

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots
Private Pilot's Licence Scholarship 2019
Generously sponsored by Signature Flight Support
Harry Thomas

I have been involved in aviation for a number of years now. I've been a member of the Air Cadets for 5 years and flew with them every opportunity I got. I also started gliding at a local club aged 14, which is something I would fully recommend to any aspiring pilot. Here I progressed to solo quickly and later added a Bronze endorsement to my licence. It was these early experiences that reinforced my childhood ambition to become a pilot.

A highlight of my Air Cadet career was being picked for the Air Cadet Pilot Scheme at Dundee. This was a 2 week residential course, providing 12 hours of flight training with the aim of soloing before the end of the course. My previous gliding experience came in useful and I soloed after 10 hours.

Wanting to progress my flying career I began to look into the costings for a PPL. Unfortunately, like many other people, this was something I couldn't afford. Exploring scholarship options I came across an article in Flight Training News advertising PPL's through the Honourable Company of Air Pilots. After finding out some more, I began to draft up my initial application. Several drafts later I finally sent it off and eagerly awaited a response. I was delighted to find out that I had been invited to their offices for an interview. I immediately began preparations thinking of any possibly questions that could be thrown my way.

The day finally came, and I set off for London. It was fair to say that I was considerably nervous, but I had confidence in myself and my preparations. Getting lost certainly didn't help with any of the nerves, but I eventually arrived and had time to settle in. The interview was tough but I tackled it well, my preparations had paid off. The other element to the selection was the exams. Despite everything at stake, I really enjoyed taking them. The rest of the day was spent sightseeing in London with my mum and travelling home. The next day at school was a write off, as I spent the whole day checking my emails every 5 minutes! At 3.22pm the email finally came and the first word that jumped out at me was 'Congratulations'. I was over the moon and couldn't wait for my A-levels to finish.



Flight planning with my Instructor Charles



Overhead my home town

A couple of weeks later I began my training at with the Peterborough Flying School at Sibson Aerodrome. Initially, it was very intense balancing my other commitments around the flying lessons. Throwing myself into it, I soloed within a couple of weeks. After consolidating for another week, I moved onto my navigational training. Personally, using the navigational aids was the most challenging element of the training. One of the most interesting experiences was preparing for my cross country, during a practice we completely lost radio communications and we had to cancel the exercise. This was certainly a challenge, but it was great to go through the experience.

There were a number of days where the weather ruined any chance of flying, however, they were not wasted days as they allowed me to revise and take the 9 exams that are required for the issue of a PPL. I'd previously studied the subjects on an Aerospace Instructors course with the Air Cadets and this no doubt helped me pass them all first time.



Visiting Signature Aviation at Luton airport

After successfully completing my navigational exercises with flights to Gamston, Cambridge, Wellesborne, Sywell and Leicester it was time to move on to practicing for my skills test.

Before this next phase started, I took a day off from training to visit my sponsors – Signature Flight Support – at Luton airport. This followed a very kind offer from Lucy and Brian at Signature. The day was amazing and very informative. I gained a real insight into the world of general aviation and FBO operations.

After a week of brushing up on general handling skills and practice engine failures it was time for the dreaded skills test. The weather on the day was on the poor side, but still flyable. My instructor and the examiner both did their best to put me at ease, but the best thing that settled the nerves was getting airborne.

The first part of the test - general handling – went very well and we then moved onto the navigation phase. The flight to Silverstone started well, but the weather began to deteriorate and as we approached Silverstone I made the call to divert. The planned diversion worked well and 30 minutes later we were back at Sibson having tracked east then north. With the debrief out the way, the examiner told me I had passed. Certainly a day to remember!

As a person who has wanted to fly for so long, I still wake up in the morning and find it hard to believe I am now a PPL holder. I am now as free as the proverbial bird, (whilst still respecting airspace restrictions)! I'm still only 18 and this is just the start of my flying career. Wherever I end up and whatever I end up flying, if anybody asks, I will always say that it all started with an Honourable Company of Air Pilots scholarship.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the scholarship process. The past winners for their advice on applying and interview prep. Angie Rodriguez at HCAP for making me feel relaxed on selection day and for answering all my questions. (and) on the selection panel for my interview and having the faith to pick me. Signature Aviation for funding the scholarship. Lucy Lonergan and Brian Humphries at Signature for inviting me to look round their facilities at Luton airport and for the career advice and finally, Charles McGregor at Peterborough Flying School for teaching me to fly so well.



Skills test in the worst weather I had flown in!

Blue skies everyone!

