



Annah's story – hope in the midst of struggle

Annah Deller's sight problems began in 2008 with headaches and difficulties seeing in bright sunlight. The diagnosis was uveitis (see panel, page 2).

Deterioration was slow at first, but in the last couple of years there's been a real decline in Annah's vision, accelerated by secondary glaucoma. Flare-ups of the uveitis inflammation are quite painful and Annah describes life as 'often a struggle'. But Torch Trust has been able to give meaningful support in ways which have given her hope for the future.

Annah (55) is from Zimbabwe, where her family, including three children and seven grandchildren, still live. She came to the UK in 1999 and has worked in adult social care, both in residential care homes and as a live-in carer. But sight loss has also meant job loss, and Annah finds it hard that from being a carer she is now in need of support herself.

Annah lives in Woking with John, her husband of 10 years. She first heard about Torch from a Sight for Surrey rehab officer in 2014 but admits that she 'ignored it'. Sometime later

someone in her church gave her a copy of **Torch News**. At that time, she says, she was 'panicking and angry' because the County Council were trying to redeploy her. So she decided to talk to Torch and in May 2016 was put in touch with Sarah Brookman, Coordinator for **Journeying With By Phone**.

Her faith shaken

'Sarah was really good,' Annah remembers. 'After several conversations she referred me to a **TorchTalk** phone group where I could do weekly Bible study with others with sight loss. It's been so helpful talking to people with similar problems. I've found losing my sight very challenging as a believer. It's shaken my faith quite a lot. I've asked, Why me?'



Next, Torch gave Annah a **Journeying With** phone befriender, Ruth, who helped her through some very difficult times by phoning weekly. Ruth encouraged Annah to visit Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre for the **Moving Forward** break.

Annah was reluctant to go on her own. 'Then I heard that Sarah was going to be there. And I thought to myself, you know her, she's really lovely, I'll be okay with her there.'

Annah found the **Moving Forward** programme 'a bit full on', with so much being covered in the two days.

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for responses to our radio broadcasts: 0333 123 1255. Go to www.torchtrust.org/reflections for details of how to listen to **Reflections**.

TORCH NEWS

is also available in audio CD, braille, email and large print (17-, 20-, 25- and 30-point) and can be viewed on the Torch website.

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But she says it was wonderful to meet others with sight loss problems and she felt she learned a great deal about gadgets and software that would be able to help her, including an audio Bible. She found the Torch staff 'really, really supportive'.

Not just me

'Going to **Moving Forward** encouraged me to think that losing your vision is not the end of the world and although I often think, why me? I realised it's not only me.'

'Being there made me want to do something with the church. I don't know what. Maybe I could do intercessory prayer. I don't know if I could preach. Some things don't work with low vision, but with new technology and talking Bibles you can still listen to the Bible and talk to people about the Bible and pray.'

And more recently Annah's been especially grateful to Torch for help in keeping herself physically active.

'Despite my sight loss I am physically very fit and I'm used to going to the gym three or four times a week and also running. Torch helped me find a local guide runner to go out with and we've started going out together.'

Together by phone



Complementing **Journeying With**, the face-to-face Christian befriending scheme, Torch has now trained a number of people to offer phone befriending to those needing support in the difficult days of sight loss. Our phone ministry also includes **TorchTalk** telephone friendship groups which bring people together in their own homes.

Contact Torch House for more details.

journeying
with

Moving Forward

The break that Annah went on – **Moving Forward** – is part of a wide-ranging programme of residential events at Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre especially for people with sight loss.

The 2018 programme is included with this issue of **Torch News**.



Janet Eardley, Area Development Officer for the South West, described what a joy it had been to meet Annah on the **Moving Forward** break. 'I'm looking forward to hearing how God uses Annah in the future. She has so much to give – gifts of listening, coming alongside and encouraging people – and she's at a church where she will be able to share those gifts.'

'Our passion at Torch is to journey with someone from the very start of their sight loss, offering a range of services that together bring an ongoing "presence",' said Julia Hyde, Chief Development Officer heading up Torch's Presence initiatives.

'Annah's story is a marvellous example of how different areas of Torch's Presence work – in her case, befriending and Bible study by telephone and our **Moving Forward** residential experience – can combine together to have a real impact on a person's life.' ■

About uveitis and glaucoma

Uveitis is a general term describing a group of inflammatory diseases producing swelling and destroying eye tissue. These diseases can slightly reduce vision or lead to severe vision loss. The symptoms of uveitis may include pain, sensitivity to bright light and poor vision.

Glaucoma is the name for a group of eye diseases that damage the optic nerve, which carries information from the eye to the brain. It's one of the world's leading causes of blindness.





Green solution for Torch in Malawi

A bundle of relatively cheap low-power technology has begun to transform the productivity of Torch House in Malawi.



Taken at the setting up of the new technology: Blessings, Janet, Jon, Stanley, Joshua, Gordon, Lazarus (front).

Until October this year, production of braille and large print Scriptures and other publications for blind and partially sighted people was severely hampered by intermittent power supply. With electricity sometimes only flowing for 20 per cent of the time, disruption was a daily occurrence.

But a few weeks ago the local team there had a visit from Jonathan Temple, son of CEO Gordon Temple. Jon has experience of setting up computer classrooms in Uganda using high-tech low-power technology.

'Linking one single solar panel, a battery, a server and antenna with very low-power laptops, we were able to have the system running 24-7,' said Jon.

Improved connection

'The server now backs up to the Cloud, meaning solid data security, and there's a much improved connection between Torch House in Malawi and Torch House in Market Harborough, on what is effectively a local call. And better communication will hopefully mean greater collaboration,' he added.

Along with spending time training the Malawian team of three to use the new software, Jon was able to travel further south in the country to visit some blind groups.

'I spent three years working in Uganda and there are striking similarities, as might be expected, but only in the rural areas where people live mainly in mud huts. The towns in Malawi are much less developed than in other parts of Africa.

'Torch is in touch with blind people in the lower Shire Valley area, the poorest region of the poorest country in the world. It's semi-arid and the people live by subsistence farming. We did travel through some lush green sugar plantations which are owned by Africa's largest sugar producing company working across six countries, using the technology of irrigation established decades ago. But most of the crop is for export globally. Beyond those plantations, people are literally starving.'

Difference

Jon felt that all around him he could see situations in which low-power tech solutions could make a huge impact. Impressed by the difference he could see one solar panel making at Torch House, he feels affirmed in his determination to start a charitable company delivering low-power tech answers for poorer communities.

Janet Stafford, Torch's International Leader, travels to Malawi for extended periods once or twice a year to distribute aid.

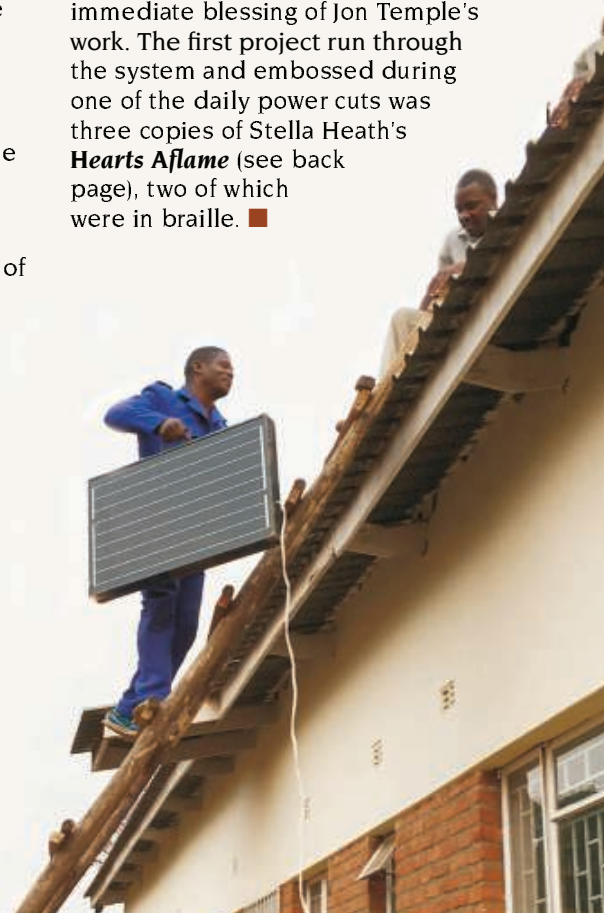
'While in some parts of the country there is food in the towns, where you will see markets with fruit and vegetables, the situation in the south is desperate. During my most recent trip 15 people known to Torch died in three weeks,' said Janet.

Though she returned from her recent trip with many sad stories, Janet is impressed by the way the attitude in Malawian churches is changing towards blind people.

'A few years ago blind people attending church would have been segregated. At an annual church convention I was privileged to speak at, 285 of the three thousand people were blind – and they were sitting with their own church groups. This integration is so encouraging. It's so good to see churches recognising the gifting of blind people, and our prayer is that this will happen more and more.'

'The long term investment by Janet and Michael supporting the team in Malawi has influenced local churches in an extraordinary way,' said CEO Gordon Temple. 'And this is seen particularly in the way local churches now receive blind people – with a number of churches now led by gifted and trained blind pastors.'

Production operative Lazarus and the rest of the team were able to see the immediate blessing of Jon Temple's work. The first project run through the system and embossed during one of the daily power cuts was three copies of Stella Heath's **Hearts Aflame** (see back page), two of which were in braille. ■





Hopelessness to Hopefulness

A message from Torch CEO Gordon Temple



my first visit to Malawi 16 years ago. I could only agree. Not much had changed. More cars on the roads. More mobile phones. But the electricity supply is even less reliable and still most homes are without it.

Outside the cities, most live as subsistence farmers, striving to grow enough food for their families with some left over to sell. Cruelly, the harvests are less reliable than they were – presumably a result of climate change. I saw little evidence of any progress with much-needed irrigation.

Asking around, no one believed the situation was going to get better. Sadly, people have completely lost hope that their political leaders are going to tackle the problems.

And what of the blind people in the Torch Fellowship Groups in Malawi? As the poorest of the poor, what hope is there for them?

My recent trip to Malawi prompted me to reflect upon the subject of hope. Hope, a slippery concept, is actually a life and death issue. When we conclude that someone has 'lost all hope' we know they are near the end.

Speaking of someone returning to Malawi after an interval of 20 years, I remarked unthinkingly that they must see a lot of change. 'Not really' was the response. I paused, recalling



Confidence, dignity & hope

Remarkably, in some of the most stricken districts of this struggling country, I encountered blind people who really do live with hope. The blind people who came together to lead worship for 'the Overnight' attended by people from five Torch Fellowship Groups in the far south, displayed confidence, dignity and, yes, hope. Making notes in braille by stylus and frame they planned and led the programme for over 200 blind people plus their families, guides and helpers – and kept up with simultaneous translation throughout for our benefit!

I returned to the UK to catch up on stories from Torch's local groups, **Journeying With** schemes and a **Moving Forward** break. People can find hope shattered through sight loss – but in so many lives hopelessness has given way to hopefulness as they have encountered the love of God through Torch Presence ministries.

The Bible tells us, 'Faith is being sure of what we hope for. It is being sure of what we do not see' (Hebrews 11:1 NIV). Faith in God is the bedrock on which Torch is built. Faith secures the hope we seek to share with people impacted by sight loss, as we introduce them to the Saviour who wept with us, who died for us and rose from death to give us a future.

Whether far away in Malawi or here on our doorstep, the hope that doesn't disappoint is not found in a place, a political leader or a system – but in a relationship with a loving, caring Lord who promises never to leave us and invites all to come to him. ■

A message from Marilyn Baker, Chair of Trustees

With our CEO Gordon Temple passing pension age earlier this year, it's



time for us to begin the search for God's person to lead the vital work and ministry of Torch Trust into the future.

Gordon threw himself into the role over 15 years ago and has served faithfully over these years, leading change and development. He has helped Torch embed its historic Christian values, crystallise a clear vision, shape new programmes and develop a deep sense of purpose. He is fully behind the search for his successor and will continue to serve in anticipation of handing the leadership over in due course.

Gordon and the trustees ask you to pray for God to lead the right person to the work. We will soon begin to advertise the position. If you are a committed Christian with the right qualities or you feel you know someone who would be suitable then contact our Chief Operating Officer Michael Heaney at Torch House.

Janet's homecoming



I remember the big roaring fire in the entrance lounge, running around in the woods and making snowmen in the grounds. I learned to swim in the pool in the large garden and I became a Christian in a big marquee on the lawn.'

Janet Caughley had something of a different childhood. In 1974 at the age of eight she moved to Torch House in Hallaton. Her parents were among the first staff to arrive there when Torch made the move from the original Torch House – the house at Hurstpierpoint in Sussex acquired by Ron and Stella Heath for the growing Torch work with blind people, then renamed 'Little Torch'.

This year there's been a kind of homecoming as Janet has taken over running 'Little Torch' – now Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre. And it's become a regular occurrence for blind and partially sighted guests arriving to say, 'I knew you when you were a child!'

Janet's parents are known to many connected with Torch. Sue and John Oldham worked at Hallaton, John in braille and giant print production and Sue in housekeeping and later in recording for audio books and magazines.

An adventure

'When we moved to Hallaton, one of the first families to arrive, the house was empty and massive. It was such an adventure. I remember making lots of dens in cupboards around the house,' Janet recalls.

At 18, Janet left Hallaton for college in Clacton-on-Sea, studying hotel management. After some years in hotel work, she decided to retrain as a physiotherapist at 40, graduating in 2010.

'I was perfectly happy working as a physio for quite a few years. Then, out of the blue, I heard about the vacancy for a Holidays Leader at Torch HRC – and I felt straight away that it was what God wanted me to do.'

Janet's been leading Torch Holidays since the end of July. 'It's fantastic!' she says. 'I love planning and organising the holidays. I love having people come to stay. And I love the fact that Jesus is central to all we pack into a Torch Holiday.'

'I've been finding my feet for the first couple of months, but we have a full programme lined up for 2018 with some exciting Torch Holidays planned. For example, there's the history week. The focus is the Tudors in Sussex. We'll be visiting Tudor houses and castles and having speakers in to help us learn more.' ■



Torch House at Hallaton in Leicestershire



Offering a safe haven – a new virtual community

How can Torch grow the reach of all the services it offers to people with sight loss?

One way is to create an online community, creating a safe space where people can make connections and friendships, share information or concerns, and find out about all Torch does offline.

'Torch has so much to offer!' says Charlotte Temple. 'We want to reach the unreached, to give an invitation to people to participate in ways which could ultimately really improve their quality of life.'

Charlotte, working freelance as Social Media Manager for Torch, has set up the Torch Trust Digital Café – a Facebook group.

'We know the sight loss community is already active on social media, and we want to get involved and get out there, creating a welcoming

meeting point – a bit like a virtual Fellowship Group! We want people to use the Digital Café by popping in to share about their day, expressing their feelings honestly, or posting interesting items to benefit other people. As with everything we do, being confidently Christian will be important to our witness online as well.'

Charlotte explains, 'Success in social media in commercial terms is around brand recognition or exposure. But for Torch it's not so much about that. As a Christian organisation, it's more about building a safe haven online where people can come together in faith-based support.'

Charlotte would value feedback. To take a seat around the café table, simply search for and visit the Torch Trust Digital Café on Facebook. You'll find a button to ask to become a member. ■

Ground-breaking Bible selling well

The new easier-to-read New Testament produced with partially sighted readers in mind is selling well and receiving compliments all round. In fact, publishers Biblica report that the first printing is close to sold out – in less than six months!

'I wanted a Bible in large print I could hold and use in church and this has been wonderful,' one delighted customer told Torch.

'Since starting to lose his sight, my husband hasn't picked up a Bible – but he's been reading the new Nlrv and has taken a lot of comfort from it,' said another.

Torch was one of several Christian disability organisations involved in designing the publication. As well as benefiting people with sight loss, the Nlrv is suitable for many with learning disabilities. And customers buying it from Torch have reported it's also useful for people with early dementia.

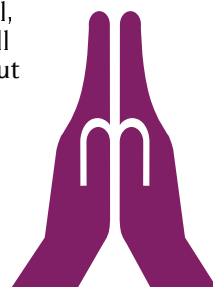
Contact Torch Trust to find out more, to get your own copy of the Accessible Edition New Testament at only £7.99, or to buy one for someone as a Christmas gift. Postage and packing is free to anyone registered partially sighted or qualifying for registration.



Stepping out in faith

Torch operates in faith dependency upon God as our provider in all things. At the end of September 2017, the close of our financial year, we gave thanks to God for his financial provision. Entering a new year, we are convicted of the need to push ahead with the development of our Presence work around the country, reaching people with sight loss earlier, serving them for

longer. Recruiting more staff to reach out across the country to people with sight loss and to share our vision with more churches is vital, though we know it will strain our finances. But we believe it's time to step out in faith. Please add your prayers and your faith to ours.





'Being with Torch is a calling ... challenging at times but fulfilling'



Michael and Janet Stafford, two of Torch Trust's longest serving staff, celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary in September.

Appropriately, it was the day of Torch's Thanksgiving. Their commitment to Torch was underlined by the fact that they spent their special day over 5000 miles apart.

While Michael was at the service in Torch House, Janet was in Malawi, making one of her regular trips to minister and distribute aid to blind people. By the wonders of modern technology, they were able to talk and see each other via the Internet during the Thanksgiving service.

Michael and Janet first met around 1960. Returning from National Service in Kenya where he had been converted to Christ, Michael found a spiritual home at New Milton Gospel Hall in Hampshire, where Janet and her family were stalwarts.

The two young people didn't really make much of an impression on each other at first, even though Michael regularly visited Janet's family home. After a short period working for Oxford University Press, followed by two years at Moorlands Bible College, Michael left for Nigeria as a missionary in 1963. Obviously, absence made the heart grow fonder, because the pair exchanged letters. After a while, Michael proposed – also by letter.

'Her reply was a fairly definite no!' recalls Michael. Happily, that wasn't her final word. The couple were married in 1967 after Janet had completed three years at Mount Hermon Missionary College, and six months later they left for Nigeria.

Meeting Stella Heath

On their return from the mission field in 1980, Janet and Michael managed a Christian conference centre. As it turned out, it was the venue used by the Torch Fellowships in East Anglia for annual holidays. And one year Stella Heath, co-founder of Torch, was the speaker. By that time, the Staffords had been six or seven years at the centre and were praying about moving on. When 'Mum' Heath heard about that, she invited them to join Torch.

Michael remembers 'Mum' Heath as being 'a dynamo'. Janet recalls, 'She was a mother to everyone. Over the years we rescued lots of needy people.'

Michael's printing background enabled him to work on giant print books and in due course to take on leadership of production. Janet was initially involved in housekeeping and cooking.

It's their sense of God's calling on their lives that has kept them going for 30 years' service to Torch, they say. Michael is now officially retired but enjoys volunteering. And since 1990 Janet

has been fully committed to the area of Torch ministry she calls her 'passion' – the work among blind people in Malawi.

'I remember standing on the foundations of what is now Torch House in Blantyre and sensing from God his challenge to me from the Bible story of Ruth. I felt God was asking me, "Will you make this people your people?" God has given me a sense of belonging in Malawi, so that I feel more at home there than in the UK.'

Thank God for the faithfulness of Michael and Janet Stafford, who have made a significant contribution to key ministry areas of Torch Trust for many years.

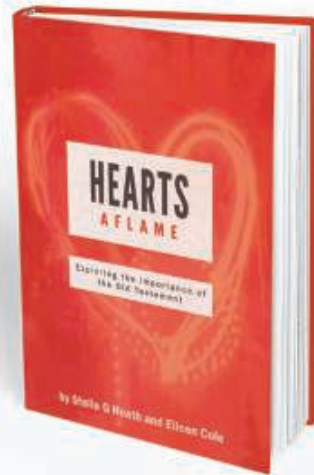
Ask God to raise up gifted people who recognise a calling on their lives to serve blind and partially sighted people through Torch. ■



New book from Torch founder: 'Hearts Aflame'

'Who is Genesis?' a young blind girl once asked Stella Heath. This was just one event through which Stella, co-founder of Torch along with her husband Ron, realised that the Old Testament was a closed book to so many – strange, foreign, and all about 'a wrathful God uttering many dark sayings.' Stella resolved to do something about it. It would be her final piece of writing.

'Stella picked up a pen to write at every opportunity,' says CEO Gordon Temple. 'The Bible was a constant inspiration to her and in her life's work with blind people she frequently shared truths from the Bible.'



Due to incapacity following a series of strokes, Stella never finished her book. Now her close friend and companion of around 40 years, Eileen Cole, has completed the book. It was published this year in time to be launched at Torch's Thanksgiving Day.

In her preface to the book, Stella writes of the Old Testament, '... the riches hidden in its 39 books are great, and important to us as Christians. So that is why I have been persuaded to share some of these treasures ... The writing of this book has certainly helped me to see more of the power, the love, the patience and the understanding of our God. It has enhanced my awareness of what he did when he sent his Son to die for me.'

Eileen first met 'Mum and Dad Heath', as she knew them, in the 1960s. 'I began learning braille with the idea of becoming a home teacher for blind people,' says Eileen. 'But then someone told me about Torch and I used my braille making five books for Torch Library. Then in 1973 I went to work with Torch at the house in Hallaton. Later, I helped the Heaths looking after the ministry at 'Little Torch' at Hurstpierpoint. When Dad Heath died in 1999, Mum Heath and I moved into a shared house in East Grinstead. After Mum Heath's death in 2009 it seemed a pity to scrap all her hard work, so I decided to finish it.'



Eileen had been involved in the book, anyway, from quite early in the writing process and says it's hard now to remember exactly which parts were written by whom!

A number of Stella's books are popular items in the Torch Library. The new **Hearts Aflame – Exploring the importance of the Old Testament** by Stella G Heath and Eileen Cole is available from Torch Trust in standard print, braille, large print and audio, price £4. ■

Working with Torch

Torch House needs someone with a sense of calling to work with the **Leadership Team** to help Torch make connections with churches and the sight loss community across the UK.

Torch would also like to recruit more **area development staff** who will play a key part in delivering ministry to people with sight loss, working from home across all regions of the UK.

The team at Torch Holiday & Retreat Centre in Sussex needs an **experienced cook** and also more volunteers to work alongside the Holidays Team.

Details of all these openings can be found on the website.



Torch's Christmas gift

The Christmas gift from Torch Resources this year is a booklet called **The Christmas Tree** by Matthew Bartlett. This explains the Christian symbolism of decorations on the Christmas tree, revealing the unchanging message of God's love and grace for the world. It's ideal for using as a seasonal devotional book. It's free to you, your Torch group, your friends and neighbours by contacting Torch. **The Christmas Tree** is available in braille, large print and audio.



The Carol Service at Torch House will be on Wednesday December 13th at 2pm – all friends are welcome to join us.

It's not too late to order your **Torch Large Print Calendar** for 2018. In the popular wirebound edition, it costs £3.50. **Also available in braille.**

