

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots PPL Scholarship Report: Mary Stokely. The Bob Dawson Scholarship (BALPA)

I have always had a fascination for planes. With my mother being from Newfoundland on the east coast of Canada, I would often spend my summers flying out of London Heathrow to the province via Nova Scotia with her. Despite of course being thoroughly excited to visit family and spend time by the coast, I would always say that my favourite two days of the holiday were the first and last since those were the days I got to fly. On a couple of occasions I was able to sit in the aircraft cockpit at the end of the flight and talk to the pilots. It was little moments like these which built up my enthusiasm and interest in becoming a pilot to what it is now.

Seeing my interest in flying, on my 16th birthday I received a trial flight at Andrewsfield Aviation from my family. Needless to say, I absolutely loved this. Over the next two years in Sixth Form, I would often find myself looking up at the sky to see the C152s and PA28s flying over the school grounds. Each time this would bring a smile to my face, for I too knew what it was like to experience flight up-front, and up there in the sky I longed to return.



The view out of G-SL on a NAV route - stunning! This flight was really special for me, how could you not want to become a professional pilot having experienced this!

At the end of Sixth Form, I decided to take a Gap Year and immediately started working at my local pub after exams to start saving up money for my flying lessons. Realising that this wasn't enough, I endeavoured to start my own second-hand book and antique selling business to save up for my flight training. Alongside this, I joined The Honourable Company of Air Pilots as an Associate Member in the January of my Gap Year, which is when I found out about their scholarships. I set out to complete my PPL training by the end of my Gap Year, however due to the difficulties generating such large funds with very minimal qualifications post-high school, this goal became further out of sight. I was lucky enough to receive a book scholarship from The Aviatrix Project, and took these books with me to university to use as some bed-time reading. Simultaneously, I joined the Yorkshire

Universities Air Squadron as another way to keep my passion for aviation alive, an opportunity which I was grateful to find out about through some of the other Young Air Pilots in The Company.

Sitting looking at my lecture notes having had a summer of flying that year made me realise even more that flying was the thing for me. So, when the 2025 scholarships opened, I decided to put in an application, but I did not expect to receive the scholarship. Nevertheless, the morning after the final set of interviews I received a call from the Company telling me the good news, and from that phone call, my life has been changed for the good.

I started my training at Andrewsfield at the beginning of June having finished my university exams for the semester. It was such a thrill to be back in the cockpit, but this time I was flying most days of the week rather than once every month or two. I noticed immediately the difference in how quickly my learning progressed when you are training much more regularly, and how quickly you get used to the feeling of being in the plane and experiencing thermals and turbulent gusts. It feels almost impossible to describe how amazing it felt to finally be training properly for my PPL, and to be surrounded by such skilled and experienced aviators on a daily basis.



A rainbow captured on one of my pre-QXC NAV flights.

As time went on, the world of aviation continued to enchant me, and even now writing this report I can confirm that I am still continuing to be enchanted by its lure even further. We started off with some very good weather at the beginning of the summer, usually managing to beat the midday heat. A typical day, with good weather, would see me complete an early-morning sortie first thing, followed by some ground school or an assessment and then finish off with a second sortie if we were particularly lucky with weather, aircraft availability, etc. Each day was certainly a busy day as we balanced the practical element of the flight training with a combination of both tutoring and self-study. Throughout my time training, I was also lucky to be surrounded by other licensed pilots who on a handful of occasions took me up on some pax flights where I got to sit and listen to RT, and familiarise myself with joining procedures without the pressure. I even managed to do some practice pans on 121.5 and track some VORs!

Another thing which I found helpful throughout my training was something called 'armchair flying' where you just take a seat when you find a quiet moment and pretend you were flying the plane by going through the same procedures you would if you were in the actual cockpit. I think that this is incredibly underrated and is certainly well-worth your time as a student pilot as it significantly speeds up your checks and makes every sortie much more impactful.

My first solo flight was certainly a big milestone for me, as it is for all aviators. We had been struck by a good few days of weather, and the aircraft the flight school prefers to send students solo in had just got back from maintenance. I knew that my first solo was coming, but wasn't quite sure which sortie it would be. My instructor took me up in the aircraft and we went straight into the circuit pattern. We did one circuit, then another two, and on the fourth my instructor informed me that it would be a full-stop landing. When I was on final, he transmitted to the A/G unit that I would be completing exercise 14. Too focused on flying the plane, the fact that this exercise would be the first solo didn't even cross my mind. Once we cleared the runway, my instructor unplugged his headset and proceeded to exit the plane asking if I was ready to do the next one on my own. What an incredible feeling. The moment I had built myself up for years finally was happening. Nothing is quite like that feeling of taking off in the aircraft you have been training in up until that point by yourself, and there is something to be said for how different the feel is of the controls when it is just you in the cockpit!



My first solo flight in G-EGSL.



My first landaway to Peterborough Conington.

Another major milestone shortly followed, my first solo cross-country. This time, I was departing the circuit and turning away from Stansted airspace over towards the coast, speaking to Southend. Now you really do feel like a proper aviator. It is incredibly surreal. My first time landing away at another airfield was also another special moment, especially coming from a grass airfield! This was at Peterborough Conington (EGSF), followed later by Norwich (NWI) airport. The route from Andrewsfield over to Norwich was particularly special as we tracked over Kings Parade meaning we got to see all the University of Cambridge colleges from above.



G-EGSL made it to Norwich!



Spotted: some controlled field burning.

Over the course of the summer my flight training culminating in my PPL has taught me so many skills which are required not only by pilots, but skills which can be translated into every other aspect of daily life. Organisation, time management, and flexibility were essential throughout the scholarship when weather, instructor availability and aircraft availability were all factors which could change at a moment's notice. These are all skills which university lectures just cannot teach you, and I can honestly say that throughout the summer I learnt more than I did the entire year at university! With my scholarship finished, I am now looking for opportunities to take my training further as I look to turn my passion into a career in aviation.

Acknowledgements

I want to use this space to offer my deepest thanks to all of those who were there for me and helped me throughout my PPL scholarship!

Tilly Watts. Thank you so much for being such an incredible mentor for me throughout the course of the scholarship. Your advice, tips, and phone calls were so helpful throughout and it made such a difference being able to discuss my training with you as it progressed, as someone who had been through the process yourself.

Mick Pitcher. It was an absolute pleasure having you as my instructor throughout my scholarship. I will really miss spending days at the airfield training with you and discussing all things aviation. You made my flight training that much more fun and I appreciate all the time you spent answering all of my questions. I'd also like to thank everyone else at Andrewsfield who offered their skills and expertise to discuss everything aviation with me whilst I was at

the airfield this summer. Blondie, Steve, it was a joy - you made each day so much fun, I'm going to miss our chats.

Friends, Family, my fellow scholars and YAPS.

All of you, your support meant the world to me. Through the highs and lows, I couldn't have made it without you. From words of wisdom to humorous remarks, you have all made this the best experience ever. I couldn't have done it without you.

And finally, I want to offer my deepest thank you to HCAP and BALPA for making this all a possibility. This scholarship this summer has been life-changing for me. You have made a dream I thought I would never achieve a reality, and opened up so many doors for me as I feel I can now look for a career in aviation - something which I never thought I would be able to achieve. I am incredibly grateful that you chose me to receive one of your scholarships, and will always be willing to help out with the Company wherever I can to give back to an organisation that has given so much to me.



Taking-off from a paved runway, flying with the big jets! A surreal experience for a pilot coming from a grass-strip airfield.