

Jehovah's Witness leader guilty of rape and seven other indecent assaults

Barry congregation elder and 'sexual predator' Mark Sewell, 53, has been convicted of rape and seven counts of indecent assault

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Mark Sewell, of Barry, Vale of Glamorgan, is pictured outside Cardiff Crown Court.

A respected Jehovah's Witnesses church leader was today convicted of a string of sex abuse allegations.

Former Barry congregation elder and "sexual predator" Mark Sewell, 53, denied nine historic sex charges against girls and women in a period spanning more than eight years.

The businessman and former Butlins holiday camp driver faces "a very substantial prison sentence" after a jury at Merthyr Tydfil Crown Court convicted him of eight counts, including rape.

The jury first returned unanimous guilty verdicts on five counts of indecent assault against two young girls following more than nine hours of deliberation.

He was also unanimously found not guilty of one count of indecent assault against one of the girls.

The jury then continued to deliberate on a single count of rape and two further allegations of indecent assault before later convicting him on all of those charges by a majority.

There was no reaction in the packed gallery as the jury of four men and eight women returned its verdicts.

The defendant, wearing a grey suit over a dark blue shirt and yellow patterned tie, looked straight ahead and sighed as the foreman of the jury replied "Guilty" in respect of five of the nine charges.

When the jury returned for a second time he had removed his tie and looked close to tears.

Judge Richard Twomlow warned Sewell he could expect "a very substantial" jail term when he returns to court for sentencing.

Sewell will be remanded in custody until he is sentenced next month.

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.

Prosecutor Sarah Waters said he had used his influence "to perpetrate such sexual abuse over a number of years for his own sexual gratification".

At the start of the trial she told the court: "He is a sexual predator that took opportunities available to him to satisfy his sexual desires.

"For example he would use his high position in the Jehovah's Witness congregation to act in a sexually inappropriate manner with women, being 'touchy-feely' and insisting that he kiss them on the lips."

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

The woman he raped told the court how Sewell "shredded" her knickers in an attack which left her pregnant. She later miscarried.

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

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

During the trial Judge Twomlow directed the jury to return not guilty verdicts on three further indecent assault counts, which heavily-built Sewell had also denied.

Remanding Sewell in custody ahead of a sentencing hearing next Wednesday, Judge Twomlow told him he had assaulted two "young and vulnerable teenagers".

By abusing the two girls, who also followed his faith, he was guilty of a "gross breach of trust" of his position as an elder.

The abuse was not "confined" to those girls alone, the judge added, after Sewell raped a female fellow worshipper and indecently assaulted another woman.

"By a combination of bullying, bluster and hypocrisy you managed to avoid being brought to account for this utterly disgraceful behaviour for many years.

"Fortunately the jury were not fooled by you and you now face a very substantial prison sentence."

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