

Best practice day is birthday celebration

Birthday cake and bubbles were on the menu at the Institute of Civil Funerals' (IoCF) 'best practice day' in July.

Members of the institute, who include former teachers, policemen, actors, registrars, servicemen and funeral directors, came together to support each other and share their skills and ideas.

This is something they do regularly – IoCF celebrants undertake rigorous accredited training and also commit to continuing professional development and assessment – but this occasion was particularly special, as it also involved a tenth anniversary celebration for the institute.

IoCF founder and president, Anne Barber told the gathering – held on one of the hottest days of the year – that the increase in civil funerals in the past 10 years had been “phenomenal” and she said there was no doubt that “the professionalism



and dedication of IoCF members has played a huge part in making this happen”.

Altogether, said Anne, the institute's members now conduct nearly 7,000 funeral services a year, with bookings already up another 20% in the first half of 2014.

The definition of a civil funeral is a one driven by the wishes, beliefs and values of the deceased and their family rather than by the beliefs or ideology of the person conducting the funeral. It sits between a religious service and a humanist funeral.

The celebration closed with a 'Happy Birthday' toast from Christine Ogden, chair of the institute, who hosted the event and is pictured with the cake.

In November, the institute will hold its annual conference for members – its biggest event of the year – in Birmingham.

Burial plot management via 'cloud'

A Northern Ireland company has developed Plotbox, a cloud platform for cemeteries and crematoria to manage their operations in one place.

Thanks to geolocation, an individual burial plot can be placed on an interactive map and linked to all its associated information. Pulling all this information together benefits bereaved families, as well as those working in the death care industry and genealogy researchers.

Founders Sean and Leona McAlister's engineering and surveying background took them into working with local cemeteries, where they saw the disconnected, mostly paper-based

systems used by the smaller parishes, and the resultant administrative problems. The problems seemed to be even more complex with larger cemeteries.

Plotbox combines all the disparate data sources into a cloud-based service and the system is flexible. A small parish can start simply by sending its paper files to go into the online system, and add further services, such as hiring the team to conduct an aerial survey of the site, later.

Plotbox is now also in the final of INVENT2014, a competition run by the Northern Ireland Science Park to find the invention with the most potential to become a successful global business.