

INTERNATIONAL FIREARMS SAFETY SEMINAR
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THE BRITISH HANDGUN BAN
LOGIC, POLITICS AND EFFECT

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INTRODUCTION

1. I find it difficult to imagine an event like this seminar being staged in Britain. The view of the British Government and the police is that the system of controls imposed in Britain is the envy of the rest of the world. It has recently been referred to as the gold standard of gun control. The official view seems to be that there is nothing to be learned from the experiences of others in this field and there is certainly no point in questioning the effects of long standing policies.

2. I noted in earlier documents about the seminar the remark attributed to New Zealand's Chief Justice that "Criminal Justice needs to be based on solid research rather than pious hope." That is a novel concept in Britain, certainly so far as gun control is concerned. In the course of my research fellowship at Cambridge in the late 1960's I could not find a single piece of research into the effectiveness of firearms laws over the fifty years that they had been in effect.

3. Since my book, *Firearms Control*, was published in 1972, there has been no other attempt at any comprehensive research in Britain. Despite a great deal of concern expressed about crime involving firearms, our seats of learning, seem to go to great lengths to avoid the subject, and no government has seen any need to commission research before introducing more and more of the same type of legislation.

4. Far from being based on solid research, recent British legislation is backed by a little pious hope and a lot of political expediency. Despite short term fluctuations and the vagaries of official statistics, the long-term trend for serious armed crime is upwards. Governments like to compare one year with the last so that changes are minimised. If we

look at the long term we can see constant upward trend quantified by the fact that in 1954 there were just four robberies in England in which a firearm was used. In the year ended April 2004 there were over four thousand (4117).

5. The law is changed at frequent and ever-shortening intervals, but that long-term trend remains constant despite minor annual fluctuations. The most elementary research shows no relationship between the increasing levels of controls and changes in rates of criminal use. But it does not seem to occur to officials or politicians that their policies might not be effective.

6. Your seminar is aimed at firearms safety. In Britain, firearms accidents are extremely rare. Occasional research into fatalities in sports activities has shown that in most years we have no fatalities from shooting sports and sports such as fishing or gymnastics cause more deaths.

7. England enjoys a very low rate of homicide, almost identical to that of New Zealand (1.76 per 100,000 compared with 1.65). Shooting is well down the list of weapons of choice but 68 people were murdered with firearms in the year ended April 2004 and over four thousand were injured or put in fear by gun carrying robbers. Control of the criminal use of firearms is therefore very much a public safety issue.

8. I want to look at the 1997 ban on handguns in Britain, and to explore the logic behind the event and the effect it has had, but that ban must not be seen in isolation and it is necessary to look at a bit of history to see how that situation developed.

EARLY LEGISLATION

9. In real terms, there were no controls on firearms in Britain until 1920. Earlier legislation was directed towards poaching or revenue raising with a single piece of 'pious hope' legislation called The Pistols Act 1903 which was remarkable only for its obvious impracticability.

10. The situation until 1920 was that, arising from a duty to keep arms that existed from the 13th Century and before, there was in England a right to keep arms which was very fully expressed in the doctrine of the Common Law set out in textbooks such as that by Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* in 1765.

11. So well founded was that doctrine that during the major industrial disorder of the early 19th century, the Government sought to pass a Seizure of Arms Bill. They applied it only to certain parts of Britain and built in what is now called a sunset clause. The Bill was passionately challenged in Parliament as a breach of the Constitution. George Bennet argued that "The distinctive difference between a free man and a slave is the right to possess arms, not so much, as has been stated, for the purpose of defending his property as his liberty. Neither can he do, if deprive of those arms in the hour of danger."

12. Blackstone's exposition of the right to keep arms as part of the Common Law is almost certainly the source of the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution, but we need to be careful about such rights. We may note that the British right applied only gradually to Scotland following the Disarming Act of 1746, that it never applied to Ireland and that it was applied very selectively in the Colonies. Blackstone himself allowed that the law could place such a right under restraints provided that they were so "gentle and moderate that no man of sense or probity would wish to see them slackened."

13. Despite some fairly feeble attempts at gun control, no legislation escaped the Constitution bar, but as World War I drew to a close, governments began to prepare for the Peace Conference. The British Government's Sub Committee on Arms Traffic drew attention to the fact that the end of the war would leave all belligerent countries with vast stocks of arms and ammunition and they feared that some would attempt to sell those to recoup at least some of their losses.

14. For Britain, they identified two major concerns. Firstly, the savage or semi civilised tribesmen in outlying parts of the Empire who would seek rifles and ammunition. They noted that most of them already

had rifles, but sought to deny them ammunition. Secondly, the anarchist or intellectual malcontent of the great cities whose weapons are the bomb and the automatic pistol. We might pause to note that whatever was done then, or since, the United Nations is still expressing its great concern about firearms in the hands of warring factions, primarily in Africa, and the malcontent is still bombing in many parts of the world.

15. The Sub-committee suggested that the British Government should ask all belligerents to undertake not to sell surplus arms or ammunition and to regulate the domestic manufacture of automatic pistols and ammunition. They suggested that British Self Governing Dominions should be asked to endorse these ideas, explaining how New Zealand was also pushed into firearms legislation at this point.

16. An internal Home Office Committee, reporting in 1918, endorsed those concerns and added its further concern about allowing those returning from military service to keep possession of firearms. They advocated a form of licensing by the police of all rifles and pistols, and their ammunition, but said that it was neither necessary nor desirable to control shotguns.

17. Nothing happened for more than two years then, quite suddenly, and as a panic measure, the 1920 Act surfaced and was rushed through Parliament. The argument raised in Parliament was the need to control crime. Some selected statistics were quoted to support that concern but examination of those statistics shows that they actually proved the opposite. Crime in general, and armed crime in particular, was falling. Debates on the Bill were short and the right to keep arms was barely mentioned.

18. This was a period of both civil and industrial unrest. The economic situation was serious. Wages for returning soldiers and others were low. In 1919 police in Liverpool went on strike for two days and nights and there was serious rioting. There were other riots elsewhere in the country. The Russian Revolution was in the minds of many. The Government was in a state of panic.

19. The Prime Minister spent a good deal of time at the Peace Conference in Versailles with Bonar Law, as Lord Privy Seal, sitting in for him at home. Sir Maurice Hankey was Secretary to the Versailles meetings and Thomas Jones was Cabinet Secretary in Whitehall.

20. A Cabinet meeting held in Paris on 17th January 1920 was described by Hankey in a secret note to Jones. He described the Ministers as "having the wind-up" and said, "I felt I had been in Bedlam. Red revolution and blood and war at home and abroad." At a Cabinet Meeting in February 1920, Lloyd George asked the Chief of the Air Staff how many aircraft and men would be available for the revolution and expressed the view that they would be able to use machine guns and bombs. Another Minister said, "The peaceable manpower of this country is without arms. A Bill is needed to license persons to bear arms." The Home Secretary replied that though they had a Bill ready, there had always been objections to restrictions on firearms. Bonar Law said, "All weapons ought to be available for distribution to the friends of the Government."

21. In fact the industrial unrest and the disturbances were no more than a continuance of events prior to 1914 and were in a gradually diminishing scale of violence. Though the strikes might be said to have culminated in the General Strike of 1926, the violence continued to diminish and there never was any threat of revolution.

22. The Firearms Act 1920 set a true precedent for virtually all the firearms legislation that has followed.

- It was panic legislation, enacted without a proper appreciation of the problem.
- The politicians of day lied to both Parliament and the people.
- It was badly drafted and had to be amended time and again over the next few years.
- There was no consultation with user groups.
- It had no honestly stated objectives and there was no method by which its success or failure could be measured.
- It produced no measurable benefit in terms of crime control, reduction of disorder or safeguarding the public.

- It gave civil servants power to effectively change the law by administrative means. For example, in respect of keeping arms for personal defence, the Home Office first advised police that firearms could be possessed for that purpose, but they would be more likely to be required in rural rather than urban areas. Next they advised that they could rarely be justified and now they advise that they can never be justified. The right to keep arms for defence has been removed by police and civil servants by purely administrative measures.
- It created restrictions designed to be manipulated by both politicians and administrators. More than 70 years afterwards HM Inspectorate of Constabulary reported that, despite guidance, firearms licensing officers in the 43 different police forces were adding their own criteria for the ownership of firearms based on subjective opinions. "The shooting public are being subjected to differing local requirements, some of which border on the discriminatory, without apparent justification."

23. In 1934, some of the work that should have been done before the 1920 Act came into effect was carried out by a Departmental Committee on the Statutory Definition and Classification of Firearms and Ammunition under Sir Archibald Bodkin. This Committee did seek some statistical evidence, but only to compare controlled and uncontrolled firearms. They also took evidence from some outside witnesses including representatives of the gun trade. But they started from the premise that the principles of the 1920 Act were sound and merely needed adjustment.

24. The Committee noted that the controls imposed by the 1920 Act had "reduced considerably the market for firearms in this country and the trade has suffered accordingly. Manufacturers and dealers have nevertheless borne their losses with resignation and have loyally co-operated with the authorities". The demise of the British Gun Trade, which once dominated the world, resulted from a complex series of factors including their failure to compete with the factory produced weapons of the United States and the complacency brought about by secure markets

in the Empire. There can be no doubt, however, that the Firearms Act 1920 was a significant nail in their coffin.

25. The result of the Committee's deliberations was a consolidating Act in 1937, which brought some consistency to a system which, though fairly generously administered, continued the decline in legitimate firearms ownership and use. The very low rate of armed crime, coupled with a poor system of recording, makes it virtually impossible to identify any public safety benefits that might have accrued.

26. Shotguns, which have always made up the major part of the guns owned in Britain, remained outside the system of controls. Armed crime remained low until, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a detectable and real increase began. One or two MPs asked about controls on shotguns. In 1965, the then Home Secretary told Parliament that he had carefully considered extending controls to shotguns but the burden which certification would impose on the police would not be justified by the benefits that would result.

27. The subject was reviewed by the next Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, and on 23rd June 1966 he announced that he would not impose controls on shotguns on the ground that "The police do not consider that it would be right to make an extension of controls at the present time."

28. On 12th September 1966, less than eight weeks later, Mr Jenkins announced that he was drawing up plans to end the unrestricted purchase of shotguns. Why this total about face in a few weeks? On 12th August 1966, three London policemen were shot dead by a group of petty criminals whom they decided to check. Capital punishment had been abolished in 1965 and there was a public outcry for its return. Mr Jenkins was a leading abolitionist and wished to divert attention from the capital punishment issue. His response to the public outcry was controls on shotguns – but the three policemen were shot with pistols.

29. Controls on shotguns were introduced on the back of an omnibus Criminal Justice Bill which contained a large number of controversial measures. Shotgun controls were hardly debated and they were not opposed by the shooting organisations. The system introduced

was ultra simple, amounting to licensing anyone of good reputation whose application was supported by a referee of similar qualities. There were no direct police enquiries. The system was planned to be so reasonable that it would meet little or no opposition, but it is clear that, from the start this was planned as a first step and measures for more stringent controls were already prepared.

30. The opportunity for this further legislation did not come until 1987 following the Hungerford Massacre of 19th August 1987 when Michael Ryan ran amok in a small rural village with an AK 47 and a pistol, both of which were licensed to him by the police. In a period of less than one hour, 16 people were killed and 15 more were injured. The perpetrator committed suicide. There was criticism of the police response and somewhat muted criticism of the fact that police had granted a firearm certificate to this man. It was alleged that he did not fulfil the normal criteria because he was not a full member of an approved club and that the certificate should not have been granted. These matters were the subject only of internal investigation and a later inquest,

31. The now inevitable response to a high profile firearms incident followed with a new law to ban all self loading rifles except those of .22 rimfire calibre and added a series of other restrictions that had formed part of the Home Office agenda for imposition when an opportunity arose. Shotguns were redefined so that some types were banned and others were raised to the same status as rifles. Those shotguns remaining in the lower category were subject to registration and the process of obtaining the certificate was strengthened. Of course shotguns had nothing to do with the Hungerford incident, but there was an opportunity when shooting as a whole could be demonised

32. This panic legislation was rushed through Parliament. Consultation with shooting interests consisted of meeting some representatives to tell them what would be done and to listen to some suggestions about minor changes that might be made. At that time I had the considerable honour of being refused access to the Home Office as part of a delegation that was supposedly to discuss the Bill. The Minister

of State sent down a message to say that he would see no delegation of which I was a part.

33. Minor changes followed the acceptance of an EU Directive on firearms, and levels of police efficiency sank to a point at which even the Home Office realised that something had to be done. Pressure was brought to bear on the most inefficient police forces as witness the 1993 investigation by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary mentioned earlier.

34. Then came Dunblane. A small town close to Stirling which is known as the gateway to the Highlands of Scotland gave its name to a massacre of small children and to further knee jerk reactions against guns. On 13th March 1996, Thomas Hamilton went to the primary school in Dunblane. He cut telephone wires outside the school though, in fact, they were not those serving the school. He then went inside with two 9mm self loading pistols, two revolvers and over 700 rounds of ammunition. He opened fire on children aged 5 or 6 who were in the gymnasium. Most were shot several times and Hamilton stood over wounded children to shoot again and again into their bodies.

35. One teacher and 16 children were killed. Three other members of staff and ten children were wounded. Hamilton killed himself at the scene.

36. There was understandable outrage and it is perhaps to the credit of the Conservative Government that, possibly to gain time or possibly from a real desire to know about the background, they immediately instituted a Judicial Inquiry. The Secretary of State for Scotland appointed a senior Scottish Judge, Lord Cullen, to conduct a public enquiry.

37. The media concentrated on two aspects. One was that Hamilton had been suspected of abuse of children at camps that he ran and a police officer had submitted a report saying that he was not a fit person to be allowed to have firearms and his certificate should not be renewed. The senior officer concerned had refused to take action on the report.

38. But the media mounted an unprecedented campaign calling for a complete ban on the private ownership of handguns, or in some cases all guns, and demonising all owners of guns. The shooting community found it hard to make their voice heard. That media campaign was maintained with undiminished fury throughout the period that followed.

39. Lord Cullen was appointed on 21st March 1996 and after a number of preliminaries, he held public sessions from 19th May to 10th July 1996. His report was ready on 30th September, but that was the period of the Political Party Conferences and the report was held back until 14th October and presented to Parliament on 16th October. I submitted extensive written evidence and in particular took issue with the submission of the Home Office which sought to show that there was a statistical link between the number of firearms in the hands of the public and the rate of homicide. I challenged that view. I did not attend any part of the hearings because of another commitment.

40. In his Report, Lord Cullen very clearly said that the banning of handguns for target shooting would not be justified. His reports suggests that consideration should be given requiring the disabling of pistols by removing a major part and leaving it at the club, or mandatory storage of pistols in a central location at the shooting club, but even these were not recommendations.

41. The Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee took the view that whilst Lord Cullen was concerned with the single incident at Dunblane, it was right for them to conduct an enquiry into the possession of handguns in the more general sense. I was appointed Specialist Advisor to that Committee. The Committee called witnesses and received a large number of written submissions. The Committee first sat on 8th May 1996 and presented its report to Parliament on 24th July, almost three months before the Cullen Report was available.

42. Parliamentary Committees are selected so that they reflect the political balance of the House as a whole. This Committee had eleven members including a chairman, though not all members attended every

sitting. The Conservative majority produced a report, clearly supported by the weight of evidence from witnesses, that opposed the banning of handguns, and opposed other suggestions such as storage at central locations and a requirement to disable any handguns.

43. The Labour minority proposed amendments that amounted to a minority report. They proposed that the goal of responsible politicians should be to dramatically reduce the ownership of guns in private hands. They proposed a total ban on the private ownership of handguns unless particular gun clubs at particular locations were prepared to build new and totally secure premises to store the guns that would be used there. They accepted the need for a few occupational exemptions such as slaughtermen, veterinary surgeons etc.

44. The question of shotguns was not within the terms of reference of the Committee and no evidence had been called about them. Nevertheless they proposed that "methods of reducing the number of shotguns legally held must be looked at". And suggested that, "Shotgun certificates should no longer be granted to those resident in urban areas". There had been no evidence on that issue. They went on to say that there was no justification for personal ownership of airguns, but occupational ownership might be justified. They suggested that airguns should be brought into the licensing system.

45. They then make a telling remark. "Opportunities for radical reforms of this sort have arisen in the past. We have in mind the 1972 Report by Sir John McKay (then HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary), which saw a reduction in the number of guns in private hands as a desirable end in itself, and the legislation arising from the killings at Hungerford in 1987. In both cases, the opportunity to strike at the gun culture in a big way was lost in general inertia. We believe that the opportunity afforded by the tragedy at Dunblane should not be missed; if action is not taken after such a disaster, it never will be."

46. They clearly saw the heightened emotions following a disaster as the only vehicle for pursuing their goals of eliminating, as far

as possible, the private ownership of firearms. They almost welcomed the disaster as a means of overcoming logic.

47. Lord Cullen's Report was presented to the Secretary of State for Scotland on 14th October 1996 and to Parliament on 16th. That Report said there was no justification for a ban on handguns, but consideration should be given to restricting access to them outside clubs. The Government also had a clear recommendation of a majority of a Parliamentary Committee that there should be no ban on handguns, no central storage requirement and no disabling requirement.

48. But the Conservative Government faced an imminent General Election and was conscious of the massive and quite hysterical anti gun campaign in the media and of what seems to have been the general public view at the time that pistols should be banned.

49. The Home Secretary, Michael Howard, decided that there would be no ban on handguns but that he would require storage at secure accommodation within clubs for those held for target shooting. There was to be a scheme for special police permits to allow pistols to be taken out for target shooting at other locations. That idea would create targets for criminals and terrorists and would hardly be likely to prevent the determined owner getting his hands on a pistol. Lord Cullen had explored various aspects of this idea and reported that the police were opposed to it. Cullen also pointed out that few clubs would be able to provide such secured storage.

50. Despite all that, the original decision taken was that, instead of a ban, all handguns except those required by people like vets and slaughter-men were to be kept in secure storage at clubs. The idea came from the Home Office and was based on the requirements in Colonial Hong Kong.

51. But that is not what transpired and I may be asked how I know that this was the original decision. The Home Office, like all Government Departments has a system of unofficial briefing of journalists prior to any major announcements so that the media is prepared in advance and can have their reports ready. Such a briefing was held on

15th October and the Home Affairs correspondents of two of the most prestigious newspapers in the UK telephoned me for comments about what was to be done. They told me in detail what would be in the announcement made the following day.

52. The decision actually announced by Michael Howard on 16th October was to ban all handguns except those in .22 rimfire. Smallbore handguns were to be restricted to storage on ranges with the complex system of authorities to remove them carried over from the original idea. There were minor exemptions for some occupational users and for some historic arms. There is ample evidence to support the explanation for this change. The final proposals were taken to Cabinet where Michael Forsyth, as Secretary of State for Scotland, had a seat. He was the Member of Parliament for the constituency covering Dunblane and is reported to have said that he had no hope of retaining his seat at the coming election unless there was a ban on handguns. He threatened to resign unless there was a ban on all handguns. The Prime Minister, John Major was unable to accept a split in the Cabinet at that time and the 'compromise' that left .22 handguns available, but locked in clubs was adopted and became the Firearms Act 1997.

53. How do I know that – I may not tell you the source of my information, but I can say that it is now widely known and has been publicly repeated many times, most recently in The Times of 9th March 2005, "Mr Howard was Home Secretary in John Major's Cabinet at the time of Dunblane, and was not convinced that tough handgun restrictions were needed. He was over-ruled by his colleagues who had been persuaded by Michael Forsyth the then Scottish Secretary, that a ban was necessary."

54. And so the general ban on handguns came in with exemptions for various classes of pistol such as those used by slaughtermen and others and making a requirement for .22 pistols to be stored at clubs. All other handguns were to be confiscated and an enormously complex compensation scheme was set up.

55. The Government sought, at first, to offer only half the value of the gun by way of compensation, but were advised that such a policy would be unlawful under the Human Rights Act and they then created a scheme which involved a basic payment of £150 for any gun, but payments according to a valuation for guns worth more than £150. A detailed list of values was published and provision was made for individual valuations of guns not listed. In addition. Compensation was paid for ammunition, reloading equipment, holsters and other accessories.

56. The ban on large calibre handguns was scheduled for July 1997, and owners were given until 30th September to hand in their guns.

57. The General Election took place on 1st May 1997 and the Conservative Government was swept from power. In particular, Michael Forsyth, who had been influential in changing Government proposals, lost his seat and has since disappeared from the political scene. Labour was elected with a massive majority and from the very start of the process had said that, if they came to power they would complete the ban by removing .22 pistols. They kept their promise and one of their first legislative measures was a Bill to complete the ban with a law that received the Royal Assent in November 1997 and came into effect in February 1998, when a new surrender and compensation scheme was generated.

58. Fifty-seven thousand people were compelled to hand in 162,000 pistols, 700 tons of ammunition, propellants and related equipment. Owners had to make appointments at local police stations. Payment was painfully slow and some compensation had not been paid over a year after the items had been handed in. An army of bureaucrats had to be assembled at the Home Office to handle all vast amount of paperwork. The police resources required to collect, check, store and then dispose of all these firearms, ammunition and equipment were enormous. The whole process of confiscating virtually all legally held handguns took place between July 1997 and February 1998.

59. The Home Office estimated that the total compensation paid was £87 million, their own costs were £4.6 million and they paid police

forces of £3.4 million for a total of £95 million. Police forces complained bitterly about the enormous cost to them and the Home Office figures are suspect. I would at least double those estimates to give a total cost around £200 million (NZ\$ 452 million).

60. The confiscation did not significantly reduce the number of active shooters. Most pistol clubs turned to shooting pistol-calibre carbines which are more powerful and have a larger magazines than most pistols. The total number of licence holders was reduced by only about 2,000.

61. All pistols were individually recorded so that there was no question of people failing to comply. In any event, licensed shooters are so thoroughly vetted that they was little prospect of non-compliance. There was, however, massive resentment that remains to this day.

62. It is my own very strong view that the ban on handguns was nothing more than dirty politics and if a general election had not been in the offing, there would have been no ban.

63. As to the effect on crime of the ban, the figures show that the ban had no discernible effect. Tables produced below show homicide and robbery figures for England and Wales over the period since 1980 by class of weapon. It is very easy to say that the use of pistols in robbery has virtually doubled since the ban and their use in homicide has also increased significantly. But that would be to use the politician's trick of picking out figures for individual years.

64. The longer term trends show that the both homicide and robbery have increased steadily and frighteningly over a twenty-four year period. Robbery in particular has increased from 15,000 to 101, 000 cases per year. Within those figures the use of pistols has increase from 500 to 2,700 cases per year. In the six years from 1980, pistols were used in an average of 1,051 robberies. In the six years before the handgun ban they were used in an average of 2,886 cases and in the six years since the ban they have been used in an average of 2,841 cases.

65. Over the same period, homicide has risen from around 600 cases per year to over 800. On average in the six years form 1980 pistols were used in 10.8 murders, in the six years before the ban they were

used on average in 29.3 cases per year and after the ban they were used in 32.6 case per year.

66. The situation is not, as some people have claimed, that the ban on handguns caused an increase in their use in crime. The truth is that it is a total irrelevance. Crime and the use of pistols has been increasing continuously over the period and everything that politicians and police have done has tended to exacerbate rather than tackle the problem, but the ban on handguns is neither here nor there in the equation.

67. The increased use of handguns tells us something about the nature of the crimes in question. These are not, for example, domestic homicides or amateur robbers. What is increasing is hard core robbery and killing. Britain is become progressively more lawless with larger and larger numbers of people who believe that they are above the law. Police, courts and politicians are failing to cope.

68. The fact that the ban on handguns would have no effect was entirely predictable. Many years ago I attended a conference at which a substantial number of anti gun groups were present. I asked if anyone present could give me one example at any time in history or in any country where tightening restrictions on legally held firearms could be shown to have had any beneficial impact on armed crime. No-one had a single suggestion to make. I wonder if anyone present today can point me to any verifiable example of reductions in armed crime attributable to gun control legislation.

TABLES

Homicides					
Year	Total Homicide	Total + Firearms	Shotgun	Sawn-off Shotgun	Pistol
1980	621	24	11	1	8
1981	556	34	21	-	11
1982	618	46	28	7	9
1983	552	42	27	5	8
1984	619	67	34	7	21
1985	625	45	22	7	8
1986	660	51	31	6	10
1987	686	77	33	10	10
1988	645	36	19	8	7
1989	622	45	19	7	13
1990	661	60	25	8	22
1991	725	55	25	7	19
1992	681	56	20	5	28
1993	675	74	29	10	35
1994	727	66	22	14	25
1995	753	70	18	10	39
1996	679	49	9	8	30
1997	753	59	12	4	39
1998*	731	49	4	7	32
1999	761	62	6	13	42
2000	850	73	12	2	47
2001	858	97	20	1	59
2002	1045++	81	20	3	40
2003	858	68	7	4	35

+ The total firearms column includes a small number of 'other firearms' that do not appear in the following columns.

* From 1998 the figures are for the financial year to 1st April of the following year.

++The total figure for 2002/03 includes 172 homicides attributed to Dr Shipman.
No imitation firearms are recorded under the homicide figure.

Robberies

Year	Total Robbery	Firearms+ Robbery	Shotgun	Sawn-off shotgun	Pistol
1980	15,006	1149	127	181	529
1981	20,282	1893	262	292	1001
1982	22,837	2560	364	372	1440
1983	22,119	1957	269	342	1011
1984	24,890	2098	216	378	1106
1985	27,463	2539	282	399	1221
1986	30,020	2651	256	471	1196
1987	32,633	2831	280	450	1374
1988	31,437	2688	241	451	1321
1989	33,163	3390	280	524	1772
1990	36,195	3939	280	448	2233
1991	45,323	5296	381	650	2988
1992	52,894	5827	406	602	3544
1993	57,845	5918	437	593	3605
1994	60,007	4104	274	373	2390
1995	68,074	3963	235	281	2478
1996	74,035	3617	224	232	2316
1997	63,072	3029	121	178	1854
1998*	66,172	2973	138	193	1814
1999	84,277	3922	138	217	2561
2000	95,154	4081	98	199	2700
2001	121375	5323	143	201	3841
2002	108045	4776	101	174	3332
2003	101195	4117	98	148	2799

+ The total firearms column includes a small number of 'other firearms' that do not appear in the following columns.

* From 1998 the figures are for the financial year to 1st April of the following year.

Imitation Firearms

Home Office Statistics (Crime in England and Wales 2003/2004: Supplementary Volume published January 2005) show that imitation firearms were used in only 230 robberies (Table 2.08).

FOOTNOTE

The basic thesis of my paper is that armed crime, including robbery and homicide are entirely unaffected by imposing the most stringent restrictions on the ownership of firearms by law abiding citizens. Even when restrictions include punitive measures such as bans on whole classes of weapons, the large scale confiscation of private property, the expenditure of very large sums of public money and the alienation of law abiding citizens, crime rates will remain unaffected.

Support for this proposition may be gained from experience in Australia where recent legislation has included bans of certain types of handgun. in the Sydney Morning Herald of 29th October 2005 reports that the head of the NSW Bureau of Statistics, Dr D Weatherburn, has commented on a reduction in firearm related crime, particularly homicide, but notes that the reduction began before the new laws and has continued afterwards. He is reported as saying, "I don't think anyone really understands why. A lot of people assume that the tougher laws did it, but I would need more specific, convincing evidence." Commenting specifically on the use of handguns in crime, he is reported as saying, "The decline appears to have more to do with the arrest of those responsible than the new laws. As soon as the heroin shortage hit, the armed robbery rate came down. I don't think it was anything to do with the tougher firearms laws."

It is not possible for me, at this distance, to further analyse this evidence, but someone should.