

Boy gangster is caught with semi-automatic pistol at the age of just 13

By [Tamara Cohen](#)

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A schoolboy, who stored a gun, silencers and ammunition at home, was sentenced to an 18-month detention and training order today.

The youngster - just 13 at the time and one of the youngest convicted in Britain of firearms possession - had agreed to look after them for a fellow gang member.

Police, who raided his Victorian terraced home in New Cross, south-east London, first found a 31-round Russian-made Baikal IZH-79 semi-automatic pistol - regarded by police as gangland's gun of choice - in a basement cupboard.

The weapon, with two silencers, had been wrapped in bags and a pillowcase and stuffed into a rucksack.



Gangster's gun: The 31-round Russian-made Baikal IZH-79 semi-automatic pistol which was found at the schoolboy's home



Gun victim: James Smartt-Ford, 16, was killed with a Baikal like the one found in the boy's possession

Officers, who launched the raid after a tip-off, also recovered 31 rounds of 9mm ammunition from one of his socks nearby.

A few minutes later, a barrel brush for cleaning another type of a gun was discovered in the loft.

As the search continued with the help of a specially trained dog, a machete was recovered from the wardrobe in the youngster's bedroom.

Although tests later showed the gun was 'clean' and not connected to any known crime, semi-automatics like this - unknown in this country until three years ago - have been involved in a string of murders.

The youngster, who is now 14 and cannot be named for legal reasons, admitted a string of possession charges.

The Metropolitan Police said he was the youngest child yet to be arrested by its Central Taskforce for having a gun.

As his parents listened anxiously from the public gallery, Judge Usha Karu told their son: 'These are dangerous times that we live in and these weapons are dangerous indeed.

'The decision that the court makes in cases such as this and, in particular, when a young defendant such as yourself, who was 13 at the time and is now 14, is what the message to the public should be about those who decide and consciously and willingly get involved in offences of this nature.

'I am bound to say that, as it is the case as far you're concerned that at the age of 13 you appeared to be the youngest boy who has ever been arrested by the Metropolitan Police for possession of firearms, I have had to make a very careful judgment about what is the right thing to do.

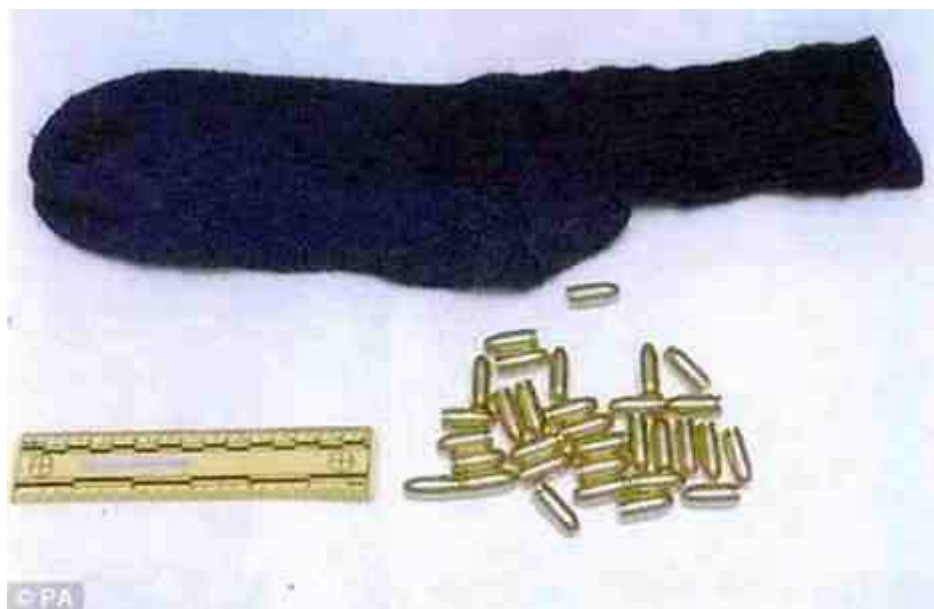
'You appear to have stated that you were threatened (into keeping the weaponry), but you are a self-confessed gang member. You had stored a firearm on a previous occasion and you appeared not to wish to disassociate yourself from the gang.'

The judge continued: 'It doesn't appear from the pre-sentence report that you showed any remorse for what you did.'

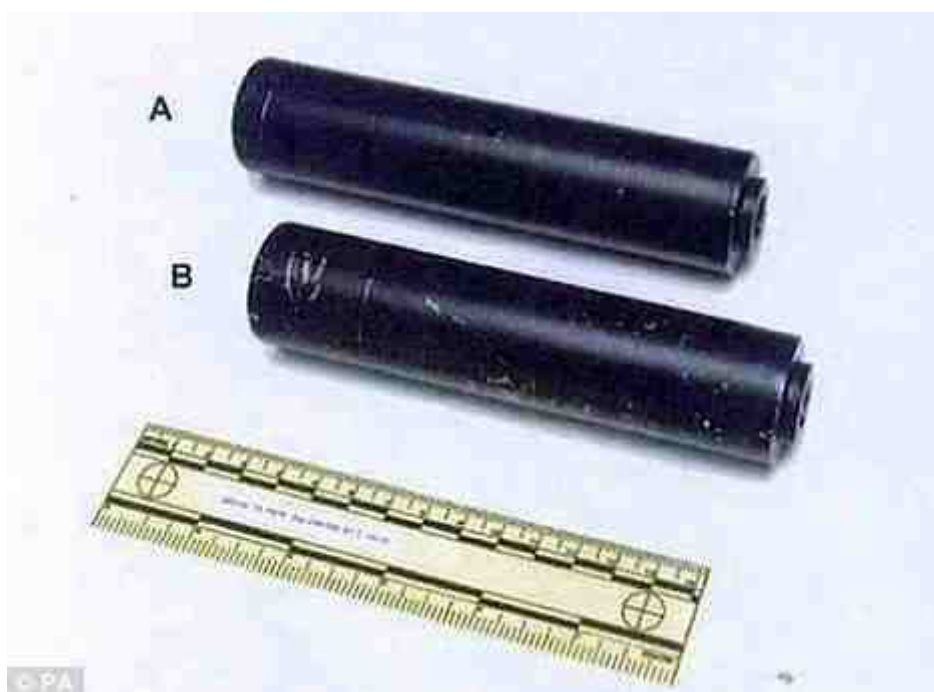
She told him that, having considered the facts of the case, including his previous brushes with the law and the 'complete disregard' he had shown for the help he had been offered, it was clear he was a 'persistent offender'.

'That being the case, it goes without saying that offences such as these cross the custody threshold and only an immediate custodial sentence is appropriate.

'Those who involve themselves in offences of this nature must realise that the courts will come down strongly against them. Gang culture cannot be tolerated and, although gang members prey on youngsters and get them to do their dirty work for them, if there is a person before the court who is a self-confessed gang member and therefore, to some extent, appears to be voluntarily associating with behaviour of this kind, it is wholly unacceptable,' she added.



The sock that contained 31 rounds of 9mm ammunition, found by police at a schoolboy's home



Hidden: Two silencers were also discovered by officers

Outside court, as the boy's mother walked past crying, Detective Chief Inspector Peter Beyer, of the Met's Central Task Force, said: 'I welcome the sentence and hope this sends out a message to other young people who might be tempted to involve themselves with guns.'

'This case is extremely sad and deeply concerning and, while we are committed to targeting anyone thought to be in possession of firearms, not one of my officers wants to come across a child in possession of a live gun.'

'Carrying or storing a gun is an extremely dangerous activity. Not only do you risk prosecution but, the second you take possession of that weapon, you put your friends and family at risk from reprisals.'

'Having a gun, even if it isn't used in a shooting or crime, will be taken incredibly seriously by the Met Police,' the officer added.

Neither of the youngster's parents wished to comment.

Earlier, Allison Hunter, prosecuting, told the court: 'The defendant bears the distinction of, at the age of 13 as he was on August 12 last year, being believed to be the youngest boy ever arrested by the Metropolitan Police for possession of firearms.'

In the months leading up to the finds, when the schoolboy was apparently gradually being sucked into south London gang culture, he received two reprimands - one for robbery, the other for threatening behaviour.

He was then made the subject of a six-month referral order after being found with a meat cleaver at school.

The barrister said that furthermore, school records showed seven 'reported incidents' involving the boy, including one in which he held a plastic knife to a teacher's throat and threatened other staff.

The search of the boy's home was ordered as part of an eight-month Met investigation targeting gang-related activity in south London.

When officers arrived they immediately handcuffed the youngster who, along with his mother, insisted there were no firearms in the house.

Miss Hunter said his parents, who were present when he was later interviewed by police, quickly realised their son's activities 'were well outside their knowledge'.

Their son was to 'confess he was a member of a gang, the Pepys gang, a gang that had not formerly been brought to the attention of the police prior to this incident'.

She said the youngster went on to explain he was given the gun in July by a 19-year-old fellow member called 'Biggie Dan'.

The ammunition and silencers were handed over during another meeting two hours later.

He initially claimed he had been forced to look after the weaponry, insisting he was warned 'something will happen to the people you love' if he did not do as he was told.

'He said he met the same boy who just said 'Take these to your house'. He claimed he told the boy 'Oh no, I've done enough for you already', but the boy supposedly told him 'Do as I say'.'

The teenager told officers Biggie and his associates 'do shootings for reasons' and that 'if they have a beef with each other there will be a shoot out'.

In fact, he knew two members of another gang he 'associated' with, who had taken part in such a confrontation. One of them even wore a bullet proof vest.

During later questioning, however, the youngster appeared to accept he was really looking after the weaponry as a favour and even admitted this was not the first gun he had looked after for Biggie.

He also said the older teenager advised him to hide the items separately, because if they were found together he would 'get more years'. He was also warned not to keep them in his bedroom because if they were found 'you're gonna get arrested and I need you'.

'Furthermore, since he has been on bail he has been contacted by Biggie Dan and said he regarded the Pepys gang as family,' Miss Hunter added.

Rhodri James, defending, who reminded the court his young client had insisted he kept the machete for his own protection, said there were other problems, too.

The boy's mother had spoken of her son's belief someone was watching him.

Sometimes he would even hear voices and turn photographs around to face the wall.

'Thirteen at the time of these offences, 14 now - very, very young and impressionable ... easily led, not surprising for a 13-year-old associating with older individuals.

'He has the support of both his parents, who are obviously very anxious about these proceedings,' he added.

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Well, if we are to "control" this epidemic we must put a deterrent out there..At the moment there is,nt, This is a bravado feeling until they get caught and then they come across as frightened children until they are released early and reform.. and again get pulled into the gang protection culture When will we learn on how to control and eradicate the severe problem that is escalating all over the British Isles ? soon I hope.. No one deserves to die from a bullet in this day and age ..especially at abus stop with their child

- Howard Clack, Newark, 30/1/2009 18:03

Click to rate Rating 33

He may be a child Sarah but if you, for instance, had accidentally bumped into him in the street there is a good chance you or, more likely, the man with you would have been shot or stabbed in "retribution".

Blaming peer pressure is not much use when someone you love is bleeding to death.

- Graeme, Glasgow, 30/1/2009 17:45

Click to rate Rating 55

I was always taught as a child that you knew the difference between right and wrong at the age of seven. At 13 this boy knew what he was doing was definitely wrong. What is that expression 'old enough to do the crime old enough to do the time'.

- Jennifer, Wirral, 30/1/2009 17:43

Click to rate Rating 48

Sarah, London. Are you for real? Sadly, I bet the answer is yes! This boy should have got a minimum of 5 years to serve in full.

- Maggie, London, 30/1/2009 17:13

Click to rate Rating 28

I agree with JC-Manchester.
All this sentence has done to a lad like this is to bestow him 'street cred'..Which will undoubtedly elevate him higher up the dregs of society ladder in less than 9 months time.

- The Phantom Raspberry Blower, Old London Town, 30/1/2009 17:04

Click to rate Rating 19

"This is a child, he is vulnerable to peer pressure. They should arrest the person who provided the weapon."

A child he is not. When will this pathetic PC brigade wake up?

- BA, London, 30/1/2009 16:58

Click to rate Rating 22

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