

IoCF 'confident' for second decade

The Institute of Civil Funerals (IoCF) can enter its second decade with confidence, its members at its annual conference were told.

Speaking at the event, which took place in Rednal, just outside Birmingham, chairman Christine Ogden said the institute was in a strong position to meet the challenges and changes facing the funeral industry.

She also paid tribute to the council of management's work in ensuring that the institute fulfilled its duties to uphold quality in funeral ceremonies, provide support and professional development for celebrants and to promote civil funerals.

Throughout the weekend, members heard presentations on a diverse range of subjects, nearly all of which shared the underlying message that the funeral profession is facing changes and challenges.

Christine outlined the successes of the past year, in which the institute celebrated its 10th anniversary. She highlighted the launch of a new golden rose logo, and its campaign to raise the institute's profile, positioning it as the beacon organisation for standards in the delivery of funeral ceremonies. The institute pledged to promote the institute's gold badge as representing a gold standard service.

Alan Slater, CEO of the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD), told members that the public's shifting expectations of funeral ceremonies and a decline in the death rate meant that all funeral businesses were having to keep up with the market trends.

Alan Jeffrey, director of Wesley Music, a returning speaker, talked about technology and modern expectations of funeral music, tribute presentations of photos, webcasts and DVDs.

Emma Restall Orr of Sun

Rising Natural Burial Ground and Nature Reserve, in Warwickshire, told members about the challenges of managing a natural burial ground ethically, and combining sustainability for future generations with the needs of bereaved families.

Geoff Price from Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS) offered personal insight into the grief experienced by families bereaved by suicide and how this can differ from that relating to any other sudden death.

Those supporting a family at such time, he said, – not least the funeral celebrant – need understanding, skills and strategies, and to allow the family to talk about their loved one.

Janice Thomson, a quality assessor for the IoCF, talked about the history of the eulogy and its importance as a memorial to the deceased, giving members helpful advice on what makes a good tribute great.

Peter Mitchell, a technical and legal expert in burial, cremation and exhumation, explained the complex reasons for, and processes involved in exhumation, for a single person or for the re-interment of an entire burial ground.

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Re-burial after exhumation, is still a funeral situation, regardless of how many years have passed since the death, he reminded members, and it may still be part of a grieving process for surviving family members in some situations.

Julie Dunk, technical services and events manager for the Institute of Cemeteries and Crematoria Management, updated conference on challenges including funeral poverty, new legislation on baby cremation and, with cremation's sustainability under consideration, the growth in natural burials and other methods of disposal.

Retiring council member Sarah Willis talked about the benefits of regional group meetings to share experiences, best practice and support, Anne Barber talked about the Child Funeral Charity, and Sharon Oldham of Siserone Ltd, the institute's website management company,

explained current innovations and how delegates might use them.

The weekend also included the AGM, a Halloween-themed fancy dress quiz and social evening and a presentation dinner, where Alistair Butler, Carole Codd and Janice Thomson, who qualified on the very first training course, received certificates of long service. Padraic Cawley and Sally McManus received certificates acknowledging their work to promote the IoCF, while the quality of Jane Grimes's and Peter Martin's presentation scripts was also recognised with certificates.

President Anne Barber presented a special award in honour of the late Marilyn Watts to Jo Donlevy for her contribution to the promotion of civil funerals and her support for fellow members throughout the past decade.