

TheCitizen LANCASTER & MORECAMBE

Church elder who sexually abused vulnerable children was invited to speak at first victim's wedding

5:30am Friday 12th February 2016

A CHURCH elder who sexually abused vulnerable children was invited to speak at his first victim's wedding, a court heard.

A court was told Harry Holt, 71, now of Rutland Street, Nelson, went on to attack seven more girls as young as nine after the Jehovah's Witnesses failed to report him to police.

When the matter was raised, a local beat officer advised parents to 'just keep your children away from him', the court heard.

Holt is facing a lengthy prison sentence after being convicted of attacks against eight girls in Scotland dating back over 40 years.

His first victim, now 56, described Holt telling her he would deny touching her and that nobody would believe her.

She told Kilmarnock Sheriff Court: "As a child I was made out to be a liar but Charlie knows I'm not lying.

"My mother and father were treated very badly and it caused disruption in the congregation. They were of very good standing.

"The local bobby was there and my mum and dad asked him what they should do and he said, 'just keep your children away from him'."

The woman, then 14, said a judicial committee of elders was held where Holt admitted groping her but not sexual touching.

She added: "He was sitting straight across from me. As a result he was removed as an elder from the congregation."

The court heard at 19 she got married and her mother insisted that Holt should officiate which caused a 'big row' as 'it wasn't until years later that she found out why'.

Another victim, now 32, described Holt abusing her in the jacuzzi at the Magnum leisure centre in Irvine, Ayrshire, when she was between 14 and 15.

The court heard the visit was laid on as a treat for 'pioneering' door to door with leaflets and church magazines.

The victim told the court: "I kept telling him to stop."

Holt, a retired engineer, and his wife later moved from Ayrshire to the Edinburgh area, although the victim still saw him through the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Holt, was found guilty of 11 charges of indecent assault and lewd and libidinous behaviour in Seamill, Dalry, Saltcoats, Kilbirnie, Stevenston and Kilwinning, Ayrshire, and in Gorebridge, Midlothian, between May 1971 and August 2004.

One of the attacks took place in a Kingdom Hall meeting place run by the church, the court heard.

The crimes came to light when two victims shared their experiences years later and went to the police.

Sentence was deferred until next month and Holt was remanded in custody.

A church spokesman said: "Jehovah's Witnesses abhor child abuse and view it as both a despicable crime and a sin.

"Anyone who commits the sin of child abuse faces expulsion from the congregation and any suggestion that Jehovah's Witnesses cover up child abuse is false."

Detective Chief Inspector John Hogg of Police Scotland said: "Harry Holt abused his position of trust by using his status to abuse and exploit vulnerable children, subjecting them to acts of sexual abuse.

"His crimes span four decades and I have no doubt in my mind that his actions have deeply affected his victims.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank the victims for having the courage to come forward and assist officers in ensuring Harry Holt was held accountable for his actions. Without their support this outcome would not have been possible.

"I also hope this case sends a clear message to other abusers that this type of behaviour will not be tolerated and our specially trained officers will work to unravel your crimes and bring you to justice."

[Back](#)

© Copyright 2001-2016 Newsquest Media Group

TheCitizen LANCASTER & MORECAMBE <http://www.thelancasterandmorecambecitizen.co.uk>