



Torch Together – at last!

After a number of pandemic-related delays, we are so pleased to share that the first Torch Together holiday has taken place, and it was a great success! The event, which was held at Cober Hill in Scarborough, featured a jam-packed programme of activities, outings and opportunities for Christian fellowship. We had a chat with Ros Macaskill, who attended as a holidaymaker, and Cath & Dave Thompson who volunteered on the holiday, to find out what they thought of it all!

Ros told us that she has fond memories of Torch holidays back in the Hurstpierpoint days and was really looking forward to this event: 'I'd read about this one and it sounded very attractive. I'd not been on holiday since lockdown so I definitely wanted to give it a go!' Ros took the plunge and is glad she did: 'It was great. It was so well organised and the volunteers were absolutely superb!'

The Christian content was a particular joy for Ros, as she explained that 'it was wonderful to be in a Christian atmosphere with the times of prayer, the talks. It was lovely! It's difficult to pick a favourite thing, there were so many things.'

Of course, it's vital to us that Torch Together holidays are accessible and work well for the people on them and Ros felt that this really shone through: 'I most definitely would recommend it to anyone who is feeling a little unsure as they would get all the help they need, nobody need be put off from attending a Torch holiday, people are catered for from the minute they arrive to the minute they leave.'

When asked if she'd come back, Ros gave an emphatic yes! 'I've already tried to book on to the Dorset one but I wasn't quick enough – I'm on the waiting list! I would recommend it to anyone, I would say just go for it!'

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Cath and Dave were first time holiday volunteers but have been involved with Torch for over 30 years, mostly through Cath helping to run Hartlepool Fellowship Group. When asked why they felt moved to volunteer at Cober Hill, Cath explained: 'We're conscious that if we want to go somewhere, we just get in the car and go. Blind people don't have that option always, we wanted to make sure that visually impaired people could have a Christian holiday. If our being there meant that they could come then that was that!'



They both enjoyed the venue greatly, as Dave explained: 'The facilities were fantastic, it's in a lovely setting and it was nice to be there and enjoy the place. It was great not to cook for a week – although we still ended up offering to help wash up!'

Cath adds that the programme itself worked very well and that flexibility was one of the keys to success: 'It was well thought out and when Becky realised we weren't quite going to manage all she'd planned, it just changed. There was no pressure to fit it all in, it was just about what was best for the group of people.'

'It was a full-on experience,' Dave added, 'but we knew it would be hard work. It was non-stop but we were prepared! We've already volunteered for another one so there we are.'

Cath went on to explain their feeling that: 'If we didn't go, other people couldn't go. The visually impaired

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people enjoyed it so much. And for anyone wondering "Could I?", yes you can because the lead from the Torch staff was so good as to how to support people. The blessing you come away with because you've helped somebody who otherwise couldn't go away is really what struck me.'

Dave felt that the holiday really seemed to have an effect on the people there:

'It seemed to help folks' mental well-being. A lady I supported a lot, after about a day and a half she said how much being there and talking with people had lifted her mood and helped. You don't think about that but it really helped her.'

'We would recommend it, to those wanting to go and those wanting to volunteer,' said Cath, 'If you go, know that you will be well looked after. When we first had training on Zoom, Pat Lower said about the ratio of volunteers to holiday-goers and it seemed a lot but she was so right. Torch really know what they're talking about. And if you're thinking of volunteering just don't have lots planned when you come home because you'll need a few days to recover! But go, do it!'

Read on to hear more stories from people who attended or were involved in the holiday...

Tim Jeffery, Torch CEO

Having heard so much about Torch's old holiday and retreat centre in Hurstpierpoint and the many wonderful times people had there, I was both excited and a little apprehensive about our first Torch Together holiday. Would it measure up? Would people enjoy themselves as much? Would the venue and all the arrangements work for our blind and partially sighted guests? And, if I'm really honest, as the speaker, would I live up to people's expectations?

Sitting at home now nearly a week after the event, I can see how unnecessary those concerns were. Whilst it was a busy week for me and as CEO I felt the responsibility of ensuring we delivered the best experience possible, I had a truly wonderful time. There was such a lovely sense of warmth, welcome and acceptance of everyone. There was so



much laughter, banter and joy. The food was great and the venue comfortable but what will stay with me is the friendship, fellowship and dare I say, love that flowed amongst us. I was blown away by the care and commitment of the volunteers and staff and remain thankful to God for his blessing over all that happened.

Dave Ling, holiday attendee

It was a great week to meet up with people, to study God's word together and have a relaxing time away in lovely surroundings and with good food! It was very well organised and I was so impressed that despite things not always going to plan there was no panic and everyone was able to enjoy the holiday to the full.

Phillip and Carolyn, volunteers

We both thoroughly enjoyed our time at Cober Hill. We were nervous at first because of the responsibility involved in looking after potentially vulnerable guests and ensuring everyone's needs were met. Would we remember all that

we had been taught during training? Our fears were soon dispelled and we quickly discovered that the VIP guests were inspirational and a joy to be with. We learnt so much from being in their company and would certainly like to repeat the experience in the future.

Becky Davies, Torch Together Coordinator

Torch Together in Scarborough was a wonderful week of friendship, fellowship and lots of laughter. I came away feeling so blessed to have spent the week in the company of such amazing people who were full of God's love and grace. We all got on so well together and it felt like a wonderful family holiday. It was a very special time and I felt so supported by staff and volunteers. The holiday went better than I imagined and it was worth all the months of preparation and planning. Thank you to everyone who made it possible.

Thank you so much to everyone who was involved, and praise God that the event was such a success! We'll be running further Torch Together holidays

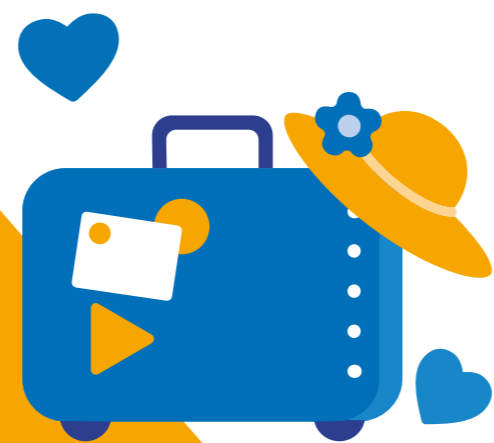
this year and in the future, which will take place around the country and we're looking for volunteers. Volunteers benefit from a half price holiday, plus help with travel. If you feel you could help out at any of the following, then please do get in touch:

16th-18th September: Corrymeela Centre, Ballycastle, Northern Ireland

26th-30th September: Shallowford House, Stone, Staffordshire



- Give thanks to God for the success of this holiday and how much it was enjoyed!
- Pray for the rest of the holidays on the 2022 calendar
- Pray for the future of our Torch Together programme as we seek to build and develop it further



Talking Torch with our audio work!

Grace Dawson, producer of Reflections Radio and the Torch Tales podcast, takes us behind the scenes of this vital part of Torch's work...



Audio has long been an important part of our ministry. It's a way to reach out and connect with people, an opportunity to share the word of God in a way that is gentle, accessible and loving.

Our radio show, Reflections, opens with a tag line every week: 'the show that focuses on faith and disability in today's world.' For me, that truly distils what we're all about. We want to explore Christianity in a way that feels inclusive and easy to understand but does not diminish the power and awe of the Lord. As we broadcast on RNIB Connect Radio, we know that most of our listeners will have some degree of sight loss. They may or may not be Christian. Our goal is always to reach out with the love of Christ, while also helping our listeners discover interesting, useful and thought-provoking stories.

Constructing the show requires a good deal of planning and preparation. Myself and colleagues will have ideas meetings where we throw around possibilities for future shows. I also do a lot of research into current issues and people of interest. Often I will pull a show together around a central theme which may reflect what's happening in the world. For example, this May we did a show on mental health at the beginning of National Mental Health Awareness Week. This was a great thing

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to cover as, of course, mental health affects us all but we can examine it from the very specific angles of Christianity and sight loss. I always aim for our show to entertain and inform. I want to leave our listeners feeling touched by God's love, feeling positive, and feeling empowered to take action. For example, in the mental health awareness show, we included features on what counselling may be like, how to access it and some helplines which are available.

Between myself, our presenter Marilyn Baker, and our helpful colleagues, we conduct interviews for the show. This is always an interesting task – some



people will happily chat away as though they were born ready, others will require gentle coaxing and putting at ease. We make sure that people know we can stop, take a break, or re-record anything they aren't happy with. I believe it's vital to uphold our moral standards: this isn't a hard-hitting news show where we try to squeeze exclusives out of people! We want our guests to feel happy with their experience, and to know that their words, which tend to be about things incredibly dear to them, will be put across with truth and dignity.

I am so happy to be a part of Torch, especially during this extremely exciting time for our audio work. I'm seeing it grow around me constantly and it's fantastic to be involved with that. We're fortunate to have Matthew Horspool on

our team, lending his audio expertise to our new stable of podcasts, along with Paul Wood, our long-standing Head of Technical Services.



Currently, I'm very excited about Insights from Sight Loss Friendly Church, a new podcast which Matthew, along with Becky and Linn, has recently been busy working on. This podcast provides handy advice on a range of concerns and queries that churches and their leadership teams may have. We're also producing a podcast called Torch Tales, which is a place for the people who have made this ministry what it is to tell their stories. If you've ever wondered how this unique and passionately-run ministry came into being, you'll find answers there!

Getting feedback from our listeners means the world to us, we are so grateful to have received emails saying that our work is a real lifeline for people who otherwise feel very isolated – people who can't go to church but will tune into Reflections every Sunday, people who just want to hear a friendly voice, or people who have decided to take up one of the services we've highlighted. We pray our audio work will continue to touch people, and we'll be able to reach out more and more with the love of God for all.

You can find all of our podcasts, which includes shorter versions of our radio show and audio versions of What's News and Torch News, on our website. Just head to torchtrust.org/radio

PRAYER POINTS



- Pray for everyone involved in the production of Torch's audio work
- Give thanks for the opportunities to share our audio work nationally and internationally
- Pray for God's guidance on the content that we create and for his wisdom to be heard

Update from Torch Malawi

We would like to say a huge thank you to all who donated for the Malawi flood relief appeal which raised over £10,00 and is now closed. Your generosity has enabled us to ensure that food and other vital relief items were distributed among the blind people in the Chikwawa and Nsanje districts. However, this distribution was not without incident, as Stanley Moyo explains...



On 11th March we set off to deliver 200 bags of maize flour, 5 bales of salt and 10 bales of soya pieces. Just before the end of the hilly area, our lorry driver lost control due to brake failure. The lorry was running at speed but the driver managed to negotiate two corners until he could not do it any more. God was with him as he decided to direct it to his left side where there was a river on one side and a hill on the other. It was not by his power or wisdom, but God had a purpose for the trip. As he drove towards that side, there was a huge stone that held the bar that holds front tyres. God used that to save lives and property. The lorry turned sideways and came to rest on the hill. The driver had an injury on the right arm whilst the assistant came out without injury. Thankfully, we managed to recover all 200 bags of flour – and only one was damaged!

Heavy rain provided another challenge to the distribution, however blind people were very happy and thanked

the two Torch offices. On behalf of Torch Malawi and on my own behalf, I would like to thank Torch UK for making the distribution possible by providing financial resources. May the Almighty God continue speaking in you the benefit of helping those that are in need of such help.

Torch CEO Tim Jeffery & Head of Technical Services Paul Wood travelled to Malawi at the end of May - we'll be sharing all about the trip in our next issue!

PRAYER POINTS



- Give thanks for God's provision, enabling Torch UK to support Torch Malawi
- Pray for the blind people of Malawi, that their needs will be met
- Please pray for fruitful outcomes and lessons from Tim & Paul's visit, for both Torch Malawi leadership and our own Trustees

Walking with Jesus

Christian books and me

We spoke with Mark Brooke Smith, a keen Torch library user, about what having access to books that he can read means to him...

Mark's first experience with sight loss was finding out as a teenager that his mother had retinitis pigmentosa: 'She didn't know when me and my brother was born but as teenagers we found out it would probably affect us. I probably shouldn't have done as much driving as I did in my twenties! Slowly my sight went, and about 3 years ago, I'm now 63, the last of the sight went. I just have light perception now.'

Mark knows that many people with sight loss will experience this slow degradation of sight: 'I remember my last game of table tennis was when I was about 47 – it's the experience of many, things you could do but as your condition grows you have to let certain things go. When I got my guide dog nine years ago, I could still read labels on things but that's all gone.'

Never one to let an experience pass him by, Mark (who grew up in South Africa) chose to do his national service despite being allowed to forgo it: 'I just wanted to be like other guys, I did three years in the army. My friends helped me – sometimes I had to do night patrols but RP means not being able to see at all in the dark! I just had a little rope between me and the guy in front of me.'

I wanted to be part of the action and I've always been a little crazy!

Mark's zest for life shines through his every word – from cold water swimming, to going to the gym five times a week, to jogging with guide runners regularly, he never shies away from a physical challenge: 'I've always been fairly intentional and proactive. For someone with my level of sight, well I'm still in employment and I make sure to stay active. I never want to be sitting around waiting for something to happen. I have a varied life! I love going to prayer groups, home groups and Sunday services. Although I also love talking books as well!'

This love of talking books is what spurred Mark on to make contact with Torch. 'I always used to read,' he explains, 'I love Bible study and things like that but one day I just couldn't any more. I had 13 Bibles and I gave them all away but I wanted to find out how I could continue. I came to the UK in 2009 and someone told me that you can get accessible Christian books through Torch Trust. I signed up there and then and if you could see the list of what I've borrowed since, there must be hundreds of things on there!'

Mark is also a fan of Premier Christianity magazine in audio, and really likes to delve deep into Christian studies: 'I have different themes I go through. I've gone through John Mark Comer's book 'Live No Lies' twice and I'll be going through a third time and making notes on my computer – I use JAWS for that. Some Torch books I read just for pleasure or inspiration, because they're beautiful stories of missionaries or pastors, others are really challenging and I'll go through them more than once. Really what it's all about is these books speaking into my life. I want to walk closely with the Lord.'

Christianity has been in Mark's life for a long time: 'When I was 13 I went to a Christian rally and just felt called to stand up and give my life to God. But of course it has been a journey. And life happens, life throws curveballs, many things happen that you don't plan. The Lord is there. And even if you feel like your life isn't Plan A any more, or Plan B, C, D, E, Z, God is still with you. As with any blind person, I've had so many people come to me saying "Oh, pray in faith, God will heal you." But for myself, I am at peace whether God heals me or not. It doesn't matter. I know this life is temporary, I'm a sojourner, and I want to live my life so that one day Jesus has no problem recognising me as one of his.'

Mark credits his reading with helping with this: 'In your spiritual walk, for me, it helps to access books. It's wonderful with Torch to listen to a book and be helped in my walk with God. Some Torch books simply give me pleasure and enjoyment, others help equip me to walk as an apprentice of Jesus!'

Support someone like Mark

Every year Torch responds to more than 16,000 requests for books and other resources in accessible formats from people like Mark. We passionately believe that blind and partially sighted people should have equal opportunity to be inspired, encouraged and equipped through access to Christian resources.

The cost to produce just one braille book can run into many hundreds of pounds, yet with your help we can put Christian books and magazines into the hands of a partially sighted or blind person! Become a Torch Bearer and we will keep you informed of how your support is transforming lives and some of the resources your gift is making available.

Could you consider making a gift of just £15 each month and make more and more books available to support and encourage those living with sight loss to grow in their Christian faith? Contact Client Services to find out more.



PRAYER POINTS



- Pray that we are able to reach more people like Mark who could benefit so greatly from accessible Christian books and resources
- Give thanks for all who have become Torch Bearers so far and the difference they are making
- Pray that more people will feel led to pick up the torch and support our ministry in this way

Thanksgiving 2022

Save the date! Our thanksgiving celebration for 2022 will be held on Thursday 22nd September at Torch House. We'll be welcoming people to attend this event of praise and thanks in person and via Zoom. This promises to be a day of celebration, reflection and fellowship as we give thanks for all that the Lord has enabled us to achieve over the year, and for what is to come. More information will follow on torchtrust.org!



Day of Prayer

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:16



At Torch we strongly believe in the power of prayer and we are so grateful to all who pray for Torch regularly. It was fantastic to join together in person and online for the annual Torch Day of Prayer on 9th June. 'It is such an encouragement to all of us here at Torch to know that all we are doing is covered in prayer' Suzie James, our Support Development Coordinator told us, 'so often we can feel overwhelmed by the needs before us but knowing that we are supported by others in prayer makes a big difference.' So, thank you from all of the team. If you want to know more about how you can support the ministry in prayer visit our website for regular prayer updates and to sign up as a Partner in Prayer.

Sight Loss Sunday

After the success of last year's inaugural Sight Loss Sunday, we are thrilled to announce that this year Sight Loss Sunday will be held on Sunday 16th October. Take part and welcome people with sight loss into your church and your congregation. Please do save the date and we'll have lots more information available over the coming months, both in Torch News and on our website sightlossfriendlychurch.org.uk



Join us for the Torch community prayer time

On the first Thursday of each month, you are invited to join us for prayer at 2pm via Zoom. Contact us to receive the joining instructions.



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Torch Trust on Video

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CEO: Tim Jeffery

Council of Reference members:

Revd Dr Steve Brady; Revd Dr David Coffey OBE; Revd Malcolm Duncan; Jonathan Lamb; Revd Roy Searle; Dr Elaine Storkey; Revd Dr Derek Tidball.

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01858 438260

Prayer Line
01858 438277

Donations

Please send donations through to our bank account
The Torch Trust for the Blind, SORT CODE: 40-52-40,
Account Number: 00017072

Sight Loss Friendly Church

torchtrust.org/sight-loss-friendly-church

Reflections

for responses to our radio broadcasts: call **0333 123 1255**

For more information or to hear the show visit:

torchtrust.org/living-with-sight-loss/radio

Torch News

is also available in audio CD, braille, email and large print (17pt, 20pt, 25pt and 30pt). You can subscribe to receive Torch News by email via our website torchtrust.org