

Mother who killed children is back home after 4 months

James Dean

A mother who suffocated her three disabled children has returned home less than four months after being sent to a secure hospital for psychiatric treatment.

Tania Clarence pleaded guilty in July last year to manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility after killing Ben and Max, twins aged three, and Olivia, aged four. All three children suffered from muscular atro-



Gary Clarence with the twins. He was on holiday at the time of the killings

phy type 2, a spinal condition that reduces muscle strength and shortens life.

Clarence, 43, who is married to Gary, 44, a City banker, was photographed last week outside the couple's £1.4 million home in New Malden, southwest London, where the killings took place. She was pictured pulling a wheeled suitcase. With her was a young girl, believed to be the couple's surviving daughter, who is not disabled.

The Old Bailey was told that Clarence suffered a "major depressive episode" that made her "unable to form a rational judgment" when she killed her three children.

Mr Justice Sweeney, sentencing in November, said that Clarence, a former graphic designer, required close psychi-

atric supervision and regular psychological therapy "for the foreseeable future". He sent her to a secure hospital and said she would remain there until she recovered from her depression.

Mr Clarence, a director at the investment bank Investec, was on holiday with the couple's elder daughter in his native South Africa when his wife killed the three younger children at the family's home.

The court heard that the family nanny and a neighbour found Olivia, Ben and Max dead in their pyjamas in bed on April 22. Clarence was found in a bedroom telling them to go away, the prosecution said. She was bleeding from her wrists and had tried to take an overdose, the court heard.

Police later found Clarence naked in her bedroom, having drunk a bottle of wine. She told them: "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I killed them. I suffocated them." A note on the door read: "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."

Psychiatrists accepted she had formed the opinion that she could solve her situation only by killing her children and herself, Mr Justice Sweeney said. He said that they were not mercy killings because "the children did not ask to be killed". The court had heard that Clarence's family had a history of psychiatric illness.

Clarence had repeatedly complained that 60 doctors, social workers and other professionals involved in the care of her children were trying to prolong their lives against her wishes.

After Clarence was sentenced last year, Richard Egan, her solicitor, said: "Her love, commitment and tenacity in the face of the overwhelming responsibilities such care entailed was extraordinary. Her daily struggle ultimately

overwhelmed Tania's ability to cope with the enormity of the task she faced. Her story of dedication and love became a story of despair and utter hopelessness.

"Tania's depression was certainly not assisted by the constant pressure placed on the family by some individuals within the medical profession and social services who could not agree with Tania and Gary Clarence's stance of prioritising quality of life for their children."