

## Whiskey Worth €56,000 Stolen at Bottling Plant

Premium Irish whiskey valued at €56,616 was stolen in a burglary at the “House of Donohue”, a whiskey bottling plant on the Industrial Estate, the Circuit Criminal Court heard in Waterford, last week.

None of the 404 bottles of ‘Middleton Rare’ whiskey destined for the Irish and US markets in special presentation cases was recovered.

A pizza delivery man, Seamus O’Neill (25) single, with addresses at O’Connell Street, and Johnstown, Waterford, was found not guilty of the burglary by a jury of nine men and two women after a two-day trial.

Barrister Noel Whelan, for the DPP, said when the staff of the “House of Donohue” opened up for work on July 19th, 2010 they found that their stock was missing.

It was alleged that the accused man was one of those involved in the theft of the whiskey and while not one the most significant players he acted as the ‘look-out’.

House of Donohoe Production Manager Sharon Power, said the company packaged a premium whiskey, “Middleton Rare” for the Irish and the US markets. The unique whiskey retailed at €144 a bottle.

The industrial premises on the IDA Industrial Estate closed for the weekend and was locked up on Friday, July 16th, 2010.

When the factory re-opened on the following Monday morning it was discovered that there had been a burglary and 404 premium cases of ‘Middleton Rare’ with a total value of €56,616 were gone. The steel fire door at the rear of the premises had been forced with a crowbar.

Missing also were 23 cases each containing 12 bottles with 750 mls whiskey as well as 23 cases with six bottles containing 700 mls of whiskey for the Irish market.

A senior operative in the factory, Phillip Kelly said the burglars forced the steel fire door and smashed an emergency door as well as a second steel door.

The Gardaí were contacted and Det Garda Patrick Kelly, Waterford, who investigated the crime, said he examined CCTV footage and saw a silver Mazda 626 car with distinctive sun roof and spoiler in a cul-de-sac at the rear of the industrial unit at 6.14 pm on July 16th.

It was suspected the car was involved in the burglary and a search was launched for the vehicle. It was found backed into the drive way of an abandoned farmhouse at Kilbarry near the halting site.

In evidence Detective Garda Tomas Manton said the car was seized and technically examined and finger prints found matched those of the accused man on the National Database.

He was arrested and detained and during an interview he admitted being a passenger in the back of the car when it was “spinning around” the Industrial Estate. He said he did not know there was going to be a burglary.

In reply to questions, the accused man said the car was parked outside the AIB and they walked to the rear of the “House of Donohue”.

The “lads” with him went in and grabbed a “load of stuff” in brown boxes. He was told to wait outside. The alarm went off and they all ran away.

The mother of the accused man, Margaret O’Neill said her son was the youngest of four children. Throughout his education he required remedial support.

Addressing the Jury, Noel Whelan, BL., for the DPP, said a crowbar was used to force open the security door and the accused man acted as lookout. There was no contest on the facts in the case and they were not disputed.

The defence was clearly playing on the emotions of the Jury by portraying him as a “child-like” character that could not be responsible.

But he was no child and was 21 years of age at the time of the commission of the crime and he lived alone in a flat in Waterford.

Barrister Elaine Morgan, defending, said it was not easy for her to say that her client was a man of “limited intellect”. He had no idea his companions were going to commit a crime.

After an absence of 20 minutes the Jury returned a verdict of not guilty.