

William Simons- The AFG Gliding Scholarship 2026

Derbyshire & Lancashire Gliding Club

I first heard about The Honourable Company of Air Pilots from a family friend last year who encouraged me to apply for a gliding scholarship after hearing about my passion for aviation and goal to become a commercial pilot. After applying for their gliding scholarship this year and taking part in a thoroughly enjoyable interview, I found out a few months later that my application was successful and that would have the privilege of spending a week of my summer in the beautiful Peak District learning to fly gliders.



I arrived at Derbyshire & Lancashire Gliding Club on the afternoon of Sunday 26th where I was welcomed by John and Sylvia, the amazing couple who hosted the scholarship in their clubhouse, and Hans, my gliding instructor for week. After I was shown to my room, I said goodbye to my parents and met the other people on the course who became great friends as we made memories and worked together throughout the course of the week. Once everyone had arrived, we wasted no time in starting our ground training with a briefing on airfield operations, safety and much to my surprise, a lesson on driving tractors which was very fun!

Every evening after we finished training, we would return to the clubhouse and have a debrief with our instructor before enjoying a delicious home cooked meal in the restaurant. I have to say that the catering was fantastic and the variety of items we could choose from was amazing- I think I would return to Camphill just for Sylvia's legendary brownie, let alone the amazing views and gliding!



Throughout the week I was very lucky to have consistent, albeit windy, good weather so I was able to complete 14 flights of varying lengths where I developed all elements of flight including launching, landing, flying circuits and even ridge soaring. On the first day of flying before I got airborne I was taught how to set up and launch a glider from the ground, introducing me to the importance of teamwork in the sport of gliding as a large team of people working together effectively is needed to safely get a glider airborne. By late morning it was my time to go up and to say the launch threw me back in my seat would be an understatement. Accelerating from 0-60mph in 3 seconds and getting airborne faster than a typhoon, glider launches are incredibly exciting experiences and I truly wish I could go back and experience the thrill of my first launch once again.

During my time in the air Hans was an excellent instructor who taught me how to maintain coordinated flight and turn smoothly, all while continually looking out for other aircraft and ensuring the flights were conducted safely. Once I became more confident at the controls Hans let me start conducting the launches where it is incredibly important to keep the wings level and maintain a safe speed so you can launch up to the maximum height possible. Due to the challenging nature of the airfield I wasn't able to complete any landings completely by myself, but instead I completed both stall and spin training which, despite making me feel slightly uncomfortable, was a thoroughly enjoyable and important experience.



By the end of the scholarship I can say with confidence that I have developed both as a pilot and also generally as a person, having developed my teamwork, critical thinking skills and safety first mindset, all of which being key skills needed by pilots I would like to say a huge thank you to Hans, John & Sylvia, Derbyshire & Lancashire Gliding Club, The Honourable Company of Air Pilots and The AFG for your generosity in giving me the opportunity to complete a gliding scholarship this summer. It was a truly incredible experience, and I am honoured to say that I have started my aviation career with such a prestigious scholarship. I would also like to thank my fellow gliding scholars for making the experience so memorable and just generally being a great group of people to be around- I wish you all the best in your future endeavours and I look forward to maybe flying with you again in the future.

