

An institute celebrates a decade

The Institute of Civil Funerals is 10 years old in July. Founder and president Anne Barber describes its 'birth' and evolution.

"It wasn't easy to set up an institute. An association or society is far easier to establish but being allowed to set up an actual institute means jumping through a lot of organisational hoops. So, how I whooped with delight in 2004 when our application was approved – and how wonderful to be able to write about its development a whole decade later.

"The IoCF was set up for three main reasons. Firstly, it was, and still is, about quality. The institute receives feedback from bereaved families regarding the funeral ceremony provided by the celebrant and this feedback is passed on to the celebrant. The hope was that such a system would provide reassurance for funeral directors and their clients that an organisation was taking responsibility for its members and guaranteeing the quality of their funerals.

"The feedback system still works well 10 years later. The fact that the Institute itself sends the form out asking for comments and receives it directly back, is of course much harder work to administer than it just being left with the family by the celebrant, but how much more effective in terms of honest feedback.

"Secondly, funeral celebrants working on their own needed a way of networking, learning from each other and being a part of an umbrella organisation that would support them in what can be a fairly lonely and remote activity. There has been huge development in terms of regular institute conferences, best practice days, regional group meetings and an online forum. I can only say how thrilled I am to see so

much more communication between celebrants.

"The third reason for originally creating the institute was to create an organisation that would tell funeral directors and their clients about the work of civil celebrants and provide a central point for those looking to find one.

"This happens continually now and the reputation of the institute members is clear, shown by increasing contact from the public and funeral directors making contact, seeking a member in their area. I am delighted to say that all the above aims have come to fruition more than I could ever have expected."

"But one thing has not changed: the early definition of a Civil Funeral is still: 'a funeral driven by the wishes, beliefs and values of the deceased and their family, not by the beliefs or ideology of the person conducting the funeral'.

"In the very early days there were no experienced practising members to run the institute council as there are now. I was chairman and Marilyn Watts, whom many in the industry will remember, was the secretary and vice chairman. Between us we enlisted the support of representatives from the NAFD, SAIF, BIFD, ICCM and the National Funerals College. I am so grateful for everyone who helped us in those early days, turning up to meetings and supporting the growth of the institute.

"The current Institute Council of Management consists of enthusiastic hard-working civil celebrants, who give of their time and experience to help other



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members and grow the institute still further. The institute is a well-oiled machine, with growing membership, with administration managed most effectively by Barbara Pearce and the list of member benefits, as well as actual members, seems to just keep on increasing.

"I remain as a very proud honorary president and am sure that under the

direction of chairman Christine Ogden the institute's future is very bright indeed.

"There is something of a party on 19th July where members will celebrate the anniversary. Ten years is certainly something to celebrate, so here's to the next decade!"

For further information, call 0845 0048608 or go to www.iocf.org.uk