

Thomas Sutton

The Red Arrows Trust Scholarship

During the summer of 2025, I was honoured to receive a week-long gliding scholarship at the Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club generously sponsored by The Honourable Company of Air Pilots and The Red Arrows Trust. This week gave me the opportunity to experience the thrill of piloting an aircraft, whilst meeting like-minded aviation enthusiasts.

My Scholarship story started in January, when I read a bulletin post from my Air Training Corp squadron advertising the opportunity. After submitting my application, I was thrilled to learn I had been invited to an online interview. Although slightly nervous, I was confident after preparing for the interview. I was ecstatic once I learned I had secured a place on this year's course.



Being a resident of Derbyshire myself, I knew the scenery from Camphill wouldn't disappoint, and after an hour's drive into the Peaks, I arrived at the stunning airfield on a Sunday afternoon, ready for a week of flying ahead. Immediately after arriving I was met with a warm welcome, and after dropping our bags off in our rooms, we were given a tour of the airfield. We were then all briefed on the week ahead, where our instructors stated that the aim would be to get as much flying done as possible.

The mornings started with breakfast at 8 a.m. where we were catered for by John and Sylvia, who were not only fantastic cooks but also friendly and welcoming hosts. After finishing breakfast, we would meet at the hangar for 9am, ready to inspect our aircraft for a full day of flying. Our aircraft for the week would be the Puchacz, a Polish, two-seater glider. After towing the glider up to the airfield, we were ready to start flying up until 6 p.m.



My instructor for the week would be Pete, an experienced Camphill pilot, who really developed my knowledge of flight both through demonstrations in the air and mini lessons on the ground. From my first flight, which happened to be my longest, lasting 56 minutes, I was taught the principles of piloting. From having no prior experience, within just a week Pete had taught me the fundamental skills of controlling a glider and how it responded to my inputs.



As we were working in two teams of three, when we weren't flying, we would act as ground crew to the operational aircraft. Duties included: Logging flight times on the computer system, attaching the winch and wing-running and - perhaps everyone's favourite task - driving the tractors to retrieve landed aircraft.

Over the course of the week, I learnt far more than I had ever anticipated. From my first flight, where I learned the principles of turns, I was soon taking on more and more responsibility for subsequent flights. A particular favourite of mine was practicing winch failures, a lesson which involved quite a few consecutive steep descents and ascents. By the end of the week, I was in control of take-off and on my 15th and final flight of the week I piloted the landing.



My week at Camphill is one that I will cherish for years to come. Not only will I remember the serenity of flying over the Peaks, but the remarkable people I met along the way. After receiving my HCAP certificate on the Friday from Past Master Robin Keegan, I felt an immense sense of pride. This scholarship has only fuelled my ambition to pursue a career as a pilot.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, The Red Arrows Trust and Derbyshire and Lancashire gliding club for this once in a lifetime opportunity. As my framed certificate takes pride of place, I will look back on this week as a key milestone in my journey into aviation.

Thank you again,
Thomas Sutton