

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Institute of Civil Funerals

Held on Saturday, 1st November 2014 at Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, at 4.30pm

1. Chairman's Welcome

Christine Ogden welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from J. Harris, J. Baker and T. Empson. There were 31 members present.

3. Minutes of the AGM held on 2nd November 2013 at Hillscourt Conference Centre

The Minutes, which had been circulated before the meeting, were approved. Proposed: J. Donlevy. Seconded: L. Banham

4. Matters Arising

- P. McNulty raised the issue of pre-paid funeral plans. Celebrants sometimes interview clients of Golden Charter and other plans in order to prepare a tribute. How is it possible to secure the celebrant's fee? Can monies be released from the plan to cover this part of the work? Fees may well have risen at the time of the funeral, and only £140 is currently budgeted for by Golden Charter. A. Patey explained that this is not legally possible since monies can only be released to the plan holder (e.g. cancellation) or to a funeral director on production of the death certificate. A. Patey believes the celebrant's fee needs to be extra to the plan as only the funeral director's costs are guaranteed - this is his personal practice.
- S. Band commented that the website has still not been adapted to allow a celebrant search by name. Sharon Oldham of Siserone would be attending Conference on Sunday and would be asked to rectify this.

5. Chairman's Report

This was read to the meeting, and will be sent to every member in full as part of the AGM Minutes. by email after Conference. This is the full text of the Report:

Chairman's report to AGM

At the end of the tenth year of existence of the IoCF, I am pleased to report that the Institute is in a position of strength to move forward into its second decade. The IoCF was founded with three main aims: to uphold quality in funeral ceremonies; to provide support and professional development for celebrants and to promote civil funerals throughout the funeral profession. All those premises still hold and remain the fundamental purpose in its management.

The Institute could rightly and proudly celebrate this summer the fact that it has been at the heart of the changing attitudes about, and expectations of, funeral ceremonies, not only within the industry but also with the wider public. In offering and promoting an alternative to a religious minister or humanist officiating at a funeral – a third way – it has created a new profession...that of the Civil Funeral Celebrant.

As the awareness of civil funerals has risen rapidly over the second half of the decade, so the number of funerals taken by Institute members has grown exponentially and, as of October 2014, 35,342 funerals are recorded on the Institute database – the number of funerals per year now being over 6000, putting the IoCF in equal position with the BHA, with a 3% share of the funerals market.

Those figures show an 'explosion' in the growth in popularity of civil funerals, along with great potential for future growth as we increase that market share. Inevitably, going hand-in-hand with that is the growth in the number of people embarking on a career as a civil funeral celebrant. There are now many training courses available (of varying standard) and many more 'self-appointed' celebrants in the market-place. The Institute has to rise to that challenge and reinforce the message that our members are better than the rest; that our ceremonies are about quality, backed up by continuing professionalism.

To that end, CCL remains the Institute's preferred training partner and their Diploma in Funeral Celebrancy meets the requirements for admission into the IoCF. However, the necessary separation of the two organisations has meant that successful trainees leaving the CCL course no longer almost automatically became IoCF members.

The Institute now has to canvass those trainees who agree to their details being passed on to us, leading to an inevitable dip in the numbers of new celebrants joining the IoCF. That, in combination with the fact that the founder members of the Institute, who, by the nature of this work, were those seeking a second or third career in middle age and have gradually retired has resulted in a slow growth in the membership over the past two years. However, I am now pleased to report that, on average, we are seeing 25 - 30% of each training course cohort joining the Institute and 50% or more for some courses and although not as large a number as we would like, the IoCF has cumulatively increased its membership by 150% since 2008.

The training course and experience of the recently qualified celebrants means that they are much better equipped to establish their own businesses and market their services and I remind members that the Institute is not an

employment agency or a franchise provider but an association to support self-employed professionals – each with unique strengths, skills and needs. Our role is to enhance the individuality they bring to funeral ceremonies whilst ensuring that standards and quality are upheld and the IoCF Code of Practice adhered to at all times – and, further, to ensure that funeral arrangers understand that.

The IoCF is wholly self-funding from its membership subscriptions – CCL training courses no longer provide income to subsidise our finances – and the Council of Management is as mindful as ever that the Institute, being run by members' subscriptions, is run for the members' benefit. As we shall hear, the bulk of our outgoings are divided between administration and website management costs and Public Liability Insurance for the members. The insurance is now vital within our profession and the cost of that alone, if arranged independently, would be greater than the annual subscription.

It was therefore necessary this year to raise the annual membership subscription to £276 (an increase of £3 per month). That combined with the increase in membership; the great savings we are now making on postage as members ensure that, whenever possible, feedback from the funeral service can be sought and returned electronically, and revenue from the Best Practice Days and conference, has put us in a much improved financial position to start the coming year...and indeed our second decade.

At this point I make no apologies for, yet again, reminding the meeting that the council members voluntarily give much of their valuable time and energy to work hard to enable the IoCF to function as it does, for which we should all be extremely grateful.

I would particularly like to thank those council members who are stepping down this year: Sarah Willis for her organisation in setting up our Best Practice days which have and, due to her hard work, will continue to, run successfully; Tricia Empson for bringing her marketing skills to the council table, reshaping our marketing plan and propelling the IoCF into becoming a bigger, brighter and better brand in the next decade and last, but definitely not least, Viv O'Neill: not only for pretty much single-handedly organising our conferences of the past three years (and very successfully) but also for her work and dedication in liaising with members and new trainees and for the huge amount of work she has done to assist with the administration at Kimbolton.

Which brings me to Barbara Pearce: as you can appreciate, as our success grows, so her administration workload grows, and she seems to be able to process the funeral bookings and feedback at a phenomenal rate but, much more than that, she is the day-to-day running of the Institute and I can only describe her with the same word that has been used in previous years...she is a star.

She, in turn, has asked me to thank the members who, after much 'nagging' from her in some cases, do now answer her requests promptly for booking forms sent in much smaller batches, script returns etc which does make her job much easier.

The council would also like to thank those Institute members who have also given of their time to promote the IoCF at funeral events and exhibitions and to talk to new celebrants or those considering entering the profession.

Over the past year the council has worked hard both publically and behind the scenes to ensure that we are still a beacon organisation within the profession, with policy review and updates, innovations and straight forward discussion to keep us ahead in the market.

Photograph ID cards have been introduced to ensure that our members are in-line with other health professionals and service providers who visit clients in their own homes.

The new 'golden rose' logo was introduced for the 10th anniversary celebrations with the intention that it becomes the centre piece of our re-branding and updating of the IoCF in the coming year.

New policies have been drawn up: a complaints policy (not just to support members in any complaint made against them but also the Institute will investigate complaints by members about funeral directors and crematoria staff whether from members or feedback or direct from families, should a member request this); a Terms and Conditions of events booking policy and the criteria for membership of the IoCF has been revised and the website updated to that effect.

Siserone continue to manage our website and mass emailing efficiently and to suggest ways in which the website can be improved – the re-vamping of the 'find a celebrant' map has not been forgotten it is, apparently, a huge project to amend. However, individual mini-websites and 'iocf.org' email addresses are still available to all members through our own website. It is appropriate at this point to thank Funeralmap.co.uk for the provision of a free standard listing for all IoCF members.

Forum usage is lower than it has been in the past and I urge members to use this facility more, in whatever way is useful for them: requests for help and advice on leading a ceremony, running your business, working with other funeral professionals or just as a 'blog' site to offload when there is no-one else who understands the stress that we all experience from time to time.

Council did again thoroughly debate its presence on Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites. However, the situation remains the same as it did a couple of years ago when we discontinued our accounts with those companies. In order to ensure our professional integrity is preserved, such accounts need constant stewardship and

monitoring and we do not have the human resources to do that – however, should anyone wish to join the council with the sole purpose of managing those accounts for us then we will be very happy to redress the situation.

The Institute was pleased to be party to the launch of the new Child Funeral Charity this summer and proud to make CFC our charity of the year.

Our relationship with not only CCL but all the major funeral industry organisations remains strong and we have been represented at all their major events and exhibitions throughout the year. The IoCF continues to be an associate member of SAIF, however that privilege is no longer extended to our members individually, unless they apply to the society independently.

The reputation of the IoCF is very good within the industry and the Council of Management will continue to work hard to sustain that. We have an established programme for articles about our events and achievements to appear regularly in all the major trade journals.

As chair of the IoCF, my aim for the next decade is for the Institute to be more outward looking; to raise its public profile, so that both funeral arrangers and families recognise our unique selling points and actively seek out IoCF members to lead their civil funeral ceremonies. In turn, I would hope to see that those celebrants who do care about the standard of service they deliver will recognise the importance of being a member of the Institute and realise the benefits of joining and thus our membership will increase.

I am confident that, although it will be a challenge and hard work at times, the passion that every single member of the IoCF has for the high quality of every single funeral ceremony we deliver will achieve.

Christine Ogden Dip CFC, M.I.C.F.
Chairman, Institute of Civil Funerals 1st November 2014

6. Financial Accounts

The Financial Report was delivered by K. Hopkins.

The Report consisted of a Profit and Loss Account and a Balance Sheet, both to July 2014, prepared by our accountants. Copies were circulated at the meeting and are available to all members on request.

The situation is far more positive than in the Financial Report for 2013. There is a net credit balance of £3,300 and HMRC have confirmed this is not liable for tax. Our income has increased, as new members have joined and membership fees have increased by £36 p.a. Members were reminded to increase their monthly direct debits by £3. One loan account has been fully repaid and a schedule for repayment of the other will be drawn up at the next Council meeting. Members' insurance premiums were paid in full in September. B. Pearce's hours will be increased to reflect the growing workload, and membership is confidently expected to grow steadily over the next year as training courses for the Diploma are becoming very popular, and several qualifiers choose to join after each course run by CCL.

The accounts had been signed off by Companies House on 30th October.

7. Reappointment of Accountants.

Tacconi Green Ltd of St. Ives were reappointed nem. con. as accountants to the Institute.

8. Appointment of Council Members

The Council of Management has to consist of between 3 and 10 members.

The current situation is that 3 elected Council members (V. O'Neill, T. Empson and S. Willis) are retiring and one (C. Ogden) has completed a three year term of office but is willing to stand for re-election. The other serving elected Council members are J. Baker, S. Band, K. Hopkins and A. Hamell-Cooke. There is one co-opted member (J. Thomson). We no longer require co-opted representatives from the funeral industry. C. Ogden was re-elected, proposed by V. O'Neill and seconded by P. McNulty.

Additionally, J. Chapman was elected, proposed by P. McNulty, seconded by J. Anderson and C. Rose was elected, proposed by A. Patey, seconded by V. O'Neill, both nem.con., to serve for a term of three years.

9. Any Other Business

Use of social media – this issue was raised at last year's AGM and the feeling is still that we should not, as an Institute, have a presence because of the need for constant monitoring for inappropriate comment. Of course members could have a personal presence if they chose.

J. Anderson asked if celebrants needed to be CRB checked. A. Barber said this was needed if working with children or the vulnerable and did not apply to us, but that a lone working policy might be appropriate. Council will discuss this.

The date of next year's AGM has been set as Saturday, 7th November 2015 during Conference (6th- 8th November at Hillscourt).

The meeting closed at 5.32pm.