

HCAP Gliding Scholarship Report – George Martin

During the summer of 2026, I was honoured to receive a weeklong gliding scholarship at the London Gliding club in Dunstable. There was not a single dull moment throughout the week, and I can confidently say it was one of the best weeks of my life.

I learnt of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and their scholarship program through an instructor at cadets and applied not expecting to get far. A few weeks later I received an email inviting me to an interview in London. Ecstatic, I attended the interview and came home thinking it could have gone better. A few nerve-racking weeks later, I received the news that I was selected.

The course itself began with an awkward wait in the club cafe as I arrived early and didn't know anyone there, but soon the other seven scholars and I started talking like old friends, and everyone got to know each other very well. After a briefing in the clubroom and getting an understanding of how the week would go, we headed out to get the gliders out to the launch point. I was really surprised to see how many gliders fit in the hangar as they were all tightly packed. My first launch was an aerotow with Matt, who was my instructor for the week. It was amazing to see how efficient the gliders were as they took off before the aircraft that were towing them did, and it was truly beautiful watching them fly off into the distance, reaching an altitude of up to 3000ft. When in the air, however, I was feeling really airsick. Although the good weather and plenty of thermals meant this could have been one of my longest flights, I had to land early because of the airsickness. The second flight, however, was a lot better, and over the course of the week, my airsickness (which I'd had a problem with even before this week and which caused me to doubt whether my dream of becoming a pilot would be possible) was almost entirely nonexistent.

The night of Day 1 the other students and I played cards and bonded over a few games of imposter.

Day 2 was much the same schedule, except each of us was getting better at flying, and we were getting to know our instructors better. I was getting less airsick and was able to truly enjoy the scenery from the air and was able to appreciate the engineering that went into getting this aircraft to fly for so long with no engine.

The night of Day 2 the eight of us walked into Dunstable and got pizza and talked for hours.

Day 3 most of us moved on to doing the flying and the approach on our own and everyone made huge progress with their turns, keeping the wings level and keeping the airspeed constant. Everyone had also learnt to do all the pre-flight checks and get ready for flying. By night 3 all of us had learnt to use the simulator and were steadily improving our skills using it.

Day 4 was similar to Day 3 and everyone was learning to take over at the climb on the winch launches. However, the day was cut short due to bad weather at which point the other seven students and I continued practice on the simulator until late then played games and bonded over hour long deep conversations.

Day 5, most of us achieved a virtual solo where there was little to no input from the instructor and we put all we had learnt over the week to good use. This day was shorter as we had to pack up to leave and had to prepare to receive our certificates, so we didn't get any flying after lunch. Day 5 was quite sad as we

knew all of us would all be going our separate ways but nonetheless, we made it special and got some pictures with all the instructors to remember them by.

Over the week I built up 12 launches in total, ranging from short 3-minute circuits to my longest flight of 25 minutes. Each one taught me something new from coordinated turning on the first two flights, all the way to achieving a virtual solo on Day 5 all thanks to Matt and all the other instructors, winch operator and aerotow pilot, and of course due to the generosity of the sponsors of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots.

Looking back, the week was an amazing experience. I met some brilliant people and made friends for life. It has given me a real taste for flying and solidified my ambition to become a pilot for the RAF. I would like to say a huge thank you to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, and to London Gliding Club and all the instructors for taking me on and giving me this opportunity.

Thank you,
George Martin

