

# Lane-Burslem (BALPA Benevolent Fund) PPL Scholarship 2024

## Piers Austin-Foss

My love for aviation started when I had the opportunity to backseat numerous flights in the PA28 in 2020 with a peer from my cadet squadron. Power was applied, I was pinned into my seat. I remember gazing at the airspeed needle. Forty, Fifty, Sixty. The nose lifted, we were airborne. From this experience (cliché, I know), my love for aviation was stemmed. In the year or so that followed, I started an online clothes reselling business which allowed me to fund a few flying hours, and alongside financial support from my mother I gained experience in an aircraft where I was sole manipulator of the controls sitting beside an instructor. After these experiences and a few more flights I managed to backseat, I decided that piloting was the profession for me. Intrigued in understanding aircraft down to the nuts and bolts, inspired by the words of QF32 Captain Richard de Crespigny, I decided to read Aeronautical Engineering, looking to specialize later in Human Factors, due to its ever increasing importance in industry.

During my sixth form studies, I had the pleasure of becoming CCF RAF NCO IC in my squadron, and was urged to put in an application for the Air Cadet Pilot Scheme for a third time. This time, I was successful! I spent my post A-Level summer looking forward to university and the flying opportunities that were ahead of me.

Move in day came very quickly. Settling in my new room and meeting my new flatmates, I received an email from the RAFAC stating that my scholarship was cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. To say I was gutted would have been an understatement. I immediately sought additional scholarships I could apply for, putting my initial application in with the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, a Scottish flight training organization, and East Midlands Universities' Air Squadron.



*My first annual formal dinner on EMUAS.*

After a long night bus journey to Glasgow, I was unsuccessful in obtaining a scholarship from the Scottish school. Upon landing at Heathrow, I received an email from the Air Pilots inviting me to interview. I was absolutely buzzing and spent the next few weeks researching the Honourable Company, their history, role in industry and preparing for my interview.

Arriving at Air Pilots House early in the morning, I was greeted with smiling faces. The atmosphere was very friendly and relaxed. After a short mathematical group exercise, I was invited into the interview room. My interviewers Amy, Lewis and Steve put me at ease right away. Their friendly nature really calmed my nerves and made our conversation extremely enjoyable. I relished the opportunity to talk to leading industry professionals about my motivations and my time on EMUAS, including my first military flight at Cranwell. It's not often I received that opportunity!

The interview flew past very quickly, and as it concluded, Lewis followed me out of the interview room, showing me a few videos from his job, sharing experiences about his company, and giving me advice on graduate roles. My interview experience was overwhelmingly positive. The interviewers want to bring out the best in you! However, I was still unsure of what the outcome would be. Had I done enough? The competition must be fierce.

I received a phone call the very next morning from my interviewer Amy stating that I had been successful. Words cannot describe how overwhelmed I was. I had been given my big break!

My first flight took place on June 21<sup>st</sup>, where I revised all the general handling from my previous flying experience. The route took me down past Littlehampton onto the coast. This was the first time I had seen the shoreline from the air, and the first time I had been in a light aircraft in over a year. I was elated to be back. The Honourable Company assigned me a 'buddy', a more experienced pilot representing the Company that would be on call to discuss my progress and help me with my training.



First Solo water dump. G-BHCP Cessna 152 – 9<sup>th</sup> July

After some more general handling, circuits and a NAV to Blackbushe to demonstrate how I would divert if the Fair Oaks runway became blocked, I had my first solo flight on the 9<sup>th</sup> July. I remember noticing the considerable boost in performance with one less person in the airplane, don't let it scare you!



Instrument flying was my favourite part of the PPL Syllabus. Although the instrument flying skills you learn are only for use in inadvertent VFR to IMC, my instructor had time to demonstrate additional instrument flying manoeuvres, including climbs, descents, partial panel flying and simulated suction failure.

Another notable flight was my QXC which I completed on the 25<sup>th</sup> August, with a planned route of Fair Oaks-Lydd-Goodwood-Fair Oaks. During my second leg, the Farnborough Radar controller contacted me stating that Goodwood had closed their main runway, and the crosswind on the remaining runway was strong. I scribbled down T-DODAR on my kneeboard, carefully analysing my options, considering endurance, availability of fuel, and my personal minimums. After this, I deemed a diversion to Shoreham was suitable, landing on their grass runway 24. I later flew the return leg to Fair Oaks, completing my QXC.

A few days before my skills test, I believed a tricky solo NAV would be beneficial. I transited the London CTR solo routing Ascot-Burnham which was the peak of my training and gave me confidence to attempt a CAS transit when I passed my test.

After completing my 9 theory exams with an average of 93%, my FRTOL, and mock test, I sat my skills test on the 30<sup>th</sup> August, one day before I had planned to in my initial plan provided to the Honourable Company. The result was positive, and I am now the holder of a PPL! I still can't believe it.



Skills test pass! In the same aircraft I first soloed in. – 30<sup>th</sup> August



View of Shoreham (EGKA) from 4000ft during a solo NAV.

This scholarship has opened so many doors for me and has given me a leg-up into helping me achieve my goal of being a technical pilot. I cannot thank the Air Pilots and BALPA enough! Every lecture at University, I leave the room thinking, how can I use this in my career and apply it to practical flying? The Honourable Company is an organization that you want to be a lifetime member of. I'll be using the PPL I've gained to hour build before commencing Commercial Pilot Training. I am also looking to learn how to operate aircraft with more difficult handling characteristics and earn my tailwheel endorsement at White Waltham.

My advice for future applicants:

- **Be yourself!** Be true about your motivations. Why do you *really* want to work in the industry?
- **Be personable!** A career in a multi-crew cockpit environment, or even as a PPL student with an instructor, you will be spending numerous hours in close proximity with other people with the same passion as you. Your interviewers work in this environment. Present yourself as someone they would enjoy flying with.
- **Be persistent!** Apply, apply, apply. Throw yourself into every opportunity that arises. Gain as much knowledge as you can. If at first you don't succeed, try and improve your application, your personal skillset and apply again.
- **Have some kind of flying experience in an aircraft.** Whether it is Cadets, University Air Squadron, or a few hours of self-funded flying time like in my case, having experience in a light aircraft is highly beneficial before seeking a scholarship. Make sure you enjoy GA flying before asking for the hefty investment in you!

## Acknowledgements

**Harry Karmel.** You have been an amazing mentor and dear friend over the last 5 years. After we first met in the CCF, you inspired me and the opportunities you have given me to backseat your flights gave me a window into general aviation and good airmanship which has proved invaluable during my flying this summer on the scholarship. I love flying with you, I learn so much! You're welcome in my right seat anytime.

**James Gibson.** After meeting you all those years ago it has been an absolute pleasure and good fun to fly with you this summer. Your instruction was first-rate, and your patience while explaining difficult concepts, and putting me through my paces on my mock test proved invaluable. Calling me the night before my skills test to offer last minute advice is a testament to your love for flight instruction and your dedication to your students. Any flight school is lucky to have you.

**Chris Barrott.** You brought out the best in me! You seemed to be on call for what felt like twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to discuss how I was getting on. Your knowledge and good humour served me well. You are an asset to The Company and I wish you well in your career.

**Mum, Dad, Grandparents.** I did it!



The return leg on my mock test with Instructor James Gibson



Post-skills test celebration flight with Harry in the Aeronca Chief at White Waltham (EGLM)