

# Isabel Dodd

## Air Pilots Flying Club Gliding Scholarship 2025

I was thrilled to be awarded a gliding scholarship by the Honourable Company of Air Pilots (HCAP), generously sponsored by the Air Pilots Flying Club. This incredible opportunity enabled me to spend a week at the Midland Gliding Club, to take my interest in aviation from theory to practice and experience flight in its purest form.

Having studied engineering, I have always been fascinated by the mechanics of flight and I was excited to deepen my understanding of aerodynamics and see these principles come alive in the cockpit.

The Midland Gliding Club is situated on the Long Mynd in Shropshire, known for its exceptional ridge and thermal flying conditions. The journey up the winding hills to the clubhouse was an adventure in itself, and when I arrived, I was immediately greeted by the sights of gliders soaring overhead.

Each morning began with unpacking the hanger (which felt like a giant game of Jenga), inspecting the gliders, conducting pre-flight checks and preparing the airfield for launch. I quickly learnt that gliding is a team sport, with every launch depending on coordination between the pilots, wind-runners, winch drivers and ground crew.

Throughout the week, I flew in a K21, a two-seater glider capable of aerobatics and cross-country flight. My instructor, Sam Prim, introduced me to the aircraft through an exhilarating demonstration on the very first day with an aerobatic 360 loop, showcasing the remarkable agility and strength of the glider I would be learning to fly.

From the rollercoaster thrill of a winch launch, climbing to altitude and cutting free, to catching thermals and staying airborne, learning to use the cockpit instruments, practicing manoeuvres and finally landing the glider - every moment of the week-long flying training was unforgettable. Throughout the week I developed my skills in coordinated rudder and stick controls, stall recovery, circuit planning and landing.



We were lucky with the weather throughout the week, and despite the occasional rain shower midweek, the sunshine allowed us to gain plenty of time in the air. I completed 15 launches and logged over 5 hours of flight time, with my longest flight lasting 46 minutes as I gained altitude by circling thermals and following cloud streets.

One of my favourite experiences was sharing a thermal with another glider, maintaining coordination in speed and position to stay in the same rising air column directly opposite each other, which was a true test of our awareness and finesse on the controls.

Another highlight was the chance to fly in a vintage RAF T21 wooden glider from the 1930s with an open cockpit and no canopy. Wearing flight goggles and a leather hat and feeling the rush of the wind on my face while flying this historic aircraft was an unforgettable experience that connected me to the early roots of aviation.



One of the most rewarding aspects of the course was learning that gliding is truly a team effort. From running the wing and signalling, to winch driving and towing the glider into position, everyone plays a vital part in getting the aircraft safely airborne. It was inspiring to rotate through each of these airfield operation roles and be part of such a collaborative environment, where teamwork and communication are just as important as piloting skills. Our favourite task was by far buggy driving to clear the airfield of sheep and occasionally horses, which was a surprisingly essential task prior to every launch!

In the evenings, I spent time using the simulator to refine my skills and exploring the Long Mynd with the other scholars.





Throughout the week under the expert guidance of our instructors Sam Prin and Mark Saunders, I grew more confident and independent in the cockpit. I discovered not only the technical aspects of flight but also the importance of teamwork and communication.

I am really grateful to The Honourable Company of Air Pilots, the Air Pilots Flying Club and the Midland Gliding Club for providing me with this incredible opportunity and making this experience possible! The silence and serenity of gliding and the view stretching endlessly in all directions was unlike anything I have ever experienced. Flying a glider for the first time was both thrilling and inspiring, and it has definitely further developed my passion for aviation and ambition to get back into the air to fly again very soon to continue my journey towards flying solo!

