. With digital as well, it's still very much museums are working out how to deal with that and it's not as well established as the physical security arrangements.

JK: If you think about it, museums have been physical museums – the Ashmolean was opening its doors hundreds of years ago – we’ve had hundreds of years of physical practice to develop. Whereas digital forms, it’s only been the last ten, twenty, thirty years, if that. So it’s a really new field and I think even in broader day-to-day life everyone’s still trying to work out how we operate in this metaverse or whatever. What does that mean? Without museums following behind, it’s really hard when you don’t have the money and the expertise to undertake that. I think there’s real work on digital and how we all understand it, because most of us understand enough to use what we’ve currently got. We’ve all had a massive learning curve in the last couple of years. How does Teams work? Because none of us were used to doing this kind of thing in the past, we’d be like what’s video conferencing and I don’t think I could do that. Now you just do it on a day-to-day basis and we’re quite comfortable mostly sitting in front of computer screens talking to a computer screen rather than talking to a person. I don’t think we should necessarily beat ourselves up that we haven’t got all the answers yet, because I think we have tried things and think well that doesn’t work and try something different. It’s a bit like different technologies as well, in that when video came out there was VHS and Betamax, and actually the Betamax was a better system but we all went with VHS. All of those things that we haven’t really grasped yet and actually really thought about. So I think there’s a lot of us in the sector going we should do more digital, and you’re like yeah but what, it’s got to be meaningful and it’s got to be not just for the sake of it. I think that’s the thing is, again, it’s ticking the box of we’ve asked that audience and they want this. Yeah, but who have you asked and how, and are you continuing those conversations? I think it’s a work in progress, but I think it has massive potential, and I think we need to look outside the sector as to what the potential might be because I don’t think we necessarily know what that could be yet. I certainly don’t, because I know how to do certain things, but no idea what technology can actually do for us in the broader context. I think things like 3D modelling, 3D printing, and all those kind of things. 3D printing costs have come down so much, is there a possibility for us to – and not saying we’d want to do this – put out a thing that you could print your own Henry the Eighth silvered and engraved armour to your size and then you could wear it. I’m sure that’s possible, would we want to do it?

SB: I suppose weapons in that respect, there’s a very difficult ethical issue there.

JK: And legal as well, obviously.

SB: Yeah, that's something to think about. It's that idea that of using digital access effectively, and not just doing it for the sake of it, I think that's really key. Before we end, this is an idea that we've already broached, but what do you think the future holds for collections access at the Armouries?

JK: We need to do more, and I think that's what we're doing. We're striving for more access to more collections across the organisation and partly that's because we need to understand the collection better ourselves. We've touched on this about, we need to improve our documentation and our research into the collection. Not just in those factual terms, because actually we don't have dimensions for all our objects and we don't have detailed material type for everything, and all the rest of it. We don't have all the fields in the database complete for all the objects, and in order for us to give more access, we need to have that information. So that's one thing that we need to do and we're striving for on a day-to-day basis. I think the other thing is that we need to provide better facilities and better opportunities for more people to access those collections physically, as in places to come in our venues that you can access a lot more of those stored materials, as well as in the digital realm. For example, at the Fort and at the Tower, we have quite a large library and archive collection. Now obviously at Leeds we have a great library facility that we can get objects out and Philip [Abbott, Archives and Records Manager] and Stuart [Ivinson, Librarian] facilitate that all the time. Philip and Stuart are our only library and archive staff trained to access and catalogue that material, and they're based in Leeds. So we have a problem because we have the Tower and the Fort and they're a long way away and whilst I keep sending Philip to the Fort to do work, we need to improve that. Those collections are not documented properly, there's no open library access that at those two venues, so that's the other thing that we're looking to do. It's a real mixture of quite basic access provision as well as the all-singing, all-dancing, and we want to do everything on digital and create something that we haven't even thought about yet in digital form. More of the same and better, I think is my summing up of the future for collections access.

SB: I think that's very fair, you just need about five times the level of staff. I'm sure DCMS [Department of Culture, Media and Sport] will grant you that, no questions asked.

JK: Yeah, thanks. Of course, yes.

SB: Wonderful. I think that's everything I'd like to talk about today, but is there anything else you'd like to add before the end?

JK: No. As always, very interesting, thought-provoking and it's great because it definitely gives me time to reflect on these issues that we don't normally do. I really enjoyed them to really take that time and think what do we do about collections access, so it's great. Thank you.

SB: Excellent. Thank you too for participating, and with that I shall end the recording.