

## **A loan shark who made almost £3m by charging clients up to 2,437% interest has been jailed for five years.**

John Kiely, 36, of Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire, was convicted of blackmail and illegal money lending at Manchester Minshull Street Crown Court.

Judge Adrian Smith told him: "It is clear to me you are a ruthless individual who has displayed a high degree of criminal sophistication."

When arrested he estimated 900 clients owed him £800,000 in outstanding loans.

Kiely, who used enforcers to collect debts owed by families on east Manchester housing estates, was found guilty of two counts of blackmail in July.

### **Mock-Tudor house**

He was also found guilty of one count of acquiring criminal property, two counts of concealing, disguising, converting or transferring criminal property, and two counts of unlawfully failing to give notice of a change in circumstances.

Kiely also admitted, at an earlier hearing, five counts of illegal money lending.

The court heard Kiely's profits of £2.9m, made between 2003 and his arrest last year, had enabled him to pay cash for a £868,650 mock-Tudor seven-bedroom house, complete with turret.

Donna Ockerby, 45, claimed she was left fearing for her life and was forced to move to a secret location to escape him.

She borrowed £300 to pay for her wedding dress in January 2007 because she was "absolutely desperate", the jury heard.

During evidence, she told a jury she was forced to move house because she was so frightened of the man she knew as "Johnny Boy Kiely".

Mrs Ockerby said she faced aggressive demands for money and a concrete block was thrown at her window after a debt collector called.

Kiely was convicted of two counts of blackmail for his actions towards her.

Prosecutor Ben Mills said Kiely, who has a conviction for assault and comes from the travelling community, began working as an illegal loan shark in 2003, and started the unlicensed money lending company Project Finance UK Ltd two years later because it was more tax-efficient.

### **'Untold misery'**

He said Kiely had set up Millennium Finance Ltd last year, by falsely obtaining a licence from the Office of Fair Trading (OFT).

New rules now mean that anyone applying to run a money-lending firm would be subject to more detailed checks.

Tony Quigley, head of the north west Trading Standards illegal money lending team, said: "Kiely showed contempt for the people he lent money to.

"This wasn't a community service, it was the sort of criminal activity that we are working hard to put a stop to."

Mrs Ockerby, speaking after the case, said she believed Kiely "was capable of anything" and warned others to think twice before borrowing money from loan sharks.

"These people prey on people's misfortune. If anyone wants to go through the horror that I have been through, then so be it, but their lives will be wrecked," she said.

Consumer minister Kevin Brennan said: "Thugs like Kiely who prey on vulnerable people cause untold misery within communities."