

The Waterside Economy

The Inland Waterways network in the UK has undergone an extensive programme of regeneration in the past decade, resulting in huge resurgence in popularity. About 300 million visits were made to the inland waterways in 2009 and, with 29,000 boats currently in use, there are more craft on the waterways now than there were at the height of the Industrial Revolution.



People tend to think that the waterways are quiet uninhabited backwaters, largely disused, whereas they are, in fact, being used by more people for a wider variety of purposes than at any time in their history.

Where once the canals were used solely for transport purposes, they are now attracting a variety of people: boaters, walkers, anglers, cyclists, new home owners, businesses, as well as those seeking a floating home offering a calmer, less stressful existence.

In the past decade, there has been a steady growth and resurgence of interest in the waterways. People live and work on the

waterways. Some use their boats for recreational purposes, but many are “live aboarders”.

Boating practicalities

A boater can rent a long term mooring in a marina, or alongside the canal and river where permitted, or just have a cruising licence. Every boat that cruises on the waterways needs to have a cruising licence either from the Environment Agency or from the Canal & River Trust (formerly British Waterways). Most of these moorings, even in marinas do not come with a postcode and this can discriminate against the boaters, including not having a right to register with a GP or to retrain, difficulties in taxing a vehicle and being unable to open a current account.

Living afloat does not prevent the circumstances of life happening either. Boaters become sick, are bereaved, experience family or marriage breakdown, loss of income, in fact any of the situations experienced on land, happen in the boating community and that is where the Waterways Chaplains have a place in providing pastoral support and care.

Boating communities are very good at caring for each other in times of trouble. They look out for each other, provide meals and other practical help when they know another boater is going through a difficult time. Sometimes though, it is good to have someone to talk to who is not part of that community, someone to listen and someone to talk the issues through with to try and find a way forward.

Waterways Chaplains

Waterways Chaplains are volunteers from the local churches. They visit the waterways in their area on a regular basis, building relationships and trust, offering friendship and a listening ear to individuals and businesses that are part of the extensive waterways economy. Whoever they meet on the tow path, be it a boater, cyclist, runner, angler, or member of Canal & River Trust/Environment Agency etc, they are the people that the chaplains are looking to meet.

British Waterways has now become the Canal & River Trust. The Trustees have worked hard to ensure that the new Trust emerges with proper funding and a new way of doing things as a charity. The Waterways Chaplaincy continues to work with the new Trust and to continue to serve a very special community.

Chaplains share in the good and bad times and they are supportive and encouraging of all, regardless of religion, orientation or race. They support people of all faiths or none. They are always happy to discuss spiritual and practical matters if invited to do so.

The Chaplains currently work on the Grand Union south, from Braunston down to Uxbridge, on the rivers Lee and Stort, the Lea Valley, the Ouse in Bedford and out towards Cambridge. We have a team on the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal, and a team is being put together in the Birmingham area. We still need people from the church to volunteer to take up this challenge and become volunteer chaplains

on their local canal or waterway. Being a chaplain is challenging, rewarding, humbling and never dull.



The chaplaincy operates as part of Workplace Matters, an ecumenical partnership reaching out through its chaplains who take Christian values into the workplace, where people spend a large percentage of their day, onto the waterways and into rural communities. It represents the six mainstream denominations: Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army and United Reformed. The other branches of the chaplaincy work with the emergency services, GM (Vauxhall) UK, London Luton Airport, Luton Casino, major supermarkets and stores, town centre chaplaincies and in rural areas.

The Waterways Community

Chaplains will always respect your privacy and treat any conversations they have with you in confidence. They will do their best to support you and work through possible practical solutions where possible.

Working alongside



Workplace Matters



41 Holywell Hill
St Albans
Herts AL1 1HE
Tel: 01727 818144

workplace.ministry@stalbens.anglican.org

Senior Chaplain

Captain Jenny Dibsdall
Salvation Army
07717 813682

jenny.dibsdall@salvationarmy.org.uk

Waterways Chaplain

John Clark
Licensed Lay Minister, Church of England
0776 7362084

clarkjih@live.co.uk

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WATERWAYS CHAPLAINCY

