

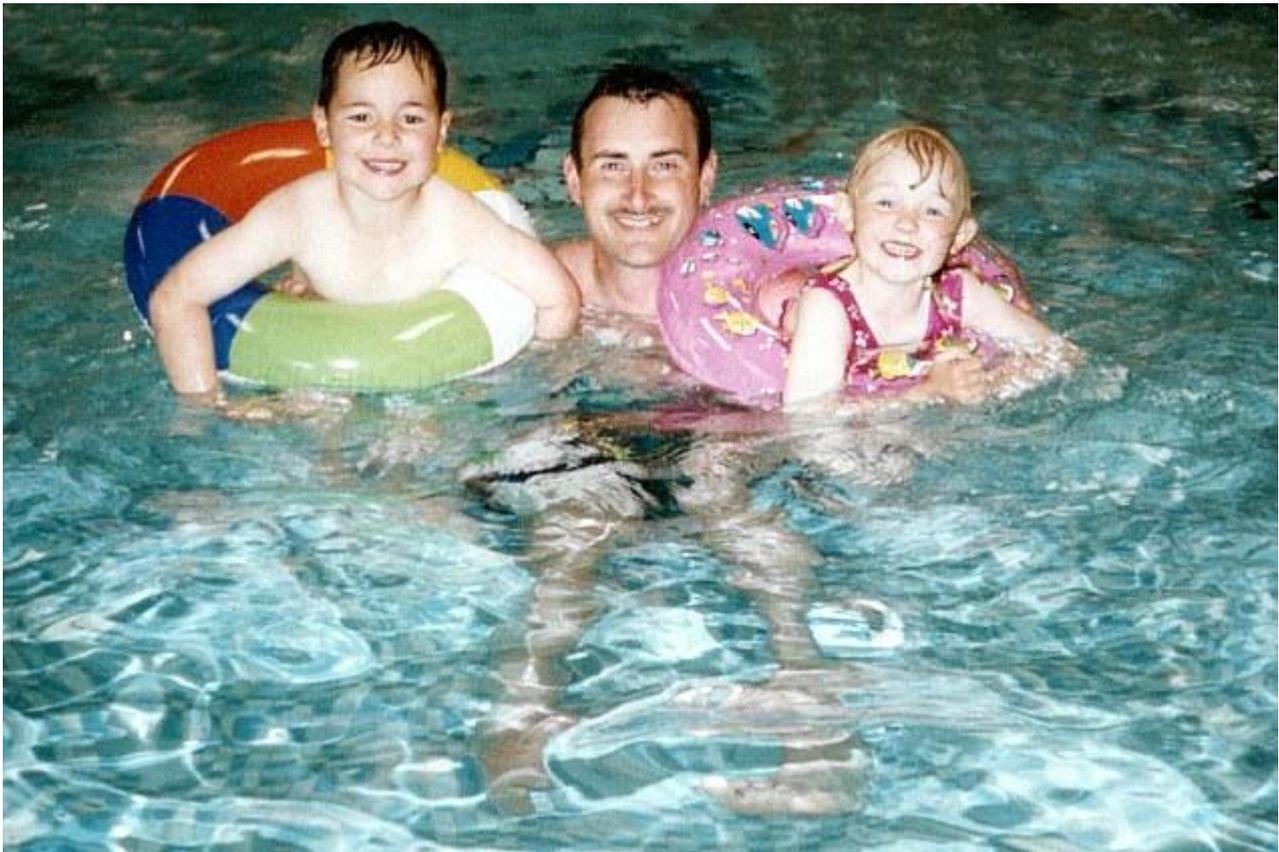
Husband tricked into believing wife's children were his own awarded £25K - for 'bereavement': Devoted 'father' deceived for years until DNA tests revealed truth

- **Richard Rodwell was a loving father until his marriage broke down**
- **After he heard rumours his children were not his own, he ordered DNA tests**
- **Results showed each child was fathered by a different man**
- **Following the revelations, his children cut off all contact with him**

By nick Craven

A man who discovered that the son and daughter he raised into their teenage years were not his has been awarded £25,000 in damages after suing his ex-wife for deceit.

Richard Rodwell was a loving father to Adam and Laura until his marriage to their mother Helen broke down. After the divorce he paid regular child maintenance for more than four years, from his salary as a factory manager.



Happy family: Adam and Laura are all smiles during a swimming session with loving 'father' Richard. Both children were fathered by different men

But in 2008 Mr Rodwell ordered DNA tests after hearing rumours about his daughter's paternity – and the results showed that each child was fathered by a different man.

Following the results, the children cut off all contact with him. He claims his ex-wife turned them against him.

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Yesterday, Mr Rodwell's solicitor, Roger Terrell, said: 'The court treated it as akin to bereavement, awarding a similar sum to the one you would receive if your child died in an accident, which is £11,800.

'I heard whispers, so I needed to know'

'I think in this case, the county court judge went further than that because of the level of deceit and the fact that Mr Rodwell's new wife is too old to give him children, so he has lost his chance of fatherhood.' Speaking for the first time about the controversial case, Mr Rodwell, 46, from Peterborough, said: 'It's like a bereavement because I have lost the children I believed were mine.'

'I treated them both as if they were my own. I was there at their births, went to their Nativity plays and helped them with school homework.'

'I can't stop thinking about the children as they were my life. I always wanted children and grandchildren and now it's too late in life for me.'

'The children were the most important people in my life, and now they have gone.'



Wedding day: Richard with Helen at King's Lynn Register Office in June 1990. After the couple divorced in 2004, Helen was granted custody of the children and Mr Rodwell paid a total of £15,600 in maintenance

'But I had to do the DNA tests. There was a whispering campaign going on that the children weren't mine and I needed to know. I couldn't live with the uncertainty any longer.'

Mr Rodwell started dating Helen, now 44, in 1989 when they were both fruit-packers at a factory near King's Lynn, Norfolk. They moved into a caravan together and in 1990 married at King's Lynn Register Office. They had 60 guests at the reception at a village hall.

'She has never even said sorry'

Laura was born in 1992, with Mr Rodwell present at the birth and signing the birth certificate. Two years later Adam was born, with Mr Rodwell still having no reason to suspect that Helen had been unfaithful. Mr Rodwell said: 'My life seemed complete. We had moved into a house, I was happily married, had a good job and two healthy children – what more could I want?'

But by 2004 the marriage was struggling. Mr Rodwell explained: 'Helen was disappearing for several days without telling me where she was going. I only found out from used train and coach tickets I discovered. I would collect the children from school as usual and walk into the house and it would be empty with no note or anything. Helen would go to places such as Newcastle or Manchester, and if I asked why she had gone there she would say, "Nothing to do with you."' "



So sad: Richard and his second wife Trudi. His relationship with Laura and Adam has 'all gone'

When the couple divorced in 2004, Helen was granted custody of the children and for the next four years Mr Rodwell paid £300 a month maintenance for both children. His total bill was £15,600. Four years after the divorce he began hearing rumours that Laura, now 20, was not his daughter. Mr Rodwell said: 'People said Laura didn't look like me and that Helen had been seeing a teacher who lived next door on the caravan park.'

'I confronted Helen on the phone but she insisted I was Laura's father. Finally I said I wanted DNA testing.' The DNA test was done by mouth swab and when the result came back Mr Rodwell was stunned. He said: 'When I saw the letter stating that I wasn't Laura's father I just broke down.'

'When I phoned Helen we had an argument and she just said, "What did you expect." She didn't even say sorry.' Mr Rodwell didn't tell Laura but he described in court documents how her attitude changed towards him. He said:

'She didn't come to see me and if I saw her in the street she would make obscene gestures with her fingers and on one occasion even kicked my car.'

Laura also posted a cruel message on Facebook that read: 'I hate you so much, I reali [sic] loved you so when you called me your little angel I take it you was just saying it and you start all that after 16 years you have ruined mine and adams life I hope your happy for what you have put us through!!' Mr Rodwell also decided to have a DNA test done to check Adam's paternity.

'I still have no idea who is Adam's father,' he said. 'For nearly 17 years I cared for Laura as my daughter and for Adam for over 14 years and now it's all gone. It's so sad.'

'I would have been happy to have a close relationship with them as a stepfather but Helen wouldn't allow this and told them to keep away from me.'

Mr Rodwell was awarded compensation in 2011 of £12,500 for each child, and costs of £25,000. He also won a court order forcing his ex-wife to move out of the marital home, which is now up for sale for £119,995. Mrs Rodwell yesterday declined to comment.