

Belfast Telegraph

Belfast cabbie cleared of raping teen passenger



Mr Harbinson told police they had consensual sex

December 17 2019 01:06 PM

A taxi driver from north Belfast has been cleared of raping a passenger after it emerged the Crown was offering “no further evidence” against him.

William Harbinson was charged with three offences arising from an incident with a female passenger in September 2017. Following the acquittal, on Tuesday, December 17, he said: "I'm an innocent man and now I'm going to spend Christmas with my family.

A trial at Belfast Crown Court commenced on Monday, when a prosecuting barrister set out the Crown's case against the 57-year old.

Mr Harbinson, who at the time was a taxi driver, picked up the 17-year old complainant after she was ejected from a Belfast nightclub in the early hours of September 2, 2017. It was the Crown's case that after offering her a beer as he took her home, Mr Harbinson then forced himself on her in the back seat of the taxi.

When Mr Harbinson was subsequently arrested and interviewed about her allegation, he told police they had sex but claimed all sexual activity was consensual.

He made the case that after picking the female up, she told him he was 'cool and dead on' and that after he gave her two beers, she leaned over, gave him a kiss and said she liked older men.

Mr Harbinson, from the Highfield area of Belfast, also made the case that after having consensual sex, he dropped her to her destination where she asked for his number, kissed him then 'walked away.'

As the hearing was due to enter its second day, prosecuting barrister Rick Weir QC told the jury of seven men and five women: "I am indicating on behalf of the Crown we are intend to offer no further evidence."

Judge Stephen Fowler QC then addressed the jury and said that as a result of the Crown's decision not to proceed with the trial, they were to return a verdict of 'not guilty by direction of the judge' on the three charges against Mr Harbinson - namely rape and two counts of sexual assault.

The Judge thanked then dismissed the jury. He then asked if there were any outstanding matters against Mr Harbinson, and when he was told there were not, the Judge told him "you are free to go."

Speaking outside the court Mr Harbinson said: "I'm an innocent man and now I'm going to spend Christmas with my family.

"I'm overjoyed at what's happened today. I've always said I was innocent.

"This has been hanging over my head for over two years and in that time I've had a stroke and I can hardly walk. I'm blaming all the stress of the last two years for my stroke.

"It's been an awful strain on my family and I want to thank them for standing by me."

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<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/belfast-cabbie-cleared-of-raping-teen-passenger-38792483.html>