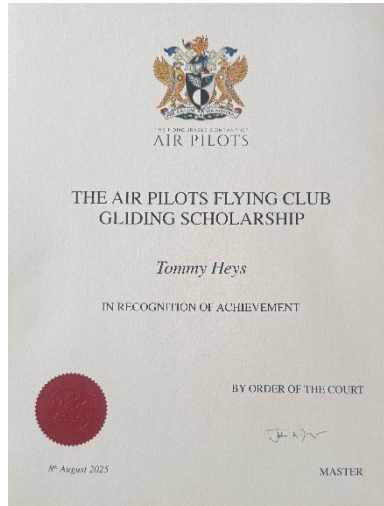


Tommy Heys

HCAP APFC Gliding Scholarship Winner 2025



London Gliding Club, Dunstable

3rd – 8th August 2025

Total number of flights: 14

I was honoured to be selected for a 5-day residential gliding scholarship, awarded by The Honourable Company of Air Pilots and proudly sponsored by The Air Pilots Flying Club. The course was completed at the London Gliding Club, Dunstable, between the 3rd and 8th August 2025 under the instruction of Trevor Mills, my lead instructor for the week.

As a 414 RAF Air Cadet and an engineering student at The Stansted Airport College, I aspire to qualify as a fully licensed aircraft engineer, a glider pilot, and to gain my Private Pilot's Licence (PPL) – enabling me to fix what I fly. This scholarship was a significant step toward achieving those ambitions and I am so thankful for this opportunity.

Day 1 – Ground School & Safety

Flying was not possible on the opening day due to severe weather warnings from Storm Floris. Despite this setback, the day did not go to waste. I trained on the club's flight simulator, practising fundamental handling skills and learned to drive the airfield buggies familiarising myself with the controls. I was orientated to the airfield, learning launch points, runway layouts, and safe operating areas and undertook comprehensive safety briefings.

Although no flights were made on Day 1, this preparation ensured that I was confident and ready to fly once conditions improved.

Day 2 – First Flights

With the weather warnings lifted, I experienced my first glider launches and flights and it did not disappoint! The focus was on handling basics, including smooth control and coordinated turns.

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I experienced both aero tow and winch launch methods and learnt about their differences. I also learnt how to identify areas of lift and thermals using the surrounding hills and landscape features.

My first airborne experience in a glider was unforgettable and set the tone for the week ahead.

Day 3 – Circuits and Landings

Conditions were again favourable which allowed longer flight times. My training progressed to practising well controlled turns and maintaining altitude, completing full flight circuits under my instructor's guidance and learning to land. This included the proper use of air brakes to manage glidepath and touchdown.

By the end of Day 3, I had developed confidence in joining the circuit and approaching the landing phase safely.

Day 4 – Independent Flying with Guidance

On Day 4, my progress increased further, I was now able to complete both winch and aero tow launches independently. I successfully flew circuits, turns, and landings without needing step-by-step instruction or intervention. My instructor remained on hand for advice, but my flying was increasingly self-directed.

Day 5 – Independent Gliding with Supervision & Certificate Presentation

The final day of the scholarship came round far too quickly and really brought together all that I had learnt. I continued to fly independently with my instructor present but without intervention. I was introduced to stalling the glider, successfully recognising the signs and recovering smoothly. My confidence in the air grew significantly, demonstrating the progress achieved during the scholarship.

The day was made even more special with a visit from 2023 PPL Scholarship winner, Dee Limbaya, and Master Elect, Elizabeth Walkinshaw, who formally presented me with my scholarship certificate.

The scholarship at the London Gliding Club has been a transformative experience. From learning the basic essentials on Day 1 to gliding independently under supervision by Day 5. Although I did not manage to complete a solo flight the week has deepened my passion for aviation and given me invaluable flying experience.

I am sincerely grateful to The Honourable Company of Air Pilots for awarding me this opportunity, and to The Air Pilots Flying Club for their generous sponsorship. A special thanks also goes to Trevor Mills for his patient and expert instruction.

This scholarship has strengthened my determination to pursue a future as an aircraft engineer and pilot, taking me one step closer to realising my dream of fixing and flying my own aircraft.

I look forward to applying to The Honourable Company of Air Pilots PPL scholarships when they open and if successful, I will be sure to share my experiences with you as I take my next steps within the aviation industry.

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