

WORKING IN THE TOWER



This month we talk to former Armstrong Isaacs Scholarship winner Geoff Burroughs, who has gone on to start a career at Oxford Airport training to be an air traffic controller

When we first met you were still and school and about to start your flight training. How are things shaping up workwise?

I started my working life part-time in Waitrose, working on the meat and fish counter! In all fairness, I now know how to gut and fillet fish and a little about different cuts of meat, so I guess it was useful. I went from there to working on the ramp at Oxford Airport. Yep, I was the guy with the red batons marshalling the aircraft onto the stand. It was good fun actually, I enjoyed being outdoors (during the summer anyway) and getting up close and personal with the big business jets was a good experience. I work as an Air Traffic Control Assistant at Oxford, and I love it. I thought I knew quite a lot about air traffic control before I started working in the tower back in November last year, but have since discovered that I've got a lot to learn.

(Above) Former Armstrong Isaacs Scholarship winner Geoff Burroughs at the controls of a PA-28 Cherokee 140

What started your interest in aviation?

My father has held his PPL now for around 33 years, so I was brought up around flying. My first flight with my dad was when I was so young I don't even remember it. But I used to fly with him a lot when I was younger, which gave me a good grounding for when I started studying for my own PPL.

What, where and when was your first flight?

That early first flight was probably in the TB10 as dad was flying out of Enstone in the early years of my life. I do remember a fantastic flight from Heathrow to Malaysia in a Malaysian Airlines 747 to visit family; I was only six years old and my sister and I

were invited up to the cockpit of this huge commercial airliner. I don't recall much but I do remember that sweets and fizzy drinks that were piled upon us like there was no tomorrow. When we got up to the cockpit the Captain asked if we would like any drinks. When the hostess brought them I was convinced that a little biplane had brought our drinks up to the aircraft from the ground. It didn't even cross my mind that she'd just brought them up from the galley!

How did you hear about the Armstrong Isaacs Scholarship?

I heard it from my dad who has really been the guiding light through my aviation career so far. After a quick bit of research, I soon realised that the Armstrong Isaacs was easily the best scholarship on offer by a mile, so I filled in an application form as quickly as my fingers could type.

MEET THE MEMBERS

Did you fly as a cadet when you were at school?

Most of my flying at a young age was with my dad. I was a member of the Air Cadets with Thame and then Bicester, but I only ever managed to get on one air experience flight which was in a Grob Tutor out of Benson. I remember that the cloudbase wasn't brilliant so we couldn't do any aerobatics, we just flew around at about 2,000ft. I didn't admit it at the time, but I was secretly very glad we didn't do any aerobatics. I don't know whether my stomach would have held.

How long have you been in the LAA?

I've been a member for around four or five years now, since I applied for the scholarship.

What types have you flown and how many hours do you have?

I haven't flown many types, it's still early days. Mainly just Cherokees and a Warrior, although I did spend a wonderful 30 minutes in a Slingsby Firefly on a clear, crisp winter's morning with my instructor at the time, basically just having a lot of fun. Of the very limited selection, my favourite would be the Warrior. It's a lovely stable aeroplane and I do like having a proper trim wheel rather than a swivelly thing in the roof. I fly a Cherokee out of Oxford at the moment, but hopefully at some point in the future I'll be able to afford something my own.

What has been your best aviation moment to date?

Having only been qualified since January 2014, I don't have many favourite flights to choose from. At the moment, however, my most recent flight stands out. It was only a short 20 minute bimbble, but there was a thin scattered layer at around 1,500ft so we just climbed up above it, maintaining VFR because we could see through the layer to the ground. It was absolutely fantastic, I got some stunning pictures. I'm planning to fly myself and my girlfriend down to Isle of Wight on the first weekend in November. It'll be my first proper cross-country flight since qualifying so I hope that'll be a fantastic flight as well.

Do you have other non-aviation hobbies/interests?



Geoff's graduated from proud PPL to trainee air traffic controller

I'm a big fan of Portsmouth FC, again I got that from my dad. The Blues haven't had the best of times in the last five or so years, but with any luck we'll be back in the Premier League in no time.

Any 'hairy' aviation moments and any lessons learnt?

The one that stands out most happened only a month or so ago. I was going in to Shotteswell, which is a farm strip just North of Banbury, approaching for Runway 15 with my mum and a friend on board. I had the approach nailed perfectly, height was bang on and the speed was perfect, and then at about 30ft I noticed a paraglider approaching for the opposite end of the runway. I put on full power and went around, banking away from him so he could see that I'd seen him and kept an eye on him to make sure we stayed out of each other's way. I went around the circuit, made sure he was well clear and made another approach and a successful landing onto 15. It definitely showed me that there isn't any moment during a flight where you can afford to relax!

Do you have an aircraft or vehicles wish list that you could share with us?

Oh so many. I'll start with other vehicles. At the moment I drive a 1997 Toyota Starlet which I love to pieces, but for my next car I would like a classic Mini Cooper. I love the design and the altogether Britishness of the Mini Cooper. As for the future, I'm aspiring towards an Audi R8. Completely different kettle of fish to the Mini, but I love the sleekness and the elegance of the R8, not to mention the powerful engine!

As for aircraft, again I have several fantasies. I really do like the PA-28, a nice simple aircraft which is fun and forgiving to fly, but I would really like a PA-46, which is an SEP, luxury six-seater. We have several that fly in and out of Oxford; I personally think they're beautiful, not to mention practical and realistic. Looking more unrealistically, if I ever won the Lottery I'd buy myself an Eclipse 550. Again it's only a six-seater, so it's not a lot bigger than a PA-46. The main difference however, is the two jet engines mounted at the rear of the aircraft. I first saw one on the ramp at Oxford and I fell in love, and watching the little pocket rocket take off was even better. It soared into the sky (the gorgeous sunset probably helped the image) with lights flashing all around, and ever since that it has been my plan to win the Lottery!

What are your ambitions for a future in aviation?

My goal is to be an Air Traffic Controller. Ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper I had wanted to be a pilot (except for one summer when I was about seven-years-old and I wanted to be a postman). All the way through Primary School and into Secondary School it was a pilot, right up until about year nine when I started to get an idea of the true value of money and realised just how expensive it would be to become a commercial pilot. It was my dad (surprise, surprise) who first put the idea of becoming a controller into my mind and the more I thought about it, the more I started to agree that controlling was the career for me. And now, seven years later, I'm working in a control tower alongside the very people I have for so long aspired to be. And with any luck, in the next few years, I'll be able to make my dream a reality. ■

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