

Wife who killed three disabled children spared trial for murder

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A banker's wife who suffocated her three disabled children before trying to end her own life will not be tried for murder, despite writing to her husband: "I don't want to be saved please, I can't live with the horror of what I have done."

Tania Clarence, 42, denied murder but admitted manslaughter by diminished responsibility after a "major depressive episode" that made her "unable to form a rational judgment".

At the Old Bailey yesterday, Mr Justice Sweeney ruled that the mother



Gary Clarence with his twin sons, Ben and Max, who were severely disabled

would not be tried for murder in the new year after the prosecution agreed to drop the higher charge.

Zoe Johnson, QC, for the prosecution, agreed that medical evidence showed that Clarence, who gave up her job as a graphic designer to care for her children, had suffered an "abnormality of mind" and had "killed her three children because she wanted to end their suffering".

The children suffered from from type 2 spinal muscular atrophy, also known

as "floppy baby syndrome", which shortens life expectancy and leaves its victims with no control over their movement.

At an earlier hearing, the prosecution told the court how the family nanny and a neighbour had found Clarence's daughter Olivia, four, and twins Ben and Max, three, dead in their pyjamas in bed on April 22. They arrived at 9pm to find the £2 million house in New Maldon, a southwest London suburb, in darkness and a note to her husband, Gary, 43, a banker at Investec.

Ms Johnson told the court: "They found Mrs Clarence in a bedroom. She was telling them to go away, saying that it was too late, and clearly seemed disturbed and devastated."

She was bleeding from her wrists and had tried to take an overdose, the prosecution said. The pair called the police and went to check if anyone else was in the house. The neighbour then opened a bedroom door and found the twins dead. Although he was too shocked to continue his search, the four-year-old daughter was discovered soon after.

At the scene, the mother told police: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I killed them. I suffocated them." A second note to her husband was found in their bedroom, saying: "Gary, I don't want to be saved please. I can't live with the horror of what I have done. I thought the pills would work, they didn't."

Mr Clarence, who was in South Africa at the time with their surviving child, was told by police that his children had died and flew home.

His wife, who was deemed to be a suicide risk, was charged with murder on April 24 and held in a secure psychiatric unit. On July 7, she wept as she admitted manslaughter at the Old Bailey while her husband refused to look at her. The hearing was adjourned so that an expert psychiatrist could examine the case, leading to dropping of the murder charge yesterday.

The mother, who was not in court for the hearing, will be sentenced on November 14 and is likely to be given a hospital order.