

On the matter of restrictions on use and sale of knives

By Esmerelda Weatherwax

I saw this headline earlier this week in the wake of the murder in Southport of three little girls and the wounding and maiming of another 8, plus three adults who were trying to protect them.

Traders who sell knives used in attacks should be prosecuted, says judge

If they sold a knife used in a murder, the managers of a shop or online platform would face the same maximum term of life imprisonment as the killers.

When I had time to read the whole article I found this sentence, which I think is sensible

Kitchen knives would be excluded, with the legislation limited to any blade whose "appearance shows that it is unlikely to have legitimate purpose", said Mr Houlder.

Because in the meantime I was looking at the selection of knives in my kitchen and thinking, should the unthinkable happen and some member of my family or passing visitor turn to the dark side, how would you prosecute Wilko who sold me my favourite vegetable knife, when Wilko closed all their stores last year.

Or the rather nice carving knife I bought in the closing down sale of Allders at Lakeside in 2005.

Or a handy little knife I use as a craft knife for paper and rough jobs. A good blade, Richardsons Sheffield steel, but a

cheap lime green handle, which was a free gift with a box of tea bags bought when I worked in Holborn in the early 1980s.

Imagine that.

40 years ago England was such a safe place that a reputable retailer (Woolworths) could sell a reputable make of tea (PG tips) with a knife as free gift making an imaginative change from a plastic daffodil or a Christmas bauble. My team and I each had several of these. One was nicked from my desk drawer but the other made it home and is still in use. I haven't seen an item of grocery with a free gift for a while, but sometimes PG do a special presentation pack with a mug, or their mascot chimp.



The last time I bought a knife (in Wilkos) I took a cardboard cut-out of a knife to the till where the cashier was happy that I am over age 25. Security then brought the tool, sealed in several layers of nearly impenetrable plastic and thick card. It wasn't until I was home that I was able to hold my choice, feel the weight and balance and examine the blade. Not that I need to be that scientific just to slice carrots.

So when protestors shout, as they are up and down the country, "We want our country back" and the chattering classes sneer back

"what bit of *your* country do you think you are missing then?" , well, that's one of the bits I'm missing.

The England where a handy knife is merely an innocent tool that can be given as free gift that a civil servant can keep openly in her desk.