



## David Hart – Wigley Scholarship

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the world of aviation. Star struck by the pilots I saw at air shows, I was adamant I wanted to be one. Joining the air cadets gave me some fantastic opportunities including my first flying experiences in light aircraft and, being able to take the controls, it was brilliant. My highlight in Cadets was in 2019 where I was lucky enough to be awarded an Air Cadet Pilot Scheme scholarship, taking me solo within 12 hours of training, I was hooked!

After the cancellation of all the scholarships in 2020 I had accepted that it would take much longer to progress as the world had much more important things to worry about when COVID-19 struck in 2020 and the impact it had on so many people's lives.

It was only by chance that I noticed that the Air Pilots had restarted their scholarship programme for 2021. I applied and worked extremely hard to get my application 'just right' through all the stages of the process, and it all paid off.

I selected Westair as my flying school. They are an impressive flying school with years of experience. Driving to Blackpool airport for the first time, I had all sorts of things going through my mind. Simply, I couldn't believe I would be spending all summer learning to fly and just generally being around aircraft, a feeling which I am sure all aviation enthusiasts can relate to.

I met my instructor Oliver who welcomed me to Westair and spoke to me about my previous flying experience. As my previous scholarship had been two years ago, we decided it would be best to go over the exercises I had done previously before showing me round the aircraft I will be flying in.



My scholarship challenges started early, only 3 hours in, when I tested positive with COVID-19. I was devastated. I had taken every precaution possible. Contacting Westair and the Honourable Company of Air Pilots was difficult, but it was the right thing to do. The reaction from both was brilliant and very understanding. I instead focused on the theory while completing the isolation period.



Getting back in the air was brilliant, continuing with the flying exercises. Flying time was frustratingly reduced at this time due to controller shortages at Blackpool Airport. Still, we continued and covered more exercises before going into the circuit.

After covering multiple emergency drills including engine failure after take-off, flapless landings, glide approach and engine fire on start I was 'sent solo'. Needless to say, I came back from that flight with a huge grin.

The next few flights were 'solo consolidation' flights to get me comfortable flying solo. We also spent some time completing advanced turning and practiced forced landings (PFLs). Once completed, my instructor and I decided to take a week or two off in order to complete the theory required for the next stage

of the scholarship.

During this period of studying, I remained motivated by the prospect of resuming flying and I soon completed the required exams. It was a big relief to get these out of the way.

Patience is a virtue they say, and the weather certainly put that to the test making progress slow. I found myself constantly looking out of the window cursing the low clouds and heavy winds, grabbing opportunities where we could.

The scholarship was gaining pace with further solo flights and my first land away with Oliver at Sleaford in Shropshire. Flying in new areas felt amazing and seeing sites like RAF Woodvale (where I took my first light aircraft flight) and Liverpool was absolutely brilliant. Speaking to all the radar services and the A/G radio at Sleaford was a completely new experience and I learnt a lot. After planning my return route, I flew back to Blackpool, and it made for an incredible day's flying. I discovered navigation added a new sense of adventure to flying.

I had a dual flight round the Ribble Valley where we performed a practice pan, before undertaking the flight solo. This flight was heavily reliant on the flight log and map. This made me realise how much I had progressed in such a short space of time as only a week ago I hadn't even touched



navigation equipment in flight! A few flights to Caernarfon and Sleaf later and I was ready to do my qualifying cross country.

After a brief chat and a sign off from my instructor, I set off for my first destination, Caernarfon. On the way to Caernarfon, I asked Liverpool for a zone transit before following the coast along over Llandudno and Bangor and reached Caernarfon. Due to mountain waves and a temperature inversion, it made for an extremely bumpy ride. After a quick 'pit-stop' at Caernarfon, I took off and headed to Sleaf. After landing, I treated myself to their delicious doughnuts, refuelled and landed back in Blackpool to complete an amazing day.

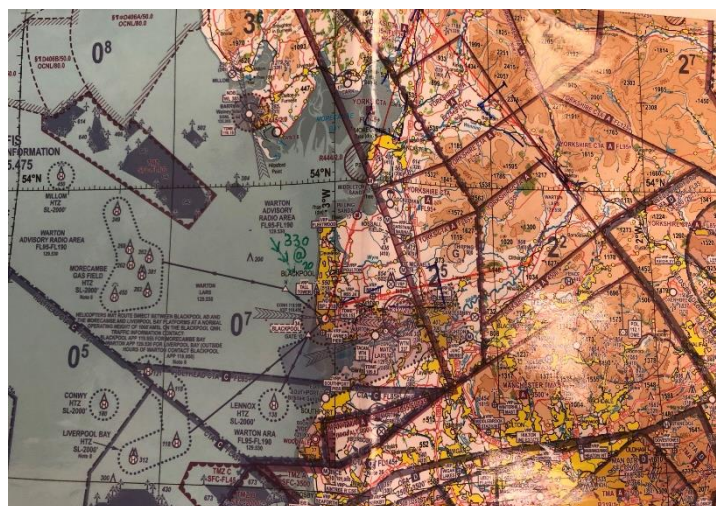
Next on the agenda was the mock skills test, it was really helpful. Ground brief and route checks finished, we took to the air to complete navigation with a few diversions, followed by steep turns, stalls and PFLs before a bit of circuit work. Although everything else was good, I still needed a bit of work on my PFLs.



One of the highlights was an invitation to a fly-out which was unrelated to the scholarship. Along with my flying instructor and fellow student we took to the air with a plan to travel to Sandown on the Isle of Wight. It was great to experience a different aircraft, the Cessna 172 as well as using SkyDemon to aid navigation. The constant airspace and enroute calls really consolidated the R/T I learnt on the scholarship. We were forced to divert to Kemble as fog over Southampton worsened. While at Kemble, I noticed an aircraft I

recognised off YouTube and found none other than the Flying Reporter, Jon Hunt. It was surreal meeting him after watching so many of his videos and I was lucky enough to get a photo.

Further bad weather delayed the PFLs, but it finally happened. Since there were strong winds, it meant an opportunity to use Blackpool's newly paved second runway, Runway 31. After practicing PFLs repeatedly on my simulator they all went brilliantly, and my instructor was more than happy with my performance.



After weeks of waiting for the weather to behave, I completed the skills test. The skills test took the same format as the mock test, and I performed everything up to standard. At the end of the test, I was relieved for my examiner to announce that I had passed, in fact he had to say it twice! After a debrief we had a picture taken by the aircraft.



I have enjoyed every minute! Learning about navigation, radios, and the general handling of the aircraft has been truly fantastic. On top of the practical flying element, the theory has been just as challenging, yet rewarding and insightful.

The journey through the scholarship has been extremely hard work but genuinely the best time of my life. I will always remember the time I have had this summer. Flying every day has been amazing and a dream come true and will allow me

to begin my flying journey. I would like to thank everyone at the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, the BALPA Benevolent Fund and Westair.

Finally, I would also like to mention my mentor, Lewis Alderson, who was assigned early in the scholarship. He has been great offering advice and guidance, both related and unrelated to the scholarship. He even drove over to meet up and have a coffee. Thank you, Lewis!