

Jehovah's Witness elder 'motivated by sexual need' in kissing women and children, court

Businessman Mark Sewell, 53, denies nine historic sex charges against girls and women in a period spanning more than eight years.

44 Shares



Share

Tweet

+1

Email



Mark Sewell

A senior Jehovah's Witness was "motivated by sexual need" in kissing women and children on the lips to "push the boundaries", a court heard today.

Church elder Mark Sewell exploited his seniority and influence to abuse his alleged victims, it was claimed.

The businessman, 53, denies nine historic sex charges against girls and women in a period spanning more than eight years.

Judge Richard Twomlow today directed the guilty to find him not guilty of a count of indecent assault against a girl aged under 16, which he had denied.

The judge had previously also directed the jury to acquit him of two counts of indecent assault against the same girl when she was aged under 14, which he had also denied.

Prosecutor Sarah Waters today told Merthyr Crown Court in her closing speech there had been repeated "themes" in the evidence heard during the trial, including claims Sewell would kiss women and children on the lips.

She asked the jury to consider whether "this is somebody who is just a little bit over-affectionate" or instead a "pre-cursor to see if he can push the boundaries with them".

Such kissing was "the start of the grooming process" with the children is alleged to have abused, said Ms Waters.

She went on to tell the jury: "This is a man who is powerful and a man who isn't afraid of using his position of power.

"His position of power as an elder means he knows people will come and confide in him. People trust the elders, won't expect him to be doing anything like this, people will believe him over them."

She added: "We say that the themes demonstrate he was a man using that power to push the boundaries with these four women, motivated by sexual need, and he would satisfy that by taking it further on future occasions."

Jurors were told Sewell had denied six times during his police interview ever kissing the girls on the lips before accepting in his evidence to the court it was something he had done.

Ms Waters said there was "no room for confusion about what he was being asked" by detectives when he was questioned.

Ms Waters asked the four men and eight women of the jury to consider whether the four alleged victims in the case had any incentive to lie about their claims.

"The defendant is a very unfortunate man indeed if it's the case that four separate females have all decided to come to the police to give evidence about very personal matters and put themselves through the ordeal of being cross-examined about very personal matters to tell serious and malicious lies against this defendant," she said.

There was no "advantage" to any of the women in making up false claims, said Ms Waters.

She added: "What's the motive for all these four witnesses to lie?"

"Have they all got together and colluded in some horrible plan to get the defendant into trouble?"

"The prosecution would say that just doesn't stand up."

Between 1987 and 1995 the former Butlins holiday camp driver is alleged to have abused two young girls and also raped a woman, all of whom were fellow Jehovah's Witnesses within the Barry congregation where he also worshipped.

He is also accused of indecently assaulting another woman by rubbing his groin against her as she made a cup of tea.

The defendant, wearing a navy suit over a blue shirt and patterned tie, appeared stony-faced as he followed proceedings from the glass-fronted dock.

Marian Lewis, defending, said in her closing speech that witnesses had spoken of defendant was "honest, kind, trustworthy" and "a man who would go the extra mile for you".

She added: "He is a man who faces, perhaps, almost the most serious kind of criminal offence that a person can face under our criminal law."

Ms Lewis said each of the victims may have had a motive to fabricate allegations against Sewell.

Ms Lewis suggested the first victim may have made allegations in the early 1990s "to excuse her own teenage behaviour at the time".

She also told jurors the subject of a rape claim may have had an interest "in making up a story" because she was "rejected" by the defendant after a relationship between the pair ended, though the alleged victim denies the pair ever engaged in an affair.

Ms Lewis said Sewell "made no secret of the fact he was affectionate, made no secret of kissing people on the lips in front of others".

She added: "Kissing people on the lips is not a criminal offence. It's not indecent.

"Being flirtatious is not a criminal offence. It's not indecent.

"Not all flirtatious behaviour is sexual, is it, ladies and gentlemen?"

"Being touchy-feely isn't criminal or necessarily sexual."

She told the jury they should have "grave concern about the quality, credibility, and reliability" of an "awful lot" of the prosecution's evidence against Sewell.

Sewell, of Porthkerry Road in Barry, denies eight counts of indecent assault and a single count of rape.

The case was later adjourned until tomorrow when the jury is expected to retire to consider its verdicts.