

Wigan man cleared of rape says allegations 'destroyed his life'

A man cleared by a jury of raping a woman in Wigan says the allegations have destroyed his life.

By Andrew Nowell

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Wigan man speaks out after being cleared of rape

Thomas Kennedy today described how he “lost everything” after spending six months remanded in custody following arrest at the home of his partner in Worsley Hall.

Police tracked down the 36-year-old as part of an investigation into what they were told was a brutal sexual attack which, had it been proven, could have landed the culprit behind bars for two decades.

Thomas, though, said that while he was at the location on that day, he had consensual sex with the complainant, showered and then left the house.

That, in the end, was the conclusion the jury reached as well, finding him not guilty.

The outcome, following a five-day Bolton Crown Court trial, has now left him trying to pick up the pieces of his shattered life. He said: “I had a flat, a home, a car, a job, and everything has been taken from me.”

“The police came to my partner’s house at half 10 at night, banging on the door, shining lights through the windows and shouting to open the door. They marched in, threw me to the floor, cuffed me and said I was arrested on suspicion of rape.

“I was remanded in custody and when I was in the cell my world fell apart.

“Even now the only thing I have got back is freedom. I know the other things are all material but I’ve got to start all over again.”

Thomas told in vivid detail his months of waiting at HMP Forest Bank for his case to come to trial and how his mental health deteriorated dramatically.

He described being locked up while protesting his own innocence and said those nearest to him helped him through the ordeal.

He said: “Prison was a living nightmare. I was threatened with being stabbed, people shouted at me that I was a rapist and threatened me with throwing boiling water over me.

“Some mornings I couldn’t get out of my cell. The first couple of weeks there I spoke to no-one, wasn’t eating and thought about taking my own life.

“Having the door locked behind me even though I was innocent was hard to swallow.

“It was only the counselling I got in prison and the support of family and friends who really knew me, believed me and stood by me that helped me through.

“Even when they dragged me from my partner’s house I just wanted to shout out I was innocent, but I was told to shut up until the day of the trial.

“In jail I felt every second of the clock tick. You are told to eat your dinner at this time, do things at certain times, and there’s someone watching over your shoulder. It’s hard to speak out about this but I’ve learned I need to do so.”

After that the five days of evidence-giving was another hurdle to get over.

The jury began deliberating on the Friday afternoon and returned their not guilty verdict on Monday lunchtime.

He said: “Listening to the evidence was like having the bandage ripped off again. It was hurtful to think those jurors could have believed this story about me, Being portrayed as this sex offender, this monster, was horrible.

“The verdict was such a relief but it was also upsetting. I could see my family in court and there was this numbness.”

But getting his freedom back was only the beginning of a new struggle.

Thomas’s flat and possessions had been repossessed while in custody and his car taken away. He has still managed to get very few of them back and is sofa surfing while living out of a sports bag. Meanwhile he is rebuilding his relationship with his partner and his children from a previous relationship.

He is also still on tablets, suffering the psychological effects of imprisonment, and struggling to return to his old job as a self-employed plasterer.

He also has a burning need to clear his name, saying his reputation has been tarnished by the ordeal.

He said: "I'm still in this hole. My tools are gone, my car is in a compound which I can't afford to pay to have it released and my doctor has said I can't go back to work. The tablets I'm on are so strong I have to see a psychiatrist.

"I still have nightmares and wake up wondering if I'm back in jail, if it's all still going on."

<https://www.wigantoday.net/news/crime/wigan-man-cleared-rape-says-allegations-destroyed-his-life-96482>