

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots Gliding RAFCT Scholarship 2024 Mahika Shepley

Aviation has always sparked my curiosity and the thrill of being up in the sky and the breathtaking views below have always captivated my interest.

During the summer of 2024, I was thrilled to learn of my successful application for the Honourable Company of Air Pilots' Gliding Scholarship. I arrived at Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club on Sunday and I was immediately greeted by Sylvia, who gave us a quick tour and showed us the facilities. We soon met our instructor and I have the pleasure of having Alan who walked us up to the top of the airfield where we were able to take in the view of the Peak District, watch a few winch launches and assist in the launch. This was a first-time experience for me as I had not had any experience in a glider. After the detailed tour of the Camphill, we got straight to learning how to drive a tractor, which was important so we could go and retrieve the glider after each flight. This was very exciting to all of us as we have never driven a tractor before and we all got the hang of it by the end of the evening.



The course swiftly began at 9 am on the Monday, we watched the hanger get unpacked with the gliders and we were taught how to complete the daily inspection of the Puchacz – which was the glider we were going to be using for the week. We soon walked the glider up to the top of the airfield where I got to experience my first launch



in a glider, the feeling of the launch was like a rollercoaster and it was exhilarating. We reached roughly 1500ft in about 30 seconds. On the first day I had successfully learnt how to adjust the trim and to turn using the rudder and the aileron. On my third flight I was in control of the turns and I was thermal soaring. This was a great practise as it was increasing our altitude each time I completed a full circle in turns. On the second day we

did more practise with trim and we started to learn how land and we planned our circuits for the next couple days. My final flight of the second day was in a T21. The T21 is an open-cockpit glider and this was one of the best flights I had at Camphill. I had control after the launch and I did a couple turns in it and it was a great flight. Throughout the week we continued to practise the circuit and learn how to use the landing gear with the airbrakes and the rudder control on the ground as well. On my eleventh launch we started thermal soaring and we managed to reach 3000ft. The views from above were beautiful and while we continued to soar, I had control, my instructor Alan played 'Dancing



Queen' by ABBA and 'Happy' by Pharrell Williams while we were up in the air. This was my favourite flight at Camphill and it was a highlight of the Gliding Scholarship overall. Throughout the scholarship we all worked collaboratively to retrieve glider to make most of the time and to get more flights in. All of the scholarship winners worked well together and we all got along with each other really well. There was lots of laughter and the other club members at Camphill were all so friendly and they all had their own personal stories about their gliding career. On our final day I had asked Alan to demonstrate a steep stall it felt like the glider was sinking and dropping and then we recovered from it. The final day we made the most of the time we had left there we had five flights each, and we completed a different circuit where I had the opportunity to land by with prompts from Alan. It went well overall and it was a great way to end to the Gliding Scholarship.



After all the flying came to an end each day, we helped to pack the hanger away which was always interesting as all the club members have a different way of packing it. We all went to the clubhouse and waited for our instructors to fill in our logbooks and give us debriefs on how each day went. This was a great way for all the other people on the course to get time to socialise with each other and get to know everyone. After our debriefs we had our dinner each night and we walked up to the top of the airfield and watched the sunset of the Peak District. This was beautiful! We watched it till it got dark and we headed back to the clubhouse where we played pool and socialised in the board room.

Unfortunately, this fantastic week had come to an end. I had made many memories with all the scholarship winners and I had met many club members who have great stories about the careers. Thank you, Honourable Company of Air Pilots, for this opportunity to allow me to develop my passion for flying. Thank you, Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club, for this unforgettable experience and your hospitality. I have had a brilliant time! In particular, thank you to my instructor Alan who has taught me the foundations of gliding and I look forward to building upon it in the future.

