

Daring 92-year-old's in high spirits as microlight flight raises £2,780



No fear: Vera Elward

Clemence Michallon / Saturday 21 November 2015 / Witney

A DARING 92-year-old woman who flew in a microlight has raised thousands to save her local church organ. Vera Elward, who was born in Bampton and has lived there her entire life, jumped into the plane for a 30-minute flight in August. Sponsorship for her intrepid flight kept rolling in and a final tally saw the funds reach £2,780.

A retired teacher at Bampton Primary School, Mrs Elward has taught several generations of pupils in the village. And she believed the amount of donations was down to so many villagers knowing her. By the time she hopped off the microlight, Mrs Elward felt exhilarated. She said:

“My feet were cold but apart from that it was wonderful. “They put me in a flying suit and I was very warm except from my feet. The instructions said wear comfortable shoes so I wore sandals. I should have worn boots. It was a beautiful day. I thoroughly enjoyed it. They asked if I was coming again the week after and I said I wished.”

Mrs Elward, who has two daughters, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, was first scheduled to complete the flight in June. But an infection meant she had to get half of her left index finger amputated, delaying the flight until August.

The money collected by Mrs Elward for the flight will go towards refurbishing the nineteenth-century pipe organ at Bampton's St Mary's Church, featured in ITV's historical drama *Downton Abbey*, currently in its sixth and final season. The Rev David Lloyd, the church's vicar, said:

"The project is to refurbish the organ, which dates back to 1812. The connections inside that link the keys together are perishing. We're taking the opportunity to get it all functioning again and to make it more powerful."

A few tens of thousands more pounds are needed to complete the restoration, Mr Lloyd added. When he first heard about Mrs Elward's choice of fundraiser, he thought it was typical of the fun-loving 92-year-old. He added:

"She's always wanting to help and raise funds and do things with people. I thought it was very well done and I think everybody was delighted. At that age, you don't really expect people to be doing things like that but she did and I know she enjoyed it."

Mrs Elward, who was christened, baptised and married in St Mary's Church, said she feels great after completing the fundraiser.

She would like to thank all the people who donated, with a special mention to Anne Harris and Rodney Rowland for their help.