

Woman denies fabricating rape allegation against Jehovah's Witness elder as revenge

Businessman Mark Sewell, 53, denies a total of 12 historic sex charges against girls and women across a 10-year timeframe.

27 Shares

Share

Tweet

+1

Email



Mark Sewell

A woman allegedly raped and left pregnant by a senior Jehovah's Witness has denied fabricating the claim as revenge for a "relationship" between the pair ending.

The woman today branded the claim "a lie" as she was cross-examined during the trial of former church elder Mark Sewell.

The businessman, 53, denies a total of 12 historic sex charges against girls and women across a 10-year timeframe.

One of the charges he denies is raping the woman in a living room at his home after pulling her to the ground and "shredding" her knickers.

Marian Lewis, defending, said the woman had made the rape allegation to "deflect any blame" after Sewell broke off what she called a "very close, intimate relationship" between the pair.

The woman, who cannot be identified for legal reasons, told the jury of four men and eight women at Merthyr Crown Court the suggestion was "a lie".

Ms Lewis asked her: "There was a natural attraction between you wasn't there?"

The witness, a former member of the Barry congregation with Sewell, answered: "I liked him."

Ms Lewis then said: "You found his attention flattering."

The woman, wearing a white cardigan over a patterned black top and black trousers, replied: "He could be very flattering."

The woman admitted the pair "sometimes" kissed, though this would never involve using their tongues.

Asked if they ever cuddled she replied: "As a comforting hug, yes."

Ms Lewis then asked if they had "touched parts of each other's bodies".

The witness said: "No."

Ms Lewis added: "Would you accept this - that you and he were in or did have a relationship?"

The woman said: "No."

Ms Lewis continued: "A relationship which didn't involve sexual intercourse but was nevertheless a relationship?"

The witness said the pair had only ever been friends.

She also rejected a claim by the defence she had asked Sewell to "run away" with her.

"I never suggested it to Mark," she said. "Never."

Ms Lewis put to the woman that the act of rape she alleges "never took place".

The woman responded: "Yes it did."

The witness also denied having a "grievance" with the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Ms Lewis added: "Your grievance is also towards Mr Sewell, who didn't carry on his relationship with you."

The woman replied: "That's a lie."

Ms Lewis said: "The allegation of rape that you made was to deflect any blame that may have attached to you for forming an attachment with Mr Sewell."

The woman responded: "No."

The alleged rape victim's former husband, who cannot be identified, said that when the couple joined the Barry congregation Sewell had "a reputation for being over-familiar, flirty, if I can put it that way".

The man, giving evidence in court, said he was "a little bit baffled" by Sewell's conduct.

The man, wearing a black suit over a white shirt and spotty tie, was asked by prosecutor Sarah Waters why the behaviour baffled him.

"Just the way he would cuddle other sisters in the congregation," he said.

"He always seemed to have a need, if we were in company, he always wanted to kiss other females if they were leaving, it seemed to be a big deal of his."

The man said when his wife told him, in the aftermath of the alleged attack in the early 1990s, that Sewell had raped her he was left in "disbelief".

He added: "She was a wreck, to be honest.

"Extremely emotional, couldn't stop crying. I wouldn't say hysterical but a complete wreck."

At a judicial committee convened by church elders to examine the claims some three years later, after the man's wife reported the allegations to a senior member of the congregation, Sewell "denied everything", the man said.

"Significantly Mary [Sewell, the defendant's wife] did a lot of the talking for him and answered a lot of the questions on his behalf, which we were annoyed about, but he just didn't want to get involved."

The court had earlier in the trial heard how respected Jehovah's Witness Sewell used his "position of power" as an elder in the congregation to "exploit and abuse" women and children for more than 10 years.

Between 1985 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.

Heavily-built Sewell, wearing a grey suit over a white shirt and a blue tie with white spots, appeared to be concentrating intently as he listened to proceedings from the glass-fronted dock.

The defendant, of Porthkerry Road in Barry, denies 11 counts of indecent assault and a single count of rape.

The case, which is expected to last three weeks, continues.