CHOCKS AWAY AT RAF HENDON

CICM SOUTHERN BRANCHES

ONCE again the CICM Southern Branches proved they know how to organise an event that is both informative and memorable, this time taking delegates to the historic RAF Museum Hendon for a day appropriately titled "Chocks Away!"

Surrounded by iconic aircraft and steeped in aviation history, attendees found themselves in the perfect setting to explore the challenges facing modern credit management. Beneath the wings of legendary aircraft that once protected our skies, credit professionals gathered to discuss how they protect something equally important today, cash flow.

Fortunately, the travel gods were smiling on us. The threatened Tube strike was called off at the eleventh hour, allowing delegates from across the South East and beyond to arrive without having to navigate their own logistical dogfight. Judging by the turnout, it was a welcome reprieve, with the event fully booked well in advance.

Following coffee, pastries and the usual networking chatter, the day's flight plan got underway. Our first speaker, Peter Francis OBE from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, delivered a fascinating presentation on the history and work of the organisation.

Peter's session explored how the Commission came into being following the First World War and the remarkable principles that still guide its work today, ensuring every fallen serviceman and woman is remembered equally and with dignity. His storytelling brought history vividly to life, from the vision of Sir Fabian Ware through to the enormous task of maintaining over 23,000 sites across 153 countries. Delegates were captivated by the scale of the Commission's work and left with a renewed appreciation of remembrance, history and service.

Remaining firmly on the military theme, Nick King FCICM then shared his personal journey from the Territorial Army into the world of credit management. Through a collection of photographs and stories spanning several decades, Nick reflected on military life, his experiences during the Falklands era and the commitment required to balance military service with a professional career.

His presentation highlighted how many of the qualities developed through military service, discipline, teamwork, resilience and decision-making under pressure, transfer seamlessly into credit management. It was a reminder that successful credit professionals often rely on the same attributes as those who have served in uniform.

After a well-earned refuelling stop, complete with more coffee and an impressive selection of cakes, delegates prepared for a completely different type of mission.

Craig Evans FCICM, CEO of Company Watch, took the audience beneath the waves with his presentation, "Beneath the Surface: What submarines taught me about financial risk."

Drawing on his background as a Royal Navy weapons engineer, Craig compared navigating a submarine to managing financial risk. Both involve operating in environments where threats are largely invisible, where decisions rely on interpreting signals rather than seeing problems directly.

Craig's thought-provoking session explored how technology, data and artificial intelligence are helping organisations identify risk earlier, while reinforcing that professional judgement remains firmly at the centre of good decision-making.

His message resonated strongly with the audience. In both submarines and credit management, the danger often lies beneath the surface. By the time risk becomes obvious, it is usually too late. Craig's thought-provoking session explored how technology, data and artificial intelligence are helping organisations identify risk earlier, while reinforcing that professional judgement remains firmly at the centre of good decision-making.

After lunch, the conference moved from submarines to artificial intelligence.

Chris Sanders FCICM and the team from O2C Lab examined how AI can improve cash performance when global processes begin to break down. Using real-world case studies, they demonstrated how strong governance, consistent controls and clear communication can transform results across multinational organisations.

The presentation highlighted a challenge many credit professionals will recognise. Even the best processes can struggle when different regions interpret them differently. The solution, they argued, is not simply more process, but better control, greater clarity and intelligent use of technology to support teams at scale.

As the afternoon progressed, delegates prepared for the final leg of the journey.

The ever-popular father-and-son partnership of Charles and Joshua Mayhew FCICM from Global Credit Recoveries provided an entertaining and insightful look at the geopolitical landscape and its impact on international credit management.

From global insolvency trends and changing payment behaviours to geopolitical tensions and cross-border risk, they demonstrated how events thousands of miles away can quickly affect customers, suppliers and collections closer to home. Their practical advice on international credit policies, governing law and due diligence gave attendees plenty of food for thought.

The day concluded with an engaging panel discussion, where delegates shared experiences, discussed emerging risks and debated the opportunities and challenges presented by AI. The consensus seemed clear. Technology is changing rapidly, but the expertise, judgement and adaptability of credit professionals remain as important as ever.

As delegates made their way towards the departure gates, there was a genuine sense that this had been another successful CICM Southern Branches event. RAF Hendon provided a fitting backdrop for a day that combined history, innovation, risk, resilience and plenty of good humour.

The hangar doors may have closed on this year's event, but planning is already underway for the next destination. Where will the Southern Branches land in 2027? We'll have to wait for the next boarding announcement.

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