

## Father 'killed his three young children with a hunting knife after wife told him she was leaving him for her Open University lecturer'

- **Ceri Fuller and his three children Sam, 12, Rebecca, 8, and Charlotte, 7, were found dead at a quarry Shropshire, in July last year**
- **All three children suffered knife wounds to their neck, an inquest was told**
- **Days earlier Ruth Fuller had told her husband she was leaving**
- **Told sister Joanne Ballard decision to leave husband was linked to 'crush' on lecturer - but there is no suggestion they had a relationship**
- **Hearing told Fuller's fingerprint was found on Bowie-type knife**

By [Becky Evans](#)

A possessive father killed his three children before throwing himself off a cliff after his wife developed a 'schoolgirl crush' on her university lecturer, an inquest heard.

Ceri Fuller, 35, drove his children to a secluded beauty spot where he slashed and stabbed them with a hunting knife after finding out that his wife Ruth was leaving him.

During a joint inquest into the four deaths, it emerged that tensions had developed between Mrs Fuller, a 35-year-old artist, and her husband because of her 'flirty' nature.



Ceri Fuller, pictured on his wedding day to Ruth, was found dead at the foot of the 60ft cliff and his children (l - r) Rebecca, eight, Charlotte, seven and Sam, 12, suffered stab wounds to their necks, an inquest heard



Fuller's fingerprint was found on a hunting knife near the children's bodies

The inquest heard the mother of three developed a liking for academic Mark Lindley-Highfield, 38, who she met at an Open University humanities course.

Mrs Fuller started sending text messages to Mr Lindley-Highfield, including one in which she asked him to go out for a drink.

She later claimed the invitation had been meant for her husband. Mrs Fuller sent five texts to Mr Lindley-Highfield between July 11 and 13 last year, and received six messages in reply. In one of the texts, she had referred to a mid-life crisis, prompting Mr Lindley-Highfield to remind her of the boundaries between a student and tutor.

In a statement to the inquest, the Gloucester University teacher said: 'I received a text from Ruth asking if I wanted to go and get a drink.

'I then got another apologising and saying it was meant for someone called Ceri. I replied sarcastically that it was a shame.'

But the inquest was told that Mrs Fuller and her husband were splitting up, and that the break-up had been brought about by her feelings for Mr Lindley-Highfield.

The alarm was raised in July last year when Samuel, 12, Rebecca, eight, and Charlotte, seven, failed to show up for school.

Fuller had also missed his shift at a papermill in nearby Lydney, Gloucestershire. After learning that her husband had fled the family home in the village of Milkwall with their children, Mrs Fuller was taken to hospital following an attempted suicide.

Her sister, Joanne Ballard, said that she was called to the house on the day that Fuller absconded with the children, finding her sister in a 'zoned out, edgy and anxious state'.

While looking through her sister's phone at the property, Mrs Ballard found recent 'loving texts between Ruth and Ceri' but also discovered her correspondence with Mr Lindley-Highfield. Mrs Ballard told the court: 'Ruth had told me she had a crush on Mark before.'



The children were found dead at a disused quarry in Poles Coppice and Fuller's Land Rover was parked nearby



Ceri Fuller, 35, was found at the bottom of the 60ft cliff in Pontesbury Hill, Shropshire, in July last year 'But she saw it as a schoolgirl crush and wasn't taking it further. We didn't talk in depth about it because I didn't think it was very important.' Mrs Ballard then asked her sister about the relationship while she was at her hospital bedside. She said: 'When she was in a cubical at A&E at around 11.30pm in a moment of lucidity she said she and Ceri had not had a row, but they had talked and he understood. I asked her what they understood and she replied that they were splitting up. I asked if it was linked to Mark and she looked at me and nodded her head clearly meaning yes.'

But Mrs Ballard insisted she had heard nothing to suggest that her sister was entering into a relationship with the tutor.



Ruth Fuller's (pictured) sister Joanne Ballard said Ceri Fuller was 'unnaturally possessive' of his wife. She also revealed that her sister suddenly woke up in the early hours of the morning while sitting at her bedside, exclaiming: 'I think Ceri killed Rebecca.'



Ruth Fuller's sister Joanna Ballard, pictured arriving at court with her partner, said Ceri Fuller enjoyed being the bread winner

Asked if Fuller had been 'unnaturally possessive' towards his wife, she replied: 'In my opinion yes, it was more possessive than I would be comfortable with in a relationship. It seemed to me that he seemed uncomfortable with Ruth wanting anything that wasn't being a mum.'

Ruth and Ceri were childhood friends who were born in the same hospital and went to school together. They started going out together when they were 21 and moved to Yorkshire. But Mrs Fuller hinted at the fragility of her relationship in a poignant blog written in 2006. She wrote: 'For the longest time my relationship with Ceri was very fragile and sometimes I still find it hard to have faith in our strength as a couple.'

And only a day before the horrific attack, Mrs Fuller wrote about having a 'mid-life crisis' on Facebook, saying she had done a 'few completely bonkers things'.

The bodies of her children were discovered four days later next to the family Land Rover 75 miles away at the Poles Coppice beauty spot, near Shrewsbury.

During harrowing evidence, the hearing was told how the children had suffered 'defensive' injuries as they tried to protect themselves from their father.

All three children had suffered a 'large incised wound' to the throat, before their bodies were dumped in woodland. Pathologist Dr Alexander Kolar told the hearing in Wem, Shropshire, that Samuel died from a single neck wound, while his two sisters suffered multiple stab injuries, including wounds to the chest. Their father was found dead nearby at the foot of a 60ft cliff. A six-inch bowie knife with blood-stained fingerprints matching Mr Fuller's was found at the scene of the murder. The hearing continues.



Flowers were left outside the family home in Milkwall, Gloucestershire, as police investigated the deaths