

# Brother David's secret sin

By ANDREW RUSSELL

A MEMBER of a strict religious sect could not live with the shame he brought on his family and himself.

David Beech, 47, died with his head on a railway line after leaving his wife and three children in the care of the Exclusive Brethren community.

The sin that drove him to suicide was . . . smoking cigarettes, an inquest heard yesterday at Stockport, Greater Manchester.

Smoking is strictly against the rules of the Brethren, and in the nights before his death, Mr Beech constantly reread a passage from one of his books. It said: 'Smoking brings in what smoke is, darkness and blackness; it is filthy, it affects the breath; it is against the spirit of God.'

Mr Beech had been a secret smoker for 20 years

... that in the power of Christ in the economy. We cannot justify smoking by saying the tobacco plant is a creation of God. It brings in what smoke is, darkness and blackness; it is filthy. It affects the breath; it is against the spirit of God. We want to get more about this secret thing and see whether we can get to the bottom of our smoking. The passage in the Bible is: 'Smoking brings in what smoke is, darkness and blackness; it is filthy, it affects the breath; it is against the spirit of God.'

The Brethren's words

when his wife, Ditra, found a packet of cigarettes in the airing cupboard of her home in Marriok Close, Cheadle.

She reported him to the Brethren's leaders, who decided that the family should be barred from the cult's closeknit social life and daily meetings for two weeks.

The pain of being apart



DAVID BEECH

from the religious community which forbids any friendships with 'outsiders' led Mr Beech to leave his family so they could return to the only friends they knew.

While his 46-year-old wife and their children, Simon, Bobby, and Gilly, were welcomed back, he went to stay with a friend and former

## Smoking drove sect man to suicide

member of the Brethren, Mr David Shorto, at his home in Abingdon Road, Bramhall.

Mr Shorto's wife Eunice, also an exile from the Brethren, said Mr Beech spent 'night after night' reading the passage about smoking. 'He said how wicked he was and how he wished he had



DAVID SHORTO

never smoked. The poor man was driven to desperation.'

Members of the Exclusive Brethren crowded the courtroom yesterday as Mrs Beech told coroner Mr Peter Revington how her husband became 'deceitful' in July 1982. 'One of the things he did was smoke secretly.'

He left the sect entirely

of his own accord, without pressure from me or anyone. He said he wanted to be with God.'

Mrs Beech, who did not take the oath but affirmed her evidence, said her husband wrote to her from hospital after taking an overdose of tablets, but she did not go to see him.

'Some members of our meeting told me they would go. They were supervisors who thought they could help him.'

The jury returned a suicide verdict after Mr Revington told them: 'It is not your duty to examine other people's beliefs. Our country allows people to practise their religion as they think best.'

After the hearing, Mr Shorto said: 'When you are in the Brethren, you have no other friends so being banned from meetings is like being under house arrest.'

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