

## Crowe picks up the boor men's baton

November 17 2002

By Paul Daley

London

The Japanese restaurant in Knightsbridge where Russell Crowe had his punch-up last week is not the sort of place you go to eat, although the food is very good and they'll charge you about £40 (\$A112) for the privilege. No, Zuma is the sort of place you go to be seen with other "A-list" celebrities or, perhaps, by wannabe A-listers.

Central and south-west London is littered with these sort of places. Photographers stake them out, waiting to catch a worse-for-drink actor or rock star throwing a punch, snogging somebody else's wife, doing cocaine or, preferably, all three. Famous people who want privacy go elsewhere, making those who frequent such places fair game.

According to all reports, Crowe was animated when he arrived at Zuma mid-evening. He ate and drank. And drank. Until he and his friends reportedly began tossing the cutlery and plates around. Other diners complained. Crowe and his friends moved to the bar, where the actor and New Zealand businessman Eric Watson, owner of the Warriors rugby league team, began arguing animatedly.

Push turned to shove and the two apparently had a punch-up in the toilets.

"One of Crowe's minders rushed in after hearing shouting and found Crowe lying on the ground with the other guy on top of him," one witness said.

Back at the bar, where he began drinking again, Crowe was photographed looking dishevelled and with a large bruise in the middle of his forehead. Life imitated art when another actor, Ross Kemp - who played a hard man in the long-running British soap *EastEnders* - intervened in an attempt to calm Crowe. (Coincidentally, Kemp is married to Rebekah Wade, editor of *News Of The World*, whose standard Sunday fare is celebrity-shaming and entrapment.)

A short time later four van-loads of police arrived.

"When police arrived the situation was under control. No allegations of a crime were received. There were no arrests and there will be no further police action," a police spokesman said.

Crowe was last seen leaving the scene, smoking a cigarette, in the back of a car.

Exactly what he's been doing in London since he arrived for the funeral of fellow *Gladiator* actor Richard Harris (a genuine hell-raiser who was never known to lose a fight in his day) from Mexico on November 4 is the subject of some conjecture. Certainly Harris's funeral gave him an opportunity to realise what has, apparently, been a burning recent ambition: to read, uninterrupted, the full text of *Sanctity*, a poem by Irishman Patrick Kavanagh.

## THE AGE

Shortly before he died of cancer at 72, Harris said of Crowe: "Top bloke, loves his rugby, doesn't give a stuff, brilliant actor, a much-loved new friend. He will carry the baton on."

The "baton", aside from considerable acting talent, being a metaphor for what regular folk might call philandering, public drunkenness, boorishness and brawling of the type made famous by Peter O'Toole, Oliver Reed and Harris.

As a baton carrier, 38-year-old Crowe has much to live up to.

And he can rest assured that if he spends any time in London, his every move will be recorded by the paparazzi. Someone with such glowing tabloid potential just can't be ignored.