

## TAKE A BREAK



Clara Elton, 16, is part of a team aiming to make life better by carrying out random acts of kindness as part of the National Citizens Service initiative. Her team raised £1,000 to help animals at the RSPCA.

**Favourite film or TV series?**  
The Wedding Ringer

**Favourite takeaway?**  
Domino's pizza

**Tell us one thing no-one knows about you?**  
People know mostly everything about me

**What's your ultimate ambition in life?**  
To own a horse

**Pet hates?**  
People not washing their hands after going to the toilet

**What's your favourite song?**  
Mabel - Finders Keepers ft Kojo Funds

**Marmite? Love it or hate it?**  
Hate it

**What's your worst habit?**  
Laugh when I talk

**What was your first car?**  
Don't have one

**If you could go anywhere in the world where would it be?**  
Bora Bora

**Who would you invite to a dinner party - dead or alive?**  
Beyoncé

**What would you do if you won the lottery?**  
Share out the money between my family and probably buy a house.

### CAMPAIGN

# Supercar dealer Tom's drive to keep village church running

By Helen Kreft

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Overseal's best known businessman is ploughing thousands of pounds from his own pocket into saving a closure-threatened village church left "hanging on by a shoestring" with dwindling congregations.

Millionaire car dealer Tom Hartley is forking out to help St Matthew's Church upgrade its heating as well as provide running water for the first time in 20 years to the building in Woodville Road, Overseal.

Worshippers have to gather in an annex, during winter months, because the church cannot afford to heat the main building.

However, Mr Hartley has stepped in to ease the crisis - and hopes his online Just-Giving website will raise a further £25,000 to cater for the church's expenses to keep the 178-year-old building open.

Car dealer Mr Hartley has bought and sold luxury and performance cars including Rolls-Royces, Aston Martins, Lamborghinis and Bugattis in the village for almost four decades. He said he was left concerned following the christening of his granddaughter, Isla, in the church earlier this month.

He said: "When I came here I said how beautiful a church it was to church warden Gill Edwards. She made it clear they were struggling. Attendance dropped to about 15 people each Sunday. I asked them why this was and they said it was very cold in here, and they had no running water.

"Gill seemed to think eventually it would disintegrate to the stage where the doors would be closed."

Mr Hartley, whose supercar business caters for car fans across the world, decided to fund the heating of the church and install running water as a thank-you to his home village.

He said: "I am quite concerned and showed interest

immediately. I suggested to them getting running water and I promised them I will help. Within a week I have arranged for them to have a water supply put in here. That makes it easier for them to do what they want to do from this building rather than making a jaunt outside the building and carrying the water back inside.

"I have also had a survey done about the heating, so it is a great start.

"As a local businessman, I have three businesses in the village, mainly cars, and have been here for 37 years and a lot of people say I put Overseal on the map. When you think of supercars globally, everyone thinks of Overseal. I want to give something back to the village. It is just a gesture."

Mr Hartley, who lives in the village, returned to the church for the Sunday service the following week.

He said: "What I saw is not what I wanted to see. I took a photograph of 15 people sitting round a table. They were not even in the church, they were in the annex next to the church.

**'I want to give something back to the village. It is just a gesture.'**

Tom Hartley

"I don't profess to be the most religious person in the world but for someone who really wants to come to the church, they have this coldness. It needs revitalising to say this is what Overseal church is all about.

"I wouldn't want to go to an annex for a Sunday church gathering when I have a church like this."

While the overall cost of the immediate work has not yet been calculated, Mr Hartley believes it will run into the thousands, which he will donate from his own pocket.

He is starting his fund-raising mission with a charity concert at the church on March 11,



Church warden Gill Edwards and Tom Hartley at St Matthew's Church, Overseal, which has no running water and its heating needs to be updated.



starring gospel singer Monica Dunbar.

He said: "It will give me great satisfaction when I can come here on March 11 to see this church full, which I do not believe has been the case for some years. You need to let local people understand what is happening and so everyone can pull together."

Church warden Mrs Edwards said the Anglican and Methodist church faced many costs, including about £14,000 a year in parochial expenses to the clergy. It is paid in order to enable the clergy member to exercise their ministry without the need to take another job in order to earn their living.

Mrs Edwards said: "That is the one we do not pay because we cannot pay. We have to pay the other expenses otherwise we go into debt, and we cannot go into debt because it would put us in difficulty."

As well as running its heating and water, the church faces a £1,500 payment a year for insurance as well as costs to repair its leaky roof and run its electricity.

Mrs Edwards said: "Heating is the thing. You cannot use the church so much in winter because it is expensive to heat and we lose heat out of the roof a lot, so we have to put the heating on hours beforehand to get any sort of heat.

"Having running water will make it easier so you do not have to carry water from the community centre to church. It can be used for hospitality drinks. Turning on a tap would be great. We have not had running water in the church for more than 20 years since the water was cut off when we took out the old lead piping."

The church funds its expenses through its Sunday services and concerts.

Mrs Edwards said: "We

shoot ourselves in the foot because you have to put the heating on and it is expensive."

She added: "Tom very kindly said he would try to assist us with fund-raising. If it all works out, it will be absolutely ground-breaking because, without it, the church will eventually grind to a halt and have to close.

"We have been hanging on by a shoestring for quite a few years but it is getting quite desperate now."

Residents of Overseal only will be issued with invitations to the concert on March 11. However, anyone who would like to donate to the cause can visit the JustGiving site [www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/saveoverseal](http://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/saveoverseal) church, email Tom Hartley at [saveoversealchurch@tomhartley.com](mailto:saveoversealchurch@tomhartley.com) or visit his showroom in Moira Road, Overseal.