

FATHER OSTRACISED BY SECT AXED FAMILY TO DEATH

A MEMBER of the Exclusive Brethren religious sect murdered his wife and three children after being ostracised by fellow members, an inquest was told yesterday.

Roger Panes, 41, cattle dealer, axed to death his wife Pamela, 39, his two sons Graham 7, and Adrian, 4, and his six-year-old daughter Angela, as they slept in their beds at their detached home in Salisbury Road, Andover, Hants.

He then hanged himself from the banisters with a length of electric flex.

Det. Chief Insp. STANLEY ATKINSON, head of Basingstoke C.I.B., told the inquest at Andover that he found Mrs Panes lying in a double bed in a front upstairs bedroom in the house. She had severe head injuries. The children were found with similar injuries in other bedrooms.

In another bedroom a blond-stained axe with a seven-and-a-half-inch blade was found. Also in the room was a bed which had been prepared but not slept in.

Mr Atkinson then read part of a statement he had taken from a Mr Fennell, the sect's leader in Andover in which he said Mr Panes had been "shut up" by other members of the Brethren.

The statement said: "Roger Panes was shut up during November 1973, because of the way he treated another member of the brethren over a minor technical offence, and shut up that person wilfully."

The statement said that this "shutting up" was an individual act carried out by Mr Panes without the consent of other members of the brethren.

Between November and February, members of the brethren had called on Mr Panes five or six times but the matter had not been resolved.

On Feb. 21, Mrs Panes contacted Mr Fennell to tell him that her husband had taken an overdose of tablets and had been admitted to hospital.

Cut off from family

On March 2—two days before the murders were discovered—a meeting was held by the Brethren but no decision was taken to "withdraw from him or excommunicate him."

Mr Atkinson said the term "shut up" meant that all other Brethren were not allowed to associate with the member concerned or his family.

"If it is mutually agreed between him and his wife, he can

in the house was an unaddressed note in Mr Panes's handwriting.

It read: "There's never been such a wicked man. This house will have to be left empty or bulldozed. You go to the Brethren, I trust they'll take you in."

"Cry to God for mercy for you all and the dear children. The Lord is coming very soon."

The jury returned a verdict that Mr Panes murdered his wife and three children and then committed suicide while the balance of his mind was disturbed.

In his summing up to the jury, Mr Ronald Bowker, the coroner, said: "It is up to anyone in



Angela and Graham Panes.

this country to follow such religious beliefs as he pleases, without question. The only qualification I suppose one would make is if such beliefs are thought to be injurious to the community as a whole or individuals in particular.

"These might be matters for inquiry, but matters for inquiry elsewhere and not here."

The Exclusive Brethren is notorious for the severity of its discipline and was ruled with an iron hand by its world leader, Big Jim Taylor, until his death in 1970.