

Jehovah's Witness elder: 'Yes, I kissed schoolgirl on lips but it was nothing sexual'

Businessman Mark Sewell, 53, denies 10 historic sex charges against girls and women in a period spanning more than a decade

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Mark Sewell

A former Jehovah's Witnesses elder today claimed he had "never" kissed a schoolgirl using his tongue.

Lifelong churchgoer Mark Sewell admitted kissing the youngster on the lips but said there was nothing sexual or inappropriate about his behaviour.

The businessman, 53, denies 10 historic sex charges against girls and women in a period spanning more than a decade.

Today Judge Richard Twomlow directed jurors to find Sewell not guilty of two counts of indecent assault against a girl aged under 14.

The allegations, said to have occurred when the girl was aged 10 and 11, had also been denied by the defendant.

Sewell, wearing a navy suit over a blue shirt and striped tie, told Merthyr Crown Court he had never assaulted the girl, who it is alleged he abused when she was aged between 12 and 15.

Marian Lewis, defending, asked him: "Did you kiss her on the lips?"

The former Butlins holiday camp driver replied: "I did, yes."

Ms Lewis then asked: "Did you ever insert your tongue into her mouth?"

Sewell answered: "Never."

Ms Lewis continued: "Did you ever touch her in any indecent way?"

Sewell again said: "Never."

He also denied ever rubbing himself against the girl or touching or kissing her while stripped down to his underpants.

Sewell said the girl's father had spoken to him when the alleged victim was "13 or 14" as she felt "awkward" about being kissed by him.

The defendant told the court he "accepted" what was said and that he acted differently afterwards.

Sewell was asked whether there was "anything sexual" in his behaviour towards the girl, who is the subject of five of the charges he faces.

"None at all," he told the jury of four men and eight women.

He told the court he would ask children "What's it worth?" before helping them but said there was "nothing at all" sexual or inappropriate about it and he was not demanding a kiss by doing so.

"It was just playing with children and banter," he added.

The court had earlier heard how respected Jehovah's Witness Sewell used his "position of power" as an elder in the Barry congregation to "exploit and abuse" women and children.

Between 1987 and 1995 Sewell is alleged to have abused two young girls and also raped a woman, all of whom were fellow Jehovah's Witnesses.

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

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

The judge has directed the jury to find him not guilty of two other counts of indecent assault, which he had also denied.

The case continues.

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